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## WOMEN'S ROLES IN AUSTRIAN AGRICULTURE

### SUMMARY

For ages, family farms have prevailed and are particular to Austria. Since work both on and off the farm and family life are combined, the role of women in agriculture is a complex one. They are mothers, wives, farm managers, partners, labourers, creators of their own branches and employed off farm. Analysing the roles of women in agriculture is more complicated than it may initially appear. Official agricultural statistics give a very limited image. Statistics on women are only available in connection with the ownership, the management and the labour force. Our knowledge of women in agriculture is largely derived from national studies and statistics as well as (periodic) surveys. With this in mind this paper aims to determine the roles performed by female farmers in agriculture according to their activities on and off the farm. Following a literature review, this paper covers an in-depth analysis of women's roles in agriculture based on data from official statistics and select data from a survey done in 2016 throughout Austria. In this respect, this paper contributes to the gender debate in agriculture and to our knowledge of the role of women in agriculture. This paper re-affirms the essential role of women in agriculture and tries to give some suggestions on the need for further research and future perspectives.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, roles, women, Austria.

### INTRODUCTION

In Austria, as in other European countries, farming is a family concern. Women play an important role in family farming. Over the last decades there has been a considerable rise in interest in the roles of women (Björkhaug and Blekesaune, 2008; Gasson 1981; Rossier, 2014; Steinmann, Matasci-Brünger, 1978). The role of the woman on the farm, the female farmer, is not precisely defined (European Parliament, 2010; Tazza, 1979 in Gasson, 1981). 'Role' means more than the professional title or the sum of the activities of a person within the profession. A woman who works as a female farmer is like an actress who takes on a role with all the related activities, responsibilities and relationships. The question about the roles is very differently answered; the views and ideas are very diverse. (Gasson, 1981) From the tasks, responsibilities and relationships of the female farmer, various roles arise, e.g. wife, housewife, mother, manager, labourer, off-farm worker (Bayerische Landesanstalt für

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Landwirtschaft, 2010a, b; Gasson, 1981; KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017; Relf, 2014; Rheinischer LandFrauenverband e.V. and Westfälisch-Lippischer LandFrauenverband e.V., 2016; Rossier and Ressig, 2014). The ‘female farmer’ is a role with many sub-roles. Analysing the roles of female farmers is more complicated than it may initially appear. Official agricultural statistics give a very limited image. They do not reveal the real nature of the contribution female farmers make on the farm. Statistics on women (including female farmers) in agriculture are only available in connection with the ownership, the management and the labour force. Our knowledge of female farmers in Austria is largely derived from national studies and statistics as well as (periodic) surveys. In this paper we draw on the available empirical evidence from official statistics and select data from the survey ‘Situation of Female Farmers in Austria 2016’ (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017). In light of the renewed recent interest in the roles of female farmers, the aim is to determine the kinds of roles performed by female farmers and how they have changed. Furthermore, this paper contributes to the gender debate in agriculture and to our knowledge of the role of female farmers in agriculture. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. We first give a view of the literature on female farmers’ roles. The subsequent section outlines the methods applied to explore the research questions. The paper continues with the presentation of the roles and closes by drawing conclusions and outlining some prospects for further research.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The paper was designed to describe the roles of female farmers. A literature review was done. General data (BMLFUW, 2014; Statistik Austria, 2013) were appropriately processed. In order to get a more comprehensive picture also select data, namely questions about ownership, decision making, activities on the farm and off farm employment as well as voluntary engagement were analysed from the survey of female farmers<sup>2</sup> throughout Austria. The agricultural population for the survey was obtained from the Austrian Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) farm data set 2014 where farm operators had the legal status of natural person or group person (without community pastures and cooperatives). The agricultural population overall was 116,615. For the online survey an email address was a further criterion. The study population for the survey was 36,573 farms. The survey was conducted as an online-questionnaire between the 2 May and the 3 June 2016. 2,200

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<sup>2</sup> Since 1976, every ten years, a survey has been conducted on the working and living situation of female farmers in Austria. This initiative is supported by the Association of Austrian female farmers. These regular surveys provide an insight into the life and work situation of the female farmers over the decades. The questionnaire for the survey of female farmers 2016 is based on that of the year 2006 and was divided into five sections. These cover questions on the following topics: A. Everyday life on the farm and household, B. Personal situation, C. Future, D. Relevant statistics on the farm, E. Statistics on the person and the partner. The questionnaire was completed with an open question regarding personal concerns. A total of 70 questions were asked. (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017)

questionnaires from female farmers were used after a quality test (consistency check) for the analysis of the research questions. The response rate was 7% of the net sample. Due to the disproportionate response, a weighting according to the federal states, the age of the manager and the utilised agricultural area was applied. The data thus collected was analysed by using descriptive statistics of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, we present the findings. We focus on the literature review, the characteristics of female farmers surveyed, the status of the female farmers on the farm and the roles on and off the farm. The comparative analyses of statistics of survey data show what the roles are and, where data from 2006 is available, how the understanding of the roles has changed in the last ten years. Here the results of the year 2016 are presented and, if available, earlier surveys are mentioned.

### **Literature on female farmers' roles**

Decades of research have largely dealt with the roles of women in agriculture (cf. Bayerische Landesanstalt für Landwirtschaft 2010a, b; Björkhaug and Blekesaune, 2008; Boserup 2007; Chaney, Schmink 1976; Gasson 1981; Relf 2014; Rheinischer LandFrauenverband e.V. and Westfälisch-Lippischer LandFrauenverband e.V. 2016; Rossier 2014; Rossier and Ressig 2014; Steinmann and Matasci-Brüngger, 1978; Tinker and Bramsen 1976). According to this research female farmers have a multi-faceted, challenging job profile. They are housewife, owners, farm managers, decision-makers, office workers, labourers/workers, family counsellors, off farm workers and do voluntarily work. Many of their activities are because of their position as wife, mother and/or partner. The interrelated, multi-dimensional aspect of their work, together with their quick adaption to production requirements, and their personal commitment to the family, make it extremely difficult for the family unit to replace them. The female farmers' contribution can hardly be provided by ordinary paid labour. Not only can many farms not afford the additional labour costs, but it is also not possible to find a paid worker, or a combination of paid workers, who can perform the multi-dimensional and interrelated functions of the female farmers. Neither will hired workers use their income to subsidise the farm. Variations in women's participation in work both on and off the farm – as well as other family members – depend on supply and demand factors linked to economic growth and agricultural modernisation as well as the structure of the rural labour market and employment opportunities (Copus et al., 2006). In turn, this needs to be considered in Austrian and European regional policy to ensure stable regional conditions (European Parliament, 2010).

### **Status of female farmers**

The women's status is hardly treated in the debate on family farming. In the following the status of female farmers is discussed by looking at their involvement as owner, manager and decision-maker.

### **Owner**

The majority of female farmers (51%) indicated that they are co-owners. In the case of 31% of the interviewees the sole owner is the partner and for 13% it is the female farmer themselves. The remainder (6%) is attributable to the category 'Other', e.g. Banks, two companies. Traditionally the farm transfer is patriarchal. 67% of the farms are transferred to the son (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017). Generally, in the case of marriage with no marriage contract the ownership legally remains with the person who already owns it (pers. comm., Mr. Reinl, Austrian Agricultural Chamber, 2017).

### **Manager**

The Farm Structure Survey (Statistik Austria, 2013) and the IACS data (BMLFUW, 2014) of recent years show an increase in the proportion of women as farm managers. In 2010, 34% of agricultural and forestry holdings were managed by women, compared with 30% in 1999, this share was only 18% in 1980 (BMLFUW, 2014).

### **Decision-maker**

In everyday farm life partnership is gaining in importance. The sole responsibility of the female farmer for company decisions showed a decline in 2016 compared to 2006. In figures, 4% of female farmers make operational decisions alone; in 2006 it was 15%. At the same time, more and more decisions are made together with the partner. On 76% of the farms, this partnership model is being lived and suggests a development that already emerged in 1986 (around 64%). (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017)

### **New roles – old roles**

The life of female farmers is usually very versatile. They practice numerous activities and take on the different roles in the family, on the farm and off the farm.

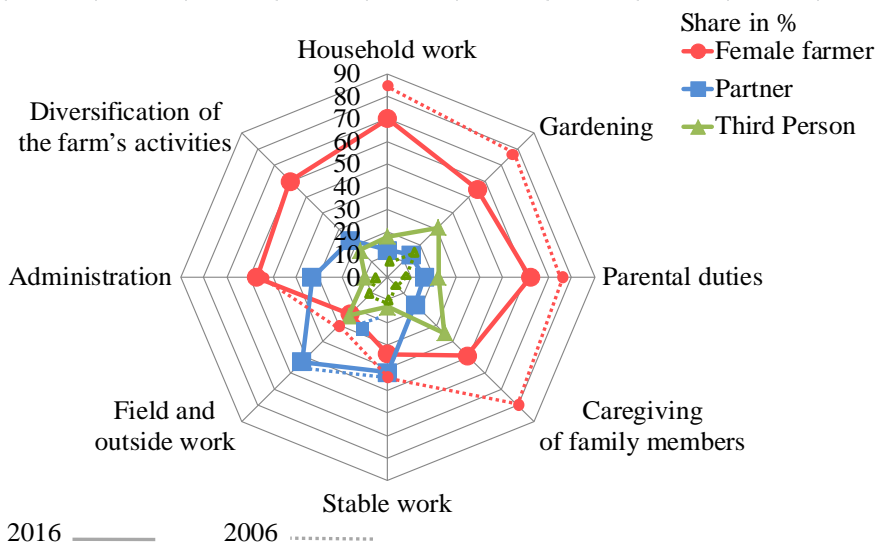
### **Roles on the farm**

The work on the farm is done by different people: the farmer, the partner and third persons. The graphic illustration in Figure 1 shows the division of the work on an average working day on the basis of the information given by the female farmers. The female farmer has her main focus in the household, parental duties, administration and the diversification of the farm's activities as well as in the garden. Work in the fields, outside work and stable work are mainly in the hands of the partner. Most of the work is divided between the female farmer and the farmer. The answer category 'third person' has a smaller proportion of the work. The workload of the female farmer in everyday work and in family work is very diverse. They have the following roles: housewife and mother, caregiver, self-employed person with garden products, person responsible for an area of operation (diversification), workers (field and outside work, stable work) as well as office worker within the administration. As Figure 1 shows there is a type of work allocation where the man is mainly responsible for the outdoor area – the farm – while the woman is responsible for the interior – the house – as well as for certain areas of the farm work. Over the years the role of the partner has been a

very stable one. The importance of the third person has increased. The activities of female farmers are nowadays done more efficiently than in the past, while more time is spent on off-farm work. This is also confirmed by Rossier and Ressig (2014) and maybe attributed to technical advances.

### Roles off the farm

Many female farmers have a role as a working woman, who works off the farm. 37% (2006 22%) of female farmers have this role (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017). Over the last decade the off-farm employment has grown. The situation in Switzerland is similar. According to Rossier (2014), 47% (2002 44%) of female farmers were working off-farm in 2012. Female farmers are not only active on the farm, but also voluntarily engage in associations and organisations. These may be agricultural and/or political ones but also other associations and organisations (not explained in more detail). In 2016, 66% of the female farmers were voluntarily engaged in at least one organisation. In 2006, the figure was 58%, whereas in 1996 only 34% were voluntarily engaged. (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017).



**Figure 1.** Distribution of work between the female farmer, the partner and third persons in %. (own visualisation according to KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017).

## CONCLUSIONS

We live in a fast moving world. The roles are very versatile and mingled. Old ones prove themselves and new ones emerge. The female farmers have an important role on the farm, which is characterised by their sub-roles. The following sub-roles currently result from their work on the farm namely: housewife and mother, partner, caregiver, self-provider with garden products, person involved in diversification activities, worker (field and outside work,

stables) and office worker within the administration. The female farmers also take on the role of the decision-maker, manager and owner. Furthermore, they also work off the farm and are engaged in voluntarily activities. This mix creates new opportunities, but also new hurdles. These are due, among other things, to the traditional gender stereotypes. Female farmers must be more ready to grasp their roles clearly in terms of their talents, competences and qualifications and to develop the partnership path further. This results in the following fields of research (i) more information about the reasons behind the change in roles, (ii) greater clarity is needed on the psychological, social, economic and cultural factors determining the specific forms their roles take, (iii) more research into the constraints female farmers face according to the given roles on and off the farm and (iv) proper consideration of the female farmers' roles and the resulting needs within policy activities and development strategies. This all together, when properly applied could encourage more young women to see agriculture as a viable career path.

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