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Wisconsin Farmers Union: Wisconsin women represent at NFU Women's Conference

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SAN DIEGO – Wisconsin was well-represented at the National Farmers Union Women's Conference March 3-5 in San Diego, with nine participants joining in workshops and networking with other female farmers from around the country.

The NFU Women's Conference builds on a strong Farmers Union history of providing women in agriculture with important leadership and risk management skills. This year's conference, with a theme of "Shaping the Future," prepared attendees and their farms for the future with topics covering business planning, succession planning, running for local office, communications, and innovative marketing.

"NFU's Women's Conference offers women of all ages the opportunity to come together to engage with a diverse group of women in agriculture from across the country, and take home invaluable experiences and lessons to improve their farm operations and communities," said NFU President Roger Johnson. "All of agriculture, from family farms and ranches to agribusiness board rooms benefit when the views and ideas provided by women are included and emphasized."

Wisconsin attendees included Lisa Kivirist, Browntown; Mary Jo Borchardt, Poynette; WFU Communications Director Danielle Endvick, Holcombe; WFU Membership Director Deb Jakubek, Amherst Junction; Jeanne Lydon, Marshall; Kriss Marion, Blanchardville; WFU Government Relations Director Kara O'Connor, Madison; April Prussia, New Glarus; and Alicia Razvi, Stevens Point.

“The Women’s Conference was a wealth of information and a huge resource,” said first-time attendee April Prussia, who farms in New Glarus and is a member of the South Central Farmers Union, which covers Green, Rock and Lafayette counties. “The conference made me even more grateful for the strong women and sense of community we have in Farmers Union.”

“I feel like I took something valuable from every session,” said Alicia Razvi, who farms near Stevens Point and is president of the Wood-Portage-Waupaca Farmers Union. “The strategies that we were given to learn how to present ourselves and our stories were powerful. It was inspiring and empowering to get up in front of others and share our stories and be completely embraced in that environment. To talk with farmers who are completely and totally different than you but still find community and come away as allies – it’s a powerful thing.”

The Women’s Conference also offered the opportunity to hear from leaders in the field of agriculture. This year, several Wisconsin women were among the presenters. Lisa Kivirist, author, farmer and owner of Inn Serendipity in Browntown, served as keynote, sharing the innovative ways women are coming together to steward the land, build up their communities and nurture more vibrant local food systems. Kriss Marion, Blanchardville farmer and president of the South Central Farmers Union chapter, spoke about why women should step up into leadership. Bridget Holcomb, executive director of the Women, Food and Agriculture Network, shared effective communication strategies. Beginning Farmer Institute participants Betty Anderson of Brodhead, Jaime Baker of New Glarus, Brittany Bula of Plainfield and Layne Cozzolino of Stevens Point served on a panel addressing challenges facing women farmers.

Other highlights throughout the weekend included presentations by Audra Mulkern, founder of The Female Farmer Project; Madeline Schultz, manager of the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Women in Ag Program;

Dr. Shannon Ferrell, associate professor at Oklahoma State University; Poppy Davis, adjunct professor at University of Arkansas School of Law; Sarah Campbell, stakeholder engagement specialist at USDA Farm Service Agency; and Charlotte Smith, founder of 3CowMarketing.com and owner of Champoeg Creamery and Charlotte Smith Pastured Meats.

The 2017 NFU Women’s Conference programming was sponsored by Farm Credit, CHS Foundation, and NFU Foundation. The conference will return to Catamaran

Resort in San Diego in 2018.