

# Women Leaders in the Field



*Allyson Angelini at Full Heart Farm in Ledyard, Connecticut, graduated from HMI's Beginning Women Farmers Program.*



*Full Heart Farm grows a variety of vegetables, chicken, pork, eggs and herbs.*

*by Kelly Eisenbarger*

In April 2013 *Acres U.S.A.* featured two Holistic Management International's (HMI) Beginning Women Farmers program (BWF) graduates and highlighted how the program led to positive changes on their farms. Another year of the program has come to a close and 104 more women have successfully graduated from BWF, which builds lifelong skills and helps the women apply holistic management principles and practices in order to build profitable businesses.

Heather Driscoll, a 2013 graduate of BWF, found that her experience during the program opened doors for her farm to become exponentially more successful.

"We have a ton of new customers — more and more every day. We eventually are going to be opening up a store and have store hours," Driscoll said. "Without the program, I wouldn't be able to make a living farming."

The Driscolls own Green Valley Farm in Eastford, Connecticut, where they have a farrow-to-finish, 100 percent Certified Berkshire Pork Program. They sell wholesale and retail to locals, grocery stores and chefs. Driscoll says the program helped her learn how to run the farm as a business and that it is growing steadily and becoming very successful.

"I think it is a great program for women who want to start farming — it makes you look at every aspect there is to look at before going in blindly, and that is extremely important," Driscoll said.

BWF, a USDA-funded program, is currently in the second year of their second set of 3-year grants. The USDA has identified a need for an additional 100,000 farmers in the next five years which signaled that the availability of effective training programs would be integral. HMI's two 3-year training grants total over \$1,166,000. The goal is to train 360 women farmers over the next three years in seven states.

Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, Maine and Texas participate in the program. The wide demographics are a tool to reach the goal of 14,400 more customers having access to a sustainable food system as the women increase their knowl-

edge, continue to plan more effectively, and implement those plans so that they improve their ability to manage all resources whether human, financial or natural.

Sandy Langelier, Director of Communications and Outreach for HMI, sees that the BWF program is extremely data-driven.

“We want to know not only ‘hey how did the day go’ but ‘did you learn something?’” Langelier said. “We want to know what knowledge change and behavior change has occurred and whether they are doing something different than before because that’s the true measurement of the effectiveness of the program.”

At the end of each of the individual programs’ 10 sessions, which ranged from six to eight hours in length and were held over five 2-day periods, participants filled out evaluations to measure knowledge and attitude change, intended behavior change, and actual change. There was a final program evaluation that also measured these changes with the whole program in mind and the changes and results of said changes that took place over a seven-month period.

The data demonstrates that a high level of knowledge and attitude change occurred and that the women completed or modified numerous farm plans which resulted in many benefits. Participant behavior change was mostly in the 90-100 percent range where there was sufficient

## Key outcomes include:

- Overall graduation rate of 85%.
- Overall level of satisfaction of the program was 91%.
- Total of 43,403 acres under management by participants.
- Participants providing products to over 3,085 customers.
- Program goal of getting 50% of participants to experience knowledge change and behavior change were met.
- Program goal of having 25% of participants experiencing some outcome of improved management as a result of the training exceeded.
- 73-96% of participants experienced improved satisfaction in their quality of life and their ability to make complex decisions, to determine needed profit and to manage time and to communicate.

time for developing plans or taking action during the actual program. The knowledge gained, the confidence built and the intentions to implement actions show that the sessions were very effective in educating the participants. Likewise, the high numbers of expressed satisfaction indicate that the participants felt the program was successful.

The data collected not only quantitatively illustrates the success of the program but serves as a tool for future programs. The numbers are used to tweak curriculum and teaching styles, and to find better ways to gather data and information from the participants.

Ann J. Adams, Ph.D., director of community services for HMI, is in charge of the overall program design and management of BWF. She sees the data as a jumping-off point.

“The program just keeps getting better and better as we refine our materials, and the state coordinators are clearer about what their roles are and what needs to happen for a successful program in each state,” Adams said.

In the 2012-13 program 123 participants were accepted and 104 graduated by participating in 70 percent or more of the trainings. The program was the result of 68 collaborating entities among the seven states to promote, plan, provide facilities, teach and mentor. There were 14 mentors and a pool of 15 instructors. In addition to the 70 day-long sessions, 21 of which were on the farm, there was a program-wide listserv and the ability for participants to take online classes of the courses they missed. One hundred women completed the final program survey for an 81 percent response rate.

Overall the program has seen improved record-keeping systems, participants achieving financial goals, improved on-farm decision-making, improved



*Instructor Lisa McCrory teaches a grazing planning course in New Hampshire.*

Photo courtesy of Holistic Management International

marketing skills, improved animal health and increased forage production.

Allyson Angelini of Full Heart Farm in Ledyard, Connecticut, graduated from the past program and found that the BWF training helped give her the skills and confidence to negotiate and buy her own farm.

“You can use the Holistic Management tools to develop any farming practice,” Angelini said.

She was primarily drawn to the program because she hoped it would help her develop a farm business plan, but she walked away with so much more.

“After the first class, everything clicked for me,” Angelini said. “Holistic Management helps me communicate my ideas to others, to prioritize, to schedule and to figure out how to balance my diverse farm business. I’m not there yet, but practicing Holistic Management helps me to keep everything in focus. I can’t speak highly enough about the program.”

For more information on Holistic Management International visit [holisticmanagement.org](http://holisticmanagement.org) or call 505-842-5252.

**ACRES** USA<sup>®</sup>  
THE VOICE OF ECO-AGRICULTURE

*Acres U.S.A.* is the national journal of sustainable agriculture, standing virtually alone with a real track record – over 35 years of continuous publication. Each issue is packed full of information eco-consultants regularly charge top dollar for. You’ll be kept up-to-date on all of the news that affects agriculture – regulations, discoveries, research updates, organic certification issues, and more.

To subscribe, call

**1-800-355-5313**

*(toll-free in the U.S. & Canada)*

512-892-4400 / fax 512-892-4448

P.O. Box 301209 / Austin, TX 78703

[info@acresusa.com](mailto:info@acresusa.com)

Or subscribe online at:

**[www.acresusa.com](http://www.acresusa.com)**