

Virginia Women in Agriculture: Hands on Cattle Training

In 2021 the Virginia Cattle Industry Board (VCIB) co-funded a hands on conference titled “Virginia Cattle WISE (Women Increasing Skills & Education).”

This initiative has a mission of ensuring that women involved with cattle operations have opportunities to learn necessary skills in an environment

comfortable for them. The endeavor was a collaboration between female ANR agents in seven different county Virginia Cooperative Extension offices with multiple funding partners.



The first Virginia Cattle WISE Conference was held on October 29, 2021 at The B.A.R.N. in Buckingham, Virginia. Forty-seven women from twenty-five counties leveraged this unique opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills in cattle production. Participants rotated through three working sessions: reproduction, chute-side cattle handling, and equipment operation.



BQA certification was provided through a virtual lecture prior to the event and hands on chute-side training during the conference. Low-stress cattle handling techniques, proper vaccination techniques, how to properly administer an implant, and general record keeping practices were highlighted during the session. Breeding and dystocia strategies were examined during the reproduction session.

The event was so successful, 2022 programming expanded to a two-day conference held in Blacksburg. Thirty-four women participating over the two day conference representing twenty-one counties in Virginia.

Day one of the conference focused on equipment safety, repair and maintenance. A session on small engine training covered repairs and the information necessary to troubleshoot issues with standard 4 stroke and 2 stroke engines. Another session was dedicated to chainsaw safety and focused on essential safety techniques and proper operation of an electric chainsaw. One program participant stated “Fantastic! More! Maybe even extended classes would be beneficial.”

Sprayer calibration, pesticide safety, ATV safety and tractor driving/maintenance sessions rounded out Day 1. Participants were eager to operate the multiple brands of tractors while learning about PTO safety and hooking up PTO shafts. Tractor servicing, including checking the fluid levels and easy methods for adding hydraulic fluid, were discussed and demonstrated.



Day two focused on cattle production with AI 101 and “How to recognize and respond to dystocia” as the main sessions. Women were educated on the three stages of labor and how to recognize the signs of a difficult calving, when to assist, and when to not. Participants were asked to glove up and practice their newly learned skills to pull a calf out of a dystocia training model. They learned the importance of proper chain placement for pulling a calf and how to reduce the risk of injury to calf and cow.

Some comments from the Cattle WISE session included “I didn’t know how to give vaccines and now I do!” and “As a new producer I have the opportunity to implement these skills and herd health strategies intentionally from the beginning.”

The 2023 Cattle WISE planning is underway with goals of refining previous cattle production sessions and expansion to post harvest beef lessons. Processing wholesale cuts of meat into retail cuts followed by multiple formats for preparing that beef is on the agenda.

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, women are now making up 36% of all operators and 56% of farms have at least one female producer associated with the operation. Female producers are often the key to convincing the family to make changes on the farming operations. Conferences such as Cattle WISE equip female producers with the education and hands on experience needed to better manage their operations improving the Virginia Cattle Industry as a whole.



Read more about funded programs at CattleIndustryVA.com. Look for more program highlights in upcoming issues of Virginia Cattlemen.