

# ► Project *brief*

Thünen Institute of Farm Economics

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## Further improve the living conditions of women on farms

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- **Gender equality is a major challenge for agriculture in Germany.**
- **Women on farms take on a variety of roles and perform a wide range of tasks, including farm management.**
- **Outdated gender images and traditional inheritance practices remain structural barriers for women in agriculture.**
- **Women's social security for old age or in case of divorce, separation or death of the farm management is uncertain.**

Female farmer, farmer's wife, working family member, countrywoman - the positions of women on farms in Germany are just as diverse as the designations. However, little is known about their life plans, wishes and concerns. Even the detailed agricultural statistics provide little information on this.

### Background and objectives

The project "The living situation of women on farms in rural regions of Germany - a socio-economic analysis", funded by the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), aimed to close this research gap. Researchers from the Thünen Institute of Farm Economics and the Chair of Sociology of Rural Areas at the Georg-August University of Göttingen conducted qualitative and quantitative studies throughout Germany from 2019 to 2022, with the support of the Deutsche LandFrauenverband (e. V.) as a cooperation partner.

The study addresses the following central questions: What is the current living and working situation of women on farms in rural regions (status quo)? How is the transformation in agriculture and society changing the lives of women on farms in rural regions? What conclusions can be drawn from the findings for policy and for rural women's organisations?

### Methods

In the project we investigated the life situation of women on farms with a mixed-method approach. Almost 80 narrative-biographical individual interviews, 11 regional workshops and an online survey with more than 7,000 participants are the basis of the analysis of the life situation of a heterogeneous target group, which includes female partners of the farm manager as

well as female employees and trainees, female farm managers and retired farm women (former farm managers or farmers' spouses).

### Results

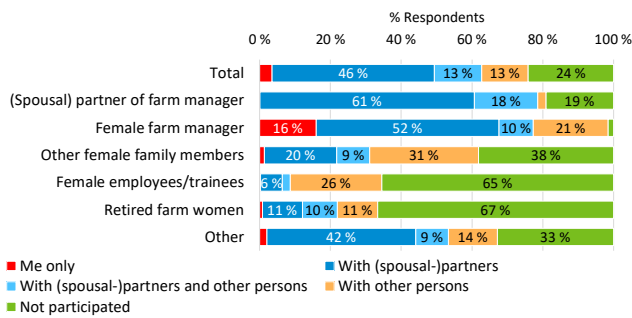
The results of the online survey show that women take on a variety of tasks on farms: 83 % of the women who responded carried out farm work and 52 % work in associated secondary businesses (e.g. direct marketing, tourism). Almost 40 % are employed outside the farm. Most of the women surveyed (83 %) are also active in the household. Field work and machine maintenance are less frequently mentioned by women as areas of work and they are less frequently mainly responsible for these than for areas such as bookkeeping or work with livestock. 6 % did not give any information on their activities.

Women often share responsibility on farms. 72 % stated that they are involved in strategic business decisions. Among the (spousal) partners of the farm management, more than 80 % share in the decision-making. The majority of respondents are responsible for bookkeeping, finances and the farm office. The women see themselves as (co-)entrepreneurs, but this does not mean that they are also legally involved in the business.

This is because 65 % of the respondents stated that they had no ownership of farm land or buildings. Among the female (spouse) partners surveyed, only about 22 % had at least partial ownership of land or buildings.

Not having property rights to farm assets has consequences in the event of separation, divorce or death of the usually male farm manager.

## Who mainly takes? important strategic business decisions on the farm?



Source: Davier et al. (2023).

Women are not only less often registered in the land register, they also manage farms less often than men. According to official statistics only 11 % of the 263,500 agricultural enterprises in Germany were managed by women in 2020. This puts Germany in the bottom third in a European comparison. Access to land is an indicator of gender equality. Most land is passed on within families; patrilineal succession - the (eldest) son inherits the farm - is still predominant in Western Europe. Thus, women are less likely to become farm successors and subsequently farm managers if they grew up with at least one brother.

## Influence of the sibling constellation on the position of women with an agricultural family background

Did you grow up with siblings?		Position on farm		
		(Spousal-)partner of farm manager	Farm manager	All respondents
No	Number of respondents	43	61	159
	% respondents	3,1 %	8,5 %	5,1 %
Yes, with brother or sister or brothers and sisters	Number of respondents	692	218	1.307
	% respondents	50,4 %	30,5 %	42,3 %
Yes, with one brother or several brothers	Number of respondents	317	134	676
	% respondents	23,1 %	18,7 %	21,9 %
Yes, with one sister or several sisters	Number of respondents	322	302	950
	% respondents	23,4 %	42,2 %	30,7 %
<b>Respondents in total</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>1.374</b>	<b>715</b>	<b>3.092</b>

Source: Davier et al. (2023).

Other results deal with stress factors in everyday life on the farm and in private life, mental and physical health, security in old age and the voluntary commitment of women on farms.

## Recommendations

The aim of a future-oriented agricultural policy should be to improve the opportunities for girls and women on farms.

Contributions to this can include:

- Empowerment of female farm successors and potential senior female employees in the form of special courses and networking opportunities by education and extension providers as well as mentoring programmes (for female farm managers and (potential) farm successors / senior employees) to pave the way for more women to become farm managers.
- Without inheriting a farm, it is difficult to start a farm business. Therefore, accessible support programmes and advisory services are needed for agricultural start-ups.
- The work situation of women can be improved by increased attention to gender-specific role patterns by all stakeholders.
- Women on farms, together with their partners, should take care of their social security for old age or in case of divorce, separation or death of the farm manager at an early stage. The insurance providers should examine the risk of possible gaps in provision for women with different employment histories and actively draw attention to possibilities of closing the gaps.
- Comprehensive education about the risks for women in the agricultural workplace and possibilities of farm support around the birth of one's own children, parental allowance for the self-employed and health services offered by the social insurance agency are necessary.
- In order to achieve a better reconciliation of work, family, care and voluntary work for women in agriculture, a more equal distribution of household tasks between men and women can also contribute, in addition to easily accessible services of general interest in rural areas.
- In order for young women in particular to continue to find working in agriculture and living in rural areas attractive, there needs to be a good public infrastructure (health, education, digitalisation, administration) and a good supply of qualified jobs for all women who want to work off-farm.
- The diverse paid and unpaid tasks of women in agriculture should also be made visible through regular surveys (e.g. within the framework of agricultural statistics). In this way, indicators of equality, such as the gender pay gap and the gender care gap, can also be calculated for agriculture and measures for improvement can be planned.

## Further information

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### Partners

<sup>2</sup> University of Göttingen  
<sup>3</sup> Deutscher LandFrauenverband (e.V.)

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3/2019-1/2023

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2129

### Publication

Davier et al. (2023)  
 Women on farms in Germany - life and work, challenges and aspirations: survey results of over 7,000 women.  
 Braunschweig: Johann Heinrich von Thünen-Institut, 195 p, Thünen Working Paper 207,  
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