



The Resilient Journey of Carrie Vollmer-Sanders

International Climate Hub

March 22, 2024

Embracing the Unfamiliar

For Carrie Vollmer-Sanders, farming is a family affair, with each member playing a specific role in nurturing their family's 1,300 acres of corn, soybeans, and wheat. Initially, Carrie's tasks did not include driving the colossal tractors or planting the seeds, a division of labor she was content with. However, life on the farm is as unpredictable as the weather, and the spring of one memorable year brought unforeseen challenges that would change Carrie's role on the farm forever.



Faced with her father's illness during the critical planting season, Carrie stepped into shoes she never imagined filling.

When her husband Ryan asked if she could plant soybeans, her instinctive "Yes" marked the beginning of a new chapter. Transitioning from a bystander to the driver's seat of their John Deere 8335R—a technological marvel compared to the 1950s Farmall H

she grew accustomed to in her youth—Carrie embarked on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment.

A Test of Resilience and Innovation

The transition was not merely about mastering the machinery, but about embracing the responsibility of continuing her family's legacy under pressure. The task was daunting; the fields awaited, and the clock ticked unforgivingly towards the end of the planting window. Yet, Carrie's determination shone through. Drawing on her deep-seated knowledge of the land and armed with the latest in agricultural technology, she navigated through the initial trepidation to successfully plant her first field of soybeans.

This moment of triumph was more than a personal achievement; it was a testament to the evolving role of women in agriculture. Carrie's story underscores the importance of adaptability, learning, and leadership in the face of adversity. Her hands-on involvement in planting not only ensured the continuity of her family's farming operations but also challenged the traditional perceptions of women's roles on the farm.



Nurturing Growth Beyond the Fields

Carrie Vollmer-Sanders' influence extends beyond her fields in Ohio and Indiana. As the Director of Sustainability for U.S. Farmers and Ranchers in Action, she is at the forefront of sustainable farming initiatives, advocating for practices that safeguard the environment while enhancing productivity. Her dual role as a farmer and environmental steward exemplifies the criti-

cal intersection of agriculture and conservation, highlighting the importance of responsible land management for future generations.

Moreover, Carrie's co-ownership of Grains and Greens Inc. and her active involvement in her community further illustrate her commitment to fostering growth, not just in crops, but in people and sus-

tainable practices. Her journey from a high school junior teaching tractor driving at a Future Farmers of America event to a leading figure in sustainable agriculture encapsulates the spirit of women who are not only growing crops but also growing communities, knowledge, and opportunities for a more sustainable world.

Championing Change on a National Stage

In recognition of her extraordinary efforts towards promoting environmental sustainability and agricultural best practices, Carrie Vollmer-Sanders was honored as a "Champion of Change" by the White House in 2014. Serving as the Director of the Western Lake Erie Basin Project for The Nature Conservancy, she played a pivotal role in improving nutrient management and drainage practices, critical to the health of Lake Erie and its surrounding ecosystems. By leading a diverse coalition of farmers, agribusinesses, researchers, and conservation groups, Carrie developed a voluntary certification program focusing on 4R Nutrient Management—a testament to her commitment to making fertilizer use beneficial for crops rather than contributing to harmful algal blooms. This program, aimed at enhancing water quality and ensuring the sustainability of agricultural practices, showcases Carrie's leadership in bringing together various stakeholders for a common cause, further cementing her status as an influential figure in the realm of sustainable agriculture and environmental conservation.

As we recognize Carrie Vollmer-Sanders and countless women like her, we are reminded of the resilience, innovation, and dedication that women bring to agriculture. Their stories are a testament to the changing landscape of farming, where women play a pivotal role in nourishing both the land and the legacy of the agricultural community. Carrie's journey from "I don't do that" to "Yeah, I do that!" resonates as a powerful narrative of empowerment, challenging us all to embrace the unfamiliar, nurture growth, and cultivate a brighter future for farming.

Carrie's journey from "I don't do that" to "Yeah, I do that!" resonates as a powerful narrative of empowerment