

SMALL FARM *digest*

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Women in Agriculture



***Maria Moreira and Hmong farmers at a newly established farmers market in MA.
Photo : Maria Moreira***

Agriculture, Its Risks and Me

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Women are growing in numbers in the area of agriculture—from the farm in rural America, to USDA headquarters in Washington, DC. These women perform in provide jobs vital to the success of the agricultural arena.

I became an agricultural professional **after** retirement from a career in education. It was really serendipity. I have come a long way and learned a lot since my sister and I sat in on a meeting for a friend on the farm at Florida A&M University in 1999.

The meeting was about developing new farming alternatives for the small farmer and resulted in training classes and workshops that were extremely helpful in teaching us the process of raising goats. However, it was not until we participated in an agricultural leadership training program at the [Small Farmers Agricultural Leadership Training Institute](#) at Southern University, in Baton Rouge, LA, that I discovered there were risks in this occupation, and that I had little knowledge of them. I knew producers want to protect their product by giving the best care and having a secure environment. We knew that marketing was key to financial success. However, there were other challenges that I had no inkling of.

Probably the number one problem facing us was record keeping. When tax time came, we had no system in place. Handling this deficiency in records was quite a challenge. We were in this situation prior to all of the risk management training and other training from the leadership program.

Being a part of the first Small Farmers

Agricultural Leadership Training Institute was the best thing to happen to me since I became a farmer. Dr. Dawn Mellion-Patin, the institute's director, provided an outstanding 2-year program that enlightened, enriched, and empowered!

The leadership program provided strategies to solve many of the problems that were risks to an agricultural operation and it allowed me to network with other small farmers and agricultural professionals, from educators to extension to USDA agency employees on all levels. I am now in touch with my county extension agent and have access to what is available through that agency, especially grazing and land management concerns.

Risk management concerns such as herd health, nutrition, and bio-security were either taught or reinforced at workshops and/or short courses, with hands-on experience sponsored by the various agencies and universities in the area. First attendance led to more and more workshops, mini-courses, conferences, etc., in places all over the southeast. You leave each activity with more knowledge.

The leadership course introduced me to estate planning, the farm bill and what it offers, what USDA and its agencies offer to small farmers, minority and limited resource producers, marketing, and networking. Even though I am still learning, and I hope to continue my education as new information becomes available, I am now helping others farmers to get the type of training and information that has improved our farm and reduced the risks involved.