Women in Agriculture

Abstract

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The U.S. agriculture industry has changed dramatically and so has the role of its farm women. American farm women are stepping forward in many leadership capacities and are being called upon to educate the public about farm issues and farm life, as well as to represent agriculture in the public policy arena.

As the business of producing food and fiber has changed, so have the issues facing rural America. Consumers are showing concern about food safety, the use of farm chemicals, the treatment of farm animals and farming's effect on the environment. In many instances, rural women are accepting the responsibility for communicating agriculture's message to young people and the non-farm public.

Like many nations, the United States is becoming more and more urbanized, meaning that fewer people have any knowledge of agriculture and rural life. In the past 60 years, the number of farms in the United States has declined from 6 million to about 2 million. The rural population has declined, and farmers now represent a much smaller percentage.

Because they represent such a small faction of our society, American farm families are doing more than ever before to ensure that the non-farm public understands their problems and supports efforts to resolve them.

One concern is finding ways to attract young farm women into active roles with farm groups. In many cases, the young farm wife has an off-farm job and is juggling that with raising children and assisting with the farm operation. Groups like Farm Bureau are doing more to try to shape programs and activities to fit in with these busy schedules.

The role of American farm women will be expanding to meet the challenges of a fast-changing industry.