

Women in Agriculture

2015

Four women have been named West Virginia “Women in Agriculture” honorees for 2015, according to the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA).

They were honored during a ceremony at the State Fair of West Virginia Sunday. Biographies of the selected women will be featured in the agriculture building throughout this year’s fair.

Induction is granted to those women who have made significant contributions to the establishment, development, advancement, or improvement of West Virginia agriculture, forestry, or specialty crops in the Mountain State.

“This program provides recognition for a very deserving group of people,” said Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick. “I extend my congratulations to this year’s new members. They have all demonstrated a lifetime of dedication to agriculture in West Virginia.”

This year’s inductees are:

Nicole Fansler - Fansler is a 7th generation farmer in Hardy County where she owns and operates a poultry and beef farm. She is a licensed livestock dealer and a weighmaster, and has worked at livestock auction markets. Her grandfather gave Nicole her first cow when she was four years old. She currently has 80 crossbred commercial cows and 20 replacement heifers, and raises broiler chickens for George’s Poultry. She coaches livestock and poultry judging teams, assists with the local FFA Ham, Bacon & Egg Sale, as well as fundraising events for FFA and 4-H clubs.

“The future of agriculture lies within the hands of our Youth,” Fansler says. “We need to teach and encourage the next generation of agricultural stewards.”

Fansler lives in Mathias with her two children and her fiancé.

Sherrie Hutchinson – Hutchinson received her B.S. in Botany from Marshall University and then a MS in Forestry (Protection) from Duke University in May 1978. Upon graduation she worked as a part-time summer employee in the WVDA’s Plant Pest Control Division as a Laboratory Technician, eventually becoming director of the WVDA Plant Industries Division.

After her retirement, she turned her focus to her farm that includes bees, chickens, ducks, a vegetable garden, and a wood lot.

“My advice to the next generation of women in agriculture is to enjoy what you do as your career - be it in agriculture business or as a full- or part-time job on the farm,” says Hutchinson. “There’s no reason you can’t make your living doing something you like!”

Hutchinson lives in Ripley with her husband, who also worked at the WVDA. They have two sons and two daughters.

Jennifer “Tootie” Hill Jones - Jones owns and manages Swift Level Farm and Swift Level Land and Cattle in Greenbrier County. She also keeps small herds of horses that she has been breeding for over 40 years, two of which have made two different Olympic three-day event teams.

She is passionate about maintaining fertile soil, lush and abundant forages, and production of healthy, grass-fed steers. Swift Level was the 2014 Greenbrier District Conservation Farm and was runner-up for the 2014 WV State Conservation Farm of the Year.

Jones is active in several agriculture organizations, including Greenbrier Valley Pasture Network, WV Food and Farm Coalition Meat Working Group, WVDA Rural Rehab Loan Committee, and Greenbrier Local Foods Initiative, among others.

"Women understand the rhythm and spontaneity of life," says Jones. "They live that way due to teaching and caring for others. Love the land as deeply as those you love, respect nature for the force you cannot control, and learn to live in the rhythm. It will feed you, your families, and your communities in every way."

Margaret W. Woodworth – Woodworth has a degree in Agriculture from WVU and worked for the Farmers Home Administration for a number of years before marrying and moving to Burlington, where she now operates Flying W Farms with her husband and three children. They are a fifth generation family farm with a heritage of producing food for the table season to season.

Flying W maintains a herd of 450 head of cattle that are grown and processed for direct sale to the public at the Flying W Market, Deli, Grill, and Catering Service. They are proud to say that Flying W cattle don't leave the farm until customers take them out the door as a beef product.

Woodworth works with 4-H and FFA because they give students a firm foundation in agriculture.

"Agriculture might not be the most rewarding career in terms of financial soundness, but it is more fulfilling knowing you feed and clothe the world," she says. "Look to strong women and follow their example. When I feel down and out, I think of how strong my mom is and draw strength from her."