



## Network Empowers Women in Agriculture

*Byline: Erin Kelly for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association*

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When asked about the importance of empowering women in agriculture, Pam Bailey’s response is simple: “Empowering women is always beneficial in every community, so why should agriculture be any different?”

While strides have been made over the years to improve inclusivity in agriculture, it’s important to build on that momentum. Building women up in agriculture can lead to improved health and safety measures and enhanced decision-making across the industry.

And that’s just what Ag Women Manitoba hopes to contribute to, says Pam, chair and co-founder of the group.

The idea for the group started when Pam participated in a mentorship program for women in agriculture facilitated by the University of Manitoba’s Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences. Realizing the benefits of having someone to talk to who has gone through similar experiences, Pam and her mentorship partner worked to launch Ag Women Manitoba, which will mark its first anniversary as a non-profit in March.

With around 40 members already, Pam notes that the supportive response to Ag Women Manitoba is “evidence that people are eager to be involved and be part of something like this.”

“Ag Women Manitoba is not farmer specific, and it’s not sector specific. It’s just about women in agriculture and how we can navigate our careers or whatever successes we are aiming for,” explains Pam, who farms with her husband and in-laws in Dacotah, Manitoba and is also a director with Manitoba Canola Growers.

“Empowering women helps them make their own choices for work, for business, and for their families.”

Having an outlet to talk with like-minded individuals can also be beneficial for mental wellness, an issue that has become an increasing concern in agriculture in recent years. After polling





members about topics to focus on, Pam says they heard a lot about burnout, loneliness, and isolation, leading the group to make mental health a key priority.

“Mental health is something that really impacts women in agriculture, whether it be low self-esteem... or isolation if they’re on the farm with three kids and no access to daycare. [Mental health] ranges in a lot of ways for different people,” says Pam, noting that mental health and other farm safety topics will continue to be incorporated into the group’s areas of focus in the future.

Part of the self-care equation is finding balance. However, that can be a difficult feat for women in agriculture who fulfil multiple roles, which often includes being responsible for the well-being and safety of all family members on the farm.

“It can be hard to do all these different jobs and figure out how to make it work,” Pam explains. “Sometimes just having the opportunity to talk... and say ‘I’m struggling’ or ‘I’m not sure I’m doing this right’ can make such a difference. Because you’re not the only one who feels that way.”

Change may not happen overnight, but judging by the phenomenal response that the group has received in its first year, it seems safe to say that Ag Women Manitoba is already having a positive impact for its members and the broader agriculture community.

“We have a wonderful diverse agriculture industry... there is a place for everyone.”

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) is an annual campaign held the third week of March of each year. In 2019, Safe & Strong Farms: Build an AgSafe Canada, takes place March 10 to 16. CASW is presented by Farm Credit Canada. For more information visit [agsafetyweek.ca](http://agsafetyweek.ca).

*Cutline P Bailey1: Pam Bailey, Chair and Cofounder of Ag Women Manitoba farms with her husband and in-laws in Dacotah, Manitoba and is also a director with Manitoba Canola Growers.*

