

# Five Years of Progress:

## Women Increasing Skills and Education(WISE) with Virginia Cattle and Equipment

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### Relevance

Women in Agriculture (WIA) are playing an increasingly significant role in farm management and farm operations. According to the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture, 58% of farms had a female involved in decision-making, and 11% had a female principal operator. In Virginia, over 20,000 women are actively shaping farm decisions. As farms transition due to life events and other factors, agricultural women are assuming increased farm duties historically performed by men. In response, a team of female Virginia Cooperative Extension Agricultural and Natural Resource Extension Agents developed a hands-on series to offer animal and farm equipment focused educational topics for women in agriculture in a non-threatening, friendly and open educational environment. These flagship programs adopted the acronym WISE (Women Increasing Skills and Education) and were coined CATTLE WISE and EQUIPMENT WISE. These workshops have been offered yearly since 2021 at various geographical locations across Virginia.

***“I unexpectedly lost my husband in January 2025. He was the farmer along with his father. Since his passing, I have taken an active role in learning and assisting with the beef cattle farm. The WISE program gave me the confidence to know that I, as a woman, have the ability to continue the multigenerational farm. I cannot express enough how wonderful this program was to adding to my knowledge and confidence. Thank you.”***  
- Participant Quote

### Equipment WISE

Accidents and injuries on the farm are generally due to interactions with livestock and equipment on the farm, according to a Penn State study. There is an estimated 396 agriculture related emergency visits per year in VA; costing an average of \$1,600, totaling \$576,000 in accidents alone.

Program evaluations over the past 5 years indicate participants have increased their confidence and skills in the following areas.

#### Program topics:

- Tractor Driving & Safety
- Truck & Trailer Driving & Safety
- Welding
- Pesticide Safety
- Advanced Tractor Driving
- Hooking-up Equipment
- Equipment Maintenance
- Equipment Loading & Securing
- Fencing
- Chainsaw Safety & More

### Cattle WISE

Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) programs, Low Stress (LS) Cattle Handling, and proper production management can increase profits on cow and calf operations. In Virginia, cattle operation profits can increase \$100,898,000 and prevention of calving difficulties and losses can increase profits \$15,000,000 per year.

According to evaluations, the following hands-on programs have increased skills and confidence per over the past 5 years.

#### Program topics:

- Low-Stress Cattle Handling
- Beef Quality Assurance Certification
- Chute Side Medication Administration
- Dystocia
- Artificial Insemination
- Understanding EPDs
- Carcass/Meat Fabrication
- Medication & Vaccine Handling
- Recordkeeping
- Cooking With Beef & More



### Celebrating Excellence

Over the past five years, the program has welcomed an impressive lineup of speakers including: Dr. Temple Grandin, Author and Livestock Consultant; Melinda McCall, DVM of Louisa Veterinary Clinic and author of *Driving Home Naked* and *The Million Dollar Goat*; motivational speaker Michelle Payne; and Dawn Hnatow, Low-Stress Stockmanship.

This year, participant milestones were also celebrated. Fifteen individuals were recognized for attending 3 or more years, three participants were honored for 4 years of involvement, and one dedicated attendee was celebrated for participating in all 5 years.

***“I’m early in my farming career and currently working on other farms, but the training and perspective I gained through WISE has had an immediate impact. It’s changed how I approach daily tasks, how I problem solve, and how I envision my own future operation. WISE has given me the tools and direction I needed to build my farm the right way from the ground up.”***  
- Participant Quote

### The Power of WISE: Results that Matter

***In five years, 323 participants from Virginia, North Carolina, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and West Virginia have attended Cattle and Equipment WISE.***

#### Cattle WISE:

- 86.5% of participants reported increased confidence in Low-Stress Cattle Handling.
- 91.8% gained confidence after Medication 101.

#### Equipment WISE:

*Participants reported similar gains as Cattle WISE*

- 90% planning to apply farm equipment maintenance skills.
- 86% noting increased confidence.

#### A five-year follow-up survey revealed:

- 86% of past participants made changes on their farms
- 90% improved safety practices.

**Over half reported stronger engagement with Virginia Cooperative Extension as a result of WISE.**



### Acknowledgements

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