

2017 Iowa Women in Agriculture Pre-Conference Tour – Summary

Prepared by Madeline Schultz, August 10, 2017

Tour Summary

Sixty-four women enjoyed the Iowa Women in Agriculture Pre-conference bus tour on July 31, 2017 from 12:30 pm to 5:30 pm. The group visited the Couser Cattle Company in Nevada, Iowa and Reiman Gardens in Ames, Iowa.

The Couser Cattle Company built a unique monoslope cattle shelter that uses deep bedding and sunlight tracking to enhance cattle comfort and environmental stewardship. The feedlot manager, Shane Jurgensen and his wife, Amber, explained how they use the Bud Williams method of cattle movement and reduce the number of times animals are handled to reduce stress.

Nancy Couser spoke on the family's environmental practices including grass buffer strips, berms and vegetative filtration areas. "It is important to remember that what you do on your property affects those around you. Be the best neighbor you can be. Stewardship comes from the heart and not just from regulation. Embrace the Nutrient Reduction Strategy and find innovative ways to be sustainable for yourself and your descendants," advises Nancy. This dedicated farm woman is a retired Registered Nurse and currently serves on the Iowa Governor's Environmental Protection Commission.

Bill Couser encouraged everyone to document their farm's history. He shared stories of how his grandfather founded this farm in 1889 and how the business has changed over time. Bill and Nancy took over the farm in 1977. Today, they raise up to 5,200 head of fed cattle and grow seed corn, corn and soybeans. Bill serves on the Lincolnway Energy Board of Directors. "When you look at the environmental stewardship between renewable fuels and livestock, it's something that fits together very well, it's part of that full circle operation we have, and it's here to stay," explained Bill Couser.

Bill and Nancy discussed the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Appendix C Master Matrix document with the group. The master matrix is a scoring system that can be used to evaluate the siting of permitted confinement feeding operations. This was very insightful and helped women understand both the regulations and how farmers are working to protect the environment.

Jamie Benning, Iowa State University Water Quality Program Manager joined the group to share information about Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy and beneficial management practices.

At Reiman Gardens, tour participants enjoyed a presentation by Dr. Donald Lewis, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Entomologist, on pollinators and their habitat and toured the butterfly wing, conservatory, and outdoor gardens.

Dr. Lewis shared fascinating details of common pollinators in Iowa. Honey bees are the most common and will pollinate many crops over a long season. That is why they are called generalists. They have become bees without borders as they are trucked thousands of miles to pollinate California almonds and other crops across the nation. This has increased honey bee stress, disease and parasites such as the Varroa mites. Solitary bees and wasps are specialists, pollinating only one or a few plants over a short period of time. "Farmers and

gardeners in Iowa can help improve pollinator numbers by diversifying crops, being careful with pesticides, planting pollinator habitat, and protecting nest sites,” explained Dr. Lewis.

Tour participants enjoyed a guided tour of the beautiful 17-acre Reiman Gardens including special areas for the Home Production Garden, Buck Rose Collection, Herb Garden, Trail Garden, Children’s Garden, and Prairie Vista Garden. About 800 butterflies from around the world populate the Butterfly Wing on any given day. This summer, ten “Washed Ashore” sculptures highlight the importance of clean water to all life.

This is the second pre-conference tour hosted by the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Women in Ag Program and sponsored by Farm Credit Services of America.