

Marieta Hauser – Woman leader

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Orlando, Florida. We are at the national meeting of the American Farm Bureau Federation, where four candidates are vying to become president of this national organization. It is a highly contested election, and the four candidates are speaking at a candidate's forum. Would you believe, the person who is moderating this forum is a woman from rural Kansas? It's today's Kansas Profile.

Marieta Hauser is the woman who moderated this candidate forum for the national Farm Bureau organization. She has risen through the ranks to be a key leader in agriculture.

Marieta was born and raised in Grant County in southwest Kansas. Grant County is located 30 miles from Oklahoma to the south and borders the mountain time zone on the west. Marieta's ancestors were in ranching and then got into the grain elevator business in Grant County.

Marieta met Tom Hauser in school and ultimately married him. They moved to Tom's farm where today they raise dryland crops of wheat and milo. Tom and Marieta had three sons and a daughter. After the kids were older, Marieta took the job as director of the Grant County Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, where she serves today.

Marieta enjoys promoting her home county. "Our historic Adobe Museum is outstanding, and Wagon Bed Springs has rich history from its location along the Santa Fe Trail," Marieta said. "Mountain man Jedediah Smith is said to have died here in an Indian battle," she said.

Each year, Marieta promotes the annual Grant County Home Products Dinner (as we have previously profiled) which serves all-local foods to more than a thousand people. Wow.

Years ago, Marieta had gotten involved in the Farm Bureau organization. Shortly after moving to the farm, her husband was invited to join the county Farm Bureau board and Marieta joined the county women's committee.

"As a service to members, we were going to offer a first aid class," Marieta said. "Since I was certified in first aid and CPR, I agreed to help." She did so well that she was asked to chair the committee the next year, and her involvement with Kansas Farm Bureau grew from there.

"I loved the fact that it was a grass-roots organization and members can really get involved and make a difference," Marieta said. She got so involved at the county level that she had the opportunity to serve on the state resolutions committee. Then a vacancy opened up for the chairmanship of the statewide Women's Leadership Committee. Marieta ran for the office and was elected. That position entails serving on the Kansas Farm Bureau Board of Directors.

Then a vacancy opened on the national level – the American Farm Bureau Federation Women's Leadership Committee. Again, Marieta ran for the office and won. Her duties involve working with the national Farm Bureau organization to promote agriculture and enhance leadership.

In 2015, the longtime president of the American Farm Bureau Federation announced he was going to retire. Four men from different regions of the nation threw their hats in the ring in hopes of being elected as his successor.

The Women's Leadership Committee recognized that the voting delegates needed more information about these candidates. They proposed to the American Farm Bureau Federation that they would host a candidate's forum where all four candidates would speak side-by-side at the same time, and the organization agreed. When the national convention was held in Orlando, the Women's Leadership Committee hosted the event. And when that committee needed someone impartial to moderate the event, the person to whom they turned was Marieta Hauser.

"I had moderated some candidate forums locally, so I agreed to take it on," Marieta said. On that national stage, she led the discussion with the candidates. It was an exciting moment for someone from the rural community of Ulysses, Kansas, population 5,857 people. Now, that's rural.

"I'm grateful for the opportunities I've had through Farm Bureau to broaden my horizons," Marieta said.

It's time to leave Orlando, where Marieta Hauser is making a difference by using her skills to help inform the voters and enhance her organization. She has grown from the grass-roots into national leadership.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.