

AGRICULTURE

Hartington woman is voice for ag

Advocate backs small family farm on various fronts

By LINDA WUEBBEN
News Correspondent

HARTINGTON — Linda Kleinschmit likes to speak out.

For many years, the rural Hartington woman and her husband, Martin, have worked diligently to be a voice representing small family farmers.

"I learned early on I couldn't operate the big machinery," Kleinschmit said. "And I'm not a very good gardener. I had a garden because we had (five) kids and needed it to make ends meet, but I do better with a small one." What Kleinschmit learned from the gardening episode on her farm was her ability to be a voice.

"I found out I'm good at this. This is what I can do best, speak out for family farms."

LINDA KLEINSCHMIT

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LINDA WUEBBEN/CORRESPONDENT

LINDA KLEINSCHMIT of rural Hartington is a longtime advocate of family farms through involvement with several agricultural groups, including the Nebraska Farmers Union and the Center for Rural Affairs.

SARE grants assist farmers with new ideas

By CURT ARENS
News Correspondent

It usually takes money to test new ideas. But farm lenders are often leery of loaning substantial funds to help farmers implement even good ideas that haven't been tried before.

That's where the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant program comes in.

"Lack of financing is often a problem," said Jim Peterson, a North Central SARE staff member. But SARE provides seed money for participants to take their ideas to reality and to test those ideas for implementation by others.

Peterson told producers at a recent grazing conference in Norfolk that SARE strives to help farmers and ranchers adopt practices that are economically viable, environmentally sound and socially responsible.

THIS NATIONWIDE competitive grant program dates to 1988. In the north-central region, Nebraska applicants compete with farmers from 12 other states. Only about one-fourth of the applications are actually funded.

Since 1992, 495 total producer grants have been awarded. Forty-six of these were from Nebraska, Peterson said. The program also funds applications for research and education, professional improvement and graduate studies.

Individual producers are eligible for up to \$6,000 for a one-year project; groups of three or more producers can garner up to \$18,000 over two years.

BECAUSE IT IS a competitive program, the application "must stand out," Peterson said.

Over the years, the program has funded such projects as rotational grazing implementation practices, non-chemical weed control, special composting inventions and systems that develop direct marketing guidelines for small farmers.

SARE budgets can partially fund the cost of equipment, permanent fencing, and perennial seeds and plants.

With outreach and distribution of results an important concept that must be written into each grant, SARE funds can be utilized for travel expenses, supplies, labor and outreach expenses as well as annual seeds, temporary fencing and operational expenses.

Want to learn more?
Check out the SARE Web site: www.sare.org.

(EQUAL); and the Sustainable Ag Research and Education (SARE) administrative council.

Early in the farm crisis, the Kleinschmits were active in organizing the Center for Rural Affairs in the area. He is employed as a sustainable agricultural specialist at the center's Hartington office. The Lyons-based center is an advocate for family farms and ranches and rural communities.

Kleinschmit said she believes that education is a key for community development at all levels.

She wants to share farming ideas in order to help others get interested and involved as well. Many of the organizations she works for are not specifically commodity-based farming tools but have educational philosophies.

For example, the Ogallala Commons is a regional Great Plains network concerned with water conservation of the Ogallala Aquifer. It partners with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Natural Resources Districts to conserve water and find a better way to practice successful sustainable agriculture.

SARE WORKS to find ways for farmers to be profitable and still be environmentally accountable to the surrounding community. It promotes sustainable

agriculture through a competitive grants and education program.

Kleinschmit also helped initiate EQUAL, a group of six area women who use educational tools to draw members of the community together by sharing farming practices.

After years as a volunteer on various fronts, Kleinschmit is now being paid for work she loves to do. She spends two days a week in Lincoln at the University of Nebraska's Public Policy Center as a research specialist and rural liaison.

She is aiding in coordinating a water and community development project for Shelby and Stromsburg, which have problems with arsenic in their drinking water.

Some long-range decisions are being explored as well as a projected U.S. Highway 81 bypass of the towns.

"We want to keep the communities viable because, although the water problem jeopardizes their future, losing the traffic from the highway will certainly affect the towns in a negative way," she said.

Kleinschmit said she sees impossible obstacles in rural farming economics today but doesn't run from them. "I found out I'm good at this," she said. "This is what I can do the best, speak out for family farms."