

Program helps struggling farmers find other income

Less than a year ago, Dale Marie Bryan and her husband, Floyd, made a difficult and life-changing decision – to leave behind the farming lifestyle they had known for decades.

For 22 years, the Bryans raised cattle, feed grain and four children in Decatur County. But the recent drought in Western Kansas left them wondering how they'd make ends meet. Their children grown, the Bryans carried the weight of operating the farm on their shoulders.

"It was a lot of work for the two of us. Physically, we probably could've kept it up a little while longer," laughs Dale Marie, who is in her 50s. "But monetarily, it just wasn't working. Finally the bank wouldn't agree to extend our

operating loans. In order to keep the land intact, we had to rent the ground and sell off our equipment and cattle – and find other means of employment."

Employment specialist Sarah Larison says that the Bryans' situation is all too common.

"I don't know many farms anymore that are able to make it solely on farm income," says Larison, who assists job-hunters through the federally funded Work Opportunities for Rural Kansans (WORKs). She says increasing input costs and low livestock and crop prices have led many farmers and ranchers to seek outside income. "It's a new era in farming, in some ways."

Just as the Bryans were facing a new era of their own, Dale Marie found a brochure for WORKs. The WORKs program, administered by the nonprofit Kansas Legal

Dale Marie had written several resumes and cover letters in her many years as a teacher and freelance writer. But Floyd hadn't updated his resume since graduating

The WORKs program, administered by the nonprofit Kansas Legal Services, helps farmers and ranchers make the transition to alternate employment.

Services, helps farmers and ranchers make the transition to alternate employment. Some clients receive money for tuition, training related materials, on-the-job training, childcare and transportation. WORKs staff members like Larison assist with resumes, applications and interviews.

from college. So, in addition to seeking help from their children and online resources, they called WORKs.

"We sort of knew what we were doing when it came to putting together resumes and all that stuff," Dale Marie says. "But having (WORKs) there to validate it and



*Sarah Smarsh
Kansas Legal Services*



A January 2004 dust storm in Kansas traverses the plains with a wall of dust reminiscent of the dust bowl days of the 1930s. The current drought afflicting Kansas and surrounding states has contributed to dust storms and other devastating farm conditions that are putting Kansas farmers and ranchers off their land and out of work.

make sure we were on the right track sure helped a lot.”

The Bryans relocated to Crawford County, where Floyd works as a fuel transporter for the Producer’s Coop in Girard. Dale Marie is now a curriculum assistant for Pitsco, which makes learning aids and products for teachers.

Dale Marie says that, for all the practical assistance that WORKs provided, she most appreciated the program’s personal support in a world that seems less than sympathetic to the family farmer.

“If you’re in the situation that we were in – where your life of all those years is gone, and you have to start fresh – it’s very, very scary,” Dale Marie says. “Our biggest thing was, nobody cared. That’s how we felt. The bank didn’t care – nor did our government. We felt like they didn’t care – they didn’t even know there was a drought in western Kansas. But the fact that the WORKs program was already in place showed that somebody did care.”

Larison says leaving farming can be a more difficult change than leaving another line of work. Larison understands the unique process, she and her husband both being “first generation off the farm.”

“Farming is a lot more than a business,” says Larison. “It’s a social structure. It’s an economic structure. It’s part of their life.” Larison says that a sense of history and family legacy leads most WORKs clients to maintain some connection to their farms or ranches.

Rick Smith used WORKs assistance to become a deputy sheriff in Osage County. His wife, Brenda, is now the primary operator of their dairy farm in

Anderson County but plans to attend truck-driving school. Even then, the Smiths hope to keep the farm running with their children’s help.

The bottom line, Brenda says, is that WORKs has armed her



A line of tractors to be auctioned off on a cold winter’s day marks a sad transition for many farmers and ranchers ending several generations of living and working on the family farm.



REACHING AGREEMENT IN NEW WAYS

ALTERNATE TIMES/PLACES FOR PRE-CONFERENCE SESSION

Parsons Wednesday, April 19

Salina Tuesday, May 9

Lawrence Tuesday, June 13

El Dorado Thursday, June 29

KRWA, in cooperation with the Kansas Water Office, will make the pre-conference workshop on Reaching Agreement in New Ways (see page 59 of conference schedule in this issue) available in four additional locations from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the dates at the left.

Why this topic? As solutions to water issues become more complex, it’s critical to deal with these issues in the most civil and cost effective manner possible. These workshops provide system personnel training and an opportunity to practice new skills on how to reach agreement on thorny issues, both internally and externally.

You may register now on the KRWA Web site, www.krwa.net, or at the booth of the Kansas Water Office at the 2006 KRWA Annual Conference in Wichita.

Program helps . . .

family with options. Running a dairy farm is a highly demanding occupation. But without professional training, the Smiths' off-farm opportunities might have been limited to check-out lines.

"The program helps people gain professional employment," she says. "I can do any job now. I'm not being limited."

Another client, Andy Atwell, 19, received financial support to

mother already has stepped off the farm to become a teacher.

Larison says that, while jobs in truck driving or nursing are frequently sought for their high growth and income potential,

WORKs clients find a wide range of employment. Their job titles include pastor, welder, office assistant, engineer, lineman, insurance agent, funeral director and more.

Looking back on her journey from Northwest Kansas farmer to WORKs client to Southeast Kansas

professional, Dale Marie is glad that the hardest times are over.

"I really feel for people that are at the opposite end of this, as we were a year ago. When you just don't know which way to turn, it's so scary and just depressing and awful," she says. "I told my husband, 'You know, I'm just so glad we're at this point in that process rather than six months ago.'"

She advises that any Kansans who might qualify for WORKs "not be too proud to do it."

"You absolutely have to take advantage of any help you can get," she says.

WORKs has been helping rural Kansans find employment for more than 10 years. The Topeka-based program has field offices in Hays and Manhattan. For more information, call your area office:

- Topeka: 785-233-2068
- Manhattan: 785-537-2943
- Hays: 785-625-4514

Visit the WORKs Web site at:

<http://www.kansaslegalservices.org/main2.html>



Professional training is available in Kansas whether it be vocational education like the technical college class above, working on an irrigation engine; or a secondary education provided by one of the state's universities or community colleges illustrated by the graduating class above right.



attend technical college. Atwell wants to become a diesel mechanic but stay in the area to help with the family farm in Ottawa County.

"This ensures that he has job skills and will be able to make that transition," Larison says. Atwell's

3/ **REBUILT ELECTRIC MOTORS**

Mitchell County Rural Water District 3 has electric motors for sale. The three motors below have been rebuilt.

- 10 hp 3-phase motor
- Frame # 215TP
- 230-460 volts
- 1745 RPM
- 1" hollow shaft

\$900

- 15 hp 3-phase motor
- Frame # 245TP
- 230-460 volts
- 1765 RPM
- 1" hollow shaft

\$1,100

- 25 hp 3-phase motor
- Frame # 284TPA
- 230-460 volts
- 1760 RPM
- 1" hollow shaft

\$1,400

The District also has a number of other used motors for sale. Call Roy Arasmith, District Manager at 785/545-6885 for more information.