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Chapter 6

The gendered 'good farmer'

This chapter addresses the gendered nature of the good farmer concept, and in particular what it means for women to be understood as a 'good farmer'. In Chapter 2 we observed how, in the 16th and 17th Centuries, the 'good wife' was an essential part of being recognised as a good farmer/husbandman. Two reasons for this could be discerned. First, the wife performed essential economic roles on the farm such as the making of linen and cheese and the breeding of livestock, as well as managing and directing the labour. Secondly, as the definition of a good farmer/husbandman incorporated moral aspects to a greater degree, the good farmer had to be a good family man and, to demonstrate he was a good husband, he needed to be able to show that he had a 'good wife'. As time progressed, the moral imperative of the farmer became production rather than God and family, while the essential role of the farm wife as a manager and manufacturer diminished. The role of the farmer and wife became strongly gendered.

This gendered role for the farm wife continues to be a significant part of contemporary agriculture. In the global North, farmers are still presumed to be men (Shortall, 2016) while in many parts of the world men are culturally presumed to have a professional career, of which farmer is one possibility. In contrast, if women have a profession it is in addition to their role as a woman, a homemaker, a wife or some other social role. As Beach (2013, p. 212-213) notes:

> The label 'farmer' is usually associated with masculine traits and men … While men are often identified in relation to their work … women on farms have been defined in terms of their marital relationships as farmwives instead of in terms of their connections to the land, the farms, or their children as farmers, farm women, or farm mothers. The farmer's wife is portrayed as the supporter of the male farmer, the homemaker, the one who raises the children and cares for the elders.

Without avenues for professional success within agriculture, women have been made invisible as farmers and thus made to be something other than a farmer. In many ways this situation parallels the invisibilising of women under patriarchy. In this chapter, we both highlight the effects of these exclusions and seek opportunities to expand research to actively look for other examples of good farmers that have been similarly marginalised.

To be a good farmer in many contexts now presumes the farmer to be a man. For the most part, studies on the 'good farmer' have followed a phenomenological line of inquiry, thus helping maintain the role of the wife as 'helper'. As such, those tasks thought of as farming (e.g. planting, harvesting, showing and breeding livestock, making contracts) are generally assumed to be male activities, while home-based organisational activities such as running errands, household management, and accounting tend to be thought of as female (Woods, 2011, p. 218). The male activities evolved metrics of success, often in parallel with systems of professionalization. Ever-increasing professionalization developed as a visible symbol of success whereas women's contributions remained local, hidden, vague, and unmeasurable. This leads to tensions and contradictions when claiming the mantle of 'farmer' that are wrapped up in land tenure, marital status, education, personality, geography, type of operation(s), the presence of children, along with other variables (Sachs *et al.*, 2016).

Women's work on farms is clearly not limited to 'helping' or reproductive labour — women on farms participate in the full range of farm activities, particularly, animal husbandry, accounting, "running errands, supervising farm labour, growing and preserving food, various farm chores, and 'filling-in' or doing what 'needs to be done'" (Shortall *et al.*, 2017; Sachs 2018:134). Women also lead farms in their own right: According to the 2012 United States Census of Agriculture, of 2.1 million farmers or 86 percent of "primary operating" (i.e. primary decision-maker) famers were male, and 14 percent were female (Hoppe and Korb, 2013). The figures are similar in the UK, where in England, 84% of farm holders in 2016 were male. Across Europe, percentages of female-led farms range from 4 to 45% (Eurostat, 2019). With the exception of countries like Lithuania and Latvia, where the percentage of female led farms approaches 50%, the number of female farmers is considerably lower than the percentage of women identified as working in the agricultural sector.[1]

[1] The wide range of female led farms in Europe also begs the question about whether 'leading' a farm is liberatory or drudgery. For example, the literature on repeasantisation strikes a celebratory tone of people entering farming

The academic literature also demonstrates that although the position of women in society has changed in recent decades (e.g. increased labour force participation, higher levels of education), farming as a sector remains male dominated. Mechanization – which should negate any biological differences in the ability of women to carry out farm work – has instead led to further polarization of gender roles (Heggem, 2014; Saugeres, 2002). Efforts to rebalance inheritance of agricultural land have been largely unsuccessful (Shortall, 2010). Gender disaggregated data about farm work and rural governance structures remains elusive (Shortall, 2016), although it is recognized that when women lead farms, those farms tend to be smaller and less commercial in orientation (Sutherland et al., 2016; Vyn, 2018). Smyth *et al.* (2018, p. 671) contend that whereas "women seem to be adapting and changing; the institution of farming and ranching does not". Agriculture across the global North continues to be patriarchal.

While much of the good farmer literature has focused on the phenomenological experiences of farmers (what meaning being a farmer gives their lives), the majority of those experiences are those of male farmers. In this chapter, we use that reality as a starting point to, first, acknowledge that weakness in the good farmer literature and explore the production of the 'good farmer' identity from a gender perspective. Second, we address the key questions of how good farmer identities are gendered and whether the good farmer construct reinforces traditional gender roles and the 'invisibility' of women in agricultural adjustment research. Third, we take an historical look at some symbols related to identification of a woman as a good farm wife. Fourth and finally, we conclude with sections on excluded others and suggestions for areas of dialogue that studies of the good farmer might more thoroughly engage with in the future. Significantly, we ask, can systems of farm professionalization emerge as change agents for inclusion and equity?

Hiding Gender in the good farmer literature

In Chapter 1 we observed how studies into women's roles and identities in agriculture preceded the good farmer identity concept by more than a decade (as noted in Burton, 1998) yet this

or doing something entrepreneurial and collective in farming. In other situations, leading a farm indicates a peasant condition rife with poverty, inequitable access to markets, historical degradation, and a life one would rather escape.

connection is barely acknowledged in contemporary studies, let alone explored. In fact, a review of the good farmer literature to date demonstrates the that the good farmer concept, as with the economic and attitudinal studies before it, also defaults towards male perceptions. Although women are sometimes identified as study participants (particularly in studies addressing the good farmer in relation to 'alternative' forms of agricultural production), the concept of the 'good farmer' is rarely explicitly applied in relation to the role of women on farms. For example, Burton's (2004) and Burton *et al.* (2008) papers on the 'good farmer' make no mention of gender [2]; respondents are identified solely by number. Studies of the good farmer such as those of Stock (2007), Hunt (2010), Sutherland and Darnhofer (2012), Sutherland (2013), Saunders (2016), Shortall *et al.* (2017) and Naylor *et al.* (2017) include a few female participants in their sample, but do not address gender dynamics.

These studies are characteristic of recent sampling practices within the rural studies and agricultural adjustment literatures, where researchers typically engage with the 'primary farmer' – i.e. one qualitative interview or survey per farm, in some cases a joint interview with a farming couple, but primarily with individual men. Women are thus typically interviewed as part of a couple, if they are interviewed at all. As Sarah Whatmore pointed out in her book *Farming Women* (1991, p. 4), "Analytical attention has focused on the 'farmer' as business principal, labourer, and decision maker (Errington *et al.*, 1986), the term itself carrying masculine connotations". For the most part, the good farmer literature tracks along a similar path because this literature began as a way for farmers (mostly men) to describe the status of being good in each other's (again, primarily men's) eyes.

Visual symbols of the good farmer foreground men and a specific kind of rural and agricultural masculinity whereby the symbols of being a good farmer also tend to reflect being a good man (Silvasti, 2003). As discussed in Chapter 3, symbols of the 'good farmer' typically include even, weed free fields, high quality, healthy livestock, and a tidy farmstead. These symbols also reflect a financially viable farm – profits are expected from quality crops and livestock; tidy farmsteads indicate that capital and labour is available for maintenance (Sutherland, 2013), thus reinforcing the role of male as both professional and provider. Men typically drive the

[2] Burton (1998) acknowledged failure to address the identity of the farmer's wife when looking behavioural choice as a weakness in his study (later published in 2004), but argued, rightly or wrongly, that the normative influence of family members had already been internalised by the individual interviewed. In the 2008 study women were present in almost 50% of the interviews, yet this was not elaborated on in later publications.

tractors (i.e. demonstrate the skilled role performance that leads to weed-free fields) (Heggem, 2014). Men are also dominant in the major visual spaces of agriculture, such as auction marts (Pilgeram, 2007). Riley (2016b), in focusing specifically on masculinity and the good farmer, argues that it is important to farmers' identity as they age that they maintain a visible, public presence as a farmer, as well as the financial viability of the farm. Farmers are thus typically reluctant to shift into full, formal retirement. Riley concludes by recognising that further research is needed to assess the intersecting roles of other farm household members including spouses.

The lack of attention to women in the good farmer literature raises a number of issues. First, as farm decision-making is typically undertaken at the household level (Farmar-Bowers and Lane, 2009; Gasson and Errington, 1993), interviewing a single (male) household member excludes or marginalizes the experiences and actions of both women and young people (e.g. successors), thus contributing to making women 'invisible (Haney and Knowles, 1988; Riley, 2009). Second, by avoiding gender debates, these studies appear gender neutral – whereas in this chapter we question whether this is actually the case. Third, as men form the vast majority of study participants, good farmer studies promote the image of farming as predominantly male. Fourth, these studies may also disproportionately represent male perspectives.

Although empirical work on the good farmer largely ignores dynamics between the genders, conceptualization of the 'good farmer' can provide useful insights into how gendered roles on farms have been reproduced in a Bourdieusian sense (described in Chapter 4). Saugeres (2002) in her French study of mechanization in farming, argued that the discourse surrounding the role of women on farms revolved around what is 'natural' for women – that women are less biologically suited to both heavy labour and operating machinery. Saugeres (2002) also contended that men, as inheritors of land, become embodied in the land and the acts of cultivation. This 'naturalness' is reinforced by women who marry into farming who may not have tractor-driving skills and can be intimidated by large (expensive) machinery. In contrast, the gendered socialization of care-work that is central to the habitus of many women can reinforce inequitable forms of familial organization. DeVault (1991) asserts that this makes it seem as if caring is a natural female trait. As a result, generations of women have been oriented to unpaid and low paid care-work. Women's labour is also primarily indoors – inside the house, or inside the barn, where women have historically taken responsibility for animal husbandry

(Alston, 1995). Work in the fields was oriented towards 'helping' (e.g. during busy periods such as harvest). Thus, studies adopting the good farmer concept are primed to make observations that de-naturalize gender-based assumptions about work related to farms.

The perpetuation of these gender norms is reinforced by farming families. Multiple family members are involved in socialization processes. Socialization in farm households is undertaken by both male and female parents. Children are socialized by parents and peers to develop specific skills, including the ability to produce and recognize culturally valued symbols. Men and women on farms reinforce the continuation of established gender roles. Fischer and Burton (2014) argue that socialization processes in childhood shape the subsequent career choices of farm children – boys identified as the successor are much more actively engaged in developing farming skills as children which, consequently, reinforces their successor identity and teaches them what it is to be a 'good farmer'. Implicit in the paper (and explicit in Fischer, 2007) is that girls raised on farms are not typically identified as successors, or given the opportunity to learn these skills and, as a consequence, do not develop farmer or successor identities. Brandth (2002) argues that this perpetuation of gender roles is continued even in cases where women earn substantial off-farm income. Rather than changing the relative social position of women in the household, farmers' wives actively seek to promote the husband's identity as provider and farmer, as a means of supporting his mental health (Shortall, 2014). As a result,

> It is the man who typically claims the title 'farmer,' even on a family farm where the 'farm wife' and the 'farm kids' labour both in the fields and in the home on tasks essential to the farm enterprise: feeding livestock, driving grain wagons to the elevator, balancing the books, washing the clothes and dishes, cooking the food, and acting as reserve drivers… every farm typically has only one 'farmer.' (Campbell et al., 2006, p. 5)

Women themselves may be uncomfortable with claiming the identity of farmer. Michael Bell's (2004) study of farmers and farms transitioning to sustainable production systems with the attendant changes in identity, found women reluctant to claim the mantle of 'farmer' – with one widow failing to do so even after being the sole farmer for 10 years. Traditionally, widows have been understood as placeholders, maintaining the farm until a male relative can take over

(Carter, 2017). Writing about a somewhat conservative district in New Zealand, Hatch (1992, p. 11) noted:

> A woman may own a farm by herself, and conceivably she could do all the work on it that a male owner would do …; but even so, to refer to her as a farmer would strain normal usage to the limit. The business of farming is conceived as inherently masculine, and this is so even though women's labour is extremely important on many properties … A woman may be highly regarded for her contribution to the farm operation, yet the labour she provides is considered supportive, not primary, and in an important sense she is viewed as subordinate to her husband in the operation of the business.

Rosenfeld (1985) describes how, despite the fact that women do a significant amount of farm work, only four percent of women claimed the title of farmer on tax forms in (at the time) the only nationally representative survey of farm women and work in the United States. The inability or unwillingness to claim the title of farmer for many women then leads to material and financial consequences; if for no other reason than because others, such as financial institutions, do not accept that women can be farmers (Contzen and Forney, 2017; Droz *et al*., 2014; Stock, Hossler and Darby, 2019)[3].

In the sole 'good farmer' study of women on farms to date, Heggem (2014) argues that traditional gender perspectives in agriculture emphasise the gendered nature of farm roles as a matter of nature over nurture. Respondents (both male and female) interviewed in her Norwegian study observed how they believed male interest in machinery was due to the 'tractor gene' – a male disposition that predetermined an interest in machinery and other traditionally male roles in agriculture, interests that women were simply not born with. Fischer (2007) and Heggem (2014) both produce compelling arguments against this perspective, arguing that the interest in machinery is enculturated from childhood through gendered engagement with agriculture rather than being part of a predetermined gender preference. Heggem (2014) further contends that, in the Norwegian context, increasing engagement in tourism and Green Care is

[3] Women farmers are also less likely to receive government subsidies and private loans for their agricultural endeavours. An estimated 43,000 female farmers have been denied more than $4.6 billion in farm loans and loan servicing from the U.S. Department of Agriculture alone (Hadlik 2012 https://womensenews.org/2012/09/grass-ceiling-overhangs-surge-in-female-farmers/). This lack of access to capital and agricultural education hinders growth potential and reduces the likelihood of female farmer survival (Trauger et al., 2008).

reshaping primary activities on the farm and leading to new symbols of the 'good farmer'. These activities have characteristics that are typically more attractive to women as they are more compatible with women's educational choices and, consequently, with women taking over key roles on the farm they are now more likely to be identified as suitable successors. This is explored later in the chapter. First, we consider the historic cultural symbols of women on farms as antecedents to contemporary imagery.

Symbols of the Good Farm Woman

Without opportunities to produce professionally articulated symbols of being a successful farm woman, women have negotiated their own symbols of what it means to be a good farm wife. How then do women represent their contribution to the success of the farm to other women and their communities? Lauters' (2009, p. 80) cultural history of farm women utilized farm periodicals in the United States from 1910 to 1960 to demonstrate that farm women were portrayed, "as the architects of farm life and keepers of the farm home and as important and central to the business of farming". In line with this, O'Hara (1998) identified four categories of farm women's labour relationships: farm helper, farm homemaker, farmwives 'working for the family farm' and farm women in paid work (where the work is not on the farm). While following the basic categorisation of O'Hara, we contend that it is in effect contextually dependent, such that in a different set of circumstances the symbols of group belonging are likely to also differ. Acknowledgement of these categories is also likely to vary. For example, in some cases the laws were such that women could not even be considered as legal title holders – meaning that they were technically unable to assume the full role of the farmer by having full control over the land (Keller, 2014).

In this section we consider the historic symbols of the good farm woman. Wilkie (2010) describes the three historic zones of farm labour: the field, farmyard, and house. Traditionally in the U.S., field production (of crops) was primarily undertaken by men and household labour primarily by women, with the two meeting in the farmyard. "The primary ingredient for success was hard work" (Lauters, 2009, p. 90). Farm women demonstrated hard work in five primary areas: animal care, 'domestic manufactures' or cottage industries, (forced) hospitality, incorporation of mechanization, and civic engagement. Whilst the following sections

emphasise the US situation, most elements echo general trends that have been documented in other western contexts, particularly the United Kingdom.

Mechanization

Over the course of the 20th century, mechanization of both farm and household machinery altered farm work for both men and women. Circa 1930 in Shelby County, Iowa,

> "farm women . . . periodically worked in the farm fields, particularly in corn picking and haying seasons. In deference to traditional notions about appropriate gender roles, however, women characterized such labour not as 'real work' but as 'helping' their husbands." (Jellison, 1993, p. 109)

Household labour changed in response to the addition of household vehicles and other 'labour saving devices' as is evident, for example, in the scaling up of poultry and egg production to rely on more mechanized systems. An 1891 editorial of the *Farmer's Wife* newspaper notes,

> New machinery has done much to lighten and lessen the work of men on the farm—riding plows, patent drills, self-binders, headers and steam threshers all tend to do this; but machinery has yet wrought but little benefit to farmers' wives (Vol. 1 No. 3 September 1891, p 1).

Many of the disagreements on farms in the early part of the 20th century were not between whether one should or should not mechanize, but whether the farm machinery or household machinery should be the first investment (Harper, 2001; Jellison, 1993). Harper's (2001) *Changing Works* documents how frustrated farm wives were as a result of the disparity between mechanized adoption of farm equipment and home mechanization in upstate New York. Harper (2001, p. 193) compares "portrait[s] of patriarchy mitigated by gender flexibility inspired by evolving technology". Or, as Susan Rogers' (1975) work inspired Lauters (2009, p. 32) to state, "Balance is maintained within [farming] communities between the informal power of the women and the overt power of the men". In the UK, Riley (2009) documents women's pride in promoting a shift towards mechanization on the farm that gave them more autonomy. This move was particularly evident during World War II where the push to encourage women into

field production was tied directly to the winning of the war. After the war, 'Tractorettes' were expected to move back into the house and revive the 'domestic ideal' (Jellison, 1993).

Brandth (1994) argued that the masculinization and professionalization of farming became particularly marked after the mechanization of agriculture: machines, as associated with physical strength and mechanical skills, were seen as masculine. Men alone are featured in tractor advertisements, alongside text emphasizing the power, precision and control offered by the machines. Tractors, and men, are pictured as large and strong, dominating nature. Saugeres (2002) describes how mechanization has reduced the visibility of women's work by limiting the presence of women in publicly visible fields – women are seen as less naturally disposed to driving tractors, and the tractor itself has become a symbol of male power. Instead of making it easier for women to undertake farm work, tractors are seen as making women's work in the fields unnecessary. Here we have the co-development of technology and the related professionalization of farming acting together to literally hide women in the house. The gender relations hiccup in farming of World War II offers an interesting example of how women were able to contribute to farm success in the same way as men, but how the strength of gender stereotypes acted to draw them back into traditional roles after the war. Symbols of women's successful contributions to the farm were thus, once again, forced to take other forms.

Animals

Prior to WWII, in both the UK and the US, women on diversified farms were typically responsible for dairy and poultry production (Lauters 2009, p. 142; Wilkie, 2010, p. 48). Harper (2001, p.7) chronicles the "transformation of farming during and just after World War II" and notes:

> The income from the eggs and poultry was 'women's money' (often denigrated as 'pin money'), bartered for the groceries needed to supplement self-provisioning and also traded and sold to pay for services such as doctoring and even, in some instances, new land and equipment (p. 186).

Indeed, although income from eggs could exceed income from the dairy herd, poultry were regarded as a nuisance rather than a part of the farm system or the family economy (Harper,

2001; Wilkie, 2010). During and after World War II the demand for eggs grew such that policies shifted to encourage larger scale production on specialized farms, a move that made it somewhat more accepted as men's work – though not completely (Jellison, 1993, p. 156-160).

Industrialisation in the dairy sector also served to 'de-feminise' milk production. Women were increasingly replaced by male workers in US and UK dairies, but strong norms of milking as women's work dissuaded men from milking roles in some countries (e.g. Sweden – Sommestad and McMurry, 1998). Women are also described in the literature as being responsible for caring for the calves, often including undertaking the calving process itself. As one woman put it, women were always taking care of the calves: "Because we treat'em like babies. And they grow better, you know if you give'em that little extra attention and fuss over'em a little bit and tell'em they look nice!" (Harper 2001, p. 198). Once the calves were older, they became the responsibility of male staff. There is a gendered hierarchy of animal care on farms – men tend to be associated with the larger, more prestigious animals (mostly cattle), whereas women are associated with smaller livestock such as poultry and sheep (Sachs, 1996). Men also tend to be more visible where livestock are on display, such as action marts and agricultural fairs (Pilgeram, 2007). Thus, gender power dynamics play out through the symbols of successful animal rearing and breeding.

Domestic Manufactures

In the 16th Century, as noted in Chapter 2, the role of the farm wife in manufacturing goods from products grown on the farm made her of critical importance to recognition as a 'good farmer'. This role has continued in more recent times, although as manufacturing has moved into the cities, so the role of the farm wife as a manufacturer of everything from candles to linen has declined. Where domestic manufacturing has been able to – and is still able to – demonstrate professional status for farm women is in the arena of agricultural fairs where prowess can be demonstrated through what Neely (1935, p. 63) termed "domestic manufactures". As Smith (2011, p. 25), writing about the Iowa State Fair, observes:

> Women have claimed spaces within the State Fair to make their own interventions in public culture and to influence the social, economic, and physical landscapes of Iowa. This gendered work is not a new phenomenon but grows directly out of rural work

> patterns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While women's work was typically bound by gender expectations, it was also valued as essential to the farm economy and the larger farm community system.

Quilting for household use, exchange, and sale was a particularly important 'neighbouring' activity performed by groups of women (Smith, 2011). As a social activity, quilts were subject to peer assessment and emerged as an indicator of skill and dedication to the task in the same way that tending fields acted as symbols for male farmers. The symbolic importance of quilting could also extend beyond the local quilting circle. Endorsed as a farm-activity, the country fair provided "a physical domain in which participants represent their lives to themselves and all other interested parties" – both for the farmer through agriculture and the farm wife through activities such as quilting (Prosterman, 1995, p. 15). Participation at county fairs extended beyond quilts to include the production of food products, linens, artwork, and other 'domestic products'. However, as was the case centuries before, improvements in industrial manufacturing and processing combined with increasingly globalised trade saw the importance of these practices gradually diminish. As products became available for purchase at a significantly lower price than was possible with hand manufacture, the manufacturing role of farm women became increasingly economically insignificant (Rosenfeld, 1985).

Other cottage industries also contributed to the farm enterprise as revenue generators. Over time, these grew to include items that did not consist solely of things manufactured on the farm and marketed by farm women – but developed as businesses in their own right in order to support the farm enterprise. A similar development of women's engagement with the farm can be seen in contemporary literature on farm diversification. Little (2016) argues that entrepreneurship is typically understood in 'masculine' terms (power, control and competitiveness) but, judging by the fact that the female production role has been maintained throughout the centuries, entrepreneurship is as much – if not more – a female role as a male one. However, there are some differences between male farm diversification and female farm diversification. In a Dutch study, Bock (2004) demonstrates that when women develop diversification activities on farm, they tend to do so at a smaller scale, and are oriented towards fitting the new activities around their existing tasks, particularly childcare, in order to retain their status as good mothers and farm wives. Further, these diversification activities were intended to supplement farm income rather than accumulate capital and were criticised for

undermining male achievements (i.e. undertaking diversification suggested that the farm was not economically viable in itself).

Hospitality

In various parts of the world, farmers hire seasonal labour. Harper's (2001) description of the changing system of shared labour and equipment related to grain growing and dairy farming, suggests that many of the hired men could expect room and board as part their labour agreement – and it would generally fall to the farm wife to provide this. For the most part her participation was expected and not negotiated (Jellison, 1993). Some enjoyed it. Others described the "irritation" of integrating hired help into the family – doing the washing, cooking, and additional care-work (Harper, 2001, p. 96). Edith Bradley Rendleman who lived on farms in southern Illinois in the first half of the 20th Century observed "That is one thing I hated, to always have somebody around to cook, wash, and iron for. You never got to enjoy your own family alone" (quoted in Harper, 2001, p. 96). As Whatmore (1991, p. 95) contends, this kind of hospitality expectation, illustrates the "'blurring' of the traditional division between 'domestic' and 'social labour' on family farms". The twin developments of the professionalization of farming and the nuclear family created strain around the family dinner table.

This echoes more recent observations on the consequences of farm diversification for women. Recent research has suggested that farm women are generally given (or adopt) the role of managing diversification activities where public interaction is required (e.g. direct sales, agri-tourism) (Wright and Annes, 2014). These interactions are understood to be more within women's skill sets and 'natural orientations'. Brandth and Haugen (2010, 2011), for example, describe how when farming couples diversify into tourism activities, gender and work identities are renegotiated. This may lead to traditionally feminine acts of hospitality becoming more highly valued within the farm business (Heggem, 2014), but can still reinforce patterned understandings of masculine and feminine roles.

Political Activity

Lauters (2009, p. 15) contends that along with other areas of farm and social life, farm women are "active citizens in rural communities". Whereas much of the rural literature excludes farm women as active civic actors (outside of the family and church), Lauters' examination of periodicals, especially *The Farmer's Wife*, concludes that many farm women supported, at least within the confines of the periodical (through contributed letters), the suffragist movement, a wider voice for farm women, and the importance of their work – especially through the great depression. In one instance, Emma D. Pack wrote,

> It is the farmer and the working man that believe the women their equal … Every man who loves his wife and children should commence to think of their future. Let the mothers vote. All people regardless of colour or sex would be benefitted by the reforms demanded by the Farmers' Alliance. (Vol X No 7 Jan. 1892: p. 5)

Sara Egge and Jenny Barker Devine's (2014) work on the same era of US farm women illustrates political involvement that helped to make the 'feminist' umbrella a little wider than many urban feminists might have imagined possible. Their work illustrates the murkiness of movement labels and categories that hinge on similar us-versus-them categories that parallel our good farmer constructions.

This murkiness carries over into the role that farm women's organizations play (Rosenfield, 2017; Sachs, 2018). While mainstream agricultural organizations continue to serve as an avenue for knowledge sharing, they remain mostly male-centric both in terms of the knowledge shared and their leadership structure (Alston and Wilkinson, 1998). Female-centred agricultural organizations privilege the unique experiences of women on farms as opposed to the presumed mainstream. Further, female leaders play a vital role in increasing both women's sense of being a farmer as part of their identity and shifting policy towards more gender equitable outcomes (McVay, 2016). This relationality adds nuance to the role that gender, marriage and parenthood, friendship, care, and dialogue play in the evolution of both the symbols and the practices of being a good farmer.

This section illustrated how the centrality of women's participation on the farm has been down-played and how women have consequently been excluded from consideration as good farmers – except in unique circumstances. Historically, women's symbols of success, of being good

farm women, have revolved around the creation of domestic objects such as quilts, raising smaller (thus feminine) animals, and contributing to the overall well-being of the home – welcoming guests, preparing meals, and limiting negative attention to the farm. These symbols have been attributed as naturally female – even when the lead farmer on a property was a woman.

The Good Farmer as an Expression of Masculinity

What it means to be a good farmer has also traditionally been related to the construction of masculinity in farming. For the good farmer to be inherently masculine also means that what is a 'good farmer' has been constructed in dialogue with a definition of rural masculinity. Charatsari and Istenič (2016, p. 392) contend that "in many studies male farmers are considered as a stable reference standard against which gender differences are evaluated often without being included in the study sample". In essence, male farmers are treated as a baseline against which women are compared, furthering the implicit position of men as 'real' farmers and women as 'other'. Contemporary research emphasizes that gender identity is relational: masculinities are heterogeneous; and often influenced by changes in women's practices (Haugen and Brandth, 2017).

Barlett and Conger (2004) identify three visions of masculine success on farms: industrial, agrarian and an emergent ecological vision. We address the first two in this section while taking up the third in the next section. In the *industrial ideal* the male is the provider and the farm the means of provision. Anything that indicates he is not able to provide for the family diminishes his masculine identity and, as such, the fact that his wife does not have to work on the farm becomes a symbol of success as both a male and a farmer (also see Barlett, 1993). Women thus become completely separated from the means of production. A 'good' (male) farmer is one who has "tamed the elements to produce crops and manage livestock, overcoming nature's vagaries and uncertainties" (Little, 2006, p. 189) – with the shift towards machinery and chemical inputs exhibiting masculine control over nature. To operate a large commercial business and complex machinery is to be professional, and that professionalism is invariably masculine (Bell et al., 2015).

Female farmers positioning themselves within this environment adopt stereotypically male symbols of success. For example, Pilgeram (2007, p. 585) writes, that:

> Rather than the women's presence 'eroding the gender stereotypes that one has be "tough, strong, dominant, and male" to be a good farmer', the women used these stereotypes in order to present themselves as good farmers, even at the expense of their personal identity as women.

She details how female farmers at American auction marts distinguish themselves from farmers' wives at the same events by wearing masculine clothing, using rough language, and positioning themselves near to the auction ring, in contrast to farmers wives, who adopt feminine symbols (e.g. wearing make-up and carrying hand-bags, locating themselves at a distance from the ring). Smyth et al. (2018, p. 669-670) found:

> women's involvement in farms and ranches is related to their gender self-perception, with more involvement being associated with a more masculine self-perception, especially for involvement in manual labour jobs and jobs that involve horses. Women who view their primary role as independent agricultural producers or full partners also perceive themselves as more masculine than women who view their primary role as homemaker.

Barlett and Conger's (2004) *agrarian ideal* of masculine success emphasizes yeomanship and the ability to perform farm work; farming is a family commitment and explicitly involves women. Examples in the 'good farmer' literature emphasize this agrarian perspective – the skilled role performance inherent in livestock husbandry and crop production, rather than the direct relationship between the farm and financial success. This may be because, as Burton (2004) observes, symbols of financial success are 'hidden' whereas skilled role performances in the field are visible, unmistakable and directly attributable to a specific farm. Sutherland (2013), however, argues that increasing economic pressures are enhancing he importance of financial success (by whatever means) as a symbol of a good farmer. Bryant (1999a) observes an association between what she terms 'feminine pride' and nurturing/helping roles in agrarian ideology, and contrasts these with the 'masculine pride' involved in undertaking physical labour. However, these ideas have yet to be developed more widely. For the good farmer

literature it is important to avoid the same essentialising assumptions, i.e. that male 'good farmers' are more likely to engage in larger scale operations while female 'good farmers' are solely committed to smaller-scale and alternative productions.

The two identified types align with Contzen's and Forney's (2017) typology of family farming in Switzerland. In this study, the majority of family farms fit with the agrarian vision, where the family and the farm are 'fully interdependent' in Switzerland as 'traditionally' complementarity whereby "the origin of labour is defined by the clear separation of spheres of activity according to the classic gendered division between production and reproduction" (p. 33). Their results emphasize that, despite the still clear domination of a 'traditional' model, a diversification of farm configurations exists, whereby all individual roles are jointly renegotiated, offering new possibilities for gender equality. The industrial vision is markedly similar to Contzen and Forney's "professional individualization" configuration, whereby farm activity is kept as separate as possible from the household and family sphere, and the non-farming partner is not involved in the farm work (p. 34). For Contzen and Forney, however, this configuration also includes families where the woman has her own professional career and is not limited to her housewife role, as is suggested in Barrett and Conger's vision.

Failure to meet either the industrial or agrarian ideals can be particularly damaging to men's identity and mental health (e.g. depression, Valkonen and Hanninen, 2012), other mental illnesses (Parr et al., 2004), and emotional distress (Coen et al., 2013). Barlett and Conger (2004) argue that there are many examples of mental health issues or even suicide as a result of farmers failing to meet expectations for maintaining farm viability. Bell (2004, p. 135) in visiting a white nationalist, militia group, surmises that many are

> 'dispossessed' farmers, those who used to farm, but lost the farm. The loss of the material farm also contributed to a phenomenological 'disorientation' whereby their opportunity to practice masculinity as they had learned it also disappeared. If you can't practice being a farmer, then your self is diminished.

Here, the gendered construction of what is it be a 'good farmer' accentuates – for male farmers – the feeling of failure, combining the professional and gender dimensions of identity. The need for off-farm employment can be seen as a failure in the role of men as provider (Barlett

and Conger, 2004). Off-farm employment can also lead women to disengage from the farm, particularly if it has become a drain on family finances (Alston, et al., 2017).

Gender and alterity: being a 'different' good farmer?

Barlett and Conger's (2004) third type of masculine success is an *emergent ecological vision.* In the ecological vision, the enjoyment of production and reduced use of inputs are championed. Women are equal partners in this relationship. The vision is aspirational – hope for change is associated with the emergence of alternative agricultural practices which challenge the norms of a range of farming trends. The emancipatory potential of alternative approaches is not solely for the ecological impacts of the dominant agricultural system, but the power relationships embedded in patriarchy and heteronormativity. The idea that an emergent ecological vision comes from a balanced relationship between men and women on heteronormative family farms can be extended beyond such parameters regarding who and what goes into being considered a good farmer. What it helps point to is that in varying times, places, and industries there exist competing notions of what comprises a good farmer. When considering gender and sexuality, we are challenged to theorize who is a good farmer when not a professional, primarily white, male?

It is well recognized that women are more visible in alternative agri-food networks (AAFN) than conventional networks (Ilbery and Maye, 2015; Tregear, 2011). Contemporary AAFNs encompasses a broad umbrella including options for production (e.g. organic, low input), marketing (e.g. direct marketing, short food supply chains, fair trade initiatives) and interactions with consumers (e.g. community-supported agriculture, local food movements). Wilbur (2013) cites historical research by Schmitt (2005), which demonstrates the 'astonishing' number of female researchers who were involved in the establishment of alternative agricultural science (i.e. early biodynamic and organic agriculture). Organic farming in particular is more likely to involve female-led farms (Pedersen and Kjærgård, 2004).

Michael Bell's ethnography of the Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) offers a concurrent example of Barlett and Conger's (2004) emergent ecological vision that he describes as relational agriculture, which "represents a great increase in the participation and prominence of PFI women on their farms and in the organization itself" (Bell, 2004, p. 205).

> Sustainable agriculture involves more than agricultural practice. It is about the practice of the self – or, better put, it is about the practice of selves, new selves, new men and new women and new dialogues between and among them. It is about new conceptions of the unfinished wholes within which we all live. It is about new cultivations of farming, and that means both new senses of what a farm is and can be and new senses of what a person is and can be. (Bell, 2004, p. 203).

Because conventional agriculture is rooted in family farm configurations, knowledge systems, and power relations that include specific gendered role models, alternative agricultural practices offer opportunities to renegotiate how gender is understood and performed at the same time as the farm practices are changed. Following this logic, Trauger (2004) argued that alternative agriculture gives women spaces to challenge accepted norms.

However, this hopeful proposition is also contradicted in the literature. For instance, Silvasti (2003, p. 146) argued that conventional farmers in Finland regarded organic farming as 'pretend farming' and as not 'real work' because they saw organic farmers as chasing subsidies. Women's higher visibility could therefore be attributed to the lower prestige associated with alternative agriculture. In addition, the physical practices of alternative agriculture do not necessarily lend themselves to gender parity. Wilbur (2014) drew attention to the traditional gender roles adopted by 'back-to-the-landers' in Italy; the physical demands associated with alternative agriculture (e.g. manual labour associated with low input production), and the need for considerable reproductive and domestic labour associated with accommodating WWOOFers, leads to a pattern of men working outdoors and women indoors. While he argues that the important issue for women in the study was the sense of freedom they gained by leaving professional urban jobs to go 'back-to-the-land', his female respondents also identified considerable angst at the discrepancy between the anticipated and practical realities of this transition. In an American study, Castellano (2015) posits that engaging in alternative agriculture is not empowering for women: it is instead a continuation of traditional gender roles surrounding food provisioning.

Sustainable agriculture also tends to presume a heteronormative family farm familial structure. Overall, in the mainstream agri-food literature, and beyond the discussion of women's role in

farming, the issue of sexuality, race, and class tend to take a marginalized role in comparison to cultural and economic analyses (Leslie 2017, 2019; Wypler, 2019). Charatsari and Istenič (2016, p. 389) "highlight under-researched area[s]" at the intersection of gender and farming with a focus on gay, lesbian, bi farmers. Leslie (2017, p. 748) challenges that, "investigating the sustainability of the family farm demands a critical examination of its embedded heteronormativity … as well as an exploration of alternative conceptions of farm families, homes, and workplaces" (see also Wypler, 2019). This leads to questions such as: How then do LGBTQ farmers navigate these extra layers of challenges to help build new alternatives to the dominant food system? Specifically, what symbols do they adopt in their farm practices that both help navigate what it means to be a (good) farmer while also helping challenge the status quo? What historical examples of sustainable, 'good farmers' do we have that do not reflect examples of professional, heteronormative success? How can the good farmer concept evolve to take in these historical challenges to both farm practices and knowledge exchange?

As the literature on intersectionality and the rural grows, we can look to some historical examples of women, especially lesbians, actively creating intentionally separate spheres of farm production that necessarily involved their own formulations of what it meant to be a good farmer on these, often, collective farm ventures. Though we do not have explicit 'good farmer' literature around these kinds of farms, Leslie (2019, p. 11) offers that,

> Some queer farmers desired the more traditional combined sexual and business partnership. Others thought it would jeopardize their relationship and farm, so created queer cohabitational home spaces that intentionally redefined the family farm.

As Luis (2018, p. 130) writes, "Women's lands are unique in their production of a gendered difference that goes beyond the creation of space 'for women' to the creation of literally female space". As part of the rising number of intentional communities of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, lesbian, rural collectives also grew. Documented in books like *Country Lesbians* (1976) (an Oregon lesbian separatist collective) and *Lesbian Land* (1985), the reality of these collectives offers challenges from the margins of the rural and who is farming. By necessity, then, these women's stories hold their own definitions of what it means to be a good farmer and the related symbols. Here, being a good farmer was less about professional achievements, but how much these accomplishments built or maintained the overall collective, separatist

efforts. Recent studies aim to extend the work on masculinity and femininity focused specifically on the rural, sexuality, and farming (Gorman-Murray et al., 2013; Gray et al., 2016).

In reference to women on the land, Luis (2018, p. 95) writes, "Boundaries are essential to maintaining community in all of its nostalgic as well as its literal sense". When everyone is the same in a community, in Luis' case primarily white, lesbian women, "there is no way to work with the Other, for strangers are automatically excluded from the community" (p. 96). Specifically, queer farmers encounter additional boundaries to access to land, credit, and knowledge based on gender and sexual identities (Leslie, 2017; 2019; Wypler, 2019) that parallel historical barriers to Native American, Latinx, African-American, and female farmers in the United Stated especially (Brewer and Stock, 2016). Leslie (2017, pp.765-766) found, counterintuitively to them,

> most farmers did not encounter the overt heterosexism they expected. … Queer farmers themselves re-evaluated their preconceived notions of rural and agricultural heterosexism, as sustainable farming often facilitated building rural community relationships and ties across sexual and gender differences.

LGBTQ farmers, are often associated with smaller scale, community-oriented agriculture and emphasize different symbols to mitigate these injustices. Tactics such as the use of hetero-male tools like chainsaws and tractors and androgynous clothing help lessen perceived differences. For many males, this means adopting a more 'macho' stance (Leslie, 2017, p. 758) or as Leslie also emphasizes, the often perceived gender-neutrality of farmer dress attracted some to the profession. Some heterosexual women, many queer women, and the trans farmers appreciated gender-neutral farmer dress. Casey, a vegetable farmer in her 20s, said, "I like the more androgynous aspect of farmer wear … I like that I can wear pretty gender-neutral-type clothing." When dressing up for special occasions, Tracy liked how farmers simply put on a vest over their normal wear. Dianne, a semiretired farmer in her 60s, wore worn overalls, and said that it felt good to do a sit-down interview "dressed like this." (Leslie, 2017, p. 761).

Beyond dress, LGBTQ farmers anticipate that land ownership helps to legitimize their pursuit of the farming profession as the most visible form of symbolic power in agriculture. In this

"quest for identity" (Annes and Redlin, 2013, p. 129) not just as LGBTQ farmers, but as (good) farmers, many celebrate the emergence of a wider queer path to the farming profession most notably in the developing power of the Cultivating Change Network (https://www.cultivatingchangefoundation.org/) that offers specific funding and professionalization opportunities (Leslie, 2017; Luis, 2018).

The historical patriarchal dominance that good farmers could only be white, male landowners often pushed others (women, lesbians, African-Americans) into separatist enclaves that sought self-sufficiency away from male-centred knowledge bases. As Nelly discussed in *Country Lesbians* (1976, pp. 108-109) about her experience of learning how to use a chainsaw,

> I have struggled to steal the knowledge of chain sawing from the male culture and to share it with my sisters. I called the forestry department and the chain saw stores for information many times without results. . . . Because I am a lesbian separatist I couldn't get first-hand information from male friends

The boundaries of how and where one can gain farming knowledge reflect the power injustice, but also serve as a mechanism to resist power structures. Learning how to chainsaw through respectful knowledge exchanges demonstrates an important symbolic assertion of autonomy and power by Nelly and others in similar situations. In recognition that having the right tools enables good farm practices to be carried out, companies like Green Heron Tools (https://www.greenherontools.com/) now make tools specifically designed for women.

Future directions

In this chapter we have drawn attention to the (lack of) treatment of gender in the good farmer literature. Statistically, the vast majority of 'primary farmers' in economically developed countries are identified as male and, when women engage in farming, they are most likely to do so as part of a heterosexual couple. It is perhaps unsurprising that the good farmer literature has focused on men to date, but in doing so it has contributed to the invisibility of women in agriculture and reinforced the practice of omitting gender dynamics from analyses of agrarian identity. The literature on women in agriculture remains distinct from other studies of agrarian transition – separate streams at conferences, specific journal articles addressing women, a

subset of rural scholars focusing on gender, but few integrate it into 'mainstream' analysis. This situation reflects partly, often unconsciously, a dominant framing in the wider society of modern, professional, agriculture as a masculine world. In order to address this issue, we suggest that new methods and concepts are needed. The good farmer literature needs to go beyond its traditional reliance on one interview per farm and actively seek to engage multiple household members. Engagement with broader feminist literatures opens up opportunities to more closely examine issues of embodiment, enactment, performance of professionalization, and more-than-human care relationships. Intersectionality is also relevant – not only to how the good farmer literature privileges male experiences, but white male experiences.

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