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YOUNG WOMEN AND AGRICULTURE: THE CASE OF ACTIVE YOUNG WOMEN FARMERS IN WEST MACEDONIA, GREECE¹

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Abstract

The 'young farmers' EU programme, managed in Greece by the Ministry of Rural Development & Food, aims at improving the age structure in rural areas, attracting young people (up to 40 years old) to agriculture and, finally, retaining young people in rural areas. Within the framework of a wider research project concerning young women farmers in the West Macedonia region, Greece, despite a general trend indicating that young women entered the 'young farmers' programme as farm managers, but do not actually overcome the traditional role as farmer wives or daughters, a nucleus of young women active in agriculture and with a positive attitude towards farming is also found. The present study focuses on this latter category of young women. Data were collected through a survey and, primarily, in-depth interviews. Their occupational trajectories since the time they finished school, their entrance into and role in farming, their participation in collective bodies as well as their attitude towards the 'young farmers' programme as related to gender, are all presented and discussed. Despite the fact that these women joined the programme due to family strategies (in order not to lose a funding opportunity), they actively seized the opportunity. The present study showed that the 'young farmers' programme helped these few women to utilise the incentives in order to become professional farmers.

Keywords: Young farmers, women farmers, gender.

1. Introduction

Keeping young populations in rural areas is of critical importance, especially as far as the successful implementation of programmes concerning the restructuring of rural space is concerned. Youngsters are the most innovative group

¹ The data of the article is derived from a project co-funded by the European Social Fund (75%) and national resources-EPEAEK II (25%).

in the population and comprise the human capital that, in principle, can more than any other rural group support endogenous development, which is of the utmost importance within the EU. The family farm is the basic production unit in the countryside. Nowadays, its role is deemed very important not only in terms of production, but in view of diversification opportunities, the latter being an important dimension for the economic and social survival and well-being of rural societies.

Since the 1970s, rural policies have been aimed at the renewal of human resources in agriculture through the provision of incentives to older farmers to quit farming (Fennel, 1997). Starting in the 1980s, but mainly since the early 1990s, the CAP has focused on youngsters, through the provision of incentives to financially assist the establishment of young people in agriculture (setting up) and thus the initial attraction of young people into agriculture and to maintain them in the countryside. The issue is more important in the case of young rural women, since they're rushing away to urban centres at a rate greater than that of young men, which has major implications in terms of the reproduction of rural households (Dahlstrom, 1996; Mies, 1999; Gidarakou *et al.*, 1999).

In Greece, within the three Community Support Frameworks (CSFs), the Ministry of Rural Development and Food (*ex* Ministry of Agriculture) implements the 'young farmers' programme. The programme mainly provides economic incentives for the setting up of young people (up to the age of 40) in agriculture and the subsidisation of the interest on loans used for the establishment of their farm business. Further national incentives are provided through Law 2520/97 (Ministry of Agriculture, 1998). The 'young farmers' programme addresses both men and women. It is therefore an invitation and a challenge to young women since, in principle, they are provided with the chance to overcome their traditional role as farmers' assistants and become farm owners and professional farmers in their own right. In the relevant literature, there is reference to the masculinisation of the farming profession, which in turn contributes to the development of a non-traditional female identity, seeking employment in sectors other than agricultural ones (Brandth, 2002). Nevertheless, one of the new roles of rural women has to do with their professionalisation in farming, as manifested in the case of a limited number of young women (Ventura, 1994; Schmitt, 1997).

Despite the importance of maintaining the renewal of the farming population, research on the 'young farmers' programme is limited. Thus, a number of issues related to the topic warrant investigation, in order to facilitate the improved implementation of the 'young farmers' programme and, in general, the design of policies relating to the reproduction of the farming family and, hence, of regional development. The horizontal implementation of the programme all over Greece is one such issue, **since the existence of diverse agricultural structures and socio-economic conditions across the country may imply**

the need for the adaptation of the programme's measures, **in order to correspond** to differentiated circumstances (Kazakopoulos *et al.*, 2004). The gender dimension is another important issue, attributed to the fact that the negative attitude of young women, **either towards agriculture and/or their incorporation** in a farming household through marriage, puts at stake the reproduction of such households and, thus, of regional development. The unwillingness of young rural women to get married to a farmer is considered to pose a greater problem than economic issues in the reproduction of farming units in Europe (Mies, 1999). Indeed, there are many pieces of **research stressing the problem** of unmarried farmers, their loneliness and their increased suicide rates (Gasson and Errington, 1993; Laoire, 2001). Such findings ring alarm bells as far as the reproduction of the farming family in particular, and the renewal of human resources in agriculture in general is concerned. They also underline the importance of research related to gender and especially to the prospects of the incorporation of young women into agriculture or, at least, into farming households. The evaluation of the Greek 'young farmers' programme for the 2nd CSF (1994-1999) does not provide any gender-based analysis (Tsiboukas *et al.*, 2002). Nevertheless, such information would be helpful in the design of specific gender-related rural policies aimed at strengthening women's participation in rural development processes.

On the basis of the aforementioned scepticism, a project is being carried out in the West Macedonia region of Greece, aimed at exploring the gender dimension within the implementation of the 'young farmers' programme in the area. Research so far has pointed to the fact that the picture of young women in their newly-established farms (for which they legally are the 'farm heads') does not overcome the known role of the husband's assistance on the family farm. Nevertheless, within the sample of the current project, there is a minority group of young women who, notwithstanding the reasons that initially motivated them to enter the 'young farmers' programme and their initial occupation preferences, nowadays show a profile of active involvement as farming individuals, who are interested in farming and work hard in agriculture. The current presentation focuses on this specific group, utilising surveys and in-depth interview data collected through the project. It aims at exploring elements of the young women's trajectories up to their entrance into the programme and their role in the production activities and the management of the farm, as well as at illustrating problems and positive aspects of their life and their evaluation of the 'young farmers' programme. This will, in turn, allow for the identification of positive and negative features of the implementation of the 'young farmers' programme to date, as far as its attraction for young women is concerned. Such results may be useful in the design of an improved programme, in terms of a gender-based approach, and its implementation. They contribute to a better understanding of topics such as the empowerment of women on the family farm, the public image of farming and the support

needed for the reproduction of the family farm/household and, thus, the support needed for regional development.

2. Development Status of the West Macedonia Region and the 'Young Farmers' Programme

The West Macedonia region comprises four prefectures (Grevena, Kastoria, Kozani and Florina). In the first place, it is characterised by high unemployment rates (18.8% as compared to the national level of 10.4% – 2001 census). Its production profile is characterised by a high dependency on mining for energy production (Kozani – Ptolemaida – Amintaio – Florina axis) which, while providing employment to thousands of local people, is saturated nowadays. It is also characterised by the fur industry (Siatista – Kastoria axis), which in recent years has been in crisis, resulting in the loss of many jobs. The economy is predominantly agricultural, especially in the rural areas, characterised by low productivity and competitiveness, a low degree of diversification at farm level and limited links with other sectors. The proportion of agriculture in the GP of the prefecture is higher than the national average – especially in the case of Grevena, which presents the highest national dependency on agriculture, as well as the highest migration. Some of the basic features of the region are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Indicators of Economic and Social Welfare

Indicators (2002)	Grevena	Kastoria	Kozani	Country
Per capita GNP (thousands €)	12.1	11.9	14.5	12.9
Agriculture in GNP (%)	28.5	11.9	12.6	6.0
Per capita savings (thousands €)	6.09	7.79	6.13	8.32
Vital statistics-births/deaths per 1,000 inhabitants	-6.27	-0.65	0.17	-0.01
Students per 1,000 inhabitants	48	60	66	59
Population growth 1991-2001 (%)	3.2	1.5	3.3	6.9

Source: The Greek Economy in Figures; Innovation Observatory of West Macedonia

In the present chapter, the cases of women coming from the prefectures of Grevena, Kastoria and Kozani are illustrated². The Kastoria prefecture is important in terms of the production of apples and wheat; the latter being also important for the other two prefectures. Annual cultivation covers 94.8%, 91.3% and 87% in the prefectures of Kozani, Grevena and Kastoria respectively. 70% of the exploitations are exclusively plant production. The percentage for exclusively animal production exploitations is only 2%, without particular dif-

² The prefecture of Florina is not included in the present work, because at the time of writing this article, research in this prefecture had not been completed.

ferentiation between the prefectures and 28% are mixed agricultural-animal production. The presence of mixed exploitations is particularly high in the prefecture of Florina (38%). The region of West Macedonia occupies fourth place amongst the regions of the country with regard to the number of raised cattle, with the prefecture of Florina accumulating the highest percentage. The average farm size is bigger than the country's average (6 ha. *vs.* 4.4 ha. respectively), but the prefectures are mountainous (86% of the farms and 85% of the agricultural land are located in mountainous areas). Under such circumstances, the 'young farmers' programme presents an opportunity to the youngsters of these areas to establish a viable farming business in their place of origin, as well as to the areas themselves, which through support to agriculture (and given the industrial crisis) can strengthen their economic activity. Agriculture can function as the link among various youngsters, diversifying the production base of the farm and utilising the natural resources, thus the young people can become a major factor against the danger of depopulation in these less-favoured areas of the country.

In terms of gender, the West Macedonia region is characterised by increased numbers of women 'farm heads', a fact which also holds true for farmers up to the age of 39 (*see* Table 2).

Table 2: Farm Owners

Spatial unit		Total	Women	% Women
Grevena	total	4,888	1,827	37.4%
	up to the age of 39	833	272	32.7%
Kastoria	total	4,179	1,309	31.3%
	up to the age of 39	1,073	306	28.5%
Kozani	total	13,907	6,074	43.7%
	up to the age of 39	2,703	1,155	42.7%
West Macedonia	total	29,586	11,272	38.1%
	up to the age of 39	6,260	2,249	35.9%
Greece	total	816,534	205,140	25.1%
	up to the age of 39	128,213	33,545	26.2%

Source: Agricultural Census, 1999/2000

The high rate of feminisation of the farms in West Macedonia can be explained through its relation to the phenomenon of pluriactivity in rural households (Miele, 1994; Gidarakou, 1998; Safiliou and Papadopoulos, 2004). The structure of economic activities in the areas under discussion favours off-farm work in mining, an exclusively male domain, and fur. Thus, women undertake the role of the 'farm head'; what this actually means is that, since their off-farm working husbands cannot be characterised as farmers and benefit from the

provisions of the CAP, their wives appear in the legal documents as the 'farm heads'.

The increased rate of young women 'farm heads' is also in contradiction with the fact that young women hold a negative attitude towards agriculture, a fact verified in both previous (Gidarakou *et al.*, 2005) and current research. Thus, the interest on the part of women to undertake the management of a farm relates to either the high unemployment rates of women or to the increased off-farm work rates of men, which does not allow them to access the 'young farmers' programme and thus to benefit from the financial assistance provided by the programme, in order to better utilise existing land resources (Kazakopoulos and Gidarakou, 2003; Gidarakou *et al.*, 2005). The project in West Macedonia revealed that the major reasons for the entrance of young women into the programme are unemployment and the opportunity to generate supplementary income in the family. Therefore, the increased rate of women 'farm heads' has to be interpreted within the households' survival strategy, according to which the legal 'farm head' status is transferred to the females of the family, due to the restrictions faced by the off-farm occupied male members to appear as the 'farm heads' and/or benefit from the incentives provided to farmers. This in turn means that there is not a genuine transformation of women's attitudes towards agriculture, as far as occupational preferences are concerned.

Nevertheless, a small group of women who are dynamic and active in agriculture has been identified in the research area. These women hold a positive attitude towards agriculture and an analysis of their interviews may throw light on issues related to the involvement of women in agriculture and the gender dimension within the 'young farmers' programme.

3. Women's Response to the Challenges of the 'Young Farmers' Programme – Data from the Current Study

As previously mentioned, the current chapter concerns young women farmers in three prefectures of the West Macedonia region, who were found to be active in agriculture. These women were located within a sample of 126 young women (stratified according to the altitude of the community in which they live). An interview based on a structured questionnaire was carried out with all the 126 women³. In the situation of the mountainous and less-favoured areas

³ Field research was carried out in winter 2004 and spring 2005 (total: 3 months). The questionnaire aimed at revealing the ways (how and why) women were involved in the 'young farmers' programme as well as the role played by such an 'exogenous' factor in their subsequent involvement in the production processes and the management of the farm, and from there to the empowerment of women in terms of professionalisation and the public image of farming. Emphasis was also put on the investigation of their perception of the positive and negative aspects of the programme in attracting young women into agriculture.

Regarding the whole picture of young persons who entered the programme in the three prefectures examined and by gender proportion, we note that, globally, from the beginning of the '90s until 2003, 828 people in total entered the programme, of which 35% were women. The specific picture in the three prefectures is as follows: From the 232 people who entered the programme in the prefecture of Grevena,

examined here and within a traditionally masculine occupation and social climate in general, the project clarified the fact that in most of the cases, the agent 'young woman' was imperceptible, since she was involved in facilitating 'clever', 'suitable' or 'rational' ways of family involvement in the programme. A number of the women were farmers only on paper (i.e. not actively involved in farming); some of them might not even comply with the typical requirements of the programme (for example, living in the village where the farm is located) or be knowledgeable of such restrictions, since their involvement was a decision taken by the family. Thus, their own opinion did not count while, in parallel, they did not see any reason to disagree with such a family decision (Gidakou *et al.*, 2005). The great majority though, consists of women who were either legally bound by the programme and who appear to be the 'farm heads', while in actual fact they are extra farm labour force in peak periods, or women who are usually involved in farming but have inferior status in the holding, as a 'natural' consequence of the division of labour, based on the perception of farming as a masculine occupation, and the biological and dexterity-based differences between the genders.

Nevertheless, among the 126 women interviewed, only 16 were identified, through their interview⁴, as corresponding to the profile of real farmers. They are active in the production process, manage or co-manage the farm on an equal basis with their husband/father/brother, hold a positive attitude towards farming and like their job, have a long-term view of their involvement in agriculture (they will continue farming after the compulsory 10-year period, i.e. the legal obligation towards the programme) and they are willing to live in the community. In-depth interviews with these 16 women followed the questionnaire-based interview.

3.1. Young Women Farmers' Profile

Out of the 16 women, half entered the programme rather young (25-30 years old); nowadays, all of them are over 30. One is single, one divorced and the rest are married. The group is quite diversified. It includes women mainly occupied with plant production, but also some involved in animal production and apiculture. There are cases of dynamic women who either undertake 'masculine' tasks, such as driving a tractor or/and believe that they are professionals, full of optimism and make plans for the farm; women who feel affection towards farming, stimulated by their parents and women who in the first place disliked agriculture (they got involved in agriculture through the programme due to a family decision) but who eventually came to like farming. There are also women who believe that they got a chance to become the boss

26.7% were women; from the 247 people in the prefecture of Kastoria, 38% were women; and from the 349 people in the prefecture of Kozani, 39.5% were women.

⁴ The open questions included in the survey questionnaire allowed for quite an extended discussion with the interviewees.

and get rid of dependency in the work place and women with critical attitudes and proposals for the improvement of the 'young farmers' programme.

3.2. Education and Occupational Preferences

The 16 women have a high educational level. More than 2 out of 3 graduated from junior high school (Gymnasium) and more than 1 in 2 from high school (Lyceum). Their superiority in terms of education, when compared to their husbands, is impressive and verifies previous findings, namely the argument about the existence of a 'gender-based cultural gap' in the countryside. Such a gap, in turn, implies that girls are prepared for an off-farm occupational life, as well as the fact that they are rejecting the possibility of getting married to a farmer (Dahlstrom, 1996; Gidakou, 1990).

Among the women, some had dreams for continuing their studies through to higher education after their graduation from the Lyceum. However, such prospects were never realised, either due to failure in the entrance exams or for family reasons.

I graduated from the Lyceum. I was a very good student. I wanted to continue in higher education. I took the entrance exams, I failed; my father discouraged me from taking another chance (Georgia⁵).

I was a medical student in Italy. My father got seriously ill and I came back to the village (Roula).

For those who dropped out early, the reason put forward was either the stereotype of gender discrimination towards children by parents or the economic difficulties of the family.

I only went to primary school. I was a good student. My father did not allow me to continue because the Gymnasium was quite away from the village. My brother was sent to a boarding school in order to continue his studies, as my father believed that he had to have a better education (Soula). Matina's story is similar. They both maintain that being disadvantaged educationally had serious consequences on them.

I went to the primary school. I come from a poor and large family. My father could not afford to educate us. I started looking for a job quite early in my life (Katerina).

For those with fewer educational attainments, job prospects did not include farming. Only one of them (Vasso) wanted, due to her affection for animals, to go into farming before the 'young farmers' programme came into the scene. The fact that farming was not included in the occupational prospects for young women is also verified by the results of the overall project in West Macedonia; out of the 126 interviewed, only 3 had a farming orientation upon finishing their studies (Gidakou *et al.*, 2005).

⁵ Fictional names are used here in order not to allow for the identification of the interviewees.

As a child, I hated agriculture. I could see my parents struggling to barely make a living. I convinced them to quit farming and we moved to Kozani and Kastoria to work in the fur industry (Anastasia).

My parents were animal breeders. They encouraged me to do anything in my power to get a job in the public sector and to leave agriculture behind ... but my affection for animals prevented me from being convinced (Vasso).

Some of the women had had an involvement in agriculture since their childhood and had been initiated in farming tasks.

I have liked working with cherries since I was a child (Soula).

My father made me love agriculture. I have a sister but I was the 'son' of the family (Anna). (The close relation between agriculture and gender and the acceptance of the agrarian ideology of patrilinear succession is obvious in Anna's words).

All but one woman had had off-farm jobs before entering the 'young farmers' programme. Their jobs were mainly temporal and with no social security (piece-work in the fur industry, employees in stores and fast-food outlets, babysitting, etc.). Therefore, when the programme was introduced, the status and attractiveness of such jobs proved no constraint from engaging in it. Some of the women are still engaged in these or similar off-farm jobs as sources of supplementary income.

Some of the women (4 out of 16) did not have any involvement with agriculture as their family did not have a farm. They had graduated from the Lyceum (including one who had attended higher education). With no previous farming experience and thus not constrained by farming traditions, two of the women were keen to try innovative ideas. One of them, a former worker in the fur industry, developed a vineyard of 3.7ha. Taking advantage of the 'young farmers' incentives as well as of the local LEADER and Integrated Rural Development programmes, she built a classic winery in which she has also invested family capital. She has plans and is active (as president) in the classic wineries collective body. She claims that she entered agriculture because she did not have any other employment option and nowadays she is a professional in viticulture and winemaking. In this way, she has successfully sought a new role for agriculture, i.e. entrepreneurial farming and multi-functional agriculture. The second woman, a freelancer in the past, is involved in the organic production of saffron on part of her farm.⁶

⁶ The trend for young people with no farm background to engage in farming through the 'young farmers' programme has also been shown in studies concerning male young farmers in other Greek areas (Kazakopoulos *et al.*, 2004).

3.3. Women's Shift towards Agriculture

The findings of previous research concerning the reasons young women enter the 'young farmers' programme is also verified by current research. The same set of reasons as identified in other cases, among which unemployment and the prospects of utilisation of the family assets are dominant, also appear in the discourse of the 16 active young women farmers. The choice was made through a collective family decision-making process and such a decision overcame their previous negative attitude towards farming. The fact that in only 2 out of the married women's husbands are farmers, while in the case of the single women, their entrance into the programme corresponded to the early retirement of a parent, supports the assumption of the collective family decision and not that of the individual women *vis-à-vis* engagement with the programme. Eugenia is revealing:

I entered the programme in order to contribute to the family income. I rent land from my father-in-law. I did not regret it; I earn a good income. I will continue to support the family income and myself.

Elli, on the other hand, reached the decision alone in order to secure a pension, but her situation was easier as she got involved in apiculture.

In the case of married women, all but two of their husbands hold an off-farm job. Thus in all such cases, the wife's entrance to the programme was the most 'suitable' option in order to benefit from the financial assistance and consequently to utilise existing assets. Intra-familial arrangements concerning the acquisition of land on the part of the young woman farmer was a solution, without at the same time jeopardising existing rights on the land; the solutions found included the renting of land from parents-in-law (8 cases) or the husband (1 case), as well as property transfers from parents (5 cases).

3.4. Women's Role in the Functioning of the Farm

It is known that what characterises the stronger or weaker status of a person on the family farm is his/her position *vis-à-vis* decision-making. The participation of women in the decision-making processes is very restricted throughout the developed world. This is especially true in cases where the decision is related to critical economic issues (i.e. investments) as compared to everyday decisions. Therefore, the role of women is relegated to that of consultation with the 'formal' or real head, who in most cases is the husband. However, the roles of the 16 women in the present study support the image of a co-manager and in some cases of the real manager of the farm holding. According to their statements, on a number of issues such as the design of the cultivation system, the purchase of tools/machinery, the sale of produce, lending, etc. women are the only decision-makers (7 out of 16). In the rest of the cases, decisions are taken on a par with their husbands or fathers and thus women feel that they are equal and that their opinion is equally valid. Vasso, an animal breeder

working with her brother, and Georgia, a viticulturist and wine-maker, comment on their self-image and their position:

I would not say that I feel I am the leader. I see my brother as a partner and he does the same. We feel like partners and equals in decision making ... It does not matter whose name appears (to be the legal owner) ... I feel this is my job and we co-operate (Vasso).

I feel equal with my husband in everything that has to do with the management ... we discuss and take our decisions together... I prefer to work with the marketing of the wine. Whatever we do is a labour of love ... we did not enter the programme as free riders (Georgia).

The involvement of these women in the everyday tasks of the farm supports their image as farmers. The division of labour depends on the specific demands of each task, its mechanisation and the use of hired labour; notwithstanding this fact, the most important element is their active involvement in farming tasks, to which they often devote more time than their husbands/fathers. In almost all cases, hired labour is used on the farm, thus relieving the family of some tasks. Within couples, the husbands, despite having an off-farm job, are actively involved in farming tasks (with the exception of 1 case); nevertheless, in half the cases, women claim that they spend more hours on farming when compared to their husbands, while it is also usual that other members of the (extended) family help them. The traditional division of labour is still in place. Women do not carry out tasks such as ploughing, sowing and reaping alone – tasks which tend to be carried out using rented machinery or a family male. Milking is also a male job, as it requires muscular strength due to the lack of milking machines. Taking animals for grazing is a task carried out by either an older family male (father or father-in-law) or a hired shepherd. The harvesting of fruit and tobacco leaves, as well as the feeding and cleaning of animals, are tasks which women carry out by themselves or in co-operation with other family members. However, there is one case in which the woman drives the tractor, thus providing a new and unusual (in Greece) image of a woman farmer. Such cases are continuously emerging in Europe, where women have decided to become professionals in agriculture (Brandth, 2002).

The growth of the women's farm holdings is also important (see Table 3). Most of the new farm holdings (entrants into the 'young farmers' programme and thus the establishment of new farm holdings) were of a size up to 5 European Size Units (ESU). Nowadays, most of them have a size over 5 ESUs. Some holdings show an impressive growth, such as in the cases of Vasso (animal husbandry; growth from 4.21 to 7.44 ESUs), Georgia (viticulture; from 1.12 to 5.94 ESUs) and Anna (cereals, tobacco and trees; from 15.89 to 39.76 ESUs).

Additionally, most of the women's discourse when discussing issues such as their interest in, plans regarding, and position in the farm holding, revolves around the concept of the farm as an enterprise. They show a dynamic and

active profile, they are looking for opportunities to extend into new, innovative activities; they seek information on policies and programmes. All 16 women, apart from one who seems uncertain, claim that they will continue farming after the 10-year period required by the programme and believe that they be equally as productive as, or better than, their husbands. They recognise that they fall behind in muscular strength but they stress their ability to produce better results in tasks demanding special attention and dexterity. All of them maintain that their husbands respect them as women-farmers.

Table 3: Economic Size of the Farm Holding

ESU ^a	Upon establishment	Nowadays
Up to 5	10	5
5.01 – 10	4	6
Over 10	2	5
Total	16	16

^a European Size Unit. 1 ESU = €1200

Source: Project data

3.5. Participation in Collective Bodies

In the relevant literature, the power of the genders within the family farm reflects their presence in collective sectoral as well as governance bodies in the rural area. This is so, since the ownership of assets and wealth implies prestige and self-confidence, which are usually found in men due to the succession patterns in farming (Shortall, 1999; Alston, 2000). Thus, women in general have a minor presence in various bodies and are not active, even if their numbers are high. This relates to the issue of gender inequality in rural areas and thus to the contribution of women in local and regional development; the empowerment of women in such fields is nowadays an all-important factor within the overall aim of attaining balanced regional development.

Eleven out of the 16 women are members of an agricultural co-operative. Of them, 5 participate regularly, attend the general assemblies of the co-ops, take the floor and express their views.

Yes, I participate ... most of the time ... and I oppose others, because they marginalise women; they (especially the older men) say 'wait, you do not know, listen to the others first'. Older men try to impose their own views (Vasso).

I started a women's co-op ... they were reluctant ... We also started an apicultural co-op upon my initiative ... but they are not interested; I am the president, the vice-president, the secretary, the finance officer. I do everything on my own; it is not worth it (Evanthia).

Two women are presidents of co-operatives. The co-operative movement is a misunderstood institution in Greece due to mismanagement practices, which have damaged the image of co-ops and the trust and expectations of farmers. Therefore, abstention either from the co-ops entirely or from their assemblies, reflects the contention surrounding their role, their inactivity, the lack of information provided by the boards to the members, etc. Only in a few cases was it argued that gender inequality plays a role.

I do not go. There is no trust (Roula).

Nobody informs us about the assembly! I do not even vote (Dionysia).

The co-op is inactive (Anastasia).

As well as the issue of participation, such views should sensitise and challenge the role of co-ops and assist towards the restoration of trust towards them.

3.6. The 'Young Farmers' Programme – Women's Views

The evaluation of a programme by those who participate in it is of extreme importance, since such information can be utilised for the improvement of that programme. The gender dimension of the programme is a further challenge requiring the actors' assessment. Despite the fact that the limited number of women examined here may pose problems in generalising the findings, these women are included in a representative sample at local level and thus they can provide useful information on the functioning of the programme and its weaknesses in the research area.

In general, the attitude of the women is positive towards the 'young farmers' programme. Most of them believe that the incentives provided were quite attractive. The restrictions of the programme (i.e. living in the same area and farming for a 10-year period) seems to bother very few among them. Quite a few also believe that the programme made them responsible/professional farmers. As far as the most important problems are concerned, women focus on the bureaucratic procedures required for their entrance into the programme (many documents have to be gathered in a short time in order to apply for candidature). Quite a few claim that the financial assistance provided is rather low. Other research data show that the evaluation of the programme on the part of men focuses on the same problems respectively (Kazakopoulos *et al.* 2004).

Many argue that a more intensive information campaign should have been undertaken about the programme on the part of the local Directorates of Rural Development (responsible for carrying out the programme). Issues such as the provision of timely and adequate information, the obscure evaluation procedures of candidatures and the lack of follow-up controls are critically mentioned. The lack of controls is a point that has to be seriously taken into account, since the implementation of controls will enhance farmers' responsibility *vis-à-*

vis their commitments as well as their demands for better information. Women demand the provision of better information/advice and support throughout the programme; they argue that they need specialised support which, in turn, means the existence of specialised agronomists (per category of cultivations or animals) in the local Directorates of Rural Development.

You do not know what to do, as they do not provide specialised information/advice (Eugenia).

There is not adequate information provision. There is lot of misinformation and the controls are not right, thus leading youngsters in irresponsible practices (free riders with their aim being just to get hold of the money) (Stella).

There is a need for proper controls. There are many youngsters who entered the programme just to get the money; they are not bothered about farming ... In the local Directorate there is no specialist in apiculture ... There is no support ... many youngsters got involved with the programme but they got disappointed (Evanthia).

A further problem for the women is that the programme puts restrictions on off-farm work (150 stamps per year), while, especially in the winter, they have lots of free time.

At times I feel restricted. Especially in the winter, when I do not have any farming tasks, why should I not get another job? (Soula).

It would be nice to be allowed to have a second job in the winter time (Evanthia).

With regard to the access to information and the behaviour towards them on the part of the local Directorate and other public services' staff, women do not refer to any kind of discrimination against them.

I would say they are more attentive to women. But if necessary I will fight; I had such an incident in the past (Vasso).

But it was also argued that:

... There must be a male by your side, otherwise they do not tell you all the details (Elli).

or

They are more attentive to a woman, especially when she resorts to her 'feminine appeal' (Anna).

Few are satisfied with the income earned from their farm holding, despite the fact that the evolution of their farms is satisfactory. Some of the women were recent entrants into the programme and thus had not yet formed a clear picture of agriculture.

If you take care of the beehives then they will take care of you – you will get a good income (Evanthia).

I work on tobacco with my family and I get a good income (Eugenia).

Most of the women are not satisfied. They believe that being occupied exclusively in farming does not ensure a satisfactory standard of living for the family. The main reason behind their dissatisfaction is the low prices of the produce.

If we did not have other sources of income in the family (husband's salary and own temporary employment) we would not make a living (Dionisia).

I cannot support the family by farming alone (Roula).

Despite such difficulties, all of them (with the exception of one) believe that they took the right decision. Each has her own justification – securing employment, being her own boss in her own business, establishing a good business that the children can later inherit. Therefore, most of them make plans for investments, some of which are interesting as they correspond to policy targets such as the multi-functionality of agriculture and quality products. Vasso, for example, wants to turn to organic animal production and agro-tourism in conjunction with horse breeding; Elli wants to get involved with honey marketing; Georgia wants to extend the winery with a distillery; Evanthia wants to make a honey packaging unit. Others also have (more common) plans concerning increases in land or animals, new machinery, etc.

One of the dimensions of professionalism is occupational training and updating, as well as the wish to acquire new competencies (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2001). All the women (except the one who may abandon agriculture) wish to have more training. The orientation of the training programme has to be tailor-made to the production of their farms or to their plans. Nevertheless, professionalism also implies the implementation of standards and codes such as the 'Good Farming Practices', which protect the environment, as well as the consumer, with respect to the quality of products and the treatment of animals. The interpretation of the above term by the interviewer and the discussions surrounding it revealed that some women, while ignoring it altogether, actually practiced some of its constitutive parts; however, this applies to a minority. This points to the general problem of information availability and the implementation of such codes in Greek agriculture. Once again, the problem of controls (including the 'young farmers' programme and the codes) on the part of the local Directorates arises.

4. Conclusion and Discussion – Are There Enough Swallows to Make a Summer?

In the French film '*One swallow made a summer*', 30-year-old Sadrine, living in Paris, is a successful professional who, being bored by the routine, decides to leave the French capital, move to the countryside and become a farmer. She attended courses at a higher agricultural school and bought the farm from an aged animal breeder in south-east France. She had to overcome the stereotypes and prove both to local society and herself that she had the will, knowledge

and skills to succeed in a traditionally male occupational field (this was also the opinion of her mother, who disagreed with the choice of her daughter). Her case gives rise to some of the fundamental issues as far as gender and professionalism in agriculture are concerned. The image of farming is masculine and such stereotypes pose symbolic obstacles to women's professionalisation in agriculture. The mother's attitude is negative, along with research findings on the socialisation of daughters *vis-à-vis* farming (i.e. Gasson and Errington, 1993; Gidakou *et al.*, 2000). Sadrine is young, thus corresponding to the new role young women may undertake in agriculture provided, according to the literature, they have the professional qualifications, which Sadrine acquired, along with a strong will, perseverance and commitment to such a choice (Brandth, 2002; Ventura, 1994; Schmitt, 1997). Such an attempt is not an easy one, since it has to overcome agrarian ideologies and long-term traditional attitudes, which are not easily overturned in conservative social environments, such as rural ones. Sadrine almost quitted, but she finally made it.

In the area of West Macedonia, it is difficult to find cases like Sadrine. Most of the women in the sample – other than the one discussed earlier – despite the fact that they are officially the 'farm heads', do not constitute a social group differentiated in any way from the traditional farmer's assistants on the family farm. Moreover, some of them are totally alienated from agriculture.⁷ The study of the 16 active women-farmers who nowadays show a strong will to go on with farming and hold a positive attitude towards agriculture, revealed that they joined the 'young farmers' programme (and agriculture) without being wholehearted, agreeing to do so as the result of a family strategic decision aiming at a 'smart' and 'suitable' solution to the need to utilise the economic incentives provided by the programme; they entered agriculture with no qualifications or training other than the 150-hour course required by the programme (which could have taken place quite some time after they joined the programme). They had minimal ownership of land, mainly through land transfer from parents; in most cases the land was rented to them by parents/parents-in-law.

Within the agrarian ideology, the farming occupation belongs to men; this reflects not only the succession practices and the division of labour within the family farm, but also the practices of the extension services and the practices of the mass media, which present and consolidate farming as a male domain. For example, occupational training in agriculture since the establishment of Extension Services in Greece was thematically organised around gender discrimination; the courses available for women revolved around domestic economy, while for men they revolved around farming. In advertisements, women never appear to promote farming inputs or produce.

⁷ The questionnaire was not carried out fully for 30 of the women out of the 126, due to the fact that they were unable to answer basic questions concerning the structure and the functioning of their farm.

In Greece, the 'young farmers' programme, in order to support the farming family unit in utilising family resources (i.e. land) through the available EU funding, did not address gender issues seriously. In order to fulfil its minimum obligations towards the requirement of gender mainstreaming (re: Amsterdam Convention, 1997), the state just provided a premium of 5 out of 100 points to young women in the evaluation of candidatures (3rd SCF). The turn of rural policies, since the mid-1980s, towards an endogenous regional development model has resulted in the provision of a number of incentives for the activation of rural women in para-agricultural and off-farm initiatives within the framework of multi-functionality and pluriactivity. Such a strategy offers employment opportunities to women and supports the income-generating activities of the rural household. But, at the same time, it alienates women from agriculture and as a result women turn down agriculture as a profession and farmers as husbands; this, in turn, has serious negative implications as far as the reproduction of farming households and the social web in rural areas are concerned. The policies for rural women, due to the consolidated relation between farming and gender, have downplayed the roles women can play through agriculture in the process of rural regional development.

The family farm still constitutes the basic productive cell in the Greek countryside and its reproduction is of critical importance for the maintenance of the economic and social prosperity of rural areas. Research studies that examined the intention of females in the countryside to select a farmer as a husband and the intention of the family and more specifically of the mother (the family member with powerful role in the socialisation of daughters) to accept a farmer as a husband for their daughter and to encourage them to marry a farmer are disappointing (Gidarakou, 1999). The problem of single farmers (men) is already obvious and not only in the Greek countryside (Gasson and Errington, 1993; Fonte *et al.*, 1994; Dahlstrom 1996).⁸ The attraction of young women into agriculture and the development of the picture of a farmer as an entrepreneur certainly cannot reverse the negative tendency. However, it will upgrade the picture of the woman-farmer and it will decrease the problem (the share of it that corresponds to women who will enter agriculture themselves).

The present research illustrated that the so-called 'feminisation' of farm holdings as depicted in the numbers of women who appear as 'farm heads' in national statistics, a phenomenon common in small farms and in the south (Pfeffer, 1989; Miele, 1994; Gidarakou, 1998), is, as in the case of West Macedonia, superficial. The increased numbers of women 'farm heads' substitutes for men who are not able to fulfil the legal requirements to appear as 'farm heads'. In reality, there are only few 'real' women farmers.

⁸ By way of indication, we note the phrase that Fonte *et al.* (1994) report in their article 'The Menial and the Sublime' that it attributes the advice of the mother of a rural household to her daughter regarding the choice of husband, particularly where patriarchal culture co-exists with difficult living and working conditions: *Mary, whoever you like but be sure it's not a farmer.*

It was also shown that the 'young farmers' programme helped a few, among the numbers of young women who joined it, to utilise the incentives in order to become professional farmers. Despite the fact that these women joined the programme due to family strategies (in an effort not to lose a funding opportunity), they actively seized the opportunity. Most of them have a high general educational background as compared to average male farmers, work hard in the fields, manage or co-manage the holding, believe that they have taken the right decision in becoming farmers and intend to continue farming. Some invested significant private capital in addition to the programme's investments and, in general, they have expanded their farms. Some seem aware of the current policy reforms and the demands for high quality production and multi-functionality and plan for organic farming and diversification of their activities. Thus, they can make significant contributions to the local and regional development. It has to be noted that the interviews revealed that these women are knowledgeable of their own farms' situation, their specific field of activity/production and they are very concerned about the future of their business. Most of them talked about their farm using the term 'enterprise', showing in this way their pride about their endeavours. They did not consider that the 'young farmers' programme had major negative aspects, apart from the bureaucratic bottlenecks. Secondary negative aspects concern some suspicion of the evaluation procedures and the restrictions imposed on off-farm jobs, as they might want to utilise the free time they have due to the temporal nature of agriculture to further support the family income. Their ignorance of the 'Good Farming Practices' reflects a general problem of Greek agriculture. The women believe that proper controls may be a solution for both acquiring information on various farming issues and avoiding free-riders.

Women's attitudes towards the 'young farmers' programme and the existence of this group of active women farmers within a sample of 126 women who joined the programme in the West Macedonia region, should not be easily dismissed (given both the practical and symbolic restrictions that women face in getting involved in agriculture as professional farmers). It should rather make policy designers and decision-makers revise their conceptualisation of the role of rural women's and thus the occupational opportunities presented to them. Does the role of women have to do with para-agricultural and off-farm occupations or with farming as well? The latter does not seem to interfere with policy. This is probably due to the fact that the agrarian ideology, through its dialectical relationship with policy, sustains an image of women as assistants to the male farmer, a role in which women have also reinforced themselves by rejecting agriculture and (male) farmers altogether. However, the current research findings indicate that through the 'young farmers' programme, interesting cases, worthy of attention and further support, do exist.

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