

Farm Women and the Empowerment Potential in Value-Added Agriculture

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Research

- agricultural transitions understood; contested; negotiated, organized
- intersection of agriculture, food systems and culture
 - contradiction and tension in alternative agrifood movement
 - citizen engagement in science and technology
 - ideologies and impacts of bioenergy development
 - women's experience in agriculture

Breaking the 'Grass Ceiling'

- Increasing number of farm women
 - 30% (969,672) of all US farmers are women
 - 14% of US farms had female principle operator
 - Women farm 7% of U.S. farmland
 - Farm differently:
 - Farms are more diversified
 - More likely to be open to value-added agriculture



Source: 2012 US Census of Agriculture

Existing Research:

- ▶ Value-added agriculture
 - ▶ New skills/competencies
 - ▶ New purpose/new role
 - ▶ New source of fulfillment
 - ▶ Brandth & Haugen, 2010; Giraud, 2004; 2007; Giraud & Rémy, 2013
 - ▶ Hosting visitors on the farm is believed to afford women the opportunity to move from a position of societal invisibility to assume roles that hold promise for personal empowerment (Cánoves, Villarino, Priestley, & Blanco, 2004).

Research Questions/Methods

Visibility & Representation

- ▶ Do women use this new platform to represent agriculture and rurality in significantly new or sustainable ways?

Empowerment

- ▶ Does increased participation and visibility translate into empowerment opportunities?

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Using qualitative data drawn from 32 interviews with Michigan value-added farmers, we examine the extent to which women have been able to translate value-added agriculture work into opportunities for empowerment.

What is Empowerment?

1. Not a state, but a dynamic and on-going process.
2. Process of gaining agency = ability to define one's goals and act upon them.
3. Empowerment = gain of power
 - ▶ Not “power over” but...
 - “power to”
 - “power with”
 - “power within”

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Sources: Ali, 2013; Charlier, 2006; Kabeer, 2001, 1999; Longwe, 1990

“Power To”

- The ability to exercise agency; to take control, make decisions, access resources, take action
 - Matriarchal Socialization
 - Previous Work Experience



“Power To”:

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➤ Matriarchal Socialization

- “I’m the boss around here. Always have been and always will ...Using the farm to make money was my mother’s idea, and they helped us buy the farm when they retired.”
- “My mother started making jams and jellies in the 1960s and selling them on the road, and then in the 1970s she had the idea to open a full restaurant on the farm and now we continue this and have 50 employees.”
- “Dad grew the cherries and mom baked pies. She would load the trunk of the ‘68 GMC, drive over to Hwy 57, set up card tables and saw horses to sell cherries, pies and jams for two and a half weeks, then reopen a few weeks later for peach season, and then again for apples. I learned a lot from her because we had to help all summer.”

“Power To”:

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► Previous Work Experience ... *money/skills*

- “I put in my time as a nurse for 28 years, waiting for the day we could start our own farm. We had to save a lot of money.”
- “I use the skills I developed as a school teacher everyday here on the farm. From managing our two employees, to teaching bread baking classes, to leading tours of the mill, I’m always teaching.”
- “After 32 year employed in the information technology sector, I was well prepared to be able to develop our farm’s website and do advertising for the farm.”
- “As an accountant I was better prepared [than husband] to take control of the farm’s recordkeeping system.”

“Power With”

- Solidarity or the capacity to collectively organize in the pursuit of common goals.
- Personal connections farm women cultivate with their consumers serves to empower.



“Power With”:

➤ Connecting with Consumers

- “My goal is to give my customers a chance to experience a life they were not exposed to and to develop a relationship with real farmers. When they come here they want to feel connected and I do too. We are not in the business to entertain ... We are here to educate and connect city dwellers and to help them experience a little slice of rural life.”
- “It’s all about educating, the guys get frustrated with customer questions, but this is a real chance to educate them.”
- “I think I have a civic responsibility to educate them. People think they are aware of what agriculture is – they watch it on TV and read books – but they don’t. They have a misconception of farmers.”
- “We wanted to save the world. We thought by increasing the supply of organic food and educating people we might help accomplish that. People who come here are looking for a personal connection with their food and I need a personal connection with them. Our tours, cooking classes, dinners, festivals help me to connect too.”

“Power Within”

- Melds issues of identity construction and the relationship between agriculture and subjectivities.
- Women increasingly viewed themselves as farmers & identified as such.



“Power Within”:

► Identity Transformation

- “I find it fun and I think it is important work and I am good at it. It gives me a lot of pride to share by knowledge and to have others take our life here seriously.”
- “God want’s me to be here, to do this work. I see this as a ministry of care as I connect with others.”
- “I think many women enter agriculture as a way to find quiet time, to recharge themselves.”
- “Women don’t get much respect in farming. I used to sell wholesale and the client wouldn’t want to talk to me. They were always looking for my husband.”
- “I feel like a farmer, but others see me as a caretaker.”
- “I think people in this area would think I was mocking farmers if I called myself a farmer publically. I feel I am, but they don’t see me that way. They are always looking to talk to my son. He’s the ‘real’ farmer.”

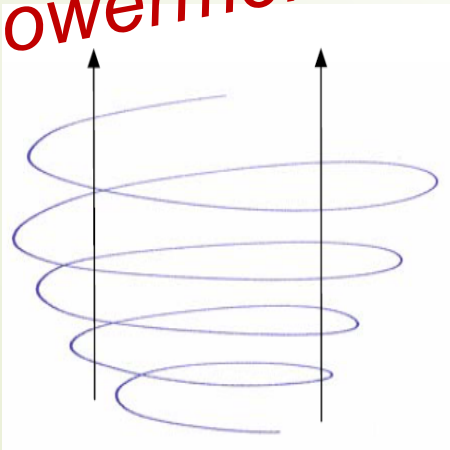
Conclusions:

Empowerment: A Mixed Bag

1. Ability to identify origin of lack of satisfaction, to act upon it and address it through farming.
2. Ability to connect with others for sharing knowledge and educating.
3. Improved self-esteem and self-confidence.

- Recognize professional identity as farmer.

Toward more empowerment

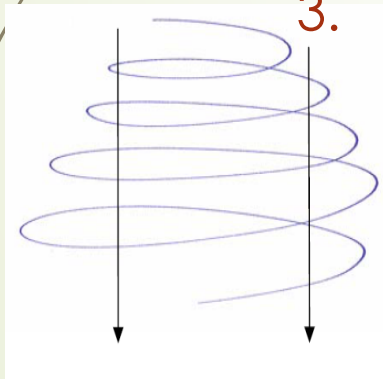


Conclusions:

Empowerment Challenges

Value-added agriculture does not necessarily pose a challenge to unequal power relations between men and women within the family farm context.

1. Empowerment not even
2. Farm women can stifle empowerment
3. Not inherently emancipatory



*Toward less
empowerment*

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Breaking the 'Grass Ceiling'

Increasing number of farm women

- ▶ 30% (969,672) of all US farmers are women
- ▶ 14% of US farms had female principle operator
- ▶ Women farm 7% of U.S. farmland
- ▶ Farms are more diversified
- ▶ More likely to be open to agritourism

- ▶ Women principle operators are older than men (60.1 vs. 58)
- ▶ Sales on female farms account for 3% of all sales.
- ▶ More likely that farming is not their primary occupation (435 vs. 48%)

- ▶ Farms with women operators tend to be smaller
 - ▶ Fewer acres
 - ▶ Lower sales
 - ▶ 76% had sales < \$10,000

- ▶ More highly educated (4 yr college degree, 33% vs. 24%)

Source: 2012 US Census of Agriculture