

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CANADIAN AGRICULTURE BY UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE OF FARM WOMEN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
2023



FARM MANAGEMENT CANADA
GESTION AGRICOLE DU CANADA



CENTRICENGINE

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following organizations for their support in funding the project:



CASA | ACSA
CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL SAFETY ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DE SÉCURITÉ AGRICOLE

This project was funded in part by the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a five-year federal-provincial-territorial initiative.



We would also like to thank the following individuals for their effort and participation on the project team.

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With gratitude for providing insights, guidance, and in-kind support for the project engagement activities.

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Jeannine Messier, Agricultrices du Québec

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Pam Bailey, Ag Women Manitoba

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Heather Watson is the Executive Director of Farm Management Canada, a national non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the awareness, appreciation and adoption of farm business management practices to help position Canada's farmers for sustainable growth and prosperity.

The Research Team recognizes the diversity of gender identities. The use of the terms woman/women and man/men in this report are not intended to be exclusive to any other gender identity. In using these terms, no distinction is made or assumed between cisgender and affirmed gender identity.

Executive Summary

Although women have been contributing to the success of farming in Canada since time immemorial, their roles are often undocumented, unacknowledged and unquantified. As such, the contribution farm women make to the industry has historically been unrecognized, uncounted and undervalued. There is ample anecdotal evidence to suggest that women are influencing and positioned to influence farming in Canada in ways that go far beyond current measurements. Articles in farm publications, social media posts and the growing membership in organizations for women in agriculture point to an increase in women's involvement in both the operational and managerial aspects of farming. Data from agricultural colleges and universities report growing numbers of women students. The lack of a body of work on the topic of the experience and contributions of farm women is both a challenge and an opportunity; a challenge in that little guidance is offered for establishing a framework to study the experience and contributions of farm women, and an opportunity to fill a significant knowledge gap for Canadian agriculture.

Today, women are involved in a broad array of on-farm activities. As well, they take on responsibilities for many family-related matters and in some cases additional employment and entrepreneurial activities both farm-related and otherwise.

One must consider what impact this lack of data is having on policy and program decisions, skills development, innovation and growth opportunities. As well, from a commercial perspective, there appears to be a customer group that needs to be better understood.

Therefore, it became imperative to initiate a study that would go beyond generalizations, stereotypes and anecdotes to create a foundation of facts to accurately identify the range of the roles undertaken by farm women and develop an understanding of their experiences, that is, their motivations, aspirations, challenges they face, and contributions to the success of farming in Canada.

Here, we provide a brief summary of the findings of this undertaking. The complete detailed report and analysis follows.

Objectives

To improve our understanding of the roles and experiences of farm women.

1. By developing a data set in order to replace stereotypes with evidence of the activities undertaken by farm women.
2. By gaining an understanding of the experiences of farm women including their motivations, challenges and aspirations.

Research Methods

To achieve these objectives, the research team:

- Created a project Steering Committee of farm women representing agricultural women's groups from across Canada
- Undertook an environmental scan of existing literature and data
- Conducted one-on-one interviews with farm women
- Conducted a nationwide survey with farm women
- Summarized the survey findings
- Performed further analysis and interpretation of the results

Considerations

This research is ground-breaking in terms of both scope and content. It required both the adaptation and invention of several techniques. In addition, the nature of many findings is complex and surprising. These topics include Survey Recruitment; Terminology: "Farm Women"; Terminology: "Roles"; Diversity of Experience; Limitations of Demographics and Farmographics and are described more fully in the detailed findings.

Key Findings

Limited research exists pertaining to the experience, contributions, motivations, aspirations, challenges and barriers faced by farm women. Any existing data is limited to anecdotal information or to regional observations. See Environmental Scan (<https://fmc-gac.com/programs-services/research-analysis/#farmwomen>).

- There is no overarching schema or framework available for documenting the roles, activities, and responsibilities involved in running farm operations and farming households, or the relationship between these undertakings. The broad range and diversity of activities undertaken underscores that there is no typical role for a farm woman and that viewing the data in aggregate or as averages provides very limited insight into individual experiences.
- The drivers of experience for farm women are centered around human factors. That is, it is their interaction with others that most determines the type of experience they are living; not their age, ethnicity, marital status, education, employment, economic status, farm size, farm structure, location, or production type.
- Viewing the data through the lens of human experience provides a compelling set of five distinct patterns of experience.
- The level of involvement and satisfaction with farm-related communication is a critical dimension in determining the nature of the experience of farm women.



- The nature of interactions and relationships with others is also a significant dimension in determining the nature of the experience of farm women. That is, whether they feel supported, and their contributions valued, and whether they feel their interactions with family members, other farmers and farm service suppliers would be better if they were a man.

Recommendations

- Create and enhance programs and resources that specifically address the needs of farm women.
- Dedicate efforts beyond Women in Agriculture to focus exclusively on supporting farm women.
- Support gender equity and equality initiatives.
- Promote communication and interpersonal skills along with business management practices as essential parts of farming.
- Expand existing research to more effectively capture data related to farm women.
- Conduct additional research on the experience and contributions of farm women, factors that influence farm success, and a comparative study of farm men using the same human-centered lens.

Viewing the data through the lens of human experience provides a compelling set of five distinct patterns of experience.
