



NEWS RELEASE- for immediate publication

October 14, 2021

Photos – see attachments & sample captions at end of release
More photos available upon request

Media Contact:

Kriss Marion, WiWiC Communications

kmarion@wisconsinfarmersunion.com

608-844-3758

Wisconsin Women in Conservation Announces October Virtual Launch of Statewide Educator Network

Chippewa Falls, WI - Citing the growing influence of women owning and managing land in Wisconsin, a coalition of agriculture and conservation organizations has announced the launch of a Wisconsin Women in Conservation Educator Network to convene, equip, and support conservation educators, professionals and volunteers who work with women landowners and farmers across the state. The **virtual Kick Off of the network is October 28, from 10am til noon on Zoom**, and will include both a statewide convening and breakouts in regional groups. All conservation educators are invited to participate, both men and women, from agency staff to non-profit volunteers. Pre-registration is required, but free, at WiWiC.org.

The network is being facilitated by the Wisconsin Women in Conservation project (WiWiC), a state-wide collaborative effort led by the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in partnership with Wisconsin Farmers Union, Renewing the Countryside, E Resources Group and the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) with support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

“The goal of this inclusive new network is to for the first time connect these educators on a regular basis to collaboratively share challenges and best practices when it comes to reaching women landowners,” said Dr. Esther Shekinah, WiWiC Project Lead, and a

Research Agronomist with the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute. “This launch is just the start. WiWiC will facilitate bi-annual meet-ups like this, as well as regional annual summits. We hope the result will be the development of cooperative strategies for working together and provide women farmers and landowners the tools they want and need to get conservation practices implemented on their land.”

Women landowners are a growing demographic. The 2017 Census recorded 38,509 female producers in Wisconsin, showing that women make up 35 percent of all producers in the state, which is slightly higher than the national average of 30 percent. But women are a group that has been traditionally underserved by federal and state conservation agencies.

“Women have more influence than ever over the future of land and water in Wisconsin, and we need to be intentional about serving them with conservation education and incentive programs,” said Shekinah. “Over the course of three years, the WiWiC team is testing a variety of methods and tools, and using survey instruments to determine what works best. Through the WiWiC Educator Network, we hope to share our research with the conservation community working with women, and collaboratively develop best practices for outreach and resource delivery.”

This unique three-year WiWiC initiative is collaboratively engaging women landowners across the state through workshops, field days, farm tours, mentorships, media content, email resource communications and other learning opportunities. The project began with virtual workshops in March of 2021, and has so far hosted five on-farm field days and 15 virtual events, reaching a total of 1200 women. A team of Regional Coordinators leads cohorts of women landowners in six different regions to network and share resources, as well as connecting them to regional NRCS agency staff and programs. Women also have the opportunity to work with WiWiC Conservation Coaches, fifteen experienced women landowners with particular expertise in different aspects of conservation across the state. Each Conservation Coach will lead a Field Day on their property over the course of the project.

A signature feature of the project, in both virtual and in-person events, is connecting women with each other in Learning Circles. In the Learning Circle model, professionals and attendees alike are given time and space to share information, needs, and resources with each other, rather than just receive content from experts. Regional events facilitate resource sharing, mentorship and support among neighboring women landowners.

“Women landowners and farmers are an increasingly significant demographic to reach with land conservation education and resources. Through the Wisconsin Women in Conservation Educator Network, we hope to provide educators and conservation professionals with the tools, data, research and support to best assist women in achieving their unique conservation goals,” said Angela Biggs, NRCS Wisconsin State Conservationist. “I’m excited to be a part of this Network, and excited to see what we can do to impact the landscape in Wisconsin and beyond. As a woman conservationist for the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, it is my goal to continue to partner with all farmers and landowners, especially women, to implement conservation that will keep our lands productive and profitable for generations to come.”

Interested individuals who cannot attend this launch event on the 28th but would like to be involved with the Educator Network should contact eshekinah@michaelfields.org. Wisconsin Women in Conservation is planning a state-wide Conservation Plan Webinar this winter, as well as six regional on-farm field days and 12 Learning Circle events across the state in 2022, in addition to virtual events. WiWiC publishes a monthly e-newsletter, a Blog and Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram content. The group will launch a Listserv this fall. To stay informed of upcoming events, sign up for the e-newsletter at WiWiC.org.

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Sample Captions:

“Women landowners and farmers are an increasingly significant demographic to reach with land conservation education and resources. Through the Wisconsin Women in Conservation Educator Network, we hope to provide educators and conservation professionals with the tools, data, research and support to best assist women in achieving their unique conservation goals,” said Angela Biggs, NRCS Wisconsin State Conservationist. Biggs is only the 2nd woman to head the Wisconsin NRCS. (Biggs is in blue NRCS shirt)

“Women have more influence than ever over the future of land and water in Wisconsin, and we need to be intentional about serving them with conservation education and incentive programs,” said Dr. Esther Shekinah, WiWiC Project Lead and Research Agronomist at Michael Fields Agricultural Institute. (in pink shirt with green tractor)

A signature feature of the WiWiC project, in both in-person and virtual events, is connecting women with each other in Learning Circles. In the Learning Circle model,

professionals and attendees alike are given time and space to share information, needs, and resources with each other, rather than just receive content from experts. (circle of participants seated beneath tree)

WiWiC Conservation Coach Valerie Dantoin, a sustainable agriculture instructor at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, leads a group of women on a farm tour at a WiWiC Summer Field Day this August. (women standing on road)



