



Women in Ag Roundtable Toolkit

Created by the Ag Women Lead Team, U.S. Department of Agriculture

The goal of women in ag roundtables is to engage communities and groups of women involved at all levels of agriculture to talk with one another about their struggles, advice, and shared experiences as a woman in the ag industry. USDA leaders have hosted these roundtables across the country with members of Congress, Directors of State Departments of Agriculture, universities, and agribusiness leadership. In order to create channels for mentoring, and reach more women across the country and all sectors of the industry, the Ag Women Lead Team is putting forward the following toolkit which will allow interested persons and stakeholders to host women in ag roundtables in their own communities. This will allow the discussion to expand nationwide, increase local connections, and promote small group or one-on-one mentorships. The ultimate goal of the women in ag network is to promote women's leadership in agriculture, with the hope that through mentoring, networking, and communication, women in ag will be more likely to assume leadership roles in the board room, in the lab, on the farm, or in the office.

Format:

- 1. Roundtable/mentoring circle:** attendees sit around a table, in a circle, or in a classroom style setting. Attendees are then invited to go around the room and share their stories, experiences, and express what kind of advice or guidance they are looking for or can offer. After going around the circle, attendees can answer guidance questions (below), respond to other's stories or asks, or talk more broadly on common themes that arose. This format is often best if there is a moderator keeping people to time limits, asking guidance questions, and paying attention to recurring themes or topics. It works well with smaller groups, people that share a geographic area or background, and people that may have some familiarity or prior interaction with one another.
- 2. Panel:** Three to five panelists and a moderator, large audience. Panelists can be exemplary women, women in leadership roles, or established mentors. The audience sits classroom style and listens to the panel answer guidance questions (below) asked by the moderator. This format is often best for a larger audience, an audience where attendees come from various backgrounds, or an audience that is not familiar with one another from prior meetings or interactions. After the panel discussion, you may choose to open the discussion to questions from the audience.

NOTE: With each format there is room for creativity. You may choose to use a white board for recording themes or writing down ideas; you may also choose to do worksheets, or other guidance and brainstorming activities rather than the question-answer format. It is truly up to the group, or group leader.

Time:

An hour is ample time for a roundtable, but conversations extend beyond that time period. An hour is suggested for the official agenda, and an additional half hour for one-on-one networking and discussions. This allows for conversation outside of the more formal setting and creates connections. It can be done in the form of a reception, a happy hour, or simply a structured breakout session.

Attendees:

The number of attendees varies on location, time frame, and geographical area. The roundtables can be as small as 10 people, or as large as 100. There is no limit on either end of the spectrum.

Best practices:

- Be sure to send invitations in advance, we recommend two weeks. Since farmers, ranchers, office, and lab workers alike all work busy schedules, time to plan ahead is necessary to ensure good attendance.
- Provide contact information for the host or host group so people can ask questions and provide input.
- Have questions or activities planned ahead of time for panelists and attendees.
- Gauge who is in the room. Who is the audience? What are their backgrounds? It is important to steer the conversation in a way that applies to participants so that they feel engaged and comfortable speaking.

Guidance questions:

- What or who inspired you to start a career in agriculture?
- What challenges face women in your particular part of the agriculture industry?
- What assistance do you know of for women in agriculture? Are there any helpful tools you have used to get started or become successful?
- What is the best advice you can give to a young person starting their career in agriculture?
- What role do you see women playing in agriculture now? In the future?
- What can the government, industry, and academic institutions do to inspire the next generation of farmers, ranchers, and ag professionals?
- What advice do you have to share for someone who may be new to agriculture, or starting their second career on the farm?

- How can women in your area take advantage of leadership opportunities?
- Talk about a time you overcame a challenge in your profession, career, or experience. What did you learn from it? How can other women benefit from your story and experience?

Outcomes and goals:

- Goal setting: goal setting is easier with more perspectives, and colleagues to hold you accountable and offer assistance
- One-on-one mentoring: mentees and mentors can more effectively find each other in group settings
- Leadership: group members have the opportunity to lead and listen through this group-facilitated format, as topics can change with each meeting
- Diversity: groups may host a diversity of age groups, professions, experiences, etc.
- Lasting relationship: whether this is a one-time session, or a monthly meeting, it is important to tailor your event to ensure attendees can create lasting and meaningful relationships with each other
 - » Follow-up: recurring meetings, sharing contact information, creating of a social media page or group

Talking points and statistics:

- Women participate in agriculture on farms, ranches, and urban gardens. Women are scientists, economists, foresters, veterinarians, and conservationists. They are in boardrooms and corner offices, owners of companies and small businesses.
- We need to inspire the next generation of women to be educated, encouraged, and empowered to take on the challenges of meeting the world's growing food, fuel, and fiber needs.
- 31% of America's farmers are women (969,672 total). Women own and operate over 300 million acres of land, and a \$12.9 billion economic impact (NASS 2012 Census of Agriculture).
 - » For statistics on your state, please visit www.usda.gov/womeninag
- Close to 60,000 jobs in agriculture, food, and natural resources are set to open in the next five years (Purdue University & USDA study). However, there are not enough agriculture program graduates to fill these jobs: there are approximately 2 jobs open for every qualified graduate.