

MN Agriculture: Amy Durand - Annie's Project

MN Agriculture: Amy Durand - Annie's Project



Day 27 of my "30 Days of MN Agriculture" is Amy Durand and Annie's Project. Amy works for AgStar, who is a sponsor of Annie's Project. Annie lives in Apple Valley, which is a suburb of the Twin City area. Annie's Project is an education program that helps to empower women in agriculture to make good business decisions and also to network with other women in ag. It's a wonderful program and I would highly advise any woman to participate.

Social Media Sites:

Sign up for [AgStar E-Newsletter](#)

Twitter: @AgStar

Facebook: [AgStar](#)

Tell me a little about your farm and/or business?

"I work with the local farm credit association, AgStar Financial Services, managing the AgStar Edge. The Edge is the AgStar Center for Education, Development, Growth & Expertise. By listening to the feedback from farmers I work with the rest of the AgStar team to develop educational blogs, workshops, events, etc."

How long have you farmed or been in business?

"I grew up on a family farm, which phased into a hobby farm during the 1980s. My parents both worked off the farm but continued to farm some acres and the farm was a great place to grow up and raise many, many 4-H projects and my FFA SAE. My daughter will be part of the sixth generation to grow up on the farm.

After high school I attended the University of Minnesota and studied Agricultural Education. In search of adventure, my first teaching post was at W.B. Saul High School of Agricultural Sciences in urban Philadelphia. There I taught animal science, managed the horse farm, taught riding lessons and advised the nation's largest FFA chapter. I then moved back to Minnesota and taught two years at the Academy for Science and Agriculture right outside of St. Paul.

Again, in the spirit of adventure, I packed up my car and moved to Las Cruces, New Mexico to do my graduate studies at New Mexico State University. While there I taught the lab section of a leadership and public speaking class. It was really interesting to see and study agriculture in other parts of the country. Across the street from my house was a chili pepper field and there was a pecan tree grove down the street.

In 2011, I graduated, moved back to Minnesota, got married, and started at AgStar within two weeks. I've been working here ever since and I hope to work here for a long time."

Tell me a little about what you grown/raise/produce or service provided.

"The work I do at AgStar is all about education. I work with farmers and our internal experts to design educational offerings to meet the needs of farmers in rural Minnesota. Most of the workshops and events we build from the ground up, others like [Annie's Project](#) that are part of a larger national organization. I focus my work on developing new educational offerings, but the educational program includes webinars, white papers, blogs, etc.

I do want to focus on [Annie's Project](#), as I think it would be of interest to the readers of this blog. Annie's Project is a national organization, its mission is to *empower* women in agriculture. It focuses on building the risk management knowledge and skill level in rural America and to connect women together through learning and networking. How it works? Women meet one night a week for six weeks, each night there is one or two speakers that come in to talk about risk management. Half of the time is spent hearing a presentation and the other half is in discussion or a hands on activity. It's very interactive and fun. My favorite part of it watching women that didn't know each other the first week, learn and get to know each other better.

An important feature of Annie's is that the content is all about growing as a business partner, there is no fluff. I really focus on finding speakers and topics that will help the female participants make sound business decisions and learn the fundamentals so they can be more active in the farm decision making."

Where do you sell or provide services to? Who is your end consumer?

"The AgStar territory covers sixty-nine counties in Minnesota and Wisconsin, but my products are designed for anyone that has an interest in farming. For Annie's Project, I have a spreadsheet and when someone contacts me and says they are interested in Annie's I put their name on a sheet, then I have a state map at my desk and I put a little dot near their town. We offer Annie's in the winter and in the summer. So when it looks like we have enough interest in an area, we pull together a steering committee and start planning. If you have interest in Annie's let me know!

The first year we offered Annie's in Mankato and Rochester. In 2016 we will offer Annie's in Saint Cloud, Mankato, Rochester and Worthington. We are also offering Annie's Project as a retreat in February 2016. We know committing a night a week, for six weeks can be a lot to commit to. So during this retreat you will get the same amount of content, small group interaction and networking in the span of one weekend.

We chose a resort in Northern Minnesota:

1. Because it's gorgeous and
2. Is close to the women in Northern Minnesota where we don't offer a lot of programming.
3. Will be a great get-away destination for women all over the state for a great weekend with other women in farming learning and networking."

What is a most embarrassing moment you have had on the farm?

"I am a natural born klutz, so this is the easiest question for me to answer. I could develop a blog around stories of my clumsiness, gaffes, and embarrassment in general. I'm going to go with a time when I had come inside after doing chores, and was getting ready to hop in the shower and realized I forgot to shut off a hose. So I slipped my big dirty t-shirt back on, pulled on my boots and ran out to the barn, just as the truck from the feed mill pulled in the driveway. I ran into the barn and hid up in the hayloft, while they unloaded the feed...I was hiding, pants-less in a hayloft. When they left I ran to the house and prayed that they hadn't seen me streaking across the farm yard..."

Who are your customers? Or what would you like to tell your customers?

"I'd like to tell the past participants of Annie's Project how much I appreciate them for making the commitment to Annie's. Our first session in Mankato, we had a lady drive from Jackson and also from Goodhue. Every week for six weeks, that is dedication. Those two women have also been very vocal supporters of Annie's. I have a photo of every

graduating group on my desk. I am truly honored to have gotten to know all these ladies through Annie's Project."

What is your favorite Minnesota location?

"Oh. I *love* this question.

Some of my favorite drives and locations are:

- between Worthington and Fulda headed north on 59 at sunrise, so beautiful
 - the Minnesota State Fairgrounds – in particular the cattle barn, horse barn, Coliseum and the Horticulture building
 - turning from hwy 19 to go north on county road 7 to Belle Plaine and seeing my parent's farm
 - the drive from Lanesboro to Rushford headed east on 16, breathtaking.
 - if you have ever been homesick, there is even a special tone to the road noise from I-35 that is a little different from other Interstates."
-

Read the other people featured in my "[30 Days of MN Ag.](#)"

There are others that are also participating in the 30 Days of Blogging Challenge. Feel free to check these out:

- [Janice Person aka JP Loves Cotton: A Month of Memories](#)
- [Rural Route 2 – 30 Days of Farm Girl Faith](#)
- [Prairie Californian – 30 Days of Food](#)
- [Mackinson Dairy – Women in Dairy](#)