



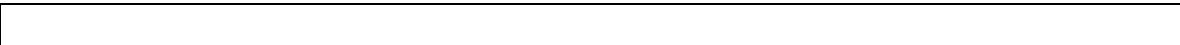
NUFFIELD FARMING SCHOLARSHIP TRUST

Report

WOMEN; ACCESS TO AGRICULTURE

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DISCLAIMER:

The views expressed in this Report are strictly my own and do not represent the views of the Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust. The Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust or my sponsors in writing this Report have not influenced me in any way.

INTRODUCTION

I became a farmer when I married my husband Jim, who is a dairy farmer in the midlands of Ireland. Farming was not my primary career choice; I worked previously in Dublin with the Solicitors' Mutual Defence Fund as an administrator.

The embryonic development of this report was 12 years ago when I became a farmer. Not having the necessary skills required to enable me to fully participate and contribute to the business at the time, I approached our national agricultural training body and requested details of courses provided for women, who like myself found themselves in this situation. The answer I received was that there were no comprehensive courses available to me. There were the conventional courses offered through the Agricultural Colleges or part-time courses, which required you to spend a period of time away from the farm on work experience. This time away was essential if you were to receive certification. Both options were unsuitable given the circumstances.

The situation highlighted to me the lack of recognition of the needs of women farmers in conducting their own business and the opportunities being missed by the farming sector. These circumstances were difficult to come to terms with having come from a position held within a company where you were judged on your merits and contribution to your job and afforded the recognition accordingly.

I set out on my study equally concerned with looking at the contribution of women farmers to their business, to their community and to their industry but I was also interested in the change of mindset towards women farmers that I believed had occurred in other countries. I wanted to investigate were there lessons to be learned from this change of mindset and what models we could use to fully utilise the potential of women farmers.

My findings provided me with mixed emotions, in that I was excited when I discovered the level of support and encouragement towards women farmers in the countries that I visited. But I was equally horrified to discover how far the agricultural industry in Ireland was behind, in not recognising and supporting women farmers to their full potential. In Australia, New Zealand, France and Norway I found the opposite where a positive attitude towards women extends from the Government down and right across all sectors of the community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- An air of change needs to develop to recognise women for what they are, people of ability and intellect who can contribute greatly for the positive benefit of their own business and that of the farming industry in general.
- Officially women do not exist as farmers. Women farmer's work should be accounted for on the national Census forms.
- Recognise the contribution of women farmers and their ability to offer different skills to that of their male counterpart for the benefit of the business.
- Recognise women farmers as clients. Improve government, government agencies and industry's attitude towards their female clients.
- Develop a policy like in Norway aimed at keeping women in the countryside because if the women did not stay, neither did the men.
- Provide more appropriate education and training for women by asking them what their needs are.
- Involve women farmers in policy and decision making. To improve and speed up the process impose in the short term a quota system like in Norway for all Boards in the agricultural sector.
- Promote farm partners working together. Highlight the advantages for the farming business, agricultural sector and the community.
- The potential of women must be harnessed. This will not only benefit the women themselves, but their partners, their families and the agricultural industry will also feel the gains.

This Report is not a feminist report. It is a Report about positive, motivated, educated people who happen to be women.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were to look at the contribution that women make to agriculture and its business. I also looked at the means women used to achieve this level of contribution through education and training and finally I looked at the benefits of women's involvement for the farm business, for farm families and the rural community in general.

AIMS

The aim of this Report is to provide knowledge and information obtained from seeing a broad overview of women farmer's role in agriculture. By providing this overview I hope to highlight the positive aspects of their work and contribution while at the same time provide ideas and clear steps as to how we can take full advantage of one of our natural resources in Ireland.

METHODOLOGY

To research my topic I visited France, Norway, New Zealand and Australia. I interviewed farmers both male and female, farm advisors, education providers, rural sociologists and researchers to give me broad, unbiased facts and information regarding women farmers. I based my study on the dairy sector as I could identify with the industry and the women who were working within it.

Each country provided its own uniqueness in what it was offering women farmers. Australia proved to be the paragon with regard to the recognition and status women farmers have within their community.

In France I conducted my research in Finistere in Brittany and Victoria in Australia. As both countries are large, I had to localise my research.

DEFINITION OF TITLE

"Women; Access to Agriculture. Women involved in agriculture, are committed and focused to maintaining support for their family farms and appreciate the benefits of farming as a lifestyle and a desirable environment for raising children.

The contributions that women make come in many forms and levels, but without those contributions there would be considerable hardship placed on many farms.

The current statistics from Australia with regard to women in agriculture are as follows:

- 40% of women are farm business partners
- 32% of the paid farm workforce are women
- 50% of farm women work off the farm for income to support their families and allow their partners to remain in agriculture
- 48% of real farm income is provided by women

I tried to get similar statistics with regard to the other countries that I visited. They were not available to me, as there is no comprehensive collection of data with regard to women farmers in the respective countries. As Dr Patricia O'Hara states in her book, "Partners in Production", **"within the European Union there are no accurate published accounts of women's involvement in farming in the Member States, either in terms of the numbers involved or the nature of their contribution to family farming. The vast array of statistics on European farming is such that there is far more information available on the animals and crops on family farms than on the women."**

THE ROLE OF WOMEN FARMERS

JOB DESCRIPTION

In the previous paragraph it is stated that there is more known about farm animals than women working in agriculture. How could this phenomenon occur when we live in a society where statistics form part of our lives? The answer lies, I believe in the fact that the work that women do on the farm is not recognised, it is considered invisible. Research in Norway, Australia and here in Ireland substantiate this.

Researchers divide work on the farm into 2 areas "productive" (farm work) and "reproductive" (domestic work) as this work is done indoors. When women farmers are asked to describe their tasks in relation to the work they do on the

farm, they immediately respond by listing their duties. They make and receive phone calls, receive salesmen, cook meals for farm employees or contractors, childcare and do farm errands. In a large percentage of cases they also do the accounts and fill out the forms for application of farm subsidies. With regard to dairy farming, the women will feed and rear the calves, milk the cows (depending on the farming culture of the country), and other ancillary work required with animals.

The constant availability of women is often cited as one of the most important facets of women's role on farms. Therefore it is difficult conceptualising the work of women on farms as it is varied and complex.

In general, it is productive farm labour that is recognised by the state, state bodies and industry. Furthermore the definition of productive labour is limited to labour associated with commercial agricultural production and it is only this type of farm work that is remunerated. As men are seen to be the ones mainly associated with this work and since women's work is less defined as it falls into both categories, it is omitted by the narrow definition of productive farm labour. As a result this renders the women's work invisible.

A further example of this is highlighted on the Census forms. Marilyn Waring in her book "Counting for Nothing" states "every country is expected to conduct a census of population every 10 years. The more statistically developed repeat the survey every 5 years. This census of population, supplemented by labour force surveys and censuses of business and agriculture, forms a major part of the data base for the compilation of national accounts and for that key derivative, per capita GDP".

In New Zealand, Australia and Ireland, in the section dealing with occupational classifications associated with farming, the "farmer" is taken to mean the registered holder of the land (usually the male). There is no section on the form dealing with the issue of the contribution the woman farmer makes to that enterprise as they are perceived not to be in receipt of an income, therefore they are regarded as unpaid and classified as a "housewife". They further compound the problem by only accounting for remunerated "productive" work.

In Australia the women's organisations have been campaigning to have the Census forms changed to highlight the status of women on farms. They are resolute that this is one area where recognition should be given to the women farmers for their involvement and contribution to the family farm. Unfortunately in Ireland, this situation is not perceived to be a problem. This results from the fact that the **women farmers in Ireland do not consider themselves to be farmers, but housewives**. This belief is contrary to what their Australian counterparts consider or believe as they consider themselves to be farmers regardless of their position on the farm, once they are making a contribution to that enterprise in whatever sphere.

RECOGNITION

The level of recognition of women farmers varies considerable from country to country. While each country has its own level of recognition (or lack of it), we have again to look to Australia to set the standard.

In the early 1980s there was a significant social movement amongst women in rural areas to hold women's group meetings. In 1989 one of the first such national meetings was called "Women on the Farms Gathering". This Gathering was organized by a group of individuals who identified the need to get the rural women together to discuss their issues and to learn from one another in a non-threatening environment. Today over 300 women in Victoria attend the yearly Gathering.

With rumblings from the grassroots, and the momentum gathering from rural women, reinforced with responses from the types of women's forums like the "Women on Farms Gathering", the first International Conference on Women in Agriculture was organised and held in Melbourne in 1994.

At that time Victoria itself was under considerable political change. In 1983 the Labour Party came to power with a large majority from the rural community. The Government identified that the rural women played a part in bringing them to power and therefore their issues had to be addressed.

In 1986 the Labour Government responded to the demands of the women farmers by setting up the first Rural Women's Network office. This Government funded organization was set up to act as the link between rural women's groups and the Government by providing support and guidance to the groups.

The Network has two objectives:

- To link women's groups and interested individuals into a network towards sharing resources and skills to meet the needs of rural women
- To enable women in rural Victoria, through their own contact and support network to have a more active and influential role in government decisions which affect their lives and those of their families and communities

The Federal Government's Department of Primary Industries and Energy in 1992 commissioned a report titled "The Invisible Farmer". It highlighted the agenda of the women's movement on the issues of women in agriculture. It identified three crucial aspects of women's invisibility as:

- Lack of documentation of their lives and work, particularly in the statistical records
- An inadequate and inappropriate public profile
- Disempowerment resulting from isolation

These three issues were raised and discussed at the International Conference on Women in Agriculture in Melbourne in 1994. Nine hundred and forty people attended the conference from 34 countries. Mr Bob Collins, Minister for Primary Industries and Energy represented the Federal Government. Mr Collins pledged his support and that of his government for the rural women and the issues raised by them.

As a direct result of the conference, two organizations representing rural women were founded, Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA) and the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women (FAAW). I will discuss at a later stage the objectives and workings of these organizations.

For the Government's part, sharing the concerns of the rural women's groups, they established the Rural Women's Unit in 1995. This step demonstrated the Government's commitment to rural women and the Unit is designed to build on and compliment the work of the rural women's organizations, government and industry. The aims of the Unit are to improve the status of rural women by gaining greater recognition of women's roles in primary industries, by increasing participation of women in the policy making process and ensuring that the issues relevant to women, their families and communities are addressed.

This Unit has been responsible for the establishment of the Rural Women's Working Group on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management. This body is made up of the state and territory heads of agriculture. With this working group together with representatives of Country Women's Association (CWA), AWiA and FAAW and members from industry, set up in March 1997 the first National Forum on Women in Agriculture and Resource Management. This forum provided the first real opportunity for rural women, industry and government officials to meet together and discuss the contribution made by women to sustainable agriculture and resource management. They in particular focused on how this contribution could be recognised, encouraged, supported and developed. As a result of this forum the National Plan for Women in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management was developed to provide the direction for all States and Territories to interpret at their local level.

The National Plan for Women in Agriculture and Natural Resources provides guidelines on best practice in supporting women as contributors and participants,

as leaders and decision-makers and as clients of agriculture and natural resource management.

I want to deal in this section with the issue of women as clients. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry as part of their commitment to the National Plan issued a set of guidelines to ensure that they provide the women as clients, with a relevant, efficient and effective service. As part of that service delivery the Department is now considering the women in:

- consultations
- representation
- research and information collection, and
- communication

The main reason for the AFFA to consult with the women is to get feedback about their policies, programs and services. They feel that consultation builds trust and ensures a better policy or programme for all concerned.

They also feel that by having an effective programme and policy, it will show the clear understanding of their client needs, and it will ensure that they include all client groups, not just the “traditional” groups. Also with women involved with the evaluating process, this will allow them to put forward their different perspectives and values for consideration.

They have devised a 4 Point Plan to achieve more inclusive consultations. One of the Plans is to “ensure that women’s needs are met when planning activities. Choose suitable times and venues with appropriate facilities, provide child care where ever possible, and keep costs down.”

Separate from the National Plan, but using it as a guideline, each State devised its own action plan. The Victorian Action Plan was born out of the extensive consultations with rural women, industry, government and the community. This 5 year Plan launched in November 1998 contains strategies to:

- recognise women’s ability to increase the productivity of agriculture and resource management based industries
- recognise and encourage the leadership skills of women
- promote a high level of involvement of women in strategic decision making roles in community, regional and government boards and committees
- recognise women as clients and improve the responsiveness of government and industry organisations to women

- build formal and effective linkages between grassroots and State Government to ensure the participation of women in policy and decision making, and finally,
- Improve access to education and training for women

In Norway, in the 1980s as in Australia, there was an increased awareness of rural women's issues. This interest was heightened by the fact that a large number of women were leaving agriculture and the rural areas. This worried the politicians and as a result the Government introduced a policy of keeping women/girls in both agriculture and the rural community. They developed a policy aimed at keeping these women in the countryside because if women did not stay, neither did the men.

In the Agricultural Agreement Negotiations of 1985, the Government and the Norwegian Farmers' Union stated "it is important to prepare for a broad and long term activity within the framework of the agricultural agreement to strengthen women's work opportunities and status in agriculture"

Prior to this agreement, as one of the first steps in the recognition of women in farming, in 1974 an amendment was passed to the act regulating the succession of farms. It was based on the fact that gender equality and social justice, understood as equal rights for women and men in Norway was in conflict with society's ideology. The act passed gave women equal right to inherit farms. The right of succession is now determined according to age alone and not according to sex and age, as was previously the case. The law was called the **Allodial Law**.

The Government also initiated a ruling that all government bodies and companies operating within Norway must have a female representation of 30% and over on their board. This was expected to rise to a minimum of 40% in 2000. A point to note is that women make up 20% of the Co-Op Boards which is less than the Government requirement. Again we see that the agricultural sector is slow to change.

With regard to the recognition of women in agriculture in Ireland, the Minister of Agriculture, Mr Joe Walsh set up an advisory Committee on the Role of Women in Agriculture in November 1999. Mr Walsh appointed 20 people to this Committee representing government agencies and farmer's representative bodies. Only 1 member of this Committee describes herself as a Dairy Farmer while the others represent government or the farming bodies.

The Terms of Reference of this Committee are;

- The Committee will advise the Minister on the policies appropriate to the promotion of the role of women in agriculture paying particular attention to the following areas,
 - education and training, including the use of information technology
 - the under representation of women at political and organizational level
 - social inclusion – practical support arrangements
 - personal finance and other economic and legal issues

- The Minister envisages that the Committee will have an input into the Department's strategies in the rural development area and in particular furthering the policies proposed in the White Paper "Ensuring the Future – A strategy for Rural Development in Ireland".

The Report from this Committee will be available in August 2000.

This Report will be based on the findings of the Committee, which requested through the media, submissions from women's groups, interested parties and individuals. They also held two open forums asking the people that made submissions to attend to discuss these further.

There are some reservations or concerns I feel should be addressed with regard to the Irish situation. Unlike the Australian model, there are very few grassroots women involved in the consultative process and on the committee. In Australia it was the grassroots women who were the instigators of the change and not the government. The government only became involved when they realised the influence these women were having in the rural communities. What concerns me is that momentum is missing from the Irish situation.

The other concern I have is who will implement these recommendations. Is there a sufficient air of change ready to embrace a Report like this, if it is not coming from the grassroots? Will the state bodies, industry and the national educational training body become more gender friendly. Will they look on women farmers as clients and all that it encompasses like in the National Plan for Women in Agriculture and Natural Resources in Australia.

The answers to these questions will not become apparent immediately, but the first step has been made in recognising the role of women and history will write the rest.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

I would like to refer back to a previous paragraph dealing with the complex and varied work roles of women farmers and how this work renders them invisible. This concept follows through into the education and training of women farmers.

Dr Sally Shortall states in her book *Women and Farming, Property and Power*, “If the work women do is not recognised, it is impossible to provide training. Pragmatically, education increases the efficiency of farm women’s work, while in terms of equity, providing training for women renders their work and work roles visible and valued”. Dr Marit Haugen in her paper on *Gender & Society, Female Farmers in Norway* concurs with Dr Shortall when she states “The education system is of key importance in the work for equal opportunities. Access to traditionally male educational subjects like agrivocational training will improve women’s possibilities to farm equally to men, and it might also have an influence on their status as farmers.”

In France and New Zealand I specifically studied the education of women farmers. I also looked at the topic in Australia. While in Norway, education was very important, the women who tended to require agricultural training obtained it through the conventional system of education ie Agricultural Colleges as these women choose agriculture as a career as opposed to “marrying the farmer”.

In Finistere and New Zealand the courses that I looked at are part time and open to both men and women. They are run over 18 and 12 months respectively.

The courses in France offered grounding in farming and business, while in New Zealand the two areas were covered separately. The French course dealt with topics like accounting, office procedure, time management, specialised management such as dairy, beef, etc, animal physiology, veterinary and environmental issues. There is also practical training where the students are taken out to the farm of the *Chambre d’Agriculture*. The training and advisory body for farmers. At the end of the course you are obliged to produce a report using your own farm as the example. You have to do an analysis of the business and put a strategic plan in place together with cash flow projections.

What the *Chambre d’Agriculture* has found is that the 18-month course is more attractive to women because it does not impose a demand for their time especially if a young family is involved. The course was not designed specifically for women but their circumstances were borne in mind when devising it. This is a direct result of the *Chambre* taking an overview of their training programme to try to determine what was needed to give women a standard of education to bring them on to a level pitch with their partners who would have had agricultural

college training. The Chambre was also aware that the women needed certification and accreditation for completing the course.

In France, there is a scheme for young farmers which provides them with a grant to help them to set up in business. This is called the Installation Grant and the upper age limit set by France is 40. To be eligible for this grant you must have a recognised standard of education. The course described above is set to that recognised standard, therefore women, where agriculture is not their primary career choice can retrain and still receive the benefits as any young entrant. In addition to this grant, young farmers can receive cheap bank loans from the agricultural banks.

I interviewed Ms Solenn de Marguerie, an advisor with the Chambre in Brest. She outlined to me that the courses offered were good provided all the women in the region attended them, but she said that they had a problem group of women who were reluctant to attend courses for whatever reason. On asked how she tackled this problem, she said that she spends a considerable amount of time on the 'phone and visiting them personally encouraging them to attend. Solenn said "I consider women very vital to the farming industry. Women see the bigger picture; they see where the future is. Men are more concerned with the practical side of farming. Also women have an easier disposition with regard to dealing with sensitive problems. It is very important that all women are involved in training and that is why I spend the time getting these women into my courses".

Solenn also pointed out to me that one of the ten objectives of the Chambre d'Agriculture is "to encourage and recognise the work and struggles that women and young entrants have and they will nurture and encourage them".

The New Zealand system is similar to the French system except the farming and business modules are dealt with separately.

While in New Zealand, I interviewed several women who in fact had completed the Production Management course (farming course). The consensus was that they thoroughly enjoyed the experience. They felt motivated and they gained self-confidence. The course also gave them an opportunity to devise a strategy plan for their own personal situation.

I spoke to Irene Nolan, Education Officer with the Livestock Improvement Corporation (LIC) with regard to these courses. She outlined to me that they were very conscious that the content of the courses on offer had to suit the client. In discussion with her colleagues prior to the running of the various courses, they took a conscious decision to:

- Get as many farmers as possible involved – they provide incentives to the Extension Officers to recruit and advertise the courses.

- Timing – 7 week break in the springtime from the course.
- The participants must have fun – if course is not given in a stimulating and motivating atmosphere, participants will not attend.
- Carefully selected tutors to ensure the above.
- Fees are kept to a minimum, \$300 for Production Management course and \$324 for the Business Planning course.
- Continuous course review. At the outset of each course they establish what skills the participants should have attained by the end of the course and work towards that goal.

Education and training in Australia is another area dealt with under the National Plan for women in agriculture. The Victorian Action Plan conducted an assessment of rural women's business training needs. The survey was conducted through a questionnaire and focus groups set up throughout the State.

As a result of this survey the women made recommendations on 14 areas and these ranged from:

- workshops should be combined with field days using discussion groups as a possible forum,
- the courses should deliver training in short intensive modules and consider delivering longer courses by mixture of group study, self learning and 1-2 day intensive study,
- formal courses and attendance at classes were preferred,
- child care should be provided when needed,
- accreditation for any training received was important, and
- suitable times for training courses, ie within school hours.

In summary of the survey, most of the rural women were interested in pursuing further training and had a very clear idea of what topics they wanted covered (financial planning and practical farming). The women also wanted access to women only courses. In fact only 5 out of the 10 women surveyed requested this. It is felt that the reason for this is the women are openly accepted as farmers and are treated accordingly, therefore not requiring preferential treatment.

The Dairy Research and Development Corporation (DRDC) in light of this survey run their courses with these recommendations in mind. They provide practical farm training and basic confidence building exercises too. Again these courses are between school times and if childcare is not available; the children can come along.

The DRDC is also providing funding for a 3-year project to increase women's contribution to the dairy industry at all levels. It encourages women in the industry to participate to gain knowledge and recognition of their contribution to the dairy industry. A chance to have a say about what is needed, to influence that change through education and training and finally, an opportunity to find out more about their industry. In the long term, it is hoped that the women involved will improve their capabilities and generally build professional skills and leadership roles.

In contrast to the structured, planned and motivating courses available in the countries mentioned above, Ireland has no national plan for the education of women in agriculture.

Teagasc is our national agricultural training body and in their publication Teagasc 2000 outline their targets for the education and training of women in agriculture. "The target is set at enrolling 1,500 women annually in 20 hour courses provided specially for women. However, the provision of courses for women is only regarded as an interim measure whose main objective is to ensure that women attend mainline adult courses which meet their needs". Yet research in Australia shows that women feel more empowered in an all women group as they operate in a less hierarchical manner. "It has been shown that the structural constraints which women experience in a mixed gender group situation do create barriers to women's empowerment" (C.L. Claridge). Ms Claridge continues by saying "Women feel very strongly that if they had more skills and experience they would feel more empowered to participate in a mixed group. The acquisition of skills would increase their self confidence."

Solenn de Marguerie, when I asked her about mixed courses, said that in France she felt women needed separate courses but all their courses were open to men and women. In her experience women prefer to remain with women until they are confident to join the mixed group. She said "Women need to feel OK to speak out first before joining a "man's group". We train the women well and they then move into main agricultural education, eg. Discussion groups meetings run by the Co-Op". Solenn also pointed out, that she felt it was very important for women to keep to their own group as well as joining the "men's group". She said "In fact we actively encourage them to move between the two groups and it is not good for the women to remain all the time with their own sex as it isolates them."

The experience in Australia and France is that, educate and build the self-confidence of the women first, then consider mixed gender grouping.

In Laois, a county in the midlands of Ireland, Teagasc is in the process of organising a first major course for women in agriculture. It will be of 500 hours duration. It has taken the organisers, Belinda Walsh and Marie Christie 2 years to research and prepare this course. It will commence in September 2000.

The first step they took was to ask the women what they wanted in this type of course by sending out a questionnaire. They compiled the results and worked with what the women wanted. Interestingly, on pursuing the results of the questionnaire, the women farmers had the same needs as their fellow women farmers in Australia in the type of agricultural training required.

The Irish women cited as difficulties with the present system of training as

- Courses “once off “ design
- Short duration, 20 hour course too short
- Lack of continuity
- Lack of certification or accreditation

Yet when we read Teagasc 2000, they propose to run once off 20-hour courses with no certification.

In contrast to the main thrust of Teagasc 2000, the advisors in Laois are going ahead with their modularised programme offering topics that are both practical and theory. The course will be accredited from the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) and having the standard of the course acceptable for the women to receive a Certificate in Farming. This Certificate will make the women eligible for the Installation Grant like in France.

In an interview with an Education Officer with Teagasc, when asked about what strategies they have in place to provide training for women in agriculture. She replied “there is no national plan or programme for the education of women farmers. It depends on the CAOs in each county to approve a course and provide funding. Usually all funding will go into mainstream productive type training and if there is some money left they will consider running a course for the women”.

She further said “it was her opinion that Teagasc provide fire brigade action with regard to education, they respond to a crisis on farms, they don’t provide training to farmers that will allow them to treat their farming as a business enterprise, they deal with the production side of farming”.

When asked about the level of participation of women on the courses run by Teagasc. She said “the level of participation is low as they are not encouraged to attend. There is no effort or policy to encourage women to attend courses or discussion groups. The notice of the meetings and courses are addressed to the farmer, usually the male and the attitude is that why send out the notice to the women as they are not going to attend anyway”.

I asked her about the attitude or recognition of women farmers within Teagasc, she replied “The advisors are very aware of the contribution of women to farming in Ireland. In fact a lot of farms would not be surviving without the women’s contribution, either in the form of another income, or the physical work or book work they do on the farms, but Teagasc have no policy of inclusion of these women. There is no effort made to encourage these women into groups. It depends very much on the individual advisor to incorporate the women”.

The education and training of women farmers in Ireland is lagging behind the countries that I visited. Unfortunately Teagasc do not seem to realise this, but fortunately there are individuals within the organisation that do.

ACCESS TO PROPERTY

In *Women and Farming, Property and Power* by Dr Sally Shortall, she states “The patrilineal line of inheritance is a powerful social custom which advances the belief that men are the natural heirs to land. It is generally accepted by men and women as natural, and is so prevalent it is little questioned. The whole public world of farming deals with the landowner, and in this way reinforces the idea that it is an individual who farms, thus rendering women and their work invisible.”

It is a recognised fact that the greater percentage of women farmers enters farming on marriage. On marriage the women does not receive, as of right, any entitlement in respect of the farm holding or family home during the couple’s lifetime. The husband has no legal requirement to share property, capital or income with his wife. Only on the death of her husband is the wife legally entitled to receive a share of the farm.

Dr Patricia O’Hara conducted a study in Ireland of landownership and property. She found in her study only 18% of the farms were in joint ownership and this occurred only in situations where the couple had a strong commitment to sharing. Dr O’Hara states in her study “Generally as long as the husbands are alive, farm women themselves appear unconcerned about the issue of ownership of land even where they are making a very significant labour input to farm production”. She believes that this apparent unconcern about this may owe as much to recognition of the impregnability of the system as to anything else. It may also be rooted in their sense of being an outsider, of “marrying in” to their husband’s family property and therefore not have any “rights”. **Only joint purchase of a farm or their husband’s explicit recognition of their contribution can alter the pattern of male dominance.**

The study by Dr O’Hara reflected the situation in Ireland, but it could have been a study conducted in France or Australia too as the results would be similar. While in Norway the situation is more composite.

As already stated, in 1974 Norway introduced an amendment to their inheritance law where by the right of succession is now determined according to age alone and not according to sex and age, as was previously the case.

The amendment was a result of an on going struggle for equal rights in the rest of society and not of a desire for equality specific to agriculture. According to Dr Marit Haugen in the Centre for Rural Research in Trondheim, “Many feared that the survival of the family farm would be threatened if the daughter married a man not interested in farming. The debate illustrated the lack of confidence in women’s ability to farm themselves. Women as farmers were a token and invisible minority who were never held up as an example that women were already in a farmer’s position.” At that time she believed it represented a “social change that was taking place. It is characterised as a movement away from a society where the segregation of sexes and male dominance were legitimate expressions of a social order, to a society where integration of the sexes in all areas of society is the expressed ideal.”

A research study in Norway has found that girls were under considerable pressure to relinquish their allodial right of inheritance in favour of a younger brother. This pressure was exerted by the girl’s parents, especially if she was married to “unsuitable or husband not interested in farming”. As a result only 10% of Norwegian farmers are women. “There is no doubt that formal political equality is of limited value if the traditional practice of unequal gender relations persists. Even so, legal changes may constitute the first step”, says Dr Haugen.

An interesting point to note is that some girls do take up their allodial right and choose agriculture as a career. **These girls are more educated and have a more professional approach to farming than that of their male counterpart,** Dr Haugen found in her research.

“Access to property remains the key source of power in farming, and with the exception of Norway, access to land continues to be governed by social norms and customs that perpetuate the transfer of land from father to son”. Dr Sally Shortall, cites this in her book, *Women and Farming, Property and Power*.

ATTITUDE

Throughout my travels, I experienced “on the ground attitude” towards women farmers. I saw how the women were treated equally by their partners, by the staff, the extension services and the community in general. It was very evident to me that the women were included in all decisions made on the farm and they were recognised accordingly. I believe that as a result of this attitude towards them, the women farmers felt fulfilled and had a sense of achievement about

their work. It was interesting to note that it was small things that mattered to the women. In Australia and New Zealand, for example the milk cheque came addressed to both partners, as were the notices for all farmer union meetings, discussion group meetings and education courses.

On the farms that I visited and in discussion with both partners on the farm, it was very evident that without the women farmer's contribution, the farm business would have remained static. The couples I spoke to were very focused, their businesses had expanded and developed. They complimented each other's work roles. As men and women think in different ways. Women bring to decision making their specific attributes and skills, which are based on co-operativeness, collaboration; problem solving based on intuition, empathy and rationality. While men bring to the partnership more technical, hands on support. In circumstances where couples openly encouraged each other and enjoyed their work, their business progressed. They used the medium of working together as sounding boards for new ideas and sorting out existing problems.

In Dr O'Hara's book, *Partners in Production*, her research has shown that "Women who work for the family farm do not perceive themselves to be subordinated by this in any way, but have created out of their involvement in farming a strong sense of identity with the family enterprise. They have a firm belief in the significance of their contribution to the family farm and a sense of solidarity with their husbands and other family members".

There was a strong "feel good factor" about their work from these women. Support is given to them by their partners, state bodies and the community in an industry that is under constant change in a non regulated environment. I believe that when the price received for milk is under continual review, the pressure it exerts on the family farm means that all possible family involvement is needed to sustain and grow that business.

The resulting recognition of these women farmers of their work on farms portrays them as role models for other women farmers. I found, again in Australia and New Zealand **that because of large number of women involved in the dairy industry, there appeared to be more women employed in the support industries.** For example in the farm advisory service, in New Zealand, 50% of the staff providing advice to farmers were women and in Australia this rose to 60%. In Ireland this figure is 2.5%!

In Norway in 1997 the Norwegian Farmer's Union elected its first female President, Ms Kirsten Ingjerd Vaerdal. It was seen as breaking the "glass ceiling" for women in the NFU. In the 1980s the NFU took initiatives designed to increase the number of women in the organisation. These initiatives were founded on the idea that women are an unexploited resource and that recruitment is important to increasing total human resources. The Victorian

Farmer's Union in Australia adopted a similar attitude and I will discuss this further on in the Report.

FARMERS' REPRESENTATION

It is an accepted fact that the level of participation of women farmer's in Farmer's representative bodies is low. Dr Margaret Alston from the Charles Sturt University in Wagga believes that by offering support for the idea of gender equity and then by failing to facilitate women as leaders, farm organisations appear able to absolve themselves of any further efforts. "We have tried and failed. There can't be any women out there".

Dr Alston in her research with the grassroots farm women suggests that "the women view farm organisations and their leaders with disquiet. They argue that the hierarchical structures and the lack of family friendly practices make women resistant. To incorporate women there is an urgent need for cultural change and a commitment to equity from the organisations".

Ciel Claridge of the Centre for Integrated Resource Management in Brisbane states in her paper to "Rural Society" "through the socialization process men and women learn that the "male" way of doing things is the right way and so the "male" way of doing things predominates. These different styles of operating and communicating make it very difficult for women to play a greater role in decision making and leadership under an existing male oriented structure". This research concurs with Dr Alston's, as she believes that to overcome this impediment "the farmer's union (Australian Farmer's Federation) should undertake to consult with the women who are looking for the change". Her research suggests "that such consultation will establish that radical commitment to change within organisations and a valuing of women's contributions is clearly needed".

I believe that this research is relevant to other similar farmer unions in the countries that I visited.

In Victoria in August 1999, the Victorian Farmer's Union established a forum to assess possible strategies to encouraging women's participation and leadership within VFF. The forum identified 4 key areas, which should be discussed with each focus group:

- what does VFF need to do as an organisation to encourage women's participation
- what are the blocks (both personal and organisational) to participation
- how can the VFF assist in overcoming these blocks

□ what is a possible plan of action.

The VFF held meetings throughout the State with the focus groups. It is an ongoing process between the Federation and the groups to work through and overcome the obstacles to women's participation.

The report from the Forum has just been published and it outlines seven critical success factors, which will release the potential of women in agriculture. They have developed a strategy built from best practice in agricultural groups, and from organisations outside the sector in corporate business, publicly funded organisations and educational institutions.

Among the seven factors, the three important ones from which we have most to learn from are:

1. Understanding the need for change – The desired change must address some of the organisation's perception of need, or include raising awareness of that need for change. The primary driving force was the realisation that without an injection of renewed membership support the organisation faced obsolescence.
2. Strong leadership – Leaders whether they are Presidents, CEOs or local branch officials must take the initiative for change.
3. Involvement of the target group – The attitudes, beliefs and information held by the organisation must be established and a strategy devised to involve the audience in the development and implementation of the solution.

The VFF had also moved to allow 2 votes per farm membership. This gives women genuine access and potential for influence over the Union's directions and policies.

In Norway, the Norwegian Farmer's Union was founded 103 years ago. In 1997, it marked the turning point in the organisation, which disrupted the general trend of excluding women from positions of political leadership. Ms Kirsten Ingjerd Vaerdal was elected as President of the Farmer's Union.

As a direct result of the election of Ms Vaerdal a number of initiatives were taken on board by the Union and one such initiative is a two year programme called "Agriculture, the female way". The aim of this programme is to strengthen the role of women and increase their opportunities to participate actively in agriculture. It is hoped to create a plural agriculture where women and men work on equal terms. It is not just concentrating on the manual work of men and women, but also their involvement in farming groups and organisations.

The target groups are:

- The eldest daughters, helping them to make the choice to have agriculture as their career and to use their rights to take over the farm. To give these girls a fair opportunity in farming and to put women's farm issues on the agenda.
- Work towards the increased participation of women in agriculture as farmers.
- To increase the female participation in the Farmer's Union both as members and elected representatives. To make the women more at ease or comfortable joining male dominated organisations. Twenty Five percent of its membership are women and only half of these female members are active.

The Farmer's Union has also been involved in some educational projects. They are very aware that women have special needs in the area of self-confidence and self-esteem, especially the older women. They are trying to make education more appealing by "lowering the doorstep" removing the obstacles to these women. The Farmer's Union experience is that when both partners in the farm complete one of their courses, the couple are by far the most motivated and more realistic in their outlook to farming.

In Ireland, the Irish Farmer's Association, is the representative organisation for Irish Farmers. It was founded in 1955 and has 85,000 members.

Membership is based on a basic membership fee plus so much per acre owned. Membership can then be taken out by the farmer, usually the male, and his name will appear on the membership card. As a result of this the notice of the meetings are then sent out to the male member in the household. This membership confers 1 vote per individual. If for any reason that IFA member cannot attend and vote at a meeting a member of his family may attend and vote, provided they provide appropriate identification.

A subscription for membership of the IFA allows you the benefits of a Personal Accident insurance policy.

If the partner or sibling want to become members of the IFA, they can do so by paying a reduced additional subscription. They then will receive the benefits of full membership, including the insurance.

Within the organisation there are numerous national commodity committees and the family farm committee is one of these committees. The brief of this

committee is to deal with issues relating to the family farm and farm women's issues. The family farm committee was established in 1976.

Dr Sally Shortall describes the family farm committee as one that operates as an autonomous unit within the farming organisation. "The composition of the groups is seen as gendered, that is, consisting primarily of women. Clearly the composition of the rest of the organisation is also gendered, consisting primarily of men, but that is hidden because of its primary identity as a farming organisation."

Dr Shortall in the book, *Women and Farming, Property and Power* asks the question what is the difference a group, like the family farm committee, when admitted to an organisation like the IFA can make to that organisation. She believes "the difference should be reflected in the goals pursued by the organisation." She argues the committees of farming organisations on which women serve have not redefined the goals of the organisation. On the contrary, they almost reinforce gender division, while legitimising the organisation in the wider social context by the existence of the family farm committee.

Dr Shortall concludes "It is farming organisations that need to be fundamentally reformed if farm women and the wider range of issues they bring to the table are to be treated seriously. A critical examination of what farming organisations currently represent illustrates that they present only partial perspective on what constitutes farming and a limited understanding of who are the players. The players they primarily represent are property owners, ie males".

In Australia, the women farmers have two organisations that represent them. This is unique to Australia as no other country I visited had the same level of representation for their women farmers.

As I have mentioned already as an outcome from the first International Conference on Women in Agriculture in 1994, two organisations were formed to meet the needs of the rural women.

Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA) is a nationally based organisation with local committees. It is committed to uniting and raising the profile of women in agriculture, to addressing rural and agricultural inequities, working to ensure the survival of agriculture for future generations and achieving the status of a political and economic force.

It is a non-governmental organisation. The organisation was invited to contribute and be part of the discussions resulting in the National Plan for Women in Agriculture and Resource Management. Under the Women as clients guidelines, the AWiA is identified as a group to consult when looking for feedback and information with regard to policy and programme development.

The Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women (FAAW) is a philanthropic organisation. It too is non-governmental and involved in the discussions for the National Plan. The board of FAAW is made up of 12 directors, 11 women and 1 man. They come from many professions, both urban and rural. They have taken a conscious decision not to isolate the rural women from the urban women and use their skill bank for the benefit of all communities.

The FAAW caters for women who have or would like to have skills to allow them to participate at a higher level in industry. The organisation, when it was founded, was initially addressing the aspect of women's invisibility in the community. Ten years later with the women having gained the experience and the skills necessary for advancement into industry, the FAAW are focusing on the lack of opportunity for these women.

Significant advances have been made and rural women's issues and concerns are being discussed and taken into account at senior Government and industry levels with the National Plan. Despite this progress the number of rural women in influential positions is still very low, eight percent of women hold industry leadership positions. Some rural women and organisations still feel marginalised and groups like AWiA and FAAW are striving to reverse this situation.

FARMING MEDIA

Examination of the farming media shows, it represents farming as a male occupation and reinforces the "farmer" and "farmer's wife" image. In Ireland the largest farming newspaper, the Irish Farmer's Journal has 3 separate sections within the one newspaper.

Journal 1 is the main section where most of the articles are written by and feature men. Articles on dairying, beef, tillage and farm and agri-business are contained in this main section. Journal 2 represents the "women's section". The editor of this section is a woman and largely women journalists write the articles. It deals with country life, fashion, cookery, gardening etc and the letters to the editor are usually deal with family problems, current affairs but not the business of farming. Journal 3 is the advertisement section and features specialised farming topics, such as silage making.

The question that I would like to pose is why does the Farmer's Journal not incorporate some of the women farmer's orientated articles into the main section of the Journal 1. Why is there a need to separate and differentiate between the two genders when the articles written are about the business of farming?

The Irish Farmer Journal sponsors various farming competitions throughout the year. They profile the finalists and highlight the winners. The competitions are

“Development Farmer of the Year”, “Dairy Farmer 2000”, “Young Farmer of the Year” and “Farm Women of the Year”. The criteria for the various competitions are different but the main influence would be that of farming and its business. The finalist of the first three competitions, which would be mainly men are covered in Journal 1 and the “Farm Women of the Year” finalists are covered in Journal 2. Why is the exception made for this competition?

The image that is presented is that gender issues are dealt with in Journal 2 and the Journal 1, main body of the paper is gender neutral. This is difficult to see, as only the male gender is present.

In contrast the Australian Agricultural magazine, while they do have a section dealing with gender issues like in the Irish Farmer’s Journal, Journal 2. The main body of the magazine integrates, includes and presents the women farmers on an equal footing with their male counterparts. They do not present women in positions of leadership as an anomaly, or as exceptional women in a man’s world. They are treated as farmers.

In New Zealand, the Dairy Exporter does not have a “women’s section”, but it portrays a gender neutral magazine where male and female farmers are treated equally and no exceptions are made.

RECOMMODATIONS

- Recognise women farmers for what they are – Farmers.
- Put women farmers on the Census Forms. Women farmers contribute to the national economy or the GDP and therefore must be included on the Census Forms.
- Gender quotas must be introduced in the short to medium term term to speed up the imbalance in the agricultural sector. It recognises women farmer's contribution to the agricultural sector, rural communities and society in general. Systems must be put in place that facilitate women farmers participation in the agricultural industry.
- Women have different skills to men, recognise and utilise this untapped resource.
- Provide relevant suitable and accessible farming education and training by providing stimulating and motivating educators. The courses must be of short duration, with continuity and there **must be** accreditation.
- Farming organisations - They must allow 2 votes per 1 farm membership.
- Farming organisations to focus on education and training. They must use their influence to highlight its importance at Government. Education and training must be one of their raison d'être as education is power.
- Farming media, highlight women farmers as individuals with ability. Stop highlighting women farmers in stereotype traditional roles by being aware of gender proofing.

CONCLUSION

On my Nuffield Study Tour to Norway, France, Australia and New Zealand, I met and interviewed some very positive women farmers. These women worked in an agricultural industry that was forever changing and as a result was putting more demands and pressures on the people involved within it.

The women were concerned with their livelihoods and that of their children. They were concerned about the environment and how they should protect it for the next generation. They realised for them and their family to survive their business must develop and grow. They had to farm more land, get extra milk quota, and reduce their cost of production. They also realised the down side of this business growth was reduced numbers in the rural communities. That schools post office, hospitals, and public transport would all be downgraded or done away with. They were concerned as to how they were going to attract and keep staff motivated on larger units where distance to the nearest town was now becoming an issue for them.

These concerns expressed by the women farmers are the same concerns expressed by the male farmers. They are concerned about their industry. In contrast to my experience here in Ireland, the women were identified as farmers with these concerns by the government, semi state agencies and the rural communities. They were given the recognition as farmers in their own right not as the farmer's wife.

The changes in attitude towards women farmers in countries like France, Australia, Norway and New Zealand have allowed significant advances to occur. Changes of attitude only occur when forced upon people or develop over time. Whatever the circumstances are, there can only be benefits for all concerned.

“To get people to change, you need to tailor your programme to their level of readiness, and help them move forward to the next stage. Among any group of people needing to change, only 20% are ready for action; 40% are in contemplation, recognising the need to change but not ready to do anything; and 40% are in precontemplation, not even thinking about change”.

Author unknown

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