**Workshop: Meeting Landlord and Tenant Conservation Interests**

*Presenter: Denise O’Brien, Women, Food & Agriculture Network (IA)*

**The best ideas for integrating conservation and stewardship into lease agreements.** Women own or co-own nearly 50 percent of Iowa’s farmland right now. Women, Food and Agriculture Network’s work with nearly 1,000 women landowners over the past 10 years has revealed a strong conservation ethic among these women. Many say they would choose conservation over maximizing farm income in order to preserve the farm’s viability and the quality of the air, land and water around it. They hope to leave the farm to a young beginning farmer and keep it in the hands of a member of the community rather than selling it to a corporation or absentee owner. However, internal and external barriers have kept women from asserting themselves during the decision-making process about their own resource – the land. A high percentage of women who own land are widows and of an aged population. Many of these women do not use lease documents, a common situation among Iowa’s farmers.

**The Voice of Women Landowners.** a) “We have some bad erosion problems that our tenant has been encouraging us to patch up till next fall. There are some craters and 95% of it is coming from 3 farms (all the same family owned) draining onto our farm and them not willing to pay for it. Anyway, I had occasion to talk to Bill from Cass County and he is a very nice man and so helpful. He was able to pull up a map of our farm and email it to me. Dale then marked the bad spots so the technicians could look at them when they are in this area and advise if our land mover is going to do the correct thing to get us through spring. Our excavator is Marc whose grandmother and Dale’s mother were 1st cousins. Isn't that kind of cool? You were so right about Steve, just thought you'd like to know what we've been doing.”

b) “Tech will come out and look over the farm and draw up a plan---call in the renter and advise him of changes that will have to be made. Nonconformance could call for a fine of $500 to $10,000. Sonjia seemed to be very aware of what was going on. I had maps to 1960----some Joe had never seen. I guess I want to thank you for setting a fire under me----would have procrastinated another year----Barb, the younger daughter and her husband who had farmed it at one time---both went with me. I'll be 83 when this next crop is harvested and the renter IS going to have to deal with the girls from here on. I'm going to bed---slept hardly at all last night----but it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be.”

**Current programs include:** 1) working with women landowners to educate them about conservation methods they can implement on their land, 2) bringing together women in sustainable agriculture for annual gatherings for education and networking, 3) providing information and tools to help women become advocates in their own communities and at the state and federal levels, and 4) informing women about opportunities to serve on boards and commissions to make sure women’s voices are heard.

Learning circles -women participating have the opportunity to meet together in small groups and attend field days that will highlight natural resource management. An advisor to this project is a farmer, an agronomist by training and the elected chair of the Linn County Soil and Water Conservation District. The advisor is intimately involved with a number of water quality issues in this fast growing, heavily populated county. Her farm reflects her conservation values. Her knowledge, along with that of the NRCS and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, will help inform the learning circles. The goal is to support women to make informed decisions about land use and how they can help Iowa improve its water quality.

**Links or references to materials, related resources, websites, etc.**

Considering Sustainable Agriculture on Your Rented Land