

Highlighting pathways to **E**mpower **R**ural women to have **S**ustainable and **E**quitable **L**ivelihoods in **F**arming

HER-SELF

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Summary Report

DAFM Project 2022PSS127



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Foreword



The work of women on farms should not go unseen. It should be fully recognised and appreciated. The starting point is to understand what impediments exist and how these can be addressed to support women's efforts to take more active and prominent roles on farms in Ireland.

In 2022, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a paper outlining how fostering gender inclusion can positively impact global food systems across food security, job security and environmental sustainability. Positive engagement with stakeholder groups and strong leadership on this issue will create opportunities to improve the lives of all agri-food stakeholders.

The Programme for Government 2025 recognises the need to do more on gender equality across Irish society. When aligned with the gender equality objectives of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and core principles of the European Union, it is clear there is significant policy support and momentum building for gender balance both nationally and globally.

As Minister for Agriculture, Food, and the Marine, I am particularly aware that the current CAP Regulations place specific focus on promoting the role of women in rural development, with special attention to farming. Ireland has seized the opportunity to include, for the first time, several measures in Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan to support greater equality. Food Vision 2030, our shared stakeholder-led strategy for the agri-food sector, recognises the importance of gender balance to its long-term sustainable future and includes actions to promote and improve gender balance at all levels. I am also committed to implementing the National Women in Agriculture Action Plan to recognise the role of women in farming.

In 2022, as Minister of State with special responsibility for research, I introduced a new research funding instrument aimed at supporting short-term projects that directly address policy, strategy or regulatory issues in the agri-food, forest and bioeconomy sectors. To complement the work under the CAP Strategic Plan and Food Vision 2030, I commissioned the HER-SELF research project on women in agriculture. The outcomes and recommendations of this project establish a baseline position on women in agriculture and provide an evidence base to inform future policy in the area. A critical element of this is targeted dissemination of the outputs of the research to farmers, advisors, policy makers and other industry stakeholders.

I wish to express my appreciation to all the researchers, postgraduate students, technicians, industry partners, and stakeholders who contributed to this important project. The learnings from this project play an important role in formulating policy and initiatives to support women in agriculture into the future and will contribute to changing the narrative on the role of women in agriculture. I especially want to thank the farmers, both female and male, who volunteered their time to share their experiences through the projects focus groups. Finally, I would encourage stakeholders to embrace the opportunity to work together to contribute in a meaningful way to positive change for women farmers in Ireland. I look forward to working with you in forging a brighter, more inclusive future for Irish agriculture.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Heydon'.

Martin Heydon T.D.
Minister for Agriculture, Food, and the Marine

Introduction

The HER-SELF project (Highlighting pathways to Empower Rural women to have Sustainable and Equitable Livelihoods in Farming) is funded under the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) 2022 Policy and Strategic Studies Research call. The project is a collaboration between Munster Technological University (MTU), Maynooth University (MU) and Teagasc. The project ran from May 2023 – September 2024 with data collection and analysis carried out between May 2023 and June 2024. The objective of this project was to establish a baseline position on women in farming and the agriculture sector in Ireland and provide evidence for policy interventions to enhance the role of women in the sector in the future.



The Wider Policy Context

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) committed to seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015), with goal five specifically addressing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls everywhere by 2030. Nine years on, large gender gaps remain across the world. Irish data from the Census of Agriculture 2020 highlights that women are underrepresented in the agriculture sector and their valuable contributions every day to family farms are essentially ‘invisibilised’. Advancing gender equality is crucial to the sustainability and success of the agriculture sector.

Gender norms, the agriculture sector, and the policy making environment, are undergoing a period of significant change. HER-SELF recommendations are broadly aligned with existing strategy actions, with recommendations on enacting a just transition for agriculture, and with strategies for the promotion of gender equality more widely. Although any one of the recommendations could be enacted as a standalone measure, meaningful advancement of gender equality in agriculture, and meaningful progress on related social challenges such as generational renewal, improved work/life balance, and the improved health and wellbeing of primary producers, will require a systems approach to policy design, implementation and evaluation.

Project Aims

- To use a gendered lens to analyse existing data on farm income, farm payments and capital investment in farms.
- To gain insights into the daily lives of women farmers and women working in the agriculture sector of all ages.
- To identify barriers and enabling factors throughout their career paths taken by women who train in the agriculture sector and the reasons for these choices.
- To identify any geographical differences by region or county in the participation levels, incomes¹ and experiences of women involved in agriculture.

Project Methodology

The research used a mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. A stakeholder group of representatives from the agriculture sector was set up to provide advice to the research team on the overall direction and approach of the project in achieving its research aims and objectives. A gendered analysis of existing datasets eg. Census of Agriculture 2020 (CoA) and Teagasc National Farm Survey (NFS), education data and agricultural organisations data were undertaken. Gender disaggregated Census of Agriculture data for 2020 were mapped to identify relevant spatial patterns. To gain insights into the daily lives of female farmers and farm workers and to identify barriers to and enabling factors of gender equality in agriculture nine focus groups and three one-to-one interviews were held. Focus groups were held both in person (at various locations around Ireland) and online with male and female farmers, educators, advisory services and policy officers. Interviews were undertaken with agriculture sector experts. Themes identified in these informed a policy co-design workshop with key stakeholders.

¹ As the Teagasc National Farm Survey is the only source of income data available and it represents a sample of approximately 900 farms, it was not possible to consider income data by gender spatially as it could render some female farmers identifiable in the data. Given this and other considerations with the sample for the NFS, income data by gender were considered nationally here.

Project Findings

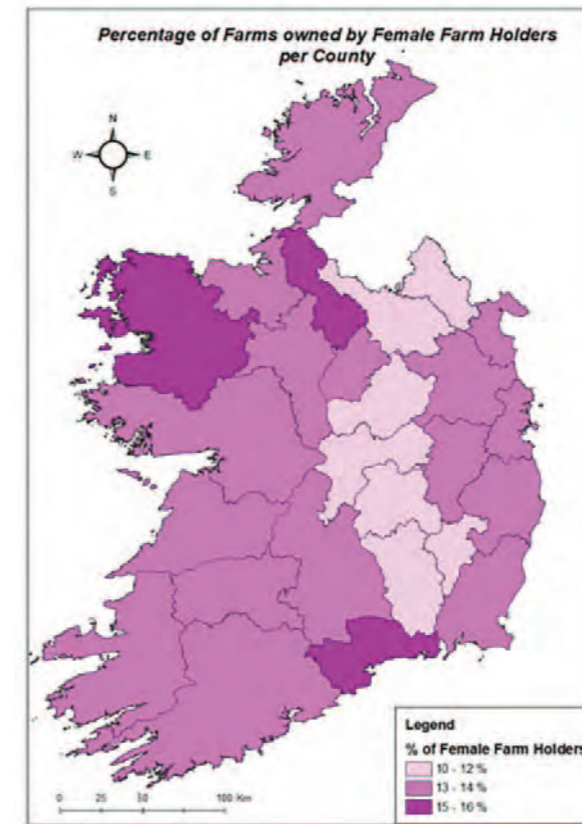
Several key findings have emerged from this research

A profile of Women Farming in Ireland

Female farm holders represent 13.4% of farm holders in Ireland, with little increase since 1991. The farming population is ageing with female farm holders tending to be older than their male counterparts, 40% of female farm holders compared with 32% of male farm holders are aged over 65 years of age (CoA, 2020), with women often becoming farm holders later in life. Female farm ownership in Ireland is highest in areas where farm sizes are smaller and land values are lower with higher proportions of female farm holders in Mayo, Leitrim, Sligo and Waterford (Map 1). The proportion of female farm workers, 27% of total agricultural workers, has not increased since 2000 and they are mainly concentrated in the southern regions.

27% of agricultural workers in Ireland are women

Female farm holders represent 13.4% of farm holders in Ireland



Map 1: Percentage of Female Farm Holders by County 2020 (CoA 2020)

The highest percentage of female farm holders (19%) own 10 hectares or less. With regard to farm systems, female farm holders are more highly represented in mixed field crops (24%), specialist sheep (17%) and organic farming (17%) enterprises. There are distinct geographies of female farm holders by sector and farm size in Ireland detailed in this research that should inform any proposed local and national initiatives to address gender equality in the sector (see Appendix B). Analysis of data from the Teagasc National Farm Survey between 2005-2020 indicate that farm incomes for female farm holders are consistently lower than for male farm holders - on average over the 15-year time period (2005-2020), female farm holders had annually €7,342 (30%) less income than their male counterparts. They receive lower direct farm payments (average direct payments for farmers through various schemes (basic payments, forestry, organics etc) illustrate a narrowing of the payments gap between male and female farm holders between 2005 and 2010 and parity in payments between 2010 and 2015). In 2020 these payments diverge once again with a slight increase in direct payments to male farm holders whilst payments to female farm holders stayed the same (see Appendix C). The farms of female farm holders are more likely to be deemed vulnerable from a farm viability perspective with the farms of 44% of female farm holders and 31% of male farm holders deemed vulnerable, respectively, over the last 15 years (see Appendix C). The proportion of viable farms owned by female farm holders remains consistently lower than that of male farm holders, 7% lower on average.

Protocols for Data Collection, Monitoring & Reporting

Accessing and analysing quantitative data on women in agriculture for the HER-SELF project proved challenging on a number of fronts:

1. While there is a wealth of data that can be gender disaggregated from the Census of Agriculture and other associated CSO datasets, the CSO staff (understandably) do not have the necessary time to commit to complex extractions of raw data and analysis for informing policy/research given existing heavy workloads and often tight timeframes of policy and research tasks.
2. Data that are crucial to measuring and monitoring gender equality in agriculture in Ireland are not routinely collected by the CSO and should be included in the Census of Agriculture in the future (2030) e.g. data in relation to marital status, income, land acquisition, off farm employment, care work.
3. The National Farm Survey collated by Teagasc annually is helpful in filling some of the gaps in Census of Agriculture data. However, its utility is hampered by the non-inclusion of farms with an SO (Standard Output) of <€8,000. Given that female farm holders are associated with smaller farm sizes, accurate and comprehensive assessments of farm incomes, payments and investments for female farm holders is hampered by the non-availability of data.
4. Although gender disaggregated educational enrolment data were available for many courses in agriculture, there were some gaps in the data provided. For example, while high level gender disaggregated data are available for Teagasc award titles from QQI, a gender disaggregated dataset of enrolment for and graduation from certificate level courses such as the Green Certificate is not readily available (this would require Teagasc staff to compile such data).

Family Farm Structures

- The labour contributions of female farm holders and female farm workers to the family farm in Ireland are significant. Family workers are often unpaid yet data from the Census of Agriculture indicate that they do a significant proportion of total AWU (Annual Work Units²) on farms (29%). Women do 37% of the total AWU of family workers (CoA, 2020) (see Appendix C).
- Dominant norms such as - the farmer as male, stoic, the decision-maker, and unwilling to help- seek; the woman as helper; care work as women's work; and the son as heir – impact on the **kinds of work** each person does on the family farm, each person's **legal status**, and the **structure of farm family finances** and **decision-making patterns**.
- Data from across the focus groups indicate that at community, organisational and national levels there is very little public recognition of women as farmers even though they have always worked on farms. This, at times, genuine lack of awareness that women can be farmers, and at other times, an intentional refusal to grant women status as 'real' farmers is exhausting for women in agriculture and speaks to the embeddedness and strength of the 'woman as helper' norm.
- HER-SELF qualitative findings suggest that women may not feel they have the right to self-identify as a farmer. They understand that at a community level they are expected to fulfil the 'woman as helper' norm and that they may be queried, ridiculed, and/or incur social penalties if they transgress that.
- It is important for women and other under-represented groups to self-identify as farmers (among other roles) if they and other members of the sector are to value the work they do on farms, and to recognise their legitimacy in the agriculture sector. Indeed, an expansion of available roles - and assigning value to those roles - that can be occupied by all, would be useful. Wider research suggests that men increasingly value the ability to self-identify across multiple roles such as farmer, business owner, and parent (Cush and Macken-Walsh, 2018).

² One annual work unit corresponds to the work performed by one person who is occupied on an agricultural holding on a full-time basis (225 working days each year of 8 hours each).





- Data are not routinely collected on the types of farm work and off farm work undertaken by farm holders and family members. Wider statistics suggest farmers work long hours. In 2020 22.6% of the workforce in agricultural, forestry and fisheries aged 20-64 reported working 70 hours or more on a weekly basis, compared to just 1.4% of the total workforce (Murphy, 2022: 14).
- Qualitative findings from HER-SELF suggest, and further research is undoubtedly required, that the person who works full time on a smaller or less profitable farm (regardless of gender identity), is likely to experience significant levels of stress due to fluctuating farm finances and high workload. Wider research suggests that the outlook for farmers' mental health and wellbeing is poor. A recent survey carried out by UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science with farmers, found that 55.5% of respondents were experiencing moderate to extremely severe depression and almost a quarter, 23.4%, were considered at risk for suicide. The gender profile of respondents (n256) was 72% male and 28% female, with farm holders reporting higher suicidal ideation and higher distress than non-holders (Russell et al., 2022).
- The significant demands of care work were raised as an issue of concern across the HER-SELF focus groups with women. Data are not routinely collected on care work by either the CoA or the NFS.
- It is likely that women in agriculture take primary responsibility for care work including housework, elder care and childcare. This hypothesis is reflective of broader societal norms wherein women do over double the unpaid caring work than their male counterparts (McGauran, 2021: 31). At a societal level there needs to be a shift in gender norms such that women and men are facilitated to undertake equal shares of paid work and unpaid care work.

- The combined load of farm work, off farm work and care work is a significant barrier to women's full participation in agriculture, and to their participation in processes to achieve a just transition (i.e. the transition into making optimal use of land and agricultural resources to support economic, environmental, and social sustainability).
- To be sustainable, the agriculture sector needs to attract younger farmers and women in greater numbers. However, long working hours and the unpaid care work women are culturally expected to take primary responsibility for, mean that it will be difficult for women to stay farming (in a full time or professional capacity) after they have children, and/or if they undertake significant elder care responsibilities. Care work is low-carbon work and ensures a healthy environment for the persons being cared for (Diski, 2022: 8; Dukelow et al, 2024: 52-56). Investment in public care infrastructure as a key part of the green transition would remove a significant barrier to women's progression within the agriculture sector.

Access to Land & Succession

- One of the biggest barriers to working as a primary producer is a lack of access to land.
- Over half of farmers in Ireland do not have an identified successor in place (CoA, 2020). Where there is an identified successor, a significant majority (over 80%) of those identified successors are male.
- HER-SELF focus group participants had mixed views on succession norms in Ireland. A few participants spoke of being 'equal opportunity' parents, as in whichever child was most interested in the farm would go on to work on the farm, regardless of gender. Their sense was that this was the case with an increasing number of farmers although this view is not reflected in the quantitative data. Many of the female participants had no brothers, or they had married in and were farming with their husbands, and this may well have shaped their perspectives. One participant with brothers was farming because she was the only child interested in it.
- However, in general, female focus group participants with brothers knew from an early age that they were never in line to inherit. Where their brother had an interest in farming they largely accepted this as reasonable, even if they too had an interest in farming. This speaks to how strongly socialised children can be to accept one son as the rightful heir.
- Some participants noted that the 'son as heir' mindset could lead to problems particularly if the son had little interest in farming. HER-SELF qualitative findings suggest that greater dialogue on the impact of the 'son as heir' norm on the sustainability of the agriculture sector is needed. Negative impacts include loss of talent; pressures on men who do not wish to continue farming; missed opportunities in relation to alternative options for the farm; and impediments to women's ability to fulfil their potential as farmers.

Visibility, Representation & Inclusion

- Visibility, representation and inclusion of people of all genders across the wider agriculture sector are key elements in advancing gender equality in agriculture.
- The 2023 Gender Pay Gap Reports from organisations across the agriculture sector evidence the overall under-representation of women in all 7 businesses (Lakeland Dairies, Irish Country Meats, Carbery, Kerry Group, Aurivo, Dairygold, Tirlán). There is gender balance at the lowest quartile in some of the agri-businesses (Lakeland Dairies, Irish Country Meats, Carbery, Kerry Group); with gender balance at the two lower quartiles in Teagasc; at the upper and lower quartile in Kerry Group; and all but the upper quartile in the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM).
- As of end 2024, in farmer representative organisations which publicly list executive team members (IFA; ICSA; ICMSA; IWFA; and INHFA), men are in the majority at leadership level across all farmer representative organisations.
- While farmer representative organisations, government bodies, co-operatives, and agri-businesses are working to advance equality - specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART) actions are needed as part of adequately resourced equality action plans in organisations.
- Focus group discussions suggest that awareness-raising at sectoral level is needed that effectively communicates the historical roots and injustice of gendered inequalities within agricultural organisations (Pini, 2008). All members of organisations need to have a good understanding of why positive action measures are necessary to advance gender equality; and why advancing gender equality makes sense on multiple levels – ensuring democratic justice, economic fairness, and best practice solution development to the full range of challenges facing the sector.

Gender Equality in Agricultural Education Pathways

- Attracting women to careers in farming is critical to the sustainability of farming and rural areas.
- Research suggests that in farm families, daughters do not receive the same level of on-farm training and support that sons do (Cassidy and McGrath, 2015; Cassidy, 2019; Sutherland et al 2023).
- HER-SELF female focus group participants with brothers discussed not getting the same learning opportunities as their brothers and having to push back against the assumption that they would only fulfil a ‘helper’ role. Some participants were not trained up on machinery and the more technical aspects of farming which put them at a disadvantage. They argued that targeted supports for women were needed to address this legacy of exclusion.
- More male students than female students study Agricultural Science at Leaving Certificate Ordinary and Higher Level, but there is gender-balanced participation at Higher Level, and overall (defined as at least 40% male and 40% female).
- A range of 3rd level agricultural science courses are gender balanced. Many show an upward trend of female enrolments since 2020 which is reflective of the strong interest in agriculture by women in Ireland.
- The fact that women are far less likely to be identified as a potential successor can be seen in 3rd level education enrolment patterns. Courses which enrol very few female students ($\leq 20\%$) (as of the most recent available data from third level institutions in Ireland) have a focus on agricultural engineering, land management and livestock management.
- A significant barrier to participation in KT groups in Ireland identified in HER-SELF is that many are only open to farm holders (the majority of whom are men).





Institutional Barriers to Gender Equality in Agriculture in Ireland

- HER-SELF identified structural and institutional barriers to advancing gender equality, produced through the intersections of tax, social welfare and agriculture policies.
- It is difficult for many women, whose partner is defined as the active farmer, to acquire legal status in a farm business. Tax policy disincentivises early-career and mid-career farmers (usually men) from putting their partner's name (usually a women) as joint owner of farmland. The rules in relation to Registered Farm Partnerships (RFP) disadvantage spouses of farm holders who work on the farm but are not a farm holder and who do not have an agricultural qualification.
- Where women in a farm couple do not own land and cannot enter into a RFP with their partner, they can jointly own the herd with their partner. There is a requirement for one person to be assigned as the herd keeper in line with EU and national legislation. This was fully accepted as necessary by study participants. However, the herd keeper is now solely named on bovine passports³ and on many front facing IT systems across the agriculture sector (participants gave the ICBF⁴, marts, milk recording companies, creameries, as examples). This has had the impact of limiting other herd owners' capacity to carry out administrative tasks and effectively invisibilised the work of herd owners who are not the herd keeper.
- The current Women Farmers Capital Investment Scheme (WFCIS) is designed to support women who already hold legal status within the farm business. The agricultural qualification requirement for women who acquire legal status within the farm business after 2022 (in order to avail of WFCIS provisions) is reportedly in place as a proxy measure of interest in, and commitment to, the farm business by the applicant. Yet given the low number of partnerships in the sector already (suggesting low levels of interest in collaborative structures of farm ownership) and how courses are designed (e.g. no micro credential options, whole day in person training) it may act as an additional barrier to the inclusion of women farmers in a legal entity such as partnerships or companies.
- HER-SELF focus group participants said that the eligibility criteria for the Women Farmers Capital Investment Scheme were difficult to meet and the requirement to pay first and then claim back costs disadvantages smaller farmers who do not have access to credit.

³ DAFM are considering ending the requirement for bovine passports

⁴ Irish Cattle Breeding Federation

Project Recommendations: Enablers of Gender Equality in Agriculture

HER-SELF identified a range of actions which would enable the advancement of gender equality in agriculture.



1. Data Collection, Monitoring and Reporting

1.1 Conduct Gender Analysis of Existing Data. With sufficient resources and time allocation, existing data held by the CSO and Teagasc could yield further insights on the role of women in the agriculture sector. An in-depth audit and gender analysis of working patterns of all who work on farms, of earnings, education, and participation levels in the agriculture sector, conducted by appropriate individuals internal to the CSO and Teagasc, is recommended.

1.1.1 Reports on the agriculture sector by government agencies (e.g. DAFM, Revenue) should report gender disaggregated results where possible (e.g. distribution of payments to farmers by gender; farmers availing of agricultural tax reliefs by gender). Where gender disaggregated data are currently unavailable this should be clearly outlined in the methodology with actions to improve gender disaggregated data collection identified.

1.2 CSO to expand questions in CoA 2030 to include questions on marital status, on-farm activities, off farm employment, care work, on farm and off farm diversification activities and land acquisition by gender for farm holders and spouses.

1.2.1 As part of making work on farms visible, data on the organisation of labour on the farm (hours spent/types of activities) by all family members should be collected through the Census of Agriculture (CoA). A note that farm administrative tasks or 'bookwork' count as farm work should be included in the survey.

1.2.2 Off farm employment of farmers and their spouses (who is employed, the nature of that employment, the roles involved, hours and income) should be considered in the Census of Agriculture (CoA) to ascertain the extent of how Family Farm Income (FFI) is supported by off farm employment.

1.2.3 Gender disaggregated data on care work commitments should be routinely collected by the CoA.

1.2.4 Gender disaggregated data on on-farm and off farm diversification activities should be routinely collected by the CoA.

1.2.5 Gender disaggregated data on farm employees (including relief workers) by gender, location, hours and types of activities should also be routinely collected by CSO.

1.2.6 CSO to explore the possibility of linking CoA data to farm income data via Revenue submissions.

1.3 NFS to collect Gender Disaggregated Data on Farm income; On Farm, Off Farm and Care Work

1.3.1 As part of making work on farms visible, data on the organisation of labour on the farm (hours spent/types of activities) by all family members should be collected through the NFS. A note that farm administrative tasks or 'bookwork' count as farm work should be included in the survey.

1.3.2 Off farm employment of farmers and their spouses (who is employed, the nature of that employment, the roles involved, hours and income) should be considered in the NFS to ascertain the extent of how Family Farm Income (FFI) is supported by off farm employment.

1.3.3 Gender disaggregated data on care work commitments should be routinely collected by the NFS.

1.3.4 Further detailed data collection on the earnings, activities and profile of farm holders on farms with a Standard Output of <€8,000 are required. This could be done as part of the National Farm Survey (broaden the inclusion criteria) or as a regular standalone survey.

1.3.5 A gendered analysis should be incorporated into both the annual National Farm Survey and the National Small Farms Survey to make the status, activities and progress of female farm holders more visible.

1.4 Collate Gender Disaggregated Enrolment Data on Agricultural Courses across the Education Pathway and Publish a Short Annual Progress Report. Recognise progress and share best practice on enabling gender balance across course offerings.

1.4.1 Conduct a qualitative analysis of the factors that explain greater female enrolment in some courses and not in others, e.g. university courses focused on agricultural engineering, land management, and livestock production and management.

1.4.2 In addition to reporting on gender disaggregated enrolment and graduation from Green Certificate courses from 2024 (1.4) a review of enrolment and graduation data (by region, specialisation, delivery mode etc) since the introduction of the Green Certificate is recommended.

1.4.3 An equality impact assessment of current knowledge transfer structures is warranted.

1.5 Prepare a baseline review of farm family health, safety and wellbeing.

1.6 Establish a Working Group with representatives from DAFM, Teagasc NFS, CSO, agricultural education providers, academia, WASG and other relevant organisations (e.g. Revenue) to prioritise, monitor and co-ordinate the collection of gender disaggregated data across various instruments.

2. Enabling Equitable Policy and Practices

2.1 PRIORITY ACTION Conduct full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of agriculture policy and practices that shape access to the status of 'active farmer' and shape the wider legal status of farm family members, farm business owners and farm employees.

To include

- gender disaggregated data on accessibility and participation of all schemes and measures
- the impacts of the intersections of agriculture policy with tax rules and social welfare entitlement criteria. Any discriminatory impacts, particularly on the basis of the intersections of gender, civil status, family status, age and ethnicity need to be considered.

2.1.1 Based on the EIA findings re-configure the intersections of agriculture policy with tax rules and social welfare entitlement criteria to enable recognition of all types of farm work (including administrative work), equitable access to 'active farmer' status and social welfare entitlements, and support generational renewal, job satisfaction, health and wellbeing for all. Due consideration should be given to the findings of the high level analysis and initial recommendations completed as part of the HER-SELF project.

2.1.2 As an outcome of the EIA develop and implement succession measures through which older farmers retain a sense of purpose and their knowledge and skills are utilised, highlight the contributions and expertise of women older farmers. This could involve further development of, and incentives for increased participation, in collaborative farming business structures.

2.2 Equality Impact Assessments must be completed in advance of any new policy in the sector - where a policy targets the farm holder only it is likely to exclude many people working on farms.



2.3 PRIORITY ACTION Resource Allocation - Addressing social challenges, with advancing gender equality as a key priority, should be allocated a percentage of any just transition in agriculture and land use funds

2.3.1 To access funds that support just transition measures all organisations should demonstrate how they will contribute to cultural change, develop a shared, evidence-based, understanding of the social and environmental challenges facing agriculture, and implement measures to address these which prioritise advancing gender equality as a core objective.

2.3.2 Farming is a low income sector with average male farm holder income at €24,578, and average female farm holder income at €17,236 on farms with a Standard Output of over €8000 (NFS, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020). Allocation of funds which require the farmer to pay costs first and then claim back disadvantage smaller farmers who cannot access credit. As part of the just transition specific financial supports should be tailored to support farmers on smaller farms enabling them to implement transition measures with security. Proposals could include a basic income for farmers which would combine the Farm Assist social welfare payment with CAP payments (Murphy, 2024); alternative means of administering grants for farm improvement measures that contribute to the just transition and farmer health and safety; and low interest long term government loans.⁵

2.4 Enable the visibility of all persons relevant to a herd and clearly identify their role (e.g. herd keeper, herd owner, authorised agent) on IT systems across the sector, thus ensuring all persons are recognised and able to conduct relevant administrative tasks.

⁵ Current loan available schemes include the Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme and the Ukraine Credit Guarantee Scheme.



2.5 Establish inclusive Participatory Policy Development processes for agriculture policy and ensure female farmers have a voice in policy design, implementation, and review processes.

2.6 Establish tailored and effective supports for women who wish to become farmers and/or develop their farm business. Supports could include measures to enable women to take up farm apprenticeships such as providing support for childcare and actively recruiting female apprentices; a land matching service, encouragement of the use of The Land Mobility Service and targeted subsidies for women farmers; a Starter Farm Scheme for women such as that offered by Forestry and Land Scotland; subsidies to enable women on smaller farms to access additional land; supports for small scale sustainable enterprises owned by women on farms.

2.7 Invest in a public model of care infrastructure as part of the just transition including a recognition of care work as green jobs.

2.8 Over half of farmers (55.5%) do not have an identified successor in place. Where there is an identified successor (44.5% of farms), a significant majority of those are male (81.6%) (CoA, 2020). The recently announced (December 2024) Commission on Generational Renewal in Farming should include a focus on advancing equality and inclusion in agriculture, with a core focus on advancing gender equality through positive action measures, in its terms of reference.

3. Dialogue and Awareness Raising

3.1 As part of any participatory processes of dialogue on the just transition, and as part of agricultural representative organisations' meetings, HER-SELF recommend well facilitated sessions on the social challenges within the agriculture sector

3.1.1 How Gender Works in Agriculture - Histories of Gendered Farm Work and Care Work Tasks, Indoor/Outdoor Hierarchy of Work; Gendered Inheritance Dynamics; Gender and Land Use; Gender and Health and Wellbeing; Gender and Decision Making.

3.1.2 Intertwinement of Social Challenges in Agriculture - Advancing Gender Equality, Generational Renewal, Access for New Entrants, Work/Life Balance and Mental Health and Wellbeing. Dialogue on the impact of the 'son as heir' norm on the sustainability of the agriculture sector should be prioritised. Negative impacts include loss of talent; pressures on men who do not wish to continue farming; missed opportunities in relation to alternative options for the farm; impediments to women's ability to fulfil their potential as farmers.

3.1.3 Imagining Farming Futures - land use, organisation of labour, fair burden sharing, policy development - all to include focus on addressing social challenges in farming, with advancing gender equality as a key priority.

3.1.4 Issues facing new entrants to farming - to include entrants who will not inherit land, women entrants, entrants from LGBTQI+ communities.

3.1.5 Policy and Economic Barriers to becoming an 'active farmer', with a focus on how these impact people based on gender, age, ethnicity and family status.

3.2 Invest and Further Develop Farm Advisory Services

3.2.1 Develop comprehensive short training module for farm advisory service providers and equip them with a basic understanding of how gender works in agriculture; intertwining of social challenges in agriculture; key environmental objectives.

3.2.2 Develop specialist team within farm advisory services/enhance existing skillsets to advise on all aspects of succession planning and implementation - environmental, economic, social, emotional and family dynamics. To include training on how to facilitate conversations on gender equal succession pathways.



3.3 Create accessible online courses with supporting materials, freely available to all, to enhance understanding of social and environmental challenges facing the sector and actions to address them

3.3.1 Develop a webpage with supporting resources, available to anyone, on how gender works in agriculture; intertwinement of social challenges in agriculture; key environmental objectives.

3.3.2 Develop a webpage with supporting resources on planning a farmyard to support health and safety for all.

3.3.3 Create an online module on manual handling on farms and make available freely to all. Highlight the long-term negative health impacts of common practices on farms e.g. back injuries.

3.3.4 Rewrite HSE and Teagasc resources on Farmers Health and Wellbeing to include sections on farm safety for children; farming while pregnant; impact of menopause.

4. Achieving Gender Equality in Organisations

4.1 Promote and support inclusive networks, such as mentoring programmes for rural women entrepreneurs, the Women in Agriculture Stakeholders Group, women's leadership networks, men's sheds, and networks which promote LGBTQI+ visibility and inclusion.

4.2 Given the current poor representation of women in the agriculture sector, develop a SMART action plan to achieve gender balance and gender expertise on the boards of all Agri food and Agri business groups, and farming representative bodies. Ask all organisations to sign up to key actions and monitor their progress in relation to same.

4.3 Create a 'talent bank' of suitably qualified women for farming positions - identify their skills and interests, offer training opportunities, and encourage farming organisations to circulate notices to this pool when positions become available.

4.4 Report on governance practices of local development companies and co-operatives and identify any practices which may inhibit gender equality (e.g. no term limits; voting rights related to lead name on joint shares only). Produce and implement recommendations to ensure equality of opportunity and due regard for the value of diversity and inclusion.

5. Achieving Gender Equality in Agricultural Education Pathways

5.1 Review and revise educational courses to include a focus on the social challenges in agriculture and enabling gender equality.

5.1.1 Ensure business management; business strategy; financial management; human health and wellbeing (including awareness raising on equality diversity and inclusion in agriculture) included on all agriculture courses.

5.1.2 Create resources for teachers and lecturers on gender inclusive pedagogies.

5.2 Include agricultural science as an option for students in more secondary schools with a specific focus on offering it as an option female students attending single sex schools.

5.3 Based on the results of 1.4.2 prepare a report on current Green Certificate programmes and make recommendations to ensure standardisation of quality with specialisations; flexible provision e.g. modularisation; appropriate level of qualification given work involved; inclusion of agroecological, organic and biological options; inclusion of human health and wellbeing modules; inclusion of business strategy and financial management skills; inclusion of equality diversity and inclusion module covering historical, structural, institutional and individual dimensions of discrimination and how to address them.

5.4 Develop Green Certificate programme with a specialised focus on organic/sustainable farming, ensure online/flexible delivery and examinations to ensure access to people with care responsibilities.

5.5 Conduct an Equality Impact Assessment of the current KT programme, address any existing barriers to female participation and embed gender equality in any new KT groups.

5.6 Develop a e-Knowledge exchange system – a two-way process of knowledge exchange focusing on improving agricultural sustainability. This knowledge exchange system should be co-designed, accessible, inclusive and remunerated.



Conclusion

Advancing gender equality is essential to the sustainability of agriculture. The agri-food sector - comprising primary agriculture, food and drink processing/manufacturing, fisheries, aquaculture, fish processing, forestry, forestry processing and the equine sector - is Ireland's oldest and largest indigenous industry. In 2020, it accounted for almost 7% of modified Gross National Income (GNI) (DAFM, 2021: 11). Its continued viability is dependent on ensuring the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the sector for all, and particularly for primary producers. All government departments have a responsibility to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and protect the human rights of those to whom they provide services. Currently a significant majority of CAP payments go to male recipients (DAFM, 2024:24) yet the labour contributions of women to the family farm in Ireland are significant. To support social sustainability, issues such as the reproduction of gendered inequalities, low levels of generational renewal, the poor health and wellbeing of a significant proportion of primary producers, and insufficient rural development need to be addressed.

The HER-SELF project has for the first time provided a profile of female farmers in Ireland. Using a mixed methods approach the factors that influence the involvement of current and prospective female farmers/farm workers in the agriculture sector in Ireland with respect to their visibility, equality, status and experiences in the sector were examined. HER-SELF has established a baseline position on women in farming and the agriculture sector in Ireland and provides evidence for future policy interventions to enhance the role of women in the sector.

It has also identified key gaps in research on gender equality in farming: the reasons why female farm holders are more prominent in some sectors (including organic farming) warrants further exploration; the area of family farm finances requires greater scrutiny using a gendered lens; improved data collection and subsequent in-depth analysis of the gendered dynamics of on farm activities, caring responsibilities and off-farm employment would make the work undertaken by all family members on farms more visible; a gender sensitive analysis of generational renewal in agriculture is warranted to provide an in-depth analysis of the factors which contribute to the continuance of patriarchal succession cycles and the ways that this could be addressed; qualitative exploration of the experiences of women in agricultural organisations to identify further pathways to gender equality in the sector. These are just some of the important areas for future research on gender equality in agriculture identified by HER-SELF.

HER-SELF provides key recommendations for consideration by industry stakeholders and policymakers. At an institutional level, a range of criteria - particularly related to the intersections of tax policy, agriculture policy and social welfare policy - shape the legal status of family members on family farms. These have particularly detrimental impacts on the spouse of the farm holder (usually a woman). They also contribute to low levels of generational renewal (older farmers retiring and younger farmers entering the sector). Meaningful advancement of gender equality in agriculture, and meaningful progress on related social challenges such as generational renewal, improved work/life balance and the improved health and wellbeing of primary producers, will require a systems approach to policy design, implementation and evaluation.

The project team would like to thank the funders (DAFM), the Steering Committee members who guided this research and all who participated in the HER-SELF project. It is hoped that the findings of this research will make a significant contribution to knowledge and awareness of gender equality in agriculture and that policy changes will be delivered to assist in advancing gender equality across the sector.

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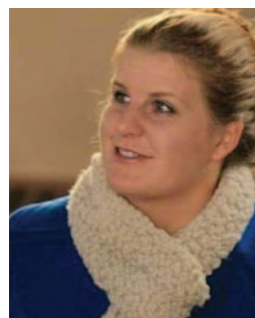
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Appendices

A - The Research Team

This project brought together a multi-disciplinary research team from Munster Technological University, Maynooth University and Teagasc, with expertise in the areas of rural geography, agricultural science, gender equality and rural sociology.

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Dr Áine Macken-Walsh
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Áine Macken-Walsh contributed to the design of the qualitative aspects of this research and the implementation of the multi-actor focus groups and the policy co-design workshop.



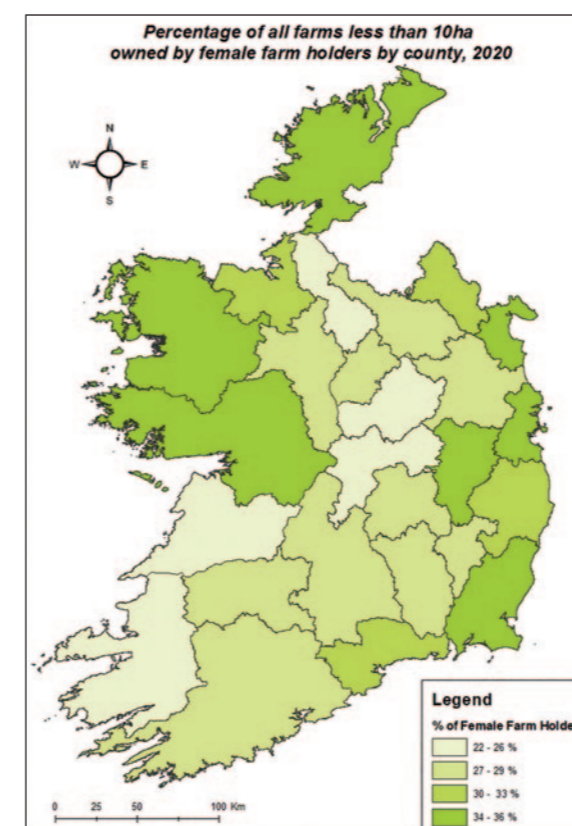
Alice Hand
Research Assistant
(Munster Technological University)

Alice Hand collated various datasets, provided technical support with the focus groups and mapped the CSO data.

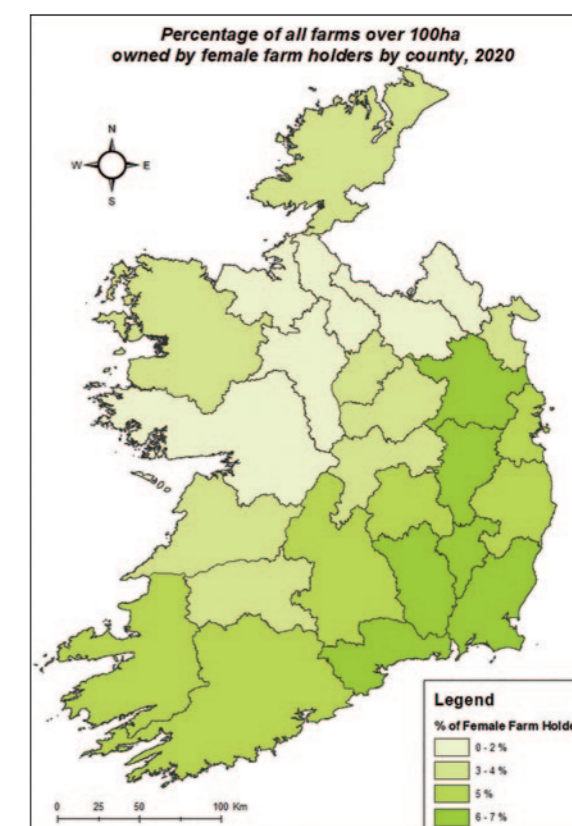
Special thanks to Sophie Emmerson (Central Statistics Office (CSO)) and Emma Dillon (Teagasc) for their contributions in the provision and analysis of data from CSO and National Farm Survey.

B - Geography of Female Farm Holders

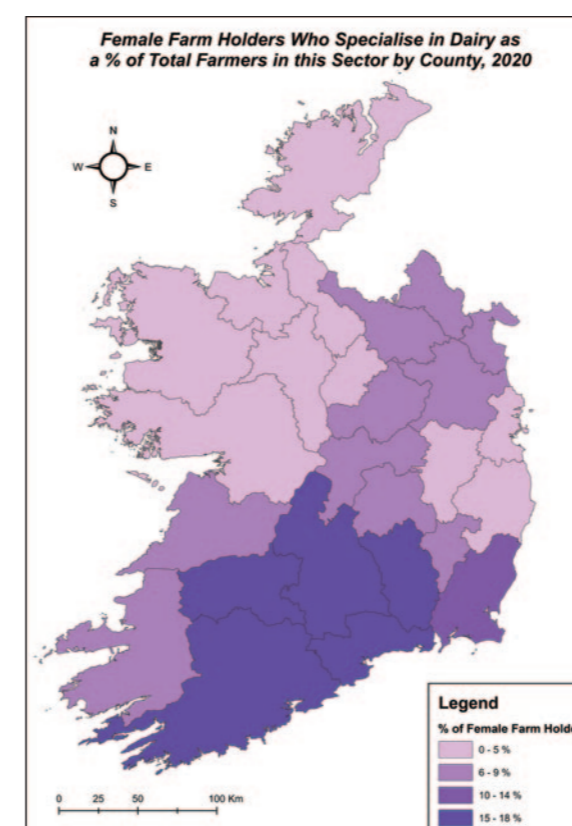
Source: Maps produced from Census of Agriculture 2020 data using Arc GIS Pro and Ordnance Survey of Ireland maps.



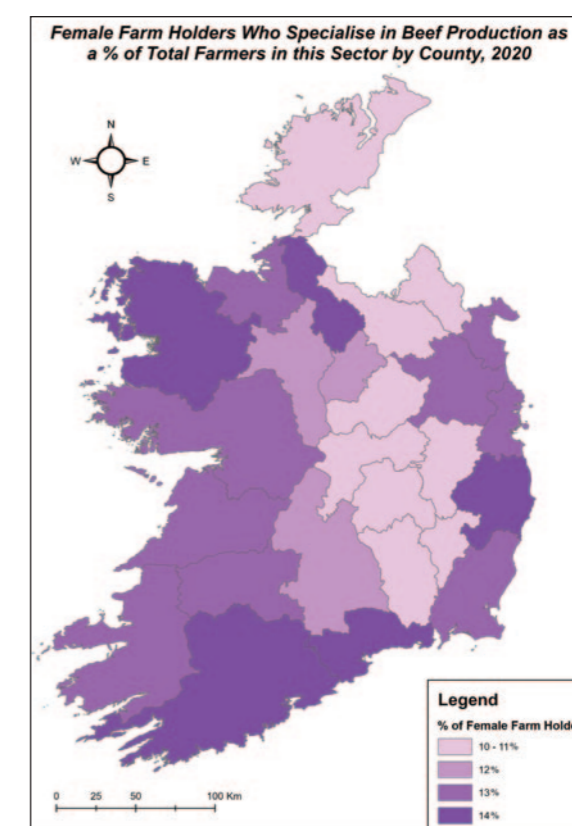
Map 2: Female Farm Holders of Farms less than 10 ha by County 2020 (CoA 2020)



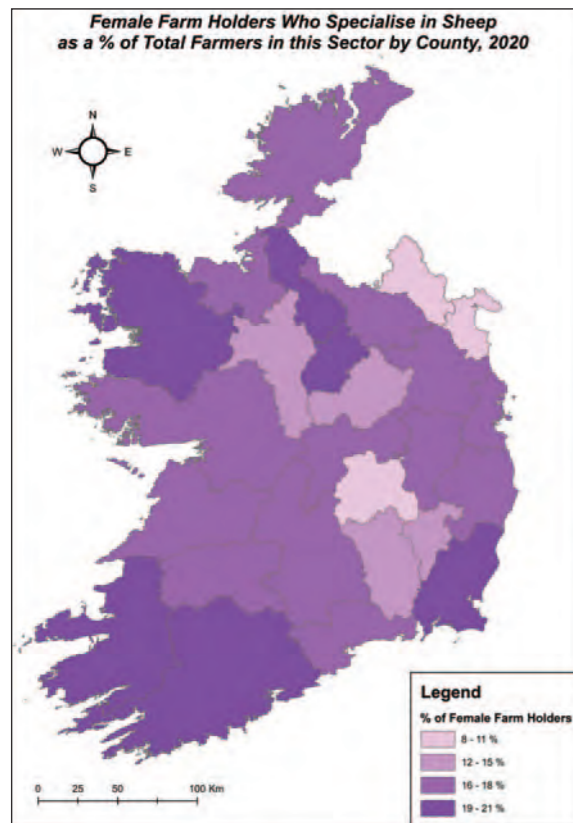
Map 3: Female Farm Holders of Farms over 100 ha by County 2020 (CoA 2020)



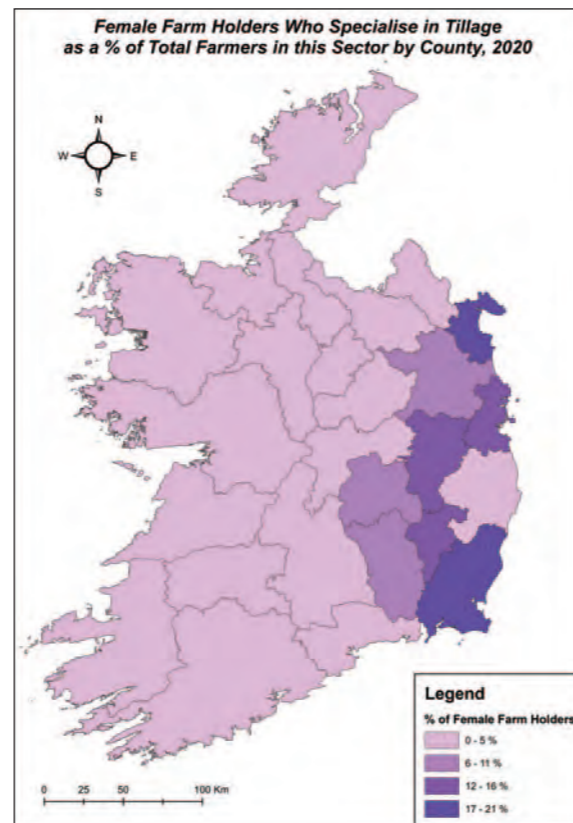
Map 4: Female Farm Holders Specialist Dairying by County 2020 (CoA 2020)



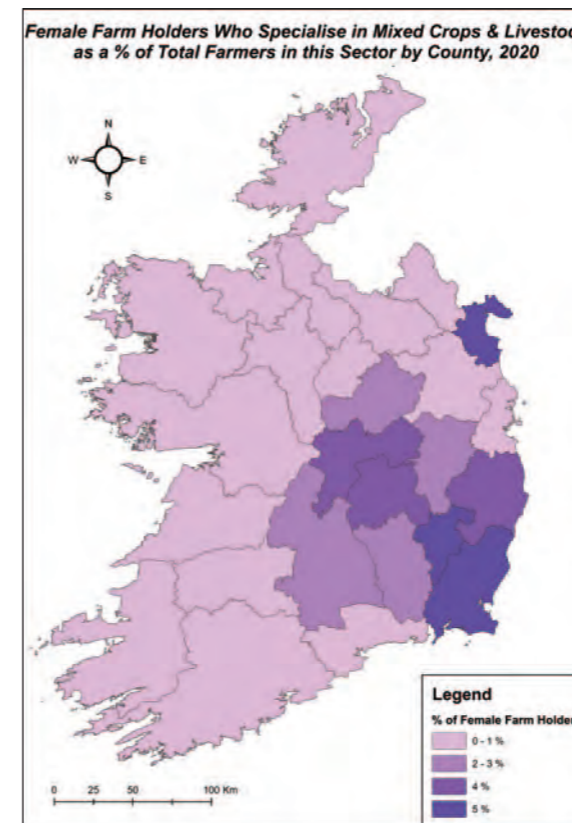
Map 5: Female Farm Holders Specialist Beef Production by County 2020 (CoA 2020)



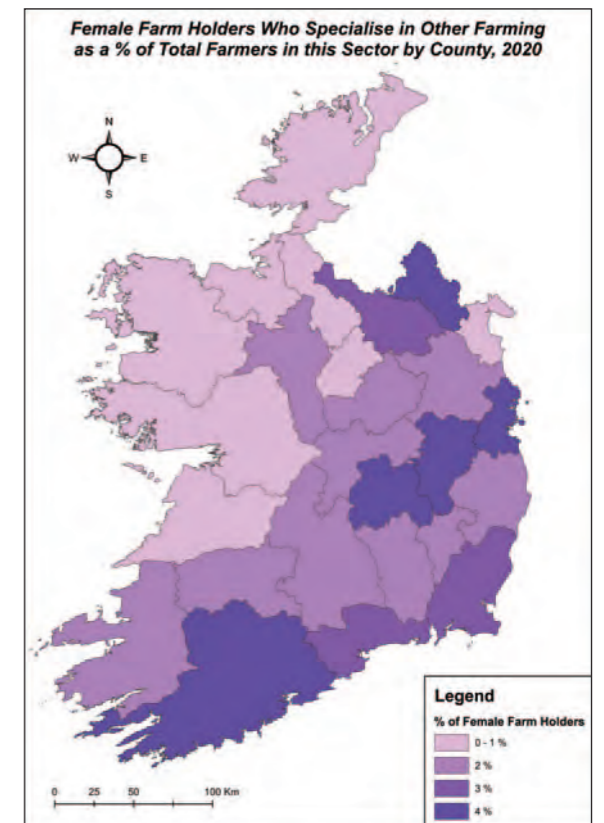
Map 6: Female Farm Holders Specialist Sheep by County 2020 (CoA 2020)



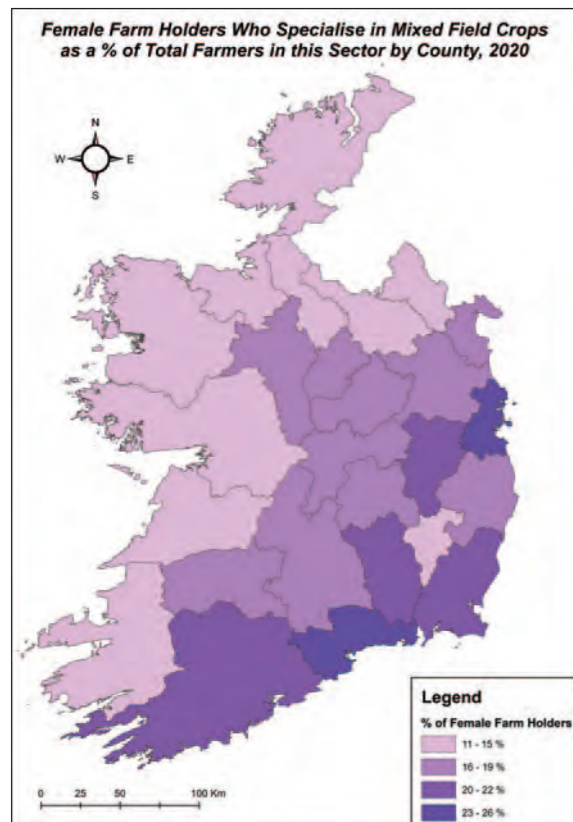
Map 7: Female Farm Holders Specialist Tillage by County 2020 (CoA 2020)



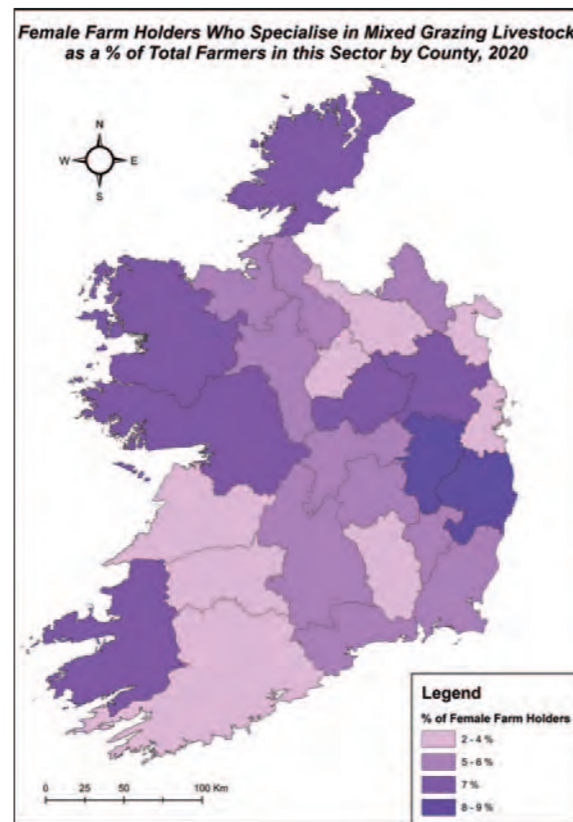
Map 10: Female Farm Holders Mixed Crops & Livestock by County 2020 (CoA 2020)



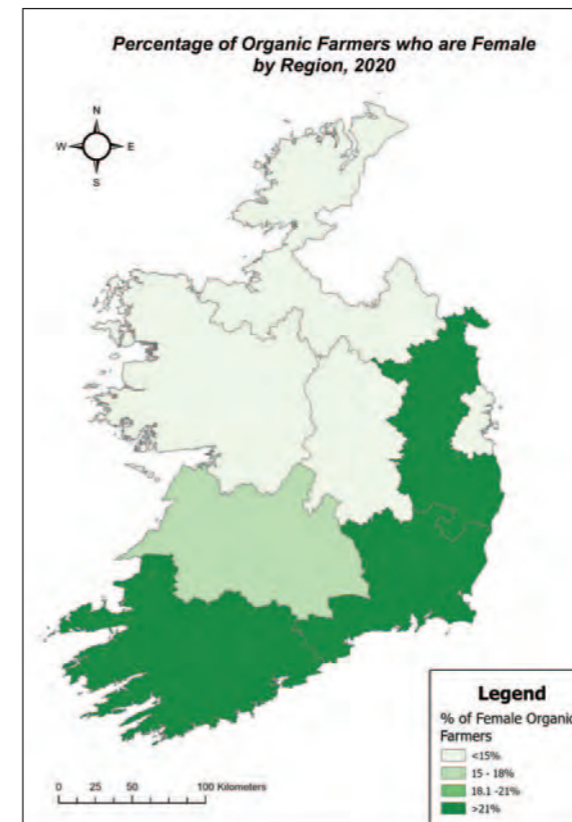
Map 11: Female Farm Holders Other Farming by County 2020 (CoA 2020)



Map 8: Female Farm Holders Mixed Field Crops by County 2020 (CoA 2020)



Map 9: Female Farm Holders Mixed Grazing Livestock by County 2020 (CoA 2020)



Map 12: Female Organic Farmers as a Percentage of Total Organic Farmers by Region 2020 (CoA 2020)

C - Farm Income, Payments and Viability

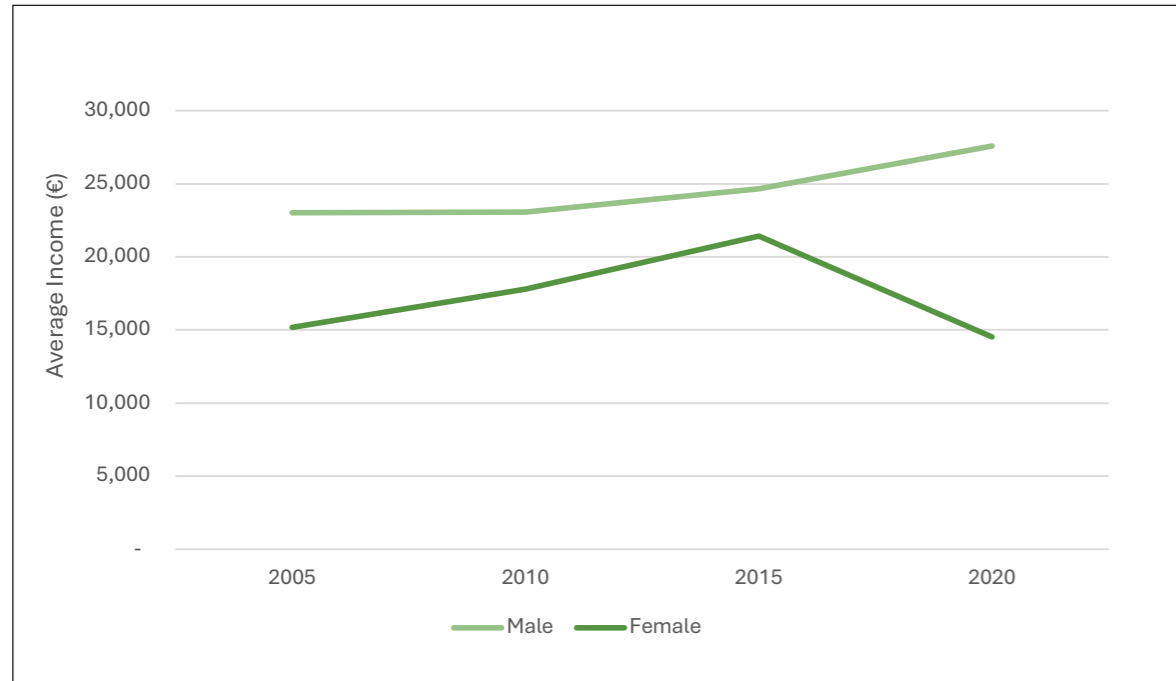


Figure 1: Average Family Farm Income by Gender 2005 – 2020 (NFS 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020)

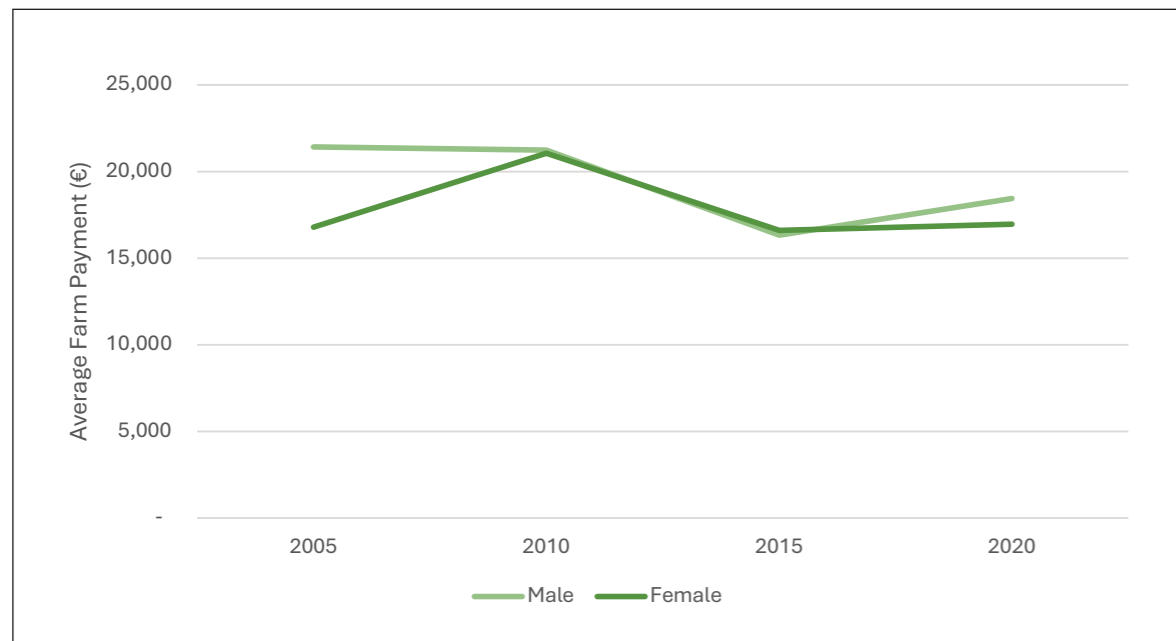


Figure 2: Average Direct Payments by Gender 2005 – 2020 (NFS 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020)

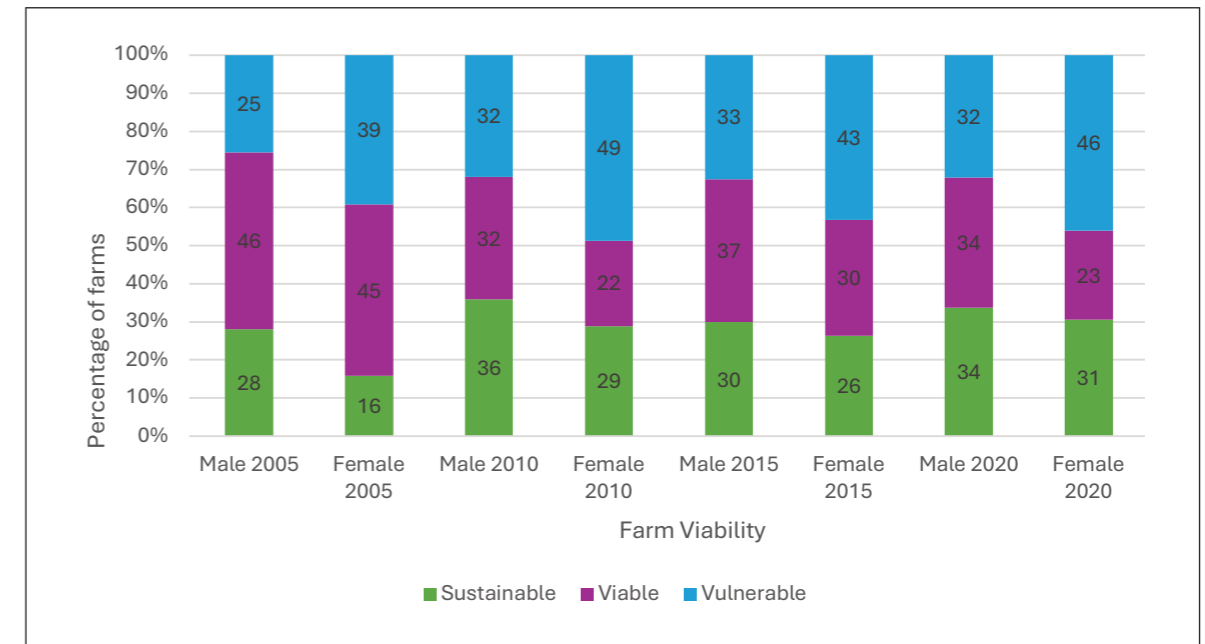


Figure 3: Average Farm Viability by Gender 2005-2020 (NFS 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020)

D - Annual Work Units

| | AWU Female | AWU Female (%) | AWU Male | AWU Male (%) | AWU Total |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Farm Holders | 10453 | 11% | 81327 | 89% | 91780 |
| Family Workers | 16540.9 | 37% | 27692.9 | 63% | 44233.8 |
| Non-Family Regular Workers | 3276.5 | 20% | 13020.4 | 80% | 16296.9 |
| Total | 30270.4 | 20% | 122040.3 | 80% | 152310.7 |

Table 1: Farm Holder, Family Worker and Non-Family Regular Worker Annual Work Units (AWU) by Gender, 2020 (CoA 2020)

