

Third Annual Young Women in Agriculture Career and Leadership Seminar (YWALS)

A Senior Project

Presented to

Faculty of the Agricultural Education and Communication Department

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By

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Third Annual Young Women in Agriculture Career and Leadership Seminar

Introduction

Agriculture has traditionally been a male-dominated industry; however, recent years have shown a significant growth in female presence. Women are beginning to take leadership roles both on the farm and within advocacy, lobbying, and business entities in the industry. According to the latest agricultural census data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), in 2012, women farmers controlled seven percent of the nation's farmland (Census, 2014). Additionally, women held leadership roles in 14 percent of the nation's two million farms (Census, 2014). This data is several years old, and likely the numbers have grown since the last census was taken.

The National Agricultural Library's website articulates the variety of roles that are available to women in agriculture today: "Women fill many roles in agriculture. They are farmers and farm workers, ranchers, agricultural researchers, educators and agri-business people" (Agricultural Library, 2014). This seminar is directed primarily at women in California, though ideally it could be replicated anywhere. California leads the nation in agricultural output by a large margin, and as such is a role model for the rest of the nation. There are more and more jobs each year available to women in agriculture; it is an exciting field for women to be in today. It is also important to note that careers in agriculture does not necessarily mean "on the farm." There are opportunities for everything from educators to lawyers to accountants and credit managers. Ideally this seminar will host a speaker who can address the range of available careers.

How It Works

The objective of Young Women in Agriculture Career and Leadership Seminar (YWALS) includes the following tenets:

- 1.) Bring young women together and educate them about agriculture
- 2.) Promote the integration of women in the agricultural industry
- 3.) Give career advice to future working members the agriculture industry
- 4.) Inform young women of some the actual tangible opportunities available to them through demonstrations by speakers
- 5.) Improve upon this seminar that has been conducted for the past two years

The YWAL Seminar started two years ago as a Cal Poly senior project. The first organizers were Diane Meyer and Natalie Madson. Feedback from the first seminar included incorporation of a tradeshow to show young women what agriculture extracurricular activities are available at Cal Poly, as well as an increase in the number of interactive workshops (Meyer, 2017). In 2016, agricultural communications seniors, Samantha Wallace and Crystal Avila, organized the event. Feedback from this seminar included changing the date so as not to conflict with any FFA events, considering a different (less expensive) approach to securing the venue, and to start getting sponsorships and donations as soon as possible (Avila & Wallace, 2017).

Results to Date/Implications

Past YWALS have shown favorable feedback from both organizers and attendees. Attendance has been at around 50-60 people each year. Because there is information on the seminar from previous years, problem areas of organizing the event can be easily identified. This event also provides an opportunity for high school-aged girls to tour Cal Poly and get a feel for the students, professors, classrooms, and atmosphere.

Future Plans/Advice

This event has proven its success and necessity in helping young women in agriculture gain confidence and discover career paths. As such, this event is one which should be hosted through Cal Poly in perpetuity. Though this event is specifically targeting young women in agriculture (before they enter their careers), it could also expand to incorporate women at all stages of their careers. This could diversify the audience and boost attendance. Past years have shown women of all ages are interested in this type of event, so future speakers could also include motivational or self-care topics for those who have already chosen their career.

This event is ideal for a person or team of people who are looking to complete their senior project. However, if no one is interested in hosting the event as their senior project, the university should still host the event. It could be hosted through the Agricultural Education and Communication Department or through the College of Agriculture, Food, and Environmental Sciences (CAFES). Additionally, in the past, Alpha Gamma Rho (AGR) has provided lunch; however, in the future it has been recommended to use a different provider. The Agriculture Engineering Society (AES) club also provides lunch services and could be a better option.

Costs/Resources Needed

There are several costs associated with hosting this event at Cal Poly. The University requires that events be planned and paid through Cal Poly Corporation, which includes the services of an event planner. Some of the guest speakers also require travel fare as well as payment for their services. The event pays one night in a hotel for each of the speakers as well. There is also a cost for providing lunch from a university approved vendor and gifts/takeaways for the guests as well as the speakers.

These costs require fundraising and donation solicitation as there is no money available through the university or the Agricultural Education and Communication Department. In 2016, a total of \$5,290 was raised through donations. This was more than enough to cover the costs and nearly \$1,000 was left over for continuation of the event. The goal for 2017, and for future years, is to raise an equal or greater amount to start a continual fund.

Results/Conclusions

The 2017 Young Women in Agriculture Career and Leadership Seminar was held on October 14, 2017. A total of \$5,500 was raised from

sponsorships. Ticket sales yielded an additional \$640. 64 tickets were sold online and an additional 11 tickets were sold at the door for a total attendance of 74 people. Lunch was catered by the Agricultural Engineering Society. The speakers included the following industry leaders:

- Celeste Settrini, CS Connections & Settrini Ranch
- Cara Crye, CEO, Farm Supply Company
- Vanessa Alexandre, Alexandre Farms
- Lisa Cork, Fresh Produce Marketing LTD.
- Matt Rush, Inspirational Speaker

A survey conducted at the conclusion of the event yielded mostly positive results. The area that needed most improvement was the promotion and awareness of the event. This can be solved in the future by doing more event outreach during the summer months and at the beginning of the school year at local high schools.

The event met each of the five objectives of the seminar. It brought young women together, promoted their integration into the agriculture industry by showing them successful women in the industry, and allowed them to gain useful career advice from industry leaders. Speakers were also open to networking opportunities for attendees to learn about tangible opportunities available to them in their career pursuits. Each year, the seminar grows and improves as it consistently establishes itself as a quality seminar.

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