

OUT OF THE SHADOWS: MAKING FEMALE LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE VISIBLE

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Although women constitute a major part of the farm labour force they often do not have formal employment status. As a result, the value of their work is often not fully recognised. This is particularly true on family farms, but is also often the case in non-family farm situations. Frequently, the man is the legal „sole holder” of the family farm and the woman, as “spouse” does not have full entitlement to social welfare, healthcare, insurance, pensions etc. Part time and/or seasonal agricultural work off the family farm, which may be necessary to supplement the family farm income, or may be the only source of income for landless, divorced and/or elderly women, or women from ethnic minorities, is commonly undertaken without an employment contract. More equitable ownership and inheritance rights can improve the economic status of farm women and social services, such as childcare, and reduce their workload. Implementation of such solutions may be constrained by the lack of legal awareness amongst both men and women or cultural, or even religious, attitudes. This paper reviews some of the issues and attempts to identify methods for increasing the visibility of the work of farm women.

Key words: *Farm women, valuing women’s labour, on-farm, off-farm.*

JEL Classification: *Q12.*

Introduction

Women constitute a major part of the farm labour force and play a crucial role in ensuring household food security. On family farms, women generally have numerous responsibilities ranging from child care, housekeeping and care for elderly to taking care of the garden and livestock as well as accounting. Whilst this wide range of tasks in agriculture and the household is increasingly acknowledged, many farm women do not have formal employment status and as a result are often not entitled to social and other benefits. Similarly, in commercial farm enterprises women often have part-time or seasonal job employment contracts.

The 21st Expert Meeting of the FAO Europe and Central Asia Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development was held in Tiranë, Albania in October 2008 with the title “Out of the Shadows: Making Female Labour in Agriculture Visible”. The subtitle was “Women’s labour input in agriculture and role in subsistence farms in South-East Europe and Central Asia: Realities and legal tools for economic recognition”. The meeting sought to identify methods for ensuring the proper valuation of the work of farm women in the region.

The paper was prepared as the keynote paper for the meeting. It highlights some of the issues and attempts to identify methods for increasing the visibility of the work of farm women. It begins with a review of family farms in Europe, touching on their origins, their place within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), their differing importance in different countries and the contribution of women in terms of hours worked. The nature of women’s on-farm work on the family farm, and their perception of their role, are then addressed. This part of the paper is

completed by discussing farm work outside the family farm, either locally or after migration.

The paper then highlights the lack of data and statistics about the work of farm women, and describes some attempts to overcome this. Regarding solutions, some top-down strategies to increase the visibility of the work of farm women are discussed, the potential offered by business development, diversification, pluriactivity and exit strategies are reviewed, and approaches to empowering farm women are described. A few general conclusions are then drawn.

Family farms and the contribution of women

The origins of the family farm, such as found in Europe, go back to the Carolingian¹ law of the ninth century (Mitterauer, cited by Hildenbrand, and Hennon, 2005). By transferring responsibility for a holding to a family rather than an individual, to be transferred as an entity to a reliable and suitable successor, the continuity of levies and services to the lord of the manor could be safeguarded. Since its inception, the CAP has supported the family farm as a trading unit. The final resolution of the Stresa Conference (from 3 to 12 July 1958) asserted the „unanimous will to preserve the familial character” of European farming. Prügl (2001) describes how the West German and French delegations in particular supported the continuation of family farms for reasons which included the fact that it represented a non-collectivised alternative to the policy being pursued in most parts of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and a traditional and male-dominated „way of life”. She suggests that the

¹ Carolingian is the Frankish dynasty founded by Pepin the Short in 751 and lasting until 987 in France and 911 in Germany.

dominance of family farming allowed the West Germans and the French to argue that agriculture was exceptional and not to be subjected to the rules of the free market, thus justifying subsidisation.

Even now, the family farm remains the dominant business model in the EU (Copus et al., 2006) accounting for 91.1% of the regular agricultural labour force of the EU-25 (Table 1), i.e. the EU-27 excluding Romania and Bulgaria. Since the political and economic changes in Eastern Europe and the New Independent States (NIS), family farming has increased owing to factors such as the break-up of the collectives and the restitution of land. This has led to a large semi-subsistence farming sector, in part due to an increase in urban unemployment which has forced

families to rely on the outputs of their small rural holdings. Romania is the most widely cited example, but even in Hungary more than 70% of the farm holdings utilise less than one hectare (Rooij and Bock, 2005). Here, and in several other countries in Central and Eastern Europe a bipolar situation of the large estates and subsistence farms has developed (Chaplin et al., 2004). The CAP is trying to encourage the emergence of a middle stratum of viable, commercial family farms, for example, through Axis 1 of the Rural Development Regulation (RDR) (EC, 2006), however the process is impeded by factors such as the lack of appropriate policies at state level and, at family farm level, the lack of mentality to run a family farm (Small, cited by Hildenbrand, and Hennon, 2005).

Table 1. Share of family labour force in the regular agricultural labour force (persons) in % in the EU-25, 2003 (PT 2000)

Country	%								
AT	95.1	FI	90.4	LU	90.4	CY	92.9	LV	91.5
BE	86.0	FR	65.4	NL	67.0	CZ	35.1	MT	94.5
DE	81.5	GR	98.4	PT	94.3	EE	83.9	PL	99.0
DK	77.8	IE	94.2	SE	82.8	HU	92.1	SI	98.3
ES	91.6	IT	96.4	UK	77.5	LT	94.7	SK	69.3

Source: Eurostat, cited by Copus et al. (2006)

The male-dominated dimension noted by Prügl (2001) assigns a man the role of a “farmer” and a woman the role of “assisting spouse”. This situation has been quantified in the EU-24 (i.e. EU-25 excluding Poland) by Copus et al. (2006). Women represent 38.7% of the total regular labour force in terms of persons and 33.2% (reflecting more part-time working) in terms of annual work units (AWU). One AWU corresponds to the work performed by one person who is occupied on an agricultural holding on a full-time basis. Copus (2006) states that, since 1990, the share of women in the agricultural workforce has remained more or less stable and is unlikely to increase significantly in the future. The overwhelming majority of spouses (76%) are women, who represent 40% of the total family labour force and 28.5% of the non-family labour force.

Within these data sets there are differences between countries and farm sizes. For example, the share of females in agriculture ranges from below one third in Malta, Ireland, Denmark, UK, Spain and France to more than 40 % in most of the New Member States (NMS) (including Romania), Portugal, Austria and Greece. In two countries, Lithuania and Latvia, women account for more than 50 %. In the NMS-12 (i.e. including Romania and Bulgaria) the share of women in the regular labour force is significantly higher than in the above mentioned regions where family labour dominates (Copus, 2006). The share of women sole holders is the highest on holdings of less than 5 ha (32% in EU-25) and lowest on holdings above 100 ha (8% in EU-25). Of

women in agriculture, almost 61% are spouses or “other family” compared to 31% of men (Table 2). Women are more heavily represented in certain types of farming including mixed grazing, livestock, mixed crops, specialist horticulture and olive growing (EC, 2002). Thus they are particularly strongly represented in Southern European countries.

Table 2. Female, male and total regular agricultural labour force by labour categories in the EU-24 (i.e. EU-25 excl. Poland due to missing data), % of total, 2003. AWU = annual work unit

	Females		Males		Total	
	Persons	AWU	Persons	AWU	Persons	AWU
Sole holder	31.3	29.6	56.6	58.2	46.8	48.9
Spouse	43.7	42.7	8.7	6.0	22.3	18.2
Other family	17.0	12.2	22.0	14.7	20.1	13.5
Non-family	8.0	15.6	12.7	21.1	10.9	19.4

Source: Eurostat, cited by Copus et al. (2006)

The contribution of female spouses to agricultural work in the EU-24 is considerable (Table 3). The 2,731,500 female spouses working as regular labour in agriculture account for 992,200 AWU indicating that they spend 36% of their “work” time working, compared to 49% for male sole holders (Copus et al., 2006). Incidentally, the level of part-time work (AWU as % of persons) is highest amongst other family members and lowest for non family labour (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of persons working as regular labour in agriculture with annual work units (AWU) in the EU-24 (i.e. EU-25 excl. Poland), 2003. M = male, F= female.

	Sole holder		Spouse		Other family members		Non family labour		Total regular labour	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Persons (1000)	5595	1954	862	2732	2174	1062	1259	502	9890	6249
AWU (1000)	2743	688	284	992	694	283	996	362	4716	2325
AWU as % of persons	49.0	35.2	32.9	36.3	31.9	26.7	79.1	72.1	47.7	37.2

Source: Eurostat, cited by Copus et al. (2006)

The nature and perception of women's on-farm work

The scientific literature is unanimous in identifying a strong gender division of the work on family farms. The presence and contribution of farm women help to bind the fabric of society in which their families and holdings operate. Price (2006) noted that women in English/Welsh border family farms were increasingly replacing on-farm paid labour in addition to off-farm work (inside or outside agriculture) and domestic responsibilities. In Western Europe, women typically have little influence on commercial decisions affecting the farm, they lack autonomy in their farm work and are often assigned the least valued tasks (Prügl, 2001). Copus (2006) reported that in the NMS-12, management, machinery maintenance and fieldwork are typical male activities, while accounting, milking, calf rearing and mostly intensive manual seasonal labour like fruit picking and harvesting is classified as typically female. The situation is similar in the NIS of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, with men doing the traditional field and herd management tasks while women act as administrators and tend youngstock.

Gender division of labour on family farms is however an arrangement that is constantly evolving. In Norway and probably elsewhere, women used to be responsible for milking but, with the introduction of milking machines, milking became a man's job (Bjorkhaug and Blekesaune, 2007). Similarly, there is widespread agreement that women are frequently the drivers of farm business development based on agricultural multifunctionality and economic diversification (e.g. Copus, 2006). This latter development may provide a route through which women's work becomes more visible, as will be discussed later, but this is not always the case.

O'Hara (cited by Quinn, 2005) interviewed 60 women in Ireland in the late 1990s and defined four categories that describe how women perceive their relationship to the work of the farm family:

- worker/Partner: working for the family farm – being involved as a partner, fully involved in all aspects of the farm and confident about their role and contribution;
- worker: the farm helper – may contribute the same amount of labour as above but less involved in farm decision making and less confident about the significance of their contribution;
- homemaker: the farm homemaker – available when needed but has very little on-going involvement in the farm work, mainly home centred;

- off-farm worker: Farm women in paid off-farm work, may not be involved in the farm work but their income is crucial to farm household.

As O'Hara points out, there is an overlap between these categories (Quinn, 2005). What is perhaps most significant about categorising the work of farm women in this way is a complete absence of any official description to be compared with, a major contributing factor to the lack of visibility of farm women's work in official statistics.

In Romania, in 2002, 46% of rural women were classed as "contributing family workers", compared to 40% who were classed as employees. Many of these family workers will be part of semi-subsistence farm households, where 57.5% of the monthly "income" is in the form of self-consumption of agricultural products from the farm (Nemenyi, 2005).

Price (2006) highlighted the extent to which farm women in English/Welsh border family farms are an unpaid pool of labour which are essential to the survival of farm businesses. She conducted a series of interviews over nine months with all individuals of seven family farms at a time when a substantial fall in farm incomes, coupled with major health scares such as BSE and Foot and Mouth disease, seriously threatened the economic viability of family farms in the region. She identified three business strategies: "maintenance", for larger farms with capital resources, "marginalisation" for smaller farms on poor land which would scale down agricultural production to subsistence level, and "diversification" for farms which could start activities such as on-farm tourism and "farm gate" selling of farm produce. These three options would appear to be, in principle, applicable to family farms across Europe and beyond.

The work of Price (2006) graphically exposes the crucial and (economically) unrewarded contribution of women who have frequently taken the place of paid farm labour. It is captured by the words of one interviewee: "Even a farm the size of this would have had a farm worker a few years ago - now my husband has to work full-time off the farm and I do the farm-labourer's work and work at another farm – there's no money to employ anyone – the farm only exists because I don't take any money out!" Her study shows that, even in a relatively prosperous part of Europe, economic diversification or leaving the industry altogether are not simple options. Many farms are isolated and therefore do not have the potential for diversification. Here, the only option is pluriactivity, i.e. a household member (frequently the woman) taking a job off the farm.

This is often undertaken together with on-farm work and keeping the home (Price, 2006).

Similarly, Quinn (2005) reported that in excess of 40% of respondents in her Irish study also worked off the farm and that over 53% of these did so to supplement farm income. This is symptomatic of a widespread doubt amongst many families as to whether they can maintain their farm in the future. In the original EU-6 over the period 1967-1997, 42% of farms closed down; in farms of 5-20 ha, 63% have closed (Rooij and Bock, 2005). In the period 2000-2003 in Hungary, 200,000 holdings disappeared (Kovács, 2005).

A powerful emotional driver which must not be underestimated is the attachment to the "way of life". Price (2006) quotes the spouse of one farmer of a farm which has been owner-occupied for three generations: *"I worry about him (her husband) all the time – he's working on his own now – his father and uncle help out a bit but there's no farm workers any more – he only has me to check up on him – I feel I have to be here preparing meals – so many farmers have killed themselves – at least I know if he turns up for his meals he's ok"*. Another interviewee said. *"We want to keep the farm going for our son – we love the way of life and I love farming – it would kill him (her husband) to leave"*.

Benefits to women of working on the family farm include the ability to stay at home; low finance, clothing, travelling and other expenses; and flexible working hours. However, the heavy domestic responsibilities of farm women are also clearly shown by Price (2006), who notes that many farm houses in the UK are large and require high maintenance, with women's cooking, cleaning and childcare responsibilities being fitted round the schedules of farming men. In Wicklow, 48% of farm women surveyed were caring for an adult either inside or outside of their home but only 1.5% were in receipt of a carer's allowance (Quinn, 2005).

Another contributory factor to the non-recognition of the contribution of farm women can be the perception of the women themselves. Quinn (2005) provided an insight into the perception of some Wicklow farm women of the value of their work. Some respondents stated that they dealt with farm callers, did the accounts or provided meals for the farm workers, but that they had no involvement in the work of the farm business. This work was not seen as „farm work” but as „women's work” or the "role of the spouse of the farmer". One of the interviewees of Price (2006) said *"If I were to say I wasn't going to help-out – what would happen? The farm wouldn't exist and then what would he (her husband) do? There's no money in it but we love the way of life so I guess we're stuck here – I can't hardly escape for an hour - it's hard now – I'm the farm labourer now – it's a good job I don't expect to get paid for it"*.

The key issue that must be remembered is that family farms operate by the rules of the family as well as rules of economics. Interpersonal relationships and individual perceptions of roles are of considerably higher significance than they would be in a conventional business. The lack of valorisation of the work of farm women by the actors themselves is a major constraint on the valorisation at official level.

Women's farm labour outside the family farm

Economic reasons frequently drive women to take farm-based employment, frequently on a part-time or temporary basis, in circumstances conducive to exploitation. Such work on other farms may be necessary to supplement the income of the family farm, or it may be the only source of income for landless women. Younger and older women can have particular difficulty in accessing the formal labour market, as can the women from ethnic minorities such as Roma which tend to be landless and are widely employed in agriculture. The poor stratum of rural society, the greatest „at risk” group, disproportionately includes the elderly, single parents, the disabled and women; and all of these categories may overlap.

In Poland it was found that marriage status – an indicator of children – was a serious obstacle to women finding work, which for men was not the case (Rooij and Bock, 2005). Private employers seem to consider women expensive, high risk employees because of the costs involved in maternity leave, during which, in many countries, women's jobs are protected by law. Therefore, for permanent jobs employers often prefer male or young women above other female applicants.

In Hungary, women were found to supplement their low wages work with illegal work in horticulture where they can work five to seven hours as „day labourers”. Divorced women, and women with more children, in particular, had this kind of second job (Rooij and Bock, 2005).

Rural areas are home to a disproportionately large proportion of elderly women. For example, in Romania, women over 60 comprise one-quarter of the rural (female) population (Rooij and Bock, 2005). This is partly because women have a higher life expectancy than men and also, in Central and Eastern Europe and the NIS, women of this generation in rural areas migrate out less. There are a number of reasons why elderly women may be extremely poor. In many transition economies, the fall in the value of pensions has been greater than that of wages, and delays in payment can be greater than for wages. For women who do not own or have access to land, supplementing their income from their own farm is of course not an option. Following divorce, land may remain with the man or, when the man dies, some or all of the land may automatically pass to the children (Rooij and Bock, 2005). In several former socialist countries, many of the former cooperatives

have remained intact as entities and private ownership of farm land is less widespread than it is in much of Western Europe (Rooij and Bock, 2005).

Unquestionably, circumstances which drive women into the „black” farm economy are unacceptable and need to be addressed through a combination of several approaches including law enforcement, payment of adequate social benefits, and revised social attitudes.

International migrants

Reduced barriers to international migration owing to developments such as EU enlargement and the subsequent enlargement of the “Schengen” area have provided opportunities for people to travel abroad in search of work. Between 2004 and mid-2008 over 850,000 immigrants from the “A8” (i.e. the 2004 EU accession countries excluding Malta and Cyprus) registered to work in the UK, of which nearly 120,000 were located in the “Anglia” postal region where agriculture (especially temporary and seasonal work) is a major job provider (Legrain, 2008). Defra (2005) reported that, of a total UK agricultural labour force of 546,000 in June 2004, 68,000 were seasonal/casual labour. Of these, about one-third were women. Economic migrants, especially women, are at significant risk of exploitation. Various ideas have been put forward to address

the problem like easier recognition of foreign qualifications, better translation services and English-language training, better information about local norms and working practices and a reduction in the bureaucratic cost of employing migrant workers (Legrain, 2008).

Romania is another country which has experienced significant out-migration, with other “Latin” speaking countries such as Italy and Spain being major destinations and agriculture again being a significant employer. In Italy, a voucher scheme for paying casual labourers during the grape harvest (Fig. 1) was introduced in 2008 (INIPA Coldiretti, personal communication). Although the first phase particularly targets students and retired people, it is potentially applicable to all groups at risk of social exclusion including foreign workers. The workers are paid with the vouchers, which employers can buy at the provincial office of the National Institute for the Social Security for EUR 10 each. The worker receives vouchers according to the amount of work undertaken, completed by the employer with the start and end dates of the work and the fiscal codes of the employer and the worker. The worker can cash the voucher at any post office, where he/she will collect EUR 7.50 per voucher (free from fiscal impositions). The remaining EUR 2.50 covers insurance, social security and the management of the service.

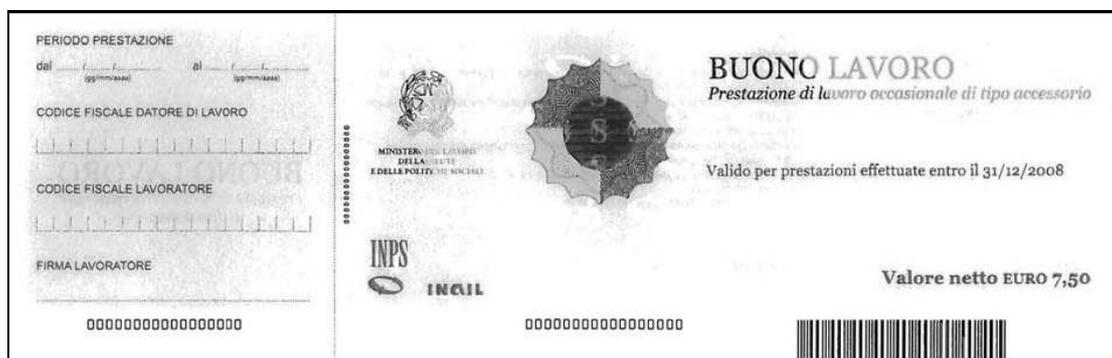


Fig. 1. Voucher used to pay casual labourers during the grape harvest in Italy in 2008

The scheme ensures that insurance and social security protection are guaranteed to casual workers in the grape harvest and reduces the bureaucratic burden for the farms, thus reducing the temptation to employ workers illegally. The employer is entitled to pay up to EUR 10,000 in vouchers and a worker may be paid up to EUR 5,000 in vouchers by a single employer in 2008. The vouchers were valid until 31 December 2008.

Availability of data and statistics

Although a number of publications (e.g. EC, 2002; Copus et al., 2006) provide overviews of the level and nature of women’s participation in agriculture, the work of farm women is frequently not reflected in sufficient detail

in official statistics. There are two further issues. Firstly, official statistics offer an incomplete picture as they normally focus on the formal labour market, i.e. people with regular jobs and officially employed. Secondly, consistent definitions of the terms are needed. Women who are pregnant or are on maternity leave may or may not be classed as unemployed. Women working on family farms may or may not be counted as employed. Long-term unemployed may not be included on employment registers (and hence not eligible for unemployment compensation).

As a woman more commonly has the role of a spouse rather than the head of household, using the household as the unit of analysis can obscure the contribution of farm women (Price, 2006). Gender disaggregation of data can increase the visibility of female labour and has been at-

tempted in several countries. The Hungarian Central Statistical Office linked the 2001 population census with the 2000 National Agricultural Census (Kovács, 2005). Matching addresses from the two data sets achieved a „hit rate” of 82% outside Budapest and generated a rich resource of information on issues such as characteristics of the farm operator (age, sex etc.) and farm household composition etc. Experience showed that such an exercise can encounter a number of difficulties and must be correctly planned from its inception. For example:

- retrospective data analysis may offer relatively little opportunity to disaggregate data;
- there is a potential to generate many new data sets of low value;
- the correct expertise (e.g. informatics expertise) should be involved from the start of the process;
- the exercise can be extremely time-consuming;
- 369 pages of tables with around 60,000 records were produced – challenging to interpret!
- such a data set does not provide information on deeper social processes related to the role of women;

The HCSO project was supported by the Gender and Development Service (SDWW) of the FAO which organised The High-Level Consultation on Rural Women and Information in Rome in 1999 (<http://www.fao.org/gender/highlcon/default.htm>). This event aimed to discuss ways of better informing decision-makers, media and the public at large on the essential role of rural women in agricultural development and their contribution to food security. SDWW aims to:

- present a more complete depiction of rural women, so that their conditions and contributions to the economy and to society are valued, recognised and integrated into planning mechanisms;
- contribute to rural women's empowerment through capacity building activities and training;
- increase the awareness by governments and policy makers to gender-based equality and accelerate the process of moving from words to deeds in the inclusion of gender issues in macroeconomic policies;
- address the vital role that women play in food production and food security and affirm the need for the full participation of women at all levels in order to achieve sustainable development.

Kyrgyzstan, perhaps surprisingly, was able to provide a wealth of statistical information on the agricultural sector, in particular on the percentage of women engaged in agricultural enterprises and institutions, on peasant holdings, on women's access to loans and commercial credit, and on the distribution of tractors to women farmers in its reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (FAO, 2004).

In 1994 in Ireland it was noted that the census of Agriculture did not adequately provide for the recording of

part-time or unpaid work by women on farms and that this results in the “non-recognition of women's economic contribution to farming and rural life in general” (Quinn, 2005). In 2003 it was reported that there was still a lack of information and that it was not possible to quantify the number of women in agriculture i.e. women who live and/or work on the farm (DAFF, 2004). Recommendations were made to the Central Statistics Office which proposed to take actions related to the Census of Population 2006, the Census of Agriculture, the Quarterly National Household Survey and the Household Budget Survey.

Also in Ireland, the EU Leader programme provides an example of a “bottom-up” approach to collecting data on female labour. Wicklow Rural Partnership (<http://www.wicklowleader.ie/index.php>) commissioned some research (Quinn, 2005) to describe and document the lives of women who live and work on farms in Wicklow and to quantify their contribution to farm business. A questionnaire was circulated to 1506 farm women identified through the electoral register and local knowledge. An awareness campaign was conducted to maximise the response rate and focus groups were used to interpret the information from the returned questionnaires. From over 500 responses, useful information was gathered on whether women are involved in the farm business, the nature of the work, whether they work off-farm and if so, then why, decision making, ownership, the potential for off-farm enterprises, support from Government and from farming organisations, networking opportunities and farm succession. The research did not seek to gather any data on the level of participation in the “grey” or the “black” economy but such a community-based initiative, if conducted with sufficient confidentiality and a “woman-centred” approach, represents a way to obtain data on such topics which will inevitably remain invisible in official censuses.

“Top-down” strategies for making farm women's labour visible

Non-recognition of the work of farm woman had both direct and indirect consequences. The direct consequence is the impact on income. The on- or off-farm work of women on family farms is frequently unpaid, or the income goes directly to supplement the income from the farm business (e.g. Price, 2006). In many instances, however, financial arrangements within the household are such that the women have sufficient access to the finances as to consider themselves remunerated for their work (Quinn, 2005). For off-farm work by women, the rate of pay may be very low. International migrants are susceptible to being paid less than the national legal minimum wage, where such a provision exists.

The indirect consequences are just as significant. Farm women frequently have no identity as workers in

terms of the social welfare system and are not entitled to state and other benefits, especially when men are the legal „sole holder” of the business. In Wicklow, there are some women working on farms that are even registered as working for the farm family business but cannot be insured in terms of Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) (Quinn, 2005). Hence, they may not be entitled to the following state benefits: Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit, Maternity Benefit, Adoptive Benefit, Health and Safety Benefit, Invalidity Pension, Widow's/Widower's Contributory Pension, Guardian's Payment, State Pension, Bereavement Grant, Treatment Benefit, Occupational Injuries Benefit and Carer's Benefit. This simply illustrates a situation which applies across Europe and beyond and which can lead to the incidence of poverty and enforced off-farm working described earlier.

EC (2002) states that, in France, Austria, Finland and Sweden women on farms received legal recognition through the status of “spouse collaborator” and were therefore directly entitled to benefits, but that this was not the case in Spain. In the latter case, 59% of farm women paid no social security contributions, but benefited from their husband's contributions.

Women who are partners in family run farming businesses, and not employees, may fall outside the scope of safety and health legislation. Farm work is a traditionally accident-prone industry but women face a particular risk to their reproductive health whilst pregnant women or breast feeding mothers are at significant risk to injuries caused by manual handling, exposure to chemicals and exposure to infectious diseases.

One approach to increasing visibility is to stimulate family farm co-ownership. Several approaches have been adopted in EU-15 countries, at least. In Ireland, tax regulations were introduced in the late 1970s which made it worthwhile to hold the farm in joint ownership (Quinn, 2005). In the Netherlands from the early 1990s, co ownership has been stimulated by tax relief (Rooij and Bock, 2005). In Greece, the establishment of Farmers Register has forced many pluriactive men to transfer farm management or/and farm ownership to their wives (Safilou-Rothschild et al. 2005). The Agricultural Census of 1999-2000 shows that in 14 Greek provinces at least one-third of farm owners are women while in some districts of these provinces half or more of farm owners are women. There is evidence to suggest that this has stimulated real gender changes in farm management, not just amongst smallholders but also on some larger farms (Safilou-Rothschild et al. 2005).

Another issue is farm succession. Norwegian farms have traditionally been handed over to new generations

on allodial rights¹, where the oldest son inherited the farm intact from his parents (Bjorkhaug and Blekesaune, 2007). In 1974 women and men gained equal rights to become successors, and this amendment of the law was given retrospective force to 1964. This means that first born girls and boys born after 1964 have the same formal right to inherit the family farm intact and become farmers. The share of women taking over the farm on allodial rights has increased from 9% in 1969 to 22% in 1999 (Rogstad, cited by Bjorkhaug and Blekesaune, 2007). Of these, about one half become main farm operators, the other half hand their role as a farmer over to partners or their rights to the farm over to younger successors.

The above can be viewed as examples of „top-down” strategies to be implemented or stimulated by central government. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by 175 countries, is the only human rights treaty that deals specifically with rural women and represents an international framework for government actions (FAO, 2004). In its Article 14 (Rural Women), the Convention affirms the rights of rural women to participate in development planning, to access adequate health care, credit, education, and living conditions. Once a country ratifies CEDAW, it is obliged to overcome barriers to discrimination against women in the areas of legal rights, education, employment, health care, politics and finance. FAO (2004) reports that equal rights between men and women with respect to ownership of property are enshrined in law in countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The situation did not appear to be quite so positive in Kyrgyzstan.

Such measures are of course ineffective when faced with legal impediments such as uncertain property rights for cadastral or other reasons, a situation which occurs widely in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (FAO, 2003). Implementation may also be constrained by lack of awareness of legal issues amongst both men and women, cultural issues, custom and practice or even religious issues. For example, women are likely to lose out in the land reform process in the post-socialist states if they lack a clear understanding of their own needs and requirements. The status of women's access to land in some Central Asian countries presents a mixed picture as follows (FAO, 2004):

- Kazakhstan - The Ministry of Agriculture has recommended to local authorities that they allocate plots of land on a priority basis to mothers with large families and to single mothers. The agrarian reforms being carried out apply equally to men and women;

- Kyrgyzstan - return to agricultural production based on unmechanised family labour is creating the conditions

¹ A legal system that allocates full property ownership rights to individuals. Under the allodial system, an individual may obtain Fee Simple ownership of a parcel of land or other property.

for a revival of paternalistic arrangements and values. This is reinforcing Muslim traditions and customary law;

- Uzbekistan - Legislation has removed all obstacles preventing women agricultural producers from being fully fledged land owners: long leases have been introduced with the right of inheritance and mortgage, coupled with the unconditional right of all people to benefit from the results of their own labour.

A number of countries (such as Kyrgyzstan) have reported that they have established specific units within their Department of Agriculture to deal with rural women or have given priority to rural women in rural development programmes (FAO, 2004). However, in several countries, such as Turkey and Uzbekistan (despite legal rights described above in the latter country, at least), because of customary law it is still very unusual for women to own land (Rooij and Bock, 2005). The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women receives country reports and can make recommendations. For example, it has recommended that Kazakhstan set specific targets in poverty reduction programmes for poor women, and especially for women heads of household, older women and rural women (FAO, 2004).

Business development, diversification, pluriactivity and exit strategies

The valorisation of the multifunctional nature of agriculture and increasing recognition of the potential for on-farm diversification (such as agritourism and direct selling) have created business opportunities for family farms, in many EU countries at least, in which women are frequently the main driver. Was it ever thus? In Norway, for example, in the pre-productivist or pre-capitalistic agricultural era men were responsible for 'outdoor' activities and the 'hard work' whilst the woman's role, in addition to the traditional work in the household and the barn, was linked to refining farm outputs (Almas, cited by Bjorkhaug and Blekesaune, 2007). This could for instance be the processing of milk and wool, for the household's own use and for sale.

EU grant schemes, such as the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (implemented under the RDR) which includes relevant measures under Axis 1 (e.g. early retirement) and Axis 3 (e.g. agricultural diversification), and the former pre-accession instrument SAPARD, embody the concept of equal opportunities which is one of the fundamental principles of the EU. However, in many countries, men tended to become land owners after restitution and, without land as collateral, women face obstructions to business development and diversification such as lack of capital, or access to affordable credit including complex procedures. In countries such as Romania, the banking sector in rural areas is undeveloped and poorly adapted to local conditions, and most farmers do

not comply with the eligibility criteria for credit imposed by banks (Nemenyi, 2005). Microcredit schemes can be of particular value to disadvantaged groups. In one Hungarian county (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg) during the period 2000-2006, 30% of small entrepreneurs who took microcredit from the Hungarian Microfinance Network were women, and 74% were based in rural areas (Kovács István, personal communication).

Part-time farming plays an important role in European agriculture. In 2003, in the EU-25, only 21 % of the employed persons on farms worked full-time, whereas 44 % of the agricultural workforce was employed less than 25 % of the time available for a full time worker. There are big differences between countries, with above 80% of part-time farming in most of the NMS and the Southern European Member States (Copus et al., 2006). In many instances, part-time farming means that both women and men earn additional income off the farm. As noted earlier, women work more often part-time on the farm than men. In Spain in 1996, 17% of women's jobs in farming were temporary or part-time compared to 3% for men (EC, 2002).

Pluriactivity can provide an opportunity for farm women to obtain „visible” employment alongside self-esteem and independence. In Wicklow, 26% of women work off-farm to have their own money and/or independence and 19% for social, personal fulfilment or career reasons (Quinn, 2005). The move to off-farm working may require the acquisition of new skills, the availability of local job opportunities, time and resources to seek out these jobs and innovation in the way the farming business is structured and operated. In Norway, new labour market opportunities within health and educational services, due to an expansion of the public sector, emerged as important pull factors for women from the 1970s (Bjorkhaug and Blekesaune, 2007). In more remote rural areas, off-farm employment opportunities may not be available or the employment gained may be below the woman's level of education (Rooij and Bock, 2005).

This paper has already highlighted the trend across the EU and beyond towards exiting farming, a trend that has been at least temporarily interrupted in a number of Central and Eastern European countries which have pursued a policy of land restitution, creating large, primarily semi-subsistence family farming communities. For many of these families, farm diversification as recognised in Western Europe is not an option. Firstly, their farms are less well capitalised (Davidova, cited by Chaplin et al., 2004) particularly in terms of buildings. Secondly, there is a desire to focus on farming, sometimes motivated by “historic justice” following land restitution. Thirdly some farmers are (or, at least were) anticipating financial rewards following implementation of the CAP following EU accession. Fourthly, lack of capital or credit, or knowledge and skills can be constraints (Chaplin et al., 2004). There are parallels here to the results of Price

(2006), namely that some farms are not in a position to diversify and that the “way of life” is a major factor sustaining the family farming business.

Many farm women, therefore, cannot use farm diversification as a strategy to enhance family incomes and/or to have a “visible” source of employment. This, together with the evidence on how women are struggling through unpaid labour to maintain the family business and “way of life”, plus the statistics across Europe on family farm closures, provides a hint of the desperate existence being led by many farm women. Price (2006) concludes that this is an increasingly unviable situation and that a more realistic approach must be taken by individuals and statutory and non-statutory agencies to develop appropriate “exit” strategies for family farmers. The “early retirement of farmers and farm workers” measure of Axis 1 of the RDR is an example (EC, 2006). This specifically mentions “family helpers” as being eligible for support but there are clear eligibility guidelines covering age, period of time worked and succession.

Empowering women and other issues

Prior (2006) observed that farming women, themselves, would undoubtedly reject the claim that they are over-burdened and that such a culturally dominant and all encompassing “way of life” makes this type of reaction perfectly understandable. When so much history and culture is bound up in a socio-economic framework it was difficult for even her research participants to acknowledge that they were, in fact, subsidising family farming. Quinn (2005) reports that many women in her study in Wicklow enjoy and are committed to farming.

Women’s associations, drawing on an accurate up to date database of farm women, can raise awareness amongst both women and men of the potential to increase the employment visibility of women through actions such as workshops, information sheets and Web-based materials. Participation in government, farmers’ organisations and agencies by women should be promoted as part of a strategy to liberalise attitudes within the authorities where the systems of reference are predominantly male. In the EU, programmes such as Equal and Leader can facilitate this process. For example, the Leader funded project in Austria called “Gender Equality in the Region of Mühlviertler Alm” sought to implement a double strategy of gender mainstreaming: (a) “promotion of opportunities for women” and (b) “steps to implement a gender democracy” in a rural community. Results included the incorporation of the gender dimension into the regional development strategy and a more balanced representation of women and men in public and private life (EC, no date). The Asian Development Bank has published a manual to support the implementation of gender-sensitive strategies and projects covering subjects such as land, equipment,

labour, capital and credit, and education, extension and training (ADB, no date). Women’s cooperatives, including credit cooperatives, may be a means of implementing such projects. Grant schemes should be designed to take greater account of the value of female labour and for this new ways of valorising skills sets of women are needed.

Can the unpaid workload of farm women be reduced? The prevailing attitude across Europe and Central Asia is that the unwaged maintenance of the family household, including care of the children and the elderly, is “women’s work”. In Western Europe, cuts in public services have tended to reduce the level of support for these tasks. Similarly, in former socialist countries the closure of state enterprises and farms has resulted in the loss of child care support, which substantially alleviated their work at home (Rooij and Bock, 2005). New initiatives by the public, private and voluntary sectors, or as collective actions, are needed to address this problem.

Women’s „crucial but invisible role” in maintaining the family farming model has been known to researchers since the 1980s (Price, 2006). Despite this, the evidence base on the value of female labour in Europe and Central Asia through official statistics remains slim, especially outside the EU-15. The Wicklow study called for an EU Information Exchange to allow the sharing and transferring of learning experiences in relation to farm women and the family farm business (Quinn, 2005). An international “Knowledge Centre” for academics, practitioners, business people and communities, under the supervision of the FAO Working Party for Women, could help to bring the work of farm women out of the shadows.

Conclusions

1. Women constitute a major part of the farm labour force. On family farms there is a strong gender division of labour and women generally have numerous responsibilities ranging from child care, housekeeping and care for elderly to taking care of the garden and livestock as well as accounting. Women also represent a large proportion of the non-family farm labour force, often working on a part-time or seasonal basis.

2. The family farm remains the dominant business model in the EU and has become increasingly important in the former socialist countries since the political and economic changes, where many farms operate at a subsistence or semi-subsistence level on land returned to private ownership. Across Europe and beyond, many family farms are struggling to survive, but there is a strong attachment to the “way of life” and unpaid work by farm women is essential to maintain their viability. Family farms operate by the rules of the family as well as the rules of economics.

3. Frequently, the man is the legal „sole holder” of the family farm and the woman, as “spouse” does not have

full entitlement to social welfare, healthcare, insurance, pensions etc. Farm work by women off the family farm is commonly undertaken without an employment contract. Landless, divorced and/or elderly women, or women from ethnic minorities are most at risk of exploitation. Much of the work done by farm women is invisible in official statistics.

4. Classifications of the roles of farm women tend to be incompatible with official terminologies. Definitions of the status of farm women are not adequately defined. Using the household as the unit of analysis can obscure the contribution of farm women. Bottom-up, women-focused projects can quantify the work of farm women. Gender disaggregation of data can help to make farm women's work more visible but this is not a simple task.

5. New forms of legal recognition such as "spouse collaborator" can ensure that women are entitled to state and other benefits. Tax rules can be adjusted to stimulate family farm co-ownership. Land inheritance and restitution rules can be reviewed to ensure that women have equal rights to land ownership. The effectiveness of such measures can be reduced by lack of awareness of legal issues amongst both men and women, cultural issues, or even religious issues.

6. Women are frequently the drivers of farm diversification and this may be a source of visible work. Training programmes which take into account the needs of farm women can be effective. Diversification is not always an option, and may simply be a way of maintaining the family farm business without giving the woman an independent or measurable income whilst simply adding to the woman's workload. This latter point also applies to pluriactivity.

7. Women's associations can raise awareness amongst women of gender issues and can help women to gain better access to credit and other resources. Greater participation by women in government, farmers' organisations etc. can help to break down the patriarchal structure of farming. Funding schemes should be designed to ensure that the needs of women are addressed and a "Knowledge Centre" could help to bring the work of farm women out of the shadows.

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² Fields of research interests: management accounting, internal audit, financial accounting