

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Significant Women in Agriculture – Katie Plohocky

If you're heading north out of Tulsa and don't know what to look for, you could pass right by R & G Family Farm and never know it. However, nestled back in the woods off of State Highway 11 you can often find Katie Plohocky gardening, feeding the livestock and organizing her latest proposal to bring agriculture and food to the communities around her.

Born on a 400 acre centennial farm in Croswell, Michigan, Katie Plohocky has been playing in the dirt since she could crawl. Upon graduating high school Katie headed for the business world. She earned a bachelor's degree in business leadership from Baker College as well as a master's and MBA from University of Phoenix. Already a well-seasoned commercial real estate agent, in 2000 she moved to Oklahoma to continue her career. It wasn't until she got involved with the Indian Healthcare Resource Center's 'Food for Life' in 2008 that she realized the food scarcity that many Oklahomans face.

"We are in a food desert," she said. "People in this area have to travel several miles to access food. We grow more than enough food in the state, but access and distribution of that food is a different story. Seventeen percent of households in this area do not have transportation, so food access is a problem. We help with community gardens, help people grow in their backyards and assist mobile farmers markets."

In addition to her selfless attitude, Plohocky's entrepreneurial spirit and work ethic set her apart. The projects and service organizations she has developed did not come with an instruction manual, nor were they a guaranteed success. One thing that is guaranteed, however, is that when Katie recognizes a need with Oklahoma food and agriculture she takes action. Take for example her mobile grocery store.

Founded in 2010, R & G Family Farm's mobile grocery store was just the first of many different ways Plohocky is striving to increase access to food and having a lasting impact on agriculture in Oklahoma. The mobile grocery store served over 10,000 people in only its second year of operation.

"We started a mobile grocery store to serve food deserts about four years ago," she said. "We converted a nine-horse trailer into a grocery store that we can transport to different neighborhoods each day. We have 16 acres that consist of chickens, goats, aquaponics, fruit trees

and vegetables that we stock the store with. We also have partner farms that grow produce for us as well as let us utilize the food they do not sell. Our customer base continues to expand significantly each year.”

With a portfolio which shows over 100 percent growth in food sales each year, her selfless attitude and entrepreneurial mindset is working well to benefit others. It is easy to see how her volunteer base is growing with individuals that want to give back.

In 2015 R&G Family Farm started ‘Hands to Harvest’, which redirects unsold produce to those who need it most. With this program, Plohocky takes volunteers to partner farms, grocery stores and restaurants to harvest unwanted food and leftover food waste. This food is either distributed through R&G Family Grocers’ mobile store, Food on the Move, Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma, or taken back to their commercial kitchen for preservation. Between her farm, gardens, mobile grocery store and volunteering it can be hard to see how Plohocky has any free time to do anything else. However, Plohocky understands the importance of educating people across Oklahoma on our food needs at both the local and regulatory level.

Don’t be surprised if you see Plohocky out of her work clothes on the steps of the state capitol building. She has become a resounding voice for Oklahoma food security and has traveled to the state capitol several times to discuss policy related to food growth and distribution. Each year she coordinates the Oklahoma Food Security Summit which brings together national, state, tribal, and local food policy experts and community members to discuss food insecurity and develop solutions to take action. On the local level, she began the “Cooking for Health” program which teaches people how to grow and prepare fresh, healthy food all the while reducing food waste.

“We currently work with Tulsa Food Security Council, Lacy Park Community Center, Tulsa City-County Health Department, OSU Health Sciences, Tulsa Public Schools, Tulsa Community College, and many others to provide community classes around healthy food,” she said.

Listening to Plohocky describe all of the different facets of food and agriculture with which she’s involved can be challenging to keep up with. However, she claims it’s all more than worth it at the end of every day.

“By doing what we do, we hope to change lives for the better. Healthy diets can only be possible through diverse farming systems that ensure everyone has adequate access to local foods. Any day we get to do that is a day well spent,” Plohocky said.

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Photo caption: Katie Plohocky of Tulsa is being recognized in the Significant Women in Agriculture series.

