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WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE: THE WOMEN OF PCFMA



By Debra Morris

More women than ever are involved in growing fruits and vegetables you enjoy every day. They either outright own, are a principal in, or share responsibility for running farms and ranches in California. Of all direct-to-consumer farmers, the American Farm Bureau found that [36% of farms are operated by women](#) nationwide.

Along with farm owners, operators, laborers, and others who own and operate farms are the women behind the scenes. They support, promote, and encourage farmers' markets and give those who work the land a place to sell their products. PCFMA has a diverse, passionate, and talented staff that includes women who come to us from a variety of different endeavors and with a desire to help California farmers keep farming. From market managers to promotions and marketing staff to administrative staff, we are here to serve and promote small family farmers.

My grandfather had a small farm in Oklahoma and I've always enjoyed farmers' markets so I jumped at the chance to work for PCFMA as a marketing specialist. I'm an avid gardener with a small plot of vegetables in the backyard and a background in teaching and marketing, so I found the perfect fit. While promoting farmers' markets, I discovered the unique and diverse world of California's small farmers and the community

surrounding them.

I've been with PCFMA for 16 years and have seen women gravitate toward this field as market managers and other important support staff. They all have a desire to educate the consumer about local farming, to encourage eating with the seasons, and to promote access to healthy fresh produce for all. These amazing, talented, and passionate women of PCFMA shoulder both front-line and behind-the-scenes responsibilities as they promote farmers' markets. Whatever position they hold and in whatever department, they strive to promote farmers and farmers' markets.

Ashley Olvera-Cortez is one of those women who were on the front lines as a market manager. She is now a Direct Marketing Coordinator. Ashley graduated from UC Davis with a B.S. in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems with an emphasis in Ecology, learning about food systems.

She comes to us from a family of women who worked the fields in Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, and Texas, and finally California. "Until I went to college and learned more about the food system and agriculture, it never occurred to me how male-dominated agriculture was, which was why it was incredible to see so many of my female peers of many nationalities have a huge interest in changing that norm, changing the system through the power of education, access, and even policy to continue making a space for women in ag."

As a market manager, she says, "I loved being a customer at my local farmers' market, and now I get to know the vendors and support people. I build relationships every weekend while keeping my goal of getting fresh produce to all." One aspect she finds most comforting is the positive reinforcement and support she gets from her co-workers, along with the camaraderie of the struggles they all face at the markets.

Mia Simmans, another one of our passionate market managers came to us with wide experience in farmers' markets. She has an extensive and eclectic work background, but her first experience working at farmers' markets was as a vendor. A farmer with organic row crops in the Monterey area needed someone to vend for her at a few San Francisco markets. She says, "After working just a few markets, I was in love with the whole world of farmers' markets. I then began playing music at the markets and made a living doing that for several years. After suffering an injury that made it impossible for me to play acoustic guitar for hours at a time, it was suggested by a PCFMA employee that I apply for a market manager position. This is my 3rd year working for PCFMA as a market manager."

She feels that the role of women in agriculture is not recognized and celebrated enough and that the world would be a better place if women were in more positions of power and ownership in this arena. She says, "I love the kindness and generosity of the farmers and vendors, as well as how the community comes together to make each weekly market its own particular slice of life. Humans have been gathering together at weekly markets for generations and I love being a part of this historically important and essential human custom. I thrill to the cycle of each fruit and vegetable coming into season and am enthralled by the different tastes they have as they go from early to late in their ripening process. I find the whole thing very exciting!"



Maureen Hovda began working at PCFMA after working many years as a bookkeeper and manager at CVS. The wife of the then-director at PCFMA noticed her dedication and strong work ethic and suggested she work with PCFMA. She began in the accounting and administrative department before rising to the position of Director of Finance and Administration.

She says, "I do not directly work in agriculture myself. However, I am a caretaker by nature. I am in a support role for women in agriculture. I am passionate about supporting PCFMA's staff and ensuring everyone that works for PCFMA is safe. I feel the same way about the women producers that sell in PCFMA markets."

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She's been with PCFMA for 11 years and says, "my favorite part of my work is when I see staff that are passionate about their positions and are excited about what they do. I work hard to ensure PCFMA staff are all treated fairly and equitably. That is by far my most important goal in my role at PCFMA."

Marisa Ades, the Marketing Specialist for Field Trips, started working at PCFMA after working in New York and Philadelphia as a chef (and, very briefly, a farmhand). She and her husband moved to California about 5 years ago and wanted to find out more about the local food scene. She has always been a proponent of strong local food systems.

She originally joined PCFMA as a market manager, then moved to our chef for the Cookin' the Market program, but then drifted toward her desire to get the word out to children and parents about the importance of eating healthy fresh produce. "In the marketing department, I can draw on my culinary background to educate and encourage customers to enjoy the charms and delights of local, seasonal produce. I love – love - love teaching kids about the flavors and benefits of healthy local food!"

As Administrative Assistant, **Melissa Hanson** knows what farmers and ranchers do every day. Her husband's family owns Hanson Farms, which raises sheep. When the ranch hit some hard times, she and her husband and children moved to the home ranch in Clayton to help. Her husband was the one who informed her of an opening as a market manager and she took it. Growing up attending swap meets as a young kid, working as a START teacher for 7 years, and as a California Conservation Crop member prepared her for working at farmers' markets - not to mention marrying into a ranching family.

She is adamant that education is the key to a successful society and women in agriculture are educators, a backbone to our society. "It's a good feeling knowing I am helping to provide bridges and resources to meet the gaps between market managers and farmers. There is nothing to beat the sense of pride I get knowing I help farmers put local products on people's tables.

There are many other women on staff at PCFMA and we would like to thank them for their dedication, passion, and hard work in making farmers' markets successful.

Historically, the role of women in agriculture is one of perseverance and plain old hard work, from the women who tended farms when husbands went off to war, to widows who had to take over the land to keep the family fed, to those who now have small family-run farms. Women farmers and ranchers continue to innovate, educate, and persevere. Let's recognize the achievements of women in agriculture and those who broke barriers in the past to bring us to today. Visit "[Wonder Women in Agriculture](#)" to discover and celebrate the great women who have come before us.