

Feature

Single Oklahoman would like to meet new friends, take exciting trips and learn more about agriculture-related businesses. Not necessarily interested in marriage, but definitely wants to form lasting friendships with other Oklahomans, as well as with people in surrounding states.

The solution? Singles in Agriculture.

"I've been a member for 12 years and don't belong to any other singles organizations," says Pat Ponder, Oklahoma chapter president of Singles in Agriculture. "Since I've joined, I've gone to places I'd never dreamed of going, learned a lot and had a wonderful time."

Oklahoma chapter vice president Warren Rowland says SIA is not a dating service, but an organization devoted to giving people an opportunity to build new friendships, as well as take part in educational tours and recreational events.

A member since 1995, Rowland says he has enjoyed meeting many new friends through his involvement with SIA.

"The first SIA event I ever attended was in Chickasha and I went inside there with my keys in hand thinking, 'If I don't like these people, I'm outta here,'" he recalls with a laugh. "Well, I'm still in!"

During their educational travels, Oklahoma SIA members have watched a working assembly line at a John Deere manufacturing plant.

Ponder speaks highly of the lasting friendships forged between members, as well as the moral support provided by those in SIA. She doesn't hesitate to drive to another state when she feels the need to be around friends with similar backgrounds and interests.

SIA was formed in the mid-1980s after a single farmer sent a letter to Farm Journal magazine expressing the difficulties of meeting single women interested in a rural lifestyle. His letter prompted Farm Journal staff writer Meg Gaige to pen several articles on the social lives of single farm people. In one of her columns, Gaige asked single readers to send in their name, address and a 50-word biography. The national magazine received more than 2,700 responses.

During the summer of 1985, these submissions were compiled, printed and mailed to all those responding. The magazine's project sparked the interest of an Iowa woman and - due largely to her efforts - Singles in Agriculture became a national organization. Iowan Marcella Spindler volunteered to handle correspondence from those interested in forming a singles organization. By the summer of 1986, the project had generated so much interest that 23 people met in Peoria, IL. to take the necessary steps to make SIA an official organization.

In October of that same year, Singles in Agriculture was chartered as a non-profit organization. The nationwide organization boasts members in 41 states, including Alaska, and as far away as France, for a total membership of more than 1,000.

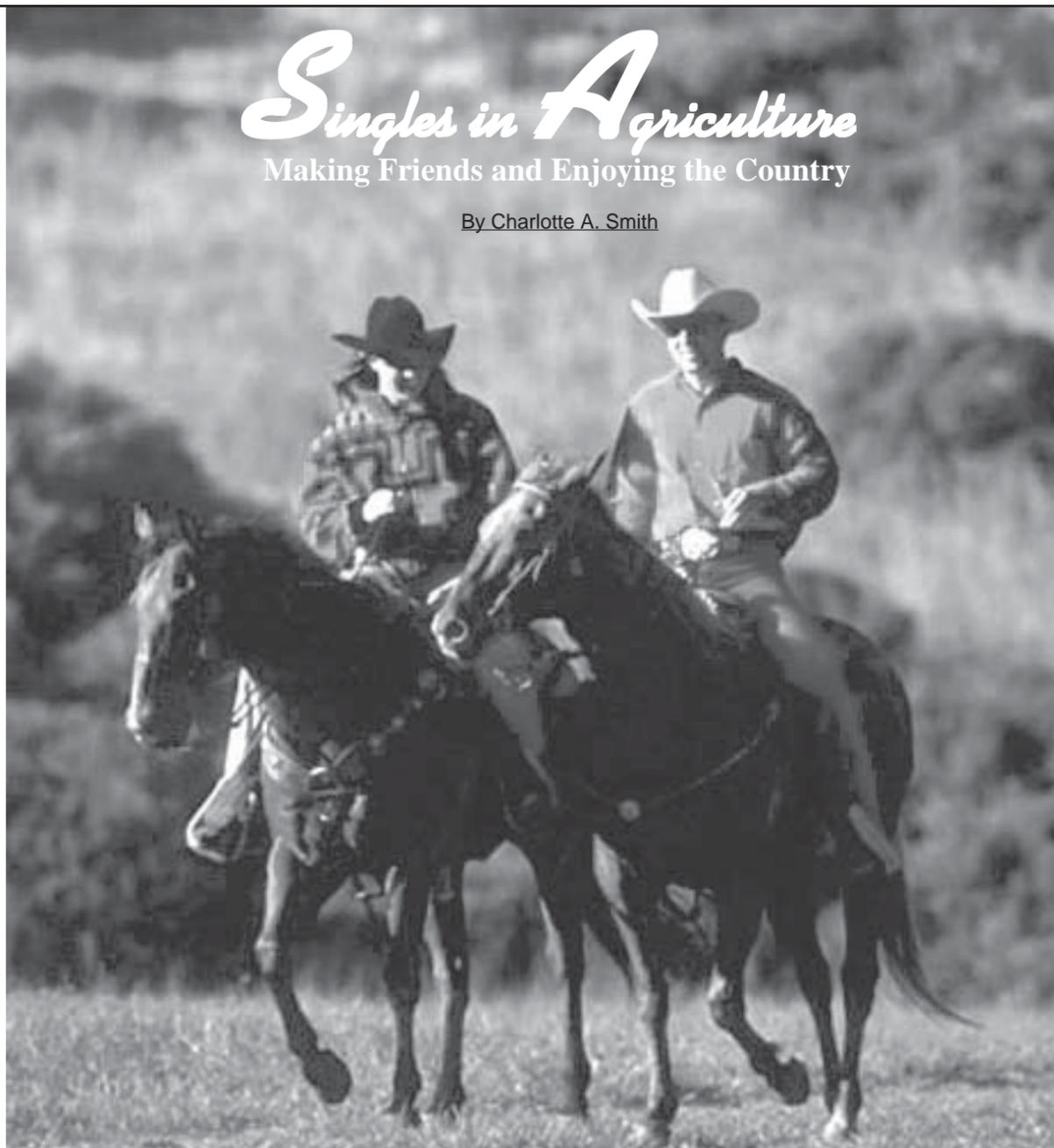
The organization is dedicated to promoting educational, recreational and social opportunities for singles who have an agriculture background or work in an ag-related occupation.

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Singles in Agriculture

Making Friends and Enjoying the Country

By Charlotte A. Smith



"Not all of us are farmers," Ponder says. "I lived in the country as a child, but when our house burned we moved to Tulsa. I lived there for years, but recently my mother and I built a new house on the old farm and moved back. We live in Hoyt, Oklahoma."

The Oklahoma chapter currently has 33 members. "We have good participation from members in the Oklahoma chapter and our membership fluctuates according to the activities that are planned," says Rowland.

In addition to the state events, such as a January meeting in Yukon and a trip to the International Finals Rodeo in Oklahoma City, SIA members can also take advantage of special events planned by other state chapters.

"We (Oklahoma chapter members) meet three or four times a year, but we're encouraged to participate in the national events. It is seven hours from the Oklahoma panhandle to where I live, so going to something in Missouri, Kansas or Iowa isn't that much farther," Ponder says. "A lot of people go to the activities in Kansas and Missouri."

There are three national SIA events held each year, including an annual convention, an anniversary celebration and a summer camp-out. The 2003 February convention takes place on Valentine's Day weekend in Corpus Christi. This year's camp-out is set for mid-August in Wisconsin Dells. The organization's 2003 anniversary event will be held in June at the Agriculture Hall of Fame in Bonner Springs, Kan.

The purpose of SIA is "to promote educational, recreational and social opportunities for singles who have an agriculture background, ag-related occupation or are actively farming...to offer friendship, fellowship, travel, inexpensive events and a chance to get together with other, 'country folk.'"

"Even though we have had people meet and marry, that isn't the main purpose of the group," Ponder says. "At almost all of our get-togethers we end with a dance. We don't promote smoking or drinking and don't set up a bar."

This past year members enjoyed an ocean cruise, as well as a trip to Hawaii. Other activities held for members include hayrides, boating, volleyball, swimming, barn dances, potluck dinners, hot dog roasts and skiing.

"Everyone is welcome to meet us (Oklahoma members) before they join," Ponder said. "You have to join the national organization before you can become a member of a state group."

National membership dues average \$30. An associate membership for former members who have married (called Single No More) is \$25 per couple. State membership dues run \$12 to \$15.

Those interested in learning more about Singles in Agriculture may contact Ponder at 918-967-0055 or vice president Rowland at 405-745-3183.

More information about both the Oklahoma chapter and the national organization is available by visiting the organization's web site at singlesinag.org.