



Longtime Christian County Lady Landowners member and historian Treva Weiser, 84, stands for a portrait Friday in her garden alongside her farm south of Taylorville. DAVID SPENCER/THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

LADY

Continued from P1

back to what we plant, what we apply, how it's marketed. And the Lady Landowners has helped us learn all kinds of things about farming."

The group — which, despite its name, isn't limited to women, land holders or even Christian County residents — requires only that attendees have an interest in caring for the land. The group, which averages 40 people each meeting, gets together four times a year.

Recent field trips sponsored by the group have varied from University of Illinois grass research for use in ethanol production to wind turbines, alpaca farms to fish hatcheries, commercial gardens to organic growers.

Speakers at the meetings keep the membership up to date on everything from the nation's latest farm bill to financial planning for family farms.

"New things are happening every day — new products, new way of doing things," group director Janice Funderburk said. "Lady



Members of the Christian County Lady Landowners tour one of the greenhouses at the University of Illinois in Champaign in 1985. PHOTO COURTESY TREVA WEISER

Landowners helps us navigate that. And then, of course, there's the social aspect, the camaraderie."

Barbara Oltmann has been a member for a decade. A neighbor invited her to her first meeting.

"I had been reading about runoff issues in Taylorville Lake," said Oltmann, who is retired after 50 years of farming land northwest of Nokomis. "And there was a representative at the meeting talking about that. It really got my interest."

Today, Oltmann serves as the group's vice president and is responsible for or-

ganizing the annual field trip. But she's worried about new recruits. The average member is between 65 and 70 years old.

"We need some younger ones," Oltmann said. "But we understand it's time. I didn't start attending until my kids were gone."

President Elaine Vangeison said women in farming often have had to juggle farming with family life and often an outside career.

She and her husband have farmed for 54 years with a homestead south of Kincaid and roughly 280 acres throughout the county. The

Vangeisons grow wheat, corn, soybeans and hay and raise cattle. But until her recent retirement, she also worked off the farm as a church bookkeeper.

"Since retiring, I do all the marketing, watch what the prices are doing," she said. Together, my husband and I figure out what we need to sell for to get a profit. And then I stay on top of what the market is doing, waiting for it to hit that point."

Vangeison said she's also been watching recent spikes in farmland values.

The current sale price for prime farmland in the area is as high as \$12,000 an acre — an increase of \$2,000 from its previous value. But active farmers aren't gambling with their land, she said.

"It's amazing what it's doing. But these things don't last," she said. "The (stock) market isn't making money right now, so people are moving their investments to farmland. Like my husband says, 'They don't make more farmland.'"

"But once the economy turns around and stocks start making money, it'll level off."

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