

Women in Agriculture Stakeholders Group

Submission to Joint
Committee on Gender
Equality

28/02/2022



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Submission

The Women in Agriculture Stakeholders Group (WASG) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on this important topic regarding gender equality in Ireland. WASG is an independent, voluntary body made up of representatives from the Irish Farmers Association (IFA), Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA), Irish Cattle and Sheep Association (ICSA), Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association (INHFA), Irish Organic Association (IOA), Macra na Feirme, South East Women in Farming and West Women in Farming with the sole purpose of representing the interests of women in farming under the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Female farmers make up just 12% (16,100) of the 137,100 family farms in the country (CSO, 2016) and just 3.8% of farms are registered with the Department of Agriculture in joint female/male names.

Despite CSO figures showing that over a quarter of those working on farms (71,700) are women, their work is rarely officially recognised and they are essentially treated as a minority group.

The patriarchal and traditional succession system of passing farms from father to son has been a huge barrier for women's access to land, as recognised in the work of Dr Sally Shortall (RTÉ, 2021).

The number of women inheriting or gaining access to land is also unlikely to change as Teagasc has acknowledged that young women account for roughly just 10% of their students and a survey by Macra na Feirme of farmers showed that only 11% identified a woman as a potential farm successor (Examiner, 2014).

For example, just 5% of farm holders were aged under 35 but for every one female farmer aged less than 35 years, there were 11 male farmers (Examiner, 2014). While the aging demographic of the farm community is a widespread concern, it is a particular issue for female farmers where figures show that 31% of female farmers are over the age of 80 (DAFM figures). This indicates that many farms are only inherited by women once they are widowed and highlights that young women are not actively considered as farm successors.

There are other factors that highlight the need to ensure women are included in the future of agriculture, as they often bring innovative solutions to problems facing farming. This has been recognised in research in The Netherlands.

It has long been known that over 90% of Single Farm Payments goes to one gender - men (Byrne et al, 2014) and the reasons behind this situation need to be addressed through the introduction of the incentivisation and support for women in farming around the areas of taxation, the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme (TAMS) and knowledge transfer (KT) groups.

Citizens Assembly Recommendations: Gender norm and stereotypes

The role of women in farming

The role of women in agriculture has been overlooked in Irish history with little formal acknowledgement, despite the industry being a multi-billion-euro sector.

The WASG paid particular attention to the Citizen's Assembly recommendations around tackling gender norms. From young age children are learnt to recognise farmers as male and this is reinforced as they grow up through tradition, where farms are passed from father to son.

In order to tackle this in agriculture, the WASG would like to see each farm organisation adopt a quota system where at least 30% of elected officials were women. We would also like to see this brought into beef and dairy processors and co-ops to ensure that women in rural communities working in the farming sector have their views adequately recognised.

The current legal text surrounding the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023 - 2027 specifically highlights the need to support women in farming.

It states in Article 6 point (h):

- *promote employment, growth, gender equality, **including the participation of women in farming**, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including circular bioeconomy and sustainable forestry;*

The list of EU specific objectives and "impact indicators" further state that attracting young farmers should include the number of new young farmers and include a "gender breakdown".

*"Attract and sustain young farmers and **other new farmers** and facilitate sustainable business development in rural areas."*

It also states that the inclusion of women in farming should include "a fairer CAP: distribution of CAP support".

Department of Agriculture: Needs and SWOT analysis for CAP

In the Department of Agriculture's own needs analysis the need to increase the opportunities for women is highlighted:

*"Women are underrepresented in management roles and this is likely linked to succession planning in the broader agri-food sector. In Ireland, less than 12% of landholders are women presumably as a result of traditional cultural bias towards male successors, resulting in women rarely inheriting land. **This has had a significant negative impact on the participation of women in agriculture at all levels and has reinforced a perception that farming is a male occupation.**"*

We therefore believe that specific supports for women are needed in the next CAP and that these must be monitored to ensure that they are achieving the aim of ensuring that more women receive payment and acknowledgement for their work in farming.

Information on schemes and meetings

The need to aggregate a gender breakdown on agriculture scheme information has been repeated at the CAP legal text level and in the Food Vision 2030.

While this information is available under Freedom of Information the Stakeholders would like to propose:

- A gender breakdown of schemes should be available alongside the current breakdown of payment information on the Department of Agriculture's website.
- Revenue should be obliged to provide a breakdown of agricultural tax reliefs availed of by each gender (this information is currently not available according to Revenue).
- The Department of Business should provide a gender and loan value information on the number of agricultural loans it helps to oversee, such as the Future Growth Loan Scheme. This information is currently not available and it would help to provide transparency to see if women have access to loans to support their farm businesses.
- In the interest of transparency, the Department of Agriculture should lead the charge in publishing both an anonymous gender and corresponding pay grade of its employees.
- These figures should also include the number of young female farmers getting grants, tax reliefs and loans.

In addition, the time and date of information and farm meetings must be taken into consideration as many women continue to support farms through off-farm employment.

For example, the Department of Agriculture recently held three CAP consultation meetings between 7pm and 9pm on three successive weekdays from the 10th to the 12th of August. This timing is impractical for many women juggling childcare needs with on-farm and off-farm commitments. In future this should be taken into consideration by the Department and farm organisations, and in cases such as CAP consultations at least one alternative meeting should be proposed on a weekend or weekday at an earlier time of the day.

The timing and time commitments of agricultural courses should also be taken into consideration by the providers of agricultural education courses such as Teagasc.

National Women in Agriculture Dialogue

From board to primary producer level, the agriculture sector falls well below national average figures for female representation and the low number of young women in primary agriculture is a damning indicator of the future of the sector in terms of gender balance.

Not one of the four biggest dairy processors in the country has a single elected female board member. On top of this representation issue, figures secured under FOI by the chair of the group confirm that fewer than 500 women under 35 years of age receive the Young Farmer Scheme top-up.

A commitment was made under Food Vision 2030 that a National Dialogue on women in agriculture would be undertaken. The Stakeholders Groups wants to ensure that the Department of Agriculture adequately funds and backs this initiative and includes the participation of Teagasc, farm organisations, Meat Industry Ireland and all of the major dairy processors.

The Dialogue should also ensure that it is interactive and inclusive and include farm walks, workshops and panel discussions where successful female farmers or joint female/male partnerships are already in operation.

The Stakeholders Group also expects the Department of Agriculture to be proactive and lead the charge in encouraging female participation and recognition on farms. It expects the Department will commit to increase the number of female farmers from 12 to 30% by 2030 - to include new female farmers, young female farmers and joint female/male partnerships. It would like to see a similar commitment made by dairy processors and farm organisations where female representation at board level has been historically poor. For example, just one farm organisation, Macra na Feirme has had a female president and it is the oldest farm organisation in Ireland. Across the dairy processors, fewer than 3% of the elected farm members are female, despite the role of women working on farms every day.

