

In the Field

UNDERWRITING TO GO

Daralis Kinder does have a home. She just doesn't spend a lot of time there.

For the past year, Daralis has led a vagabond life, serving as the ultimate team player in two different ProAg® regions while also holding down her regular responsibilities in a third.

"They needed underwriting help during the transition in Lexington, so I worked in that office off and on for about six months," Daralis recalls. "Then starting in April, I was there every week. I would fly home on the weekends. You haven't lived until you have half an hour to get yourself from gate A 1 to C 99 in Atlanta to make your connection, but I always made it. It was very good exercise."

Daralis is the lead underwriter in the Lenexa office, her true home base. After the Lexington office was fully staffed and trained, she spent the summer doing ProAg training. "I did the tour of Kansas and the tour of Illinois, then went to Texas a couple of different times," she says. "After that, I moved on to assist the Des Moines office with a supervisory transition. I come up here on Monday mornings and head home on Wednesday afternoons."

Enjoys variety

With 15 years of underwriting experience, Daralis has underwritten just about every crop there is. "I've underwritten half

the states in the country, so please don't give me corn and soybeans," she laughs. "That's one thing I loved about working in the different regions. In Lexington, I got to take on something new and learn how to underwrite fresh market green beans. That was interesting."

She's excited about the ProAgWorks™ system she spent the summer training others to use. "I love it," Daralis says. "It's not perfect, of course, but it is adaptable, and it will be able to handle the changes that the RMA continues to throw at us. It's change, and change always takes some time to get used to. But I like the way they made the transition between seasons. I went through a similar conversion when I was working for another company, and we switched in the middle of the crop year. That did not go well."

Obviously, change doesn't bother Daralis. She's enjoyed her travels and the variety and opportunity it has provided.

"I've had a great time, actually," she says. "I've gotten to meet a lot of people and make friends all across the country. Meeting and working with all these people has been my favorite part of the past year." 🌱



Daralis Kinder

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WOMEN IN AGRIBUSINESS SUMMIT AN EYE-OPENER

When five ProAg® employees headed to New Orleans to attend the inaugural Women in Agribusiness Summit, they weren't exactly sure what they would take from the experience. What they brought home were some new connections and a deeper understanding of the role women are playing in agribusiness today.

ProAg was a Gold Sponsor of the event, organized by HighQuest Partners and held September 17, 2012. Missy Waters, Kim Haar, Terri Sell, Diane Stinson, and Linda Miller made the trip south.

"We got to listen to an impressive list of speakers, and had a chance to network and talk about the challenges we face as women in the ag industry," Diane says. "It was a good start to what they hope will become an annual event. I guess I'll have something to do with that, because I'm on the Summit advisory board now."

"One of the stats I wrote down was that there has been a 30% increase in farm ownership by women since 2002," adds Terri. "In 2007, NASS published a report estimating that 14% of all farms are owned or operated by women now. That fact was one of the drivers behind the organizers putting together this conference."

Terri noted that the winner of Monsanto's Mom of the Year award, who was recognized at the summit, was the primary decision maker on their farming operation. "It was a kind of role reversal, where she managed the farm and her husband worked off the farm," she elaborated. "It took me back to when I was 16 years old, my siblings were in college, and I was helping my father carry irrigation pipe from field to field while all my friends were dating."

Strong speakers

From banking to insurance to transportation and grain marketing, the speakers represented all aspects of agriculture. Both Diane and

Terri mentioned two presenters in particular: Mary Shelman, director of the agribusiness program at Harvard Business School, and Janine Mansour, commercial manager at the Port of New Orleans.

"First, I was somewhat surprised that Harvard Business School had an agribusiness program," Terri recalls. "Mary talked about how they are working to change the perception of agriculture as a 'male' profession. She pointed out that in industry worldwide, statistics show that some of the most successful companies are led by women."

"Janine talked about the condition of our transportation system, and how important the condition of our infrastructure is to agribusiness," Diane adds. "That's an area I didn't know a great deal about. That was one of the great things about this conference—hearing presentations from people from so many different parts of the industry."

Outside the lines

Both Terri and Diane stressed that some of the best takeaways from the conference were captured outside of the formal sessions.

"The evening social events, and just the time between sessions, gave us a chance to meet people from different markets we haven't partnered with yet," Diane states. "That could lead to some interesting opportunities."

"On Sunday night before the sessions really kicked off, there was a reception for the 'early arrivers,'" Terri says. "It was a beautiful evening, so a bunch of us were sitting outside, and I got into a conversation with a grower of large amounts of rice in Arkansas. Of course, I had to bring up crop insurance. She didn't have it and didn't want it, so she told me all the reasons why. The chance to visit with her was as valuable as anything else I took from the formal sessions." 🌾



THE ART AND SCIENCE OF CROP HAIL INSURANCE

Crop hail insurance is a different animal, and the people who work with it are a breed apart as well. It's a different world, and ProAg® is fortunate to have a team of experts that know that world extremely well.

Tom Vetter, national crop hail coordinator for ProAg, was the third generation of his family to sell crop hail insurance. After heading up the crop insurance division of Continental Insurance Company, Tom started his own company, Crop Growers Insurance, in 1974. He was also one of the 10 people from the crop insurance industry who assisted in writing the Crop Insurance Act of 1980.

"Crop hail products have been developed by the industry over a 50-year period," Tom notes. "The crop hail and named-peril adjusting and claims staff have to have an entirely different knowledge base and use a completely different approach to adjusting." Tom has developed many of those adjusting procedures, as well as written many of the industry adjusting manuals.

ProAg also has underwriters and claims processing staff specifically trained on crop hail and named-peril insurance. "It's almost a company within a company," Tom says.

Creating new products

Barry Cermak traces his roots in crop insurance back to his early days as a crop hail adjuster in his home state of South Dakota. Today, he is the member of the ProAg crop hail team most closely associated with the development of new named-peril products.

"Named-peril is an area that has seen quite a bit of growth in recent years, and that trend is continuing," states Barry, who is based in Des Moines. "It is a very competitive part of the industry, because while the multi-peril is the same for everyone, named-peril is a way to differentiate yourself from the others in the crop insurance business."

New named-peril products are suggested all the time, Barry notes, but a good idea has to pass through several filters before it is actually brought to market.

"First we ask, is this product marketable to the farmer?" Barry explains. "Then you have to determine if it is an actuarially sound product. Next, can an adjustment procedure be developed that will allow adjusters to accurately determine loss? If it passes those tests, you may have a marketable named-peril product."

Central to that assessment is another member of the crop hail team, Kansas-based Mark Lesperance. "Mark comes up with the formulas from which we can develop our rates," Tom says. "The production staff gives us their wants, needs, and desires, and we work with Mark and

others to convert that into policies with a rate that will sell but will still return a profit for us."

Barry notes that popular named-peril products vary by region. Supplemental replant coverage, for instance, generates a great deal of interest in the Midwest. In California, citrus freeze and grape cluster freeze products are in demand.

"Named-peril products are a very important part of an agent's arsenal," Barry states. "They need to have products that are needed in order to provide full service to their customers. In fact, we get a lot of requests for new named-peril products from our agents. We tell our agents that if there is a named-peril product that would benefit you, your customer, and ProAg, we're always willing to review the request."

Fine-tuning the system

The universe of crop hail and named-peril products, of course, has to be efficiently handled by the new ProAgWorks™ processing system. That's where team member Mary Holle comes in.

"I've worked with crop hail for 26 years," says Mary, who serves with ProAg as the crop hail underwriter for the Lenexa/Robinson region. "I'm kind of unique among the underwriters in that I handle all aspects of the crop hail business, from underwriting to claims to the accounting portion."

That global understanding makes Mary the perfect person to help fine tune the ProAgWorks system to properly process crop hail named-peril claims. "I'm part of the testing squad," she explains. "I go through what our needs are in terms of rules we need to put in place, making sure that the rules are all correct, the endorsements work correctly, and that the screen setups are right."

"We're currently running through the entire system using the winterkill endorsement in the Northwest, since that is one of the first endorsements we process each year," Mary continues. "The crop hail team continues to make suggestions, working to make this the best system it can be. So far, it's going really well."

With a depth of experience that would be tough to equal in the industry, the crop hail leadership team and their staff of dedicated underwriters, adjusters, and claims processors stand behind the ProAg lineup of crop hail and named-peril products. 🍀





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PREPARATIONS CONTINUE FOR 2013

By Missy Waters, Regional Vice President

As 2012 wraps up and a new year begins, our resources are focused on training for the agents as well as our adjuster schools. Getting everyone ready for the changes coming from RMA prior to the intense 2013 spring sales season is crucial every year. We're well into that training, of course, and should be wrapping that up within the next week or two.

A portion of our training in certain locations focuses on the new ProAgWorks™ processing system, particularly the enhancements that have been put in place since the initial release. System users have asked for processing shortcuts that will enable them to operate more efficiently and be more comfortable with the system, and many of those have been incorporated into ProAgWorks.

As is always the case, the RMA has introduced a number of new products, as well as extending the availability of existing products into new geographic areas for spring. For example, trend adjustment has expanded into the South and been added to several new crops,

including cotton. This is a prime example of the value of training, because trend adjustment is an enhancement that can, in many cases, provide improved coverage to the farmer.

This month marked the kickoff of adjuster training on the ProAgWorks system as they prepare for the 2013 claims season. As more people gain experience with the system, we gain valuable feedback and continue to add more functionality and resources to the system.

For example, as we went through the wheat sales closing, and they processed production and wheat acreage reports, we received feedback from agents and processors. Their feedback on areas where they believe a tweak will make the process easier and more efficient is invaluable. We're incorporating suggestions on an ongoing basis.

Our goal continues to be a processing system which makes it easier, and thereby more efficient, for you to process policies. We've made great progress, and we'll continue that process with your help. 

