

Farm wives no longer silent partners

By Beccy Tanner

Their national motto is, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." And for Kansas members of Women Involved in Farm Economics, or WIFE, the anger is rising.

Not always do these Kansas women feel their story is being told, nor do they feel they have a receptive audience. According to Kansas WIFE president, Peggy Arensman of Kinsley, it was time for a paper of their very own.

And so, in October the Kansas WIFE members banded together for WIFE Lifeline, a paper published monthly from Lewis.

"We want our story told," Arensman said. "But we also needed some sort of publication enabling us to maintain a pipeline with members. This seemed effective. Our united efforts will be aimed at our No. 1 goal, parity. Women must become involved politically to hold back the changing scene of agriculture."

"Women are logically the ones to educate our politicians as we are the ones who raise our small children. Politicians and children are alike. We must patiently repeat, repeat, and repeat our message again for it to be absorbed," she said.

According to Arensman, the paper will serve not only as a communication to WIFE members but as an education vehicle to non-members as well.

She declined comment on the numbers of subscribers, saying instead the number was growing. As the paper enters into its second month, she said, there are more non-WIFE subscribers than member subscribers.

"We want people to look at this paper as an education, a place where they can get news not normally found in the other papers," she said.

This is the first time any Kansas WIFE members or national members have tried publishing a paper. At this point in the game, they say it is still a challenge.

"Well, it is a strange experience," Arensman said. "We just kind of fun-



Peggy Arensman

bled into it gradually. Last year we had a newsletter and this, right now, seems like less work."

The WIFE organization was organized in Dec. 1976 in Sidney, Neb., as a non-profit agricultural association of women. The purpose was to develop and promote agriculture in the U.S., and membership is open to all women interested in farming. Members are working together for 100 percent parity at the marketplace for all raw agricultural products whether food or fiber.

One hundred percent parity is receiving full value of products grown on the farm in relationship to labor and other costs involved.

"Through efforts of the American Agriculture Movement and other farm organizations like WIFE, the farmer has made a tremendous advancement in educating the public. We feel the public as a whole is more understanding to our plight, they are more willing to listen. But still, the need to educate is always there. We don't want to lose what headway we may have gained. That's the purpose of this paper," she said.

As state president of WIFE, Arensman has served as beef commodities chairperson for WIFE in the state of

Kansas and has testified at United States Department of Agriculture hearings on the plight of the American farmer.

"One gentleman in Washington once told me to argue with me was equivalent to arguing with a buzz saw. Nevertheless, people need to know what's happening to the farmer. It used to be people said a reason a farmer went into farming was because he didn't know how to do anything else. But I'll have you know this is a highly specialized field. One mistake can be costly. Oh yes, you will find a tremendous amount of students enrolled in some form of agriculture at the state colleges, but this doesn't mean they are going back to the farm."

"The days of a young person starting out in farming from scratch is over. And most of the young have stopped farming. They just can't make a go of it anymore," she said. For men still involved with a family

farm, Arensman said, the role of their wife is twice as important as it was five years ago.

"The days of a woman staying in the house all day and going to the supermarket once a week are over. The Kansas farmwoman is, by in large, more involved with her husband's farm. She is just as specialized as he is. In other words she is a vital part of the family farm."

In the WIFE Lifeline paper, Arensman acts as an assistant editor. Responsibilities of editor fall on Sheryl Giesel of Larned.

"More and more women are speaking out and getting involved with farming," Giesel said. "And men are finding out we are speaking with some credence. Always we have been considered the silent partner, but we are gaining a growing confidence in agriculture. We are important. And so is this paper."

Subscription rates for WIFE Lifeline are \$6 a year per member, and \$7.50 per year for non-members.

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President of WIFE testifies at USDA hearings on farm status

By Beccy Tanner

KINSELY — Kansas president of Women Involved in Farm Economics (WIFE), Peggy Arensman, Kinsley, was among three farm representatives from Kansas chosen to speak Dec. 5 at a United States Department of Agriculture hearing in Sedalia, Mo. Arensman was featured in an article of The Hutchinson News Nov. 18 as being the co-editor of a new farm-oriented newspaper, "WIFE Line."

The USDA hearing at which she testified was to determine the present status of the American farmer.

Arensman based much of her testimony in refutation of the USDA's Young Executives Committee which in May 1972 proposed to phase out all farm price support programs, including both loans and purchases.

According to Arensman this committee recommended farm policy should disregard the incomes of farmers and be concerned only with assuring production enough to meet needs of the domestic and export markets.

She also said that the Young Executives Committee forecasted a \$6 billion decline in farm income and speculated on the number of farms dropping to 600,000 from the present 2.7 million.

"With the results of this committee," Arensman said. "We are told that parity was discarded because of the increase of productivity. It seems farmers should not benefit for increased yields because they were brought about by public-supported research. USDA contends the public should benefit, not the farmer. USDA's objective is equitable returns to resources, not equitable returns to farmer, hence parity is a poor measure."

Arensman also said the Young Executives Committee believed that national agriculture policy should aim at creating an environment which would enable the industry to provide adequate supplies of food and fiber at reasonable prices to meet domestic needs to compete in the world markets.

"I contend that the level of farm in-



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"There exists a need for the USDA to monitor the agricultural economy to identify at what point government intervention is necessary."

industry should not be evaluated on its ability to provide an adequate level of living for participants, regardless of the size of their operation or managerial ability. If adequate supplies of food and fiber are being made available, we should conclude that the nation has a healthy viable agriculture. The committee was far off target."

And finally in her testimony before the USDA hearing, Arensman called for a knowledgeable board to monitor farm regulations.

"There clearly exists a need for the

department to monitor the agricultural economy to identify at what government intervention is necessary to insure a viable agriculture consistent with national objectives. The beef industry has not had time to recover from our last devastating lasting years and already we're reading, 'Red meat — bad for health,' 'Cattle eat grain that could be used for consumption.'

"What is needed is a knowledgeable producer board to govern our agriculture policy — actual, honest-to-goodness grassroots farmers understand our industry."



An uncertain future?

Farmers Angry With Grain Embargo

—History Repeats Itself

Embargo. The thought of it leaves a bad taste in farmer's mouths. Especially for those who remember and were hurt by the wheat embargo of the President Ford administration.

However, despite the promises made by President Jimmy Carter and his administration that the farmer wouldn't have to worry about a repeat of such action, many found out differently this past weekend as grain sales to the Soviet Union were halted in response to their invasion of Afghanistan.

President Carter's action against the Soviet Union means that delivery of 17 million tons of US grain to that country has been stopped.

Singled Out Again
"We're shocked and angry because we've been singled out to carry the ball again," said Kansas WIFE President Peggy Arensman of Kinsley, referring to the previous embargo.

"Russia is still going to get the grain," she noted. "All this means is that our prices will drop and other countries will be able to buy our grain and turn around and sell it to Russia at a profit. The farmer will be left out in the cold again."

While she is opposed to the Carter administration's recent action, she did express satisfaction with the action taken afterwards by the Commodities Futures Trading Commission whereby they suspended trading on futures contracts for six grain contracts. In an emergency session, the commission voted to suspend trading temporarily on contracts for wheat, corn, oats, soybeans, soybean oil and soybean meal.

However, in recent contact with the FTC, Mrs. Arensman urged that they extend the suspension to include cattle and hog futures which have suffered since the embargo announcement.

"I commended them (FTC) for their action in suspending the trading of futures contracts," said Mrs. Arensman. "I also asked that the suspension be continued indefinitely until action can be taken to stabilize all commodities affected by the embargo."

She has also been contacting Governor Carlin's office, the state's senators and representatives as well as the US secretary of agriculture's office to urge them to protect the farmer from being hurt financially while the embargo is in effect.

Offer Some Support
"We strongly believe the president should apply pressure to alleviate the problems in Afghanistan and rescue our people in Iran, but not at the expense, once again, of the American farmer," Mrs. Arensman emphasized.

"Had the farmer been receiving parity—what now stands at \$6.16 for wheat—he could af-

ford to carry the nation on his back. But he has been kicked into a non-profit situation for years and cannot financially afford to carry the political maneuvering of (President) Carter's."

"When the trading is resumed, it's going to hurt the farmer terribly," she added. The same general feelings were echoed by Darrel Miller of Lewis, district representative of the American Agriculture Movement.

"My reaction to the whole thing is that we're being treated as an illegitimate, unwanted stepchild once again," said Miller.

He felt the embargo proves that the farmer needs to accomplish two goals to protect himself from such action. First of all, the farmer needs to be guaranteed a fair price for his product through legislative action and farmers need to get together as a group to set the price for their product. "If we don't get our act together and bring our own destiny under control we are

going to deserve what we get," he said.

Free Market System?
"What this proves is that we don't have a free market system for the farmer," he said. "We saw this in 1972 and 1973."

"It's free as long as it serves the interest of the government," he said. "The impact of this will hurt the economy of the entire country. If the government does buy the grain off the market to help the farmer all we're doing is buying it from ourselves."

Miller said the official position of AAM was they were opposed to the action, but they would go along with it as long as the producer is protected.

He did see some bright spots in the bad news for farmers, though. Miller feels AAM is "becoming a viable political force" because the US Department of Agriculture notified the nation's AAM leader to notify him of the embargo plans before the official announcement was made, plus an AAM spokeswoman is being considered for a position on the CFTC.

Hasty Action
However, Miller still feels the action was made in haste. "The president made a drastic mistake by not contacting the major grain exporting countries to see if they would go along with such an embargo."

"And what is to keep the multi-national grain companies from purchasing grain in the United States and transporting it to another country to sell to Russia from there?" Above all, Miller warns the farmer against creating a panic on the market.

"The worst thing a farmer can do is panic and sell his grain," he said. "We don't know how the market will react to this."

Right now, unity is the key to the farmer weathering this latest threat to his pocketbook. Miller is hoping this kind of action is just what the farmer needs to unite in a common bond.

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Farm 'WIFE' Joins Influence Game on Economics

By FORREST HINTZ
Staff Writer

KINSELY — "It's contagious, like flu." That, said Peggy Arensman, explains why "WIFE," acronym for "Women Involved in Farm Economics," is a fast-growing lobbying group.

Formed in December, 1976, by a handful of disgruntled farm wives in Nebraska, now is nationwide. In Kansas, 70 chapters were formed in a few weeks, and there now are about 100 Kansas members.

Arensman, Kansas state president, said it began because "farm women were desperate and just plain mad."

"As equal partners with their husbands they saw the family farm concept going down the tube through lack of understanding and governmental bungling," she said. "They were mad because no one in Washington would listen to them."

They adopted a slogan — "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" — and began proving it.

ARENSMAN SAID WIFE has no room for casual "joiners." Each member works in her own interest. Some build files on politicians and candidates, although the organization is non-partisan. Others do market research to find uses for farm products. Others study legislative proposals or schools or attempt to find energy answers. Anything that affects farming is fair game.

"We try to do our work through logic," Arensman said.

"Most people understand that there's something basically wrong, but they don't quite know what it is. We're trying to educate ourselves so we can educate the public and the politicians. These we cannot educate we will work to remove."

Arensman said one of the major irritants is that so many unrealistic farm programs are being formulated and administered by non-farmers.

"IN JULY, 1978," she said, "Margaret Heckler (D-Mass.), who had been a member of the House Agriculture Committee since 1962 visited a farm near St. John. She never had been on a farm before except for about 10 minutes in China."

"She kept asking what everything was and how much it cost. She wanted to know why we didn't use every bit of land to raise crops turn into alcohol fuel so 'my people' would have plenty of heating oil."

"I finally asked her why she was on the agriculture committee because it was clear that she had no interest in it. It didn't know what it was all about and didn't understand. She said she was there to 'keep food prices down for my consumers.'"

Testifying before a Senate committee on the beef problem — she testified 37 times last year — Arensman crossed swords with a Sen. Edward Kennedy who said he was "sick to death of subsidizing farmers."

(See FARM, 3F, Col. 4)



PEGGY ARENSMAN

We're just trying to get

a decent break for the farmer.

People see land, cattle, machinery,

but they don't see the mortgages...

— Kinsley's Peggy Arensman

April 6, 1980

"Farmer Needs To Make A Profit"

Message Is Still the Same After Two Years

It was just over two years ago that farm tractors from across the nation first began the long trek to Washington, D.C. to emphasize the message of their financial plight.

Last year, farmers once again hopped on their big machines and rolled into the nation's capitol to put more emphasis on their problem.

This year there was no massive tractorcade. The farmer stayed on his farm. However, that doesn't mean the problem has been cured. In fact, many farmers would argue whether any progress at all has been realized over the past two years.

While farmers were staying at home, hoping on the outside chance for a solution from Washington, they were informed that this year the government would pay them a visit, instead of the farmer traveling to Washington.

As a result, the US Department of Agriculture staged a series of hearings around the nation for farmers to attend and voice their opinions, offer suggestions, and further emphasize

the problems facing agriculture today.

Among the many people taking advantage of the government's trip to the nation's heartland was Peggy Arensman of Kinsley, president of the Kansas chapter of Women Involved in Farm Economics (WIFE).

When Mrs. Arensman made the trip to the public hearing at Sedalia, Mo., she could be seen with her familiar red notebook and she was dressed in red — to symbolize the financial situation facing many of the nation's farmers.

Along with Mrs. Arensman, there were about 900 to 950 other people attending the one-day hearing either as participants or observers.

Different Format
"There were a lot of interesting things that came out at the hearing," noted Mrs. Arensman. "It was especially interesting to note the wide cross-section of people attending. There were farmers, cattlemen, hog raisers—you name it, they were there."

She has attended other hearings in the past, but Mrs. Arensman noted the format for this one was different. Instead of one person getting before the audience and Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland and his assistants, the speakers were put in panel groups of five and they were questioned by Bergland. Following the panel discussions, there was a time set-aside for persons from the audience to speak during an "open mike session".

For Mrs. Arensman, who has attended similar hearings in the past, the latest hearing was a repetition of earlier ones.

"Everyone there was saying basically the same thing over and over," said Mrs. Arensman. "The farmer needs to make a profit."

"They (USDA) are going to have a hard time explaining why farmers all over the nation are saying the same thing."

That same point was raised by Bergland when he was questioning Mrs. Arensman and noted, "Mrs. Arensman, this is the same stuff you have told us for the past two years."

She replied, "Bergland, it's the same thing I've been telling you for two years and you haven't done a damn thing about it."

Cheap Food Policy
Among the major criticisms aimed at the USDA was their continuing action in maintaining a "cheap food policy," said Mrs. Arensman.

"In 1972 and 1973 our cattle and wheat markets fell below the cost of production. In my search for answers I came across the USDA's Young Executive Committee Plan to Abolish Farm Price Support Programs, commonly called the Young Executive Committee," she said.

"Here, spelled out in black ink was America's cheap food policy," she noted. "The committee contends government programs are too costly and they limit the supplies of food and fiber. The plan for phasing out our farm programs in five years is introduced. Loan rates would be reduced to disaster price levels for feed grains and wheat and zero payments for all other crops."

"The committee believes the agricultural industry should provide adequate supplies of food and fiber at 'reasonable' prices to meet domestic needs and to compete in the world markets," she continued. "The industry should not be evaluated on its ability to provide an adequate level of living for participants regardless of the size of their operation or managerial ability. If adequate supplies of food and fiber are being made available we should conclude that the nation has a healthy viable agriculture."

"In short, the USDA is saying if we are not hungry agriculture is healthy," Mrs. Arensman said.

Part of the problem stemming from the Young Executive's report is that there are no titles on the committee who are familiar with agriculture.

"It makes as much sense to put librarians on the Young Executive's board as it does to put farmers in the doctor's operating rooms," said Mrs. Arensman. "We recommend the establishment of a knowledgeable producer board to

govern our agriculture policy."

Effects Local Economy
A wheat farm pricing structure also has an effect—both directly and indirectly—on the farming community, she notes.

For example, Mrs. Arensman pointed out that sales tax collections declined in 1977 and 1978 from the amount collected in 1976.

"This is because farmers simply are not able to make the purchases they could if they had a stronger economy," she said.

Based on figures compiled by the Edwards County treasurer, tax collections in 1976 reached a high of \$428,450.10, but dropped to \$399,262.62 the next year and in 1978 sales tax collections fell to \$337,586.38, which was even below the 1974 level.

At the same time, delinquent taxes have seen a sharp increase during the four year period from 1974 to 1977. In 1973 they reached a low of \$9,000.73, but the following year they doubled to \$18,853.88 and in 1977 they jumped to \$49,289.12.

Businessman Loses
When the farmer suffers, so

does the businessman. Mrs. Arensman pointed out that for each dollar spent by the farmer, it turns over in the economy five to seven times.

"When farmers don't pay taxes, and don't spend money, it affects the entire economy."

Based on statistics compiled for every 2,000 farmers that go broke, there are 300 businesses lost on main street. In other terms, the study shows that for every six farms that go out of business, a community loses one downtown business.

Bergland kept asking why small farmers keep selling out to the large operations," said Mrs. Arensman. "We told him when you are in debt you have to sell. And when you have to sell out you go to the highest bidder."

Shake-Up In USDA
Because of the hearings—and the answers the USDA has been getting from farmers—there has been a large shake-up in personnel in recent weeks, Mrs. Arensman said.

According to David Senter, an agriculture analyst and a lobbyist for farmers in Wash-

ington, D.C., there have been a number of people dismissed from the department because department officials "don't like what they are hearing."

Bergland and others with him kept trying to get us to say things we didn't want to say," Mrs. Arensman stated. "They kept wanting farmers to say a new taxing policy is needed to keep land out of the big farmer's hands."

"We kept telling him that the best solution wouldn't be a different way to tax, but a market structure which would allow the farmer to make a profit."

Just how much did the hearings accomplish?

"When I went down there I was skeptical. I knew we'd be telling them the same things we had been saying for more than two years," she added.

"Overall, I wasn't completely satisfied with the results, but the only fighting chance we have is to put our story on record. And we'll keep doing that until we can get something done."

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