

**IFA submission
to the consultation Towards a new Women's Strategy 2017 - 2020**

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Dublin 12**

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1. Introduction

Family farming is at the heart of the Irish agricultural sector. There are approximately 140,000 family farms in Ireland, with family members accounting for 94% of the regular workforce on the farm.

The role played by women farmers is vital to agricultural productivity but is traditionally understated due to the predominance of male farm owners and the preference to transfer farmland to a son or other male relative. Family farming is at the heart of the Irish agricultural sector and the backbone of our rural economy. Farming underpins economic activity across all parts of the country, and has a particularly important role to play in the economic recovery and growth outside the main urban areas.

Towards a new National Women's Strategy 2017 – 2020 must recognise the important contribution of women in agriculture and empower more women to take a central role in the management of the farm and farm businesses, which will improve the viability of both family farms and rural communities.

1.1 IFA call for a study to investigate the current situation of women farmers, by gathering more statistical data, which could be used to gain an overall picture of the situation so that suitable policies and supports are introduced.

2. Women farm ownership

The Central Statistic Office (CSO) figures show that over 74,000 or a quarter of the regular agricultural workforce in Ireland are women. These women farmers work in partnership with their husbands, they are typically responsible for the bulk of management and administrative tasks associated with the farm. Women farmers are at the forefront of new agri-tourism businesses or high quality food production on farms from wholesale or retail distribution. In many cases, they manage to successfully combine this with a myriad of other roles - homemaker, carer, tutor etc.

The CSO figures also show that the number of family farms owned by women in Ireland remains low at 12.4% in 2010. A study undertaken by Macra supported by IFA on Land Mobility and Succession shows that this imbalance is unlikely to change in the short to medium term, as only 11% of those identified in the report as successors are women. By comparison across Europe, almost a quarter of farm holders are women. Also, in Ireland joint ownership of farms between spouses is uncommon and women generally only inherit farms upon the death of their spouse. This clearly shows that women's contribution to agriculture is underrepresented when we look at ownership solely.

There are a number of social and cultural barriers to women's participation in agriculture that need to be addressed, in order to effect change. An increase in women's participation in agriculture, will require among other things, a significant increase in ownership and control of the farm asset, whether individually or in joint ownership with a spouse. Ownership and control is an important first step in terms of active participation in the farm enterprise and in decision making.

2.1 IFA proposes the development of an educational and awareness programme of positive stories to change parental attitudes on succession to daughters.

2.2 IFA recommends the removal of disincentives in the taxation system to joint ownership of farms, this would be a positive step towards greater participation by women farmers. To encourage the transfer of a family farm into joint ownership at the time of inter-generational transfer, IFA believes that 90% Agricultural Relief should apply where the farm is transferred

into joint names, and where the 80% asset test and the active farming requirement is satisfied by either of the spouses.

2.3 IFA proposes an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit to €1,650, in the forthcoming Budget. In addition to removing the discrimination between employees and the self-employed in the income tax system, it would create a positive incentive towards greater female participation and decision making on the farm enterprise, through the joint assessment of the family farm income.

3. Women farmer entrepreneurs

Agriculture is a male dominated profession and it can often be challenging for a woman to get involved. Women farmers are typically slower to put themselves forward and are often happy to let their male counterparts take the lead. Affirmative action programmes are required that encourage women farmers by providing training, advocacy and mentoring to remove practical barriers that might disadvantage them.

Rural women can make a significant contribution to economic growth, we are an underutilised resource that needs to be empowered and supported to achieve our full potential. Programmes and services should take into account women farmers' specific needs and recognise that women led businesses are diverse, if we are to build an enabling environment for successful entrepreneurship. Women farmers need to be given a voice, a presence so that our vision and concerns for agriculture and rural communities are heard and responded to, and are given equal weight in policy development.

3.1 IFA calls for a targeted campaign to promote agricultural science and agricultural career options for young women at secondary and third level to increase participation of women in the agricultural sector. To cultivate the next generation of farmers we must invest in the young women of today.

3.2 Additional support for women who seek to develop and grow their businesses, including helping them strengthen their networks, acquire management skills, learn to manage risk, identify researchers with innovative ideas and grow into international markets. Continue to offer support for female-run start-ups in rural areas given the success of the ACORNS program.

3.3 IFA recommends that Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland should encourage and financially support the extension of female business networks at county, regional and national level. These grant funds for female entrepreneurs must include child care incentive element in overall financial support packages.

3.4 IFA proposes that support should be provided through the taxation system at the start-up point in farming, through tax relief for the employment of farm labour. This would encourage more women to actively take over the running of the farm enterprise.

4. Measures to increase participation of women farmers

The nature of agricultural work is that it entails a seven day working week. Guaranteeing adequate social protection for women who work in agriculture is an essential factor to contribute to the modern, sustainable development of rural areas. The goal has to be a social protection system based on equality between men and women. Ireland has made a number of very positive changes to improve the social protection status of farm spouses and assisting spouses in recent years to allow them to access a

Contributory State Pension. However, anomalies still exist that limit women's participation in the agricultural sector.

4.1 IFA calls for low cost child care programmes for women entrepreneurs, including through the use of tax incentives, to support greater participation of rural women in society.

4.2 IFA calls for the early introduction of total contribution system for the purposes of calculating State Pension (Contributory). This is more equitable than the current average system, which puts your total contributions over the number of years you have been in the workforce, and disadvantages anyone who has stepped in and out of the system over their working life.

5. Women as carers

Women provide around two-thirds of all care hours, increasing to over 70% from the age of 50. The peak age for caring amongst women was 45 to 49 with over 11% of women in this age group providing unpaid care, amounting to 572,680 hours every week. In addition 43.2% of carers are in rural areas.

A carer is defined in the Census as someone who:

“provides regular, unpaid personal help for a friend or family member with a long-term illness, health problem or disability (including problems which are due to old age). Personal help includes help with basic tasks such as feeding and dressing.”

The National Positive Aging Strategy aims to support and enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. This can only be achieved if family and women carers are supported. The current periods of respite and home care support need to be improved to give carers an opportunity to rest, which would reduce the negative impact on their health status.

5.1 IFA supports the need to establish a new statutory homecare scheme that will support and enable older people to stay within their homes and communities for as long as possible.

5.2 IFA proposes that the gap between the Home Care Support and the PAYE tax credit is reduced.

6. Conclusion

Women have a vital role to play in advancing agricultural development and food security. But women farmers and entrepreneurs face many constraints in the multiple activities they pursue, due to less land ownership, difficulty in accessing credit, extension and other services, and ability to hire labour. Increasing opportunities for women can have a powerful impact on productivity and agriculture-led growth. For women farmers to achieve their full agricultural productive capacity it will require investment and collaborative efforts to build on best practices, as well as pilot programs using innovative and bold approaches for better integration of women into the agriculture value chain.