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## Young Women and Farming: A Case Study of Active Women Farmers in the West Macedonia Region, Greece.

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# **Young Women and Agriculture – The cases of active young women farmers in West Macedonia, Greece**

I. Gidarakou, E. Dimopoulou, O. Lagogianni, S. Sotiropoulou<sup>1</sup>

## **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 the rural space is concerned. Youngsters are the most innovative group and comprise the human capital that, in principle, can more than any other rural group support endogenous development which is of outmost 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 all important dimension for the economic and social survival and well being of rural societies.

Since the '70s rural policies aimed at the renewal of the human resources in agriculture through the provision of incentives to older farmers to quit farming (Fennel 1997). Starting in the '80s, but mainly since the early '90s, the CAP focused on youngsters through the provision of incentives to financially assist the establishment of young people in agriculture (setting up) and thus the attraction of young people in agriculture and their staying in the countryside. The issue is more important in the case of young rural women since their flying away to urban centres, at a rate larger than that of young men, has major implications in 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 & Food (ex Ministry of Agriculture) implements the 'young farmers' programme. The programme mainly provides economic incentives for the setting up of youngsters (up to 40 years old) in agriculture and the subsidization of the interest for loans used for the establishment of their farm business. Further national incentives are provided through the Law 2520/97 (Ministry of Agriculture 1998).

Despite the importance of the renewal of the farming population research on the 'young farmers' programme is limited. Thus, a number of issues related to such a topic should be investigated 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 of such issues since the existence of diverse agricultural structures and socioeconomic conditions across the country may imply the

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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 owed to the fact that the negative attitude of young women either towards agriculture or/and 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 economics in the reproduction of farming units in Europe (Mies 1999). Indeed, there are many pieces of literature stressing the problem of unmarried farmers, their loneliness and their increased suicide incidents (Gasson and Errington 1993, Laoire 2001). Such findings ring the bell as far as the reproduction of the farming family is concerned and the renewal of the human resources in agriculture. They also underline the importance of research related to gender and especially to the prospects of the incorporation of young women in agriculture or, at least, into farming households.

The 'young farmers' programme addresses both men and women. It therefore is an invitation to and challenge for young women since, in principle, they are provided with the chance to overcome their traditional role as farmers' assistants to become farm owners and professional farmers. In literature there is reference to the masculinisation of the farming profession which in turn contributes to the development of a detraditional women identity who seek employment in other than agriculture sectors (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).

The evaluation of the 'young farmers' programme for the second CSF (1994-1999) does not provide any gendered analysis (Tsiboukas et al. 2002). Nevertheless, such information would be helpful in the design of specific gendered rural policies aiming at strengthening women's participation in rural development processes.

On the basis of the aforementioned problematique a project is carried on in the West Macedonia region, Greece, aiming at exploring the gender dimension within the implementation of the 'young farmers' programme in the region. 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 husband's assistant in 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 as well as their initial occupation preferences, nowadays show a profile of actively involved in farming individuals who are interested in farming and work hard in agriculture. The current presentation focuses on this specific group utilizing survey and in-depth interviews data collected through the project. It aims at exploring elements of the young women's trajectories up to their entrance in the programme, of 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 thus far implementation of the 'young farmers' programme as far as its attraction for young women is concerned. Such results may be useful in the design of an improved, in terms of a gendered approach,

programme and its implementation. They contribute to a better understanding of topics such as the empowerment of women in the family farm, the public image of farming and the support needed for the reproduction of the family farm and 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 of four Prefectures (Grevena, Kastoria, Kozani and Florina). In the first place, it is characterized by high unemployment rates (18.8% as compared to 10.4% at national level – 2001 census). Its production profile is characterized by high dependency upon mining for energy production (Kozani – Ptolemaida – Amintaios – Florina axis) which, while providing employment to thousands local people, nowadays is saturated. It is also characterized by the fair industry (Siatista – Kastoria axis) which in the last years is in crisis resulting in the loss of many jobs. The economy is predominantly agricultural, especially in the rural areas, characterized by low productivity and competitiveness, the low degree of diversification on farm level and the limited links with other sectors. The contribution of agriculture in the Prefectures’ GP 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
Migration per 1000 inhabitants (%)	-6.27	-0.65	0.17	-0.01
Students per 1000 inhabitants	48	60	66	59
Population growth 1991-2001 (%)	3.2	1.5	3.3	6.9

Sources: 1. The Greek Economy in Figures ([www.economics.gr](http://www.economics.gr)).  
2. Innovation Observatory of West Macedonia ([www.innowestmac.gr](http://www.innowestmac.gr)).

In the present paper cases of women coming from the Prefectures of Grevena, Kastoria and Kozani is illustrated. The Kastoria Prefecture is important in terms of production of apples and wheat; the latter is important for the other two Prefectures too. Annual cultivations cover 94.8%, 91.3% and 87% in the Prefectures of Kozani, Grevena and Kastoria respectively. The average farm size is higher 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, on the one hand, for youngsters to establish a viable farming business in their place of origin and, on the other, for the areas themselves, through such a support to agriculture and given the industrial crisis, to strengthen economic activity. Agriculture can function as the link of various, diversifying the production base of the farm, activities including the utilisation of the natural resources and thus to become a major factor against the danger of desertification of these less favoured areas of the country.

In terms of gender, the West Macedonia region is characterized by the increased numbers of women heads of farms a fact which also holds true for farmers up to 39 years old (Table 2).

**Table 2. Farm owners**

Prefecture	Total	Women	% women
<b>Grevena (total)</b>	4888	1827	37,4
<b>Grevena (up to 39 years old)</b>	833	272	32,7
<b>Kastoria (total)</b>	4179	1309	31,3
<b>Kastoria (up to 39 years old)</b>	1073	306	28,5
<b>Kozani (total)</b>	13907	6074	43,7
<b>Kozani (up to 39 years old)</b>	2703	1155	42,7
<b>West Macedonia (total)</b>	29586	11272	38,1
<b>W.M. (up to 39 years old)</b>	6260	2249	35,9
<b>Greece (total)</b>	816534	205140	25,1
<b>Greece (up to 39 years old)</b>	128213	33545	26,2

Source: Agricultural Census 1999/2000.

With reference to Table 2 it should be mentioned that the concept of the farm ‘owner’ as used by the National Statistical Service of Greece does not correspond to the actual owning of the production factors, especially of land and capital. It refers to the person who formally (re: specialty) or not declares to be the farm owner. Nowadays, for reasons relating to the CAP (subsidies, bank transactions etc.) all farms have a legal representative. The representative may (in total or partially) or not own some of the family’s assets. This is so since the farm is a peculiar enterprise characterized by a high degree of intra-family transfers that is not found, at least to such an extent, in any other business (Molnar and Wu 1985); this mostly happens in the case of the first son who, as a successor, will inherit the production assets of the farm. The land is the most important production factor with women having the least prospects of inheriting it, even in countries where the inheritance practices allow for the splitting the parental farm (Shortall 1999, Alston 2000, Gidarakou et al. 1999). A further overlap concerns terms such as “farm owner” and “farm head” which are used as identical despite the fact that the “farm head” refers to the manager of the farm. Kinship relations are central to the ‘family farm’ (Gasson and Errington 1993), and explain such a confusion.

The abovementioned 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 the economic activities in the areas under discussion favours off-farm work in mining, an exclusively male domain, and fair. Then women undertake the role of the “farm head” (or farm owner); it actually means that since their off-farm working husbands cannot be characterised 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 contradicting with the fact that young women hold a negative attitude towards agriculture, a fact verified in both previous and the current research (Gidakou et al 2005). 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 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 utilize existing land resources (Kazakopoulos and Gidakou 2003, Gidakou et al. 2005). The project in West Macedonia revealed that the major reasons for the entrance of young women in 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 dynamic and active in agriculture women is identified in the research area. These women hold a positive attitude towards agriculture and their discourse analysis may illuminate 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 – current paper's data**

As aforementioned, the current paper 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 126 young women's sample (stratified according to the attitude of the community in which they live). With all the 126 women an interview based on a structured questionnaire was carried out<sup>2</sup>. In the arena of the mountainous and less favoured areas examined here and within a traditionally masculine occupation and social climate in general the project made clear 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 them were farmers only on paper (i.e. not involved in farming) benefited; some of them may 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, on parallel, they did not see the 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 appear to be the farm heads while actually being

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<sup>2</sup> 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 therefrom 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 positive and negative aspects of the programme in attracting young women into agriculture.

extra farm labour force in peak periods or 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 differences between the genders.

Nevertheless, among these 126 interviewees, 16 were identified, through the interview<sup>3</sup>, to correspond to the profile of real farmers. They are active in the production process, manage or co-manage on an equal basis with their husband/father/brother the farm holding, 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, are willing to live in the community. In-depth interviews with these 16 women followed the questionnaire-based interview.

#### **4. Young women farmers' profile**

Out of the 16 women, half entered the programme rather young (25-30 years old); nowadays all of the 16 women 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 with 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, are optimists and make plans for the farm; women who feel affection towards farming owed to 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 as the time passed by liked farming; women who believe that they got a chance to become the boss and get rid of dependency at the work place and women with critical attitudes and proposals for the improvement of the 'young farmers' programme.

#### **5. Women's background (before entering the 'young farmers' programme)**

##### ***5.1 Education and occupational preferences***

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

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

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<sup>3</sup> The open questions included in the survey questionnaire allowed for quite an extended discussion with the interviewees.

*I graduated 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 (Georgia<sup>4</sup>).*

*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 reasons brought forward was either the stereotype of the gender discrimination of 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 better education (Soula). Similar is Matina's story. Both maintain that such a lag had serious consequences for them.*

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

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

*As a child I hated agriculture. I could see my parents suffering to hardly make a living. I convinced them to quit farming and we moved to Kozani and Kastoria to work in the fair 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 behind agriculture... But my affection to the animals did not allow me to get convinced (Vasso).*

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

*I liked to work 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 discourse).*

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<sup>4</sup> Fictional names are used here in order not to allow for the identification of the interviewees.



All the women but one have had off-farm jobs before entering the ‘young farmers’ programme. Their jobs were mainly temporal and with no social security (fair work paid by the piece, employees in stores and fast-food, babysitting etc.). Therefore, when the programme came in the status and attractiveness of such jobs were not constraints to them from engaging in it. Some of the women are still engaged in these/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 have graduated the Lyceum (including one who has attended higher education). Being free from complying with a previously existing farm two of the women were kin to try innovative ideas. One of them, a former worker in the fair industry, developed a vineyard of 3.7 ha. without any prior experience in viticulture; taking advantage of the ‘young farmers’ incentives as well as of the local LEADER and Integrated Rural Development programmes she built a showy winery in which she also invested family capital. She has plans and is active (as president) in the showy wineries collective body. She claims that she entered agriculture as she did not have any other employment option and nowadays she is a professional in viticulture and winemaking. Through such a role she is searching for a new role for agriculture, i.e. entrepreneurial farming and multifunctional agriculture. The second one, a free lancer in the past, is involved in the organic production of saffron in part of her farm. The trend for youngsters with no prior experience in agriculture to engage in farming through the ‘young farmers’ programme has also been shown in studies concerning male young farmers in other Greek areas (Tsitos 2005, Tahtatzis 2005).

## ***5.2 The turn to agriculture***

The findings of previous research concerning the reasons young women enter the ‘young farmers’ programme is verified by current research as well. The same complex of reasons identified in other cases, among which unemployment and the prospects of utilization of the family assets are dominant, appear in the discourse of the 16 active young women farmers too. The choice was made through a collective family decision-making process and such a decision nullified 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 the entrance in the programme matched the early retirement of a parent, supports the assumption of the collective family decision and not the individual women’s one 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.*

*We discussed with my husband and decided that I had to enter the programme (Georgia)*

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

In the case of married women, all but two husbands hold an off-farm job. Thus in all such cases women's entrance in 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 jeopardizing existing rights on the land; the solutions found concern the renting of land from parents in law (8 cases) or the husband (1 case) as well as property transfers from parents (5 cases).

## **6. The functioning of the farm**

It is known that what characterizes the stronger or weaker status of a person in the family farm is his/her position vis-à-vis decision making. Women's participation in the decision making processes is very restricted all over the developed world; this is true especially in cases in which the decision has to do with critical economic issues (i.e. investments) as compared to everyday decisions. Therefore, women's role is relegated to the consultation of the 'formal' or real head who in most cases is the husband. However, the roles of the 16 women of the paper support the image of a co-manager and in some cases of the real manager of the farm holding. According to their arguments, on a number of issues such as the design of the cultivation system, the purchase of tools/machinery, the sale of produces, 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, commend as far as their self-image on their position is concerned:

*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 partners and equal in decision making... It does not matter whose name appears (to be the legal owner)... I feel this is my job and we cooperate (Vasso).*

*I feel equal with my husband in everything that has to do with the management ... we discuss and take our decisions... I like more 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 mechanization, the use of hired labour; notwithstanding, the most important element is their active involvement in farming tasks in which they often devote more time than their husbands/fathers. In almost all cases hired labour is used in the farm thus relieving the family of some tasks. Within the couple, husbands despite having an off-farm job are actively involved in farming tasks (with the exception of 1 case); nevertheless, in half of the cases women claim that they spend more hours in farming as 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 alone tasks such as ploughing, sowing and reaping which are carried out by rented machinery or a family male. Milking is also a male job as it requires muscular strength due to the lack of milking machines. Grazing is a task carried out by either an older family male (father or

father in law) or a hired shepherd. The collection of fruits and tobacco leaves as well as the feeding and cleaning of animals are tasks which women carry out by themselves or in cooperation with other family members. However, there is one case in which the woman drives the tractor thus providing a new, unusual in Greece, image of a woman farmer. Such cases are continuously emerging in Europe by women who have decided to become professionals in agriculture (Brandth 2002).

The growth of the women’s farm holdings is also interesting (Table 3).

**Table 3: Economic size of the farm holding**

ESU <sup>5</sup>	Upon establishment	Nowadays
Up to 5	10	5
5,01 – 10	4	6
Over 10	2	5
<b>Total</b>	16	16

Source: Project data

Most of the new farm holdings (entrance into the ‘young farmers’ programme and thus establishment of new farm holdings) had a size of 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 on, plans about and position in the farm holding revolves around the conception of the farm as an enterprise; they show a dynamic and active profile, they are looking for opportunities to extent into new, innovative activities, they seek information on policies and programmes. All of the 16 women, but one who seems uncertain, claim that they will continue farming after the 10-year period required by the programme, believe that they work equally productive or better than their husbands. They recognize that they fall behind in muscular strength but they stress their ability to produce better results in tasks which demand special attention and dexterity. All of them maintain that their husbands respect them as women-farmers (see: Appendix).

## 7. Participation in collective bodies

In literature, the power of the genders within the family farm reflects to their presence in collective sectoral as well as in governance bodies in the rural space. This is so since the ownership of assets and wealth imply 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; women’s empowerment in such fields is nowadays an all important factor within the overall aim of attaining a balanced regional development.

<sup>5</sup> European Size Unit.

The 11 out of the 16 women are members of an agricultural cooperative. Among them, 5 participate very often in the general assemblies of the coops, they take the floor and express their views.

*Yes, I participate ... most of the times ... and I oppose, because they marginalize women; they (especially the older men) say “wait, you do not know, listen first to the others”. Older men try to impose their own view (Vasso).*

*I started a women’s coop ... they were reluctant ... We also started an apicultural coop upon my initiative ... but they are not interested; I am the president, the vice-president, the secretary, the financier. I do everything on my own; it does not worth it (Evanthia).*

One of the women is the president of the coop “Oenoefrosini” (wine pleasure) and, as mentioned, another one the president of an apicultural coop.

*I am the president of the “showy wineries network – Oenoefrosini”. There are five men and two women in the network. We are a new network; I do not have many responsibilities. The network will support the wine makers of the area. We will construct a website, we will go on with promotion in order to support rural tourism (Georgia).*

The cooperative movement is a misunderstood institution in Greece due to mismanagement practices which have damaged the image of coops and the trust and expectations of farmers. Therefore the abstention from either the coops altogether or from their assemblies reflect the contestation of their role, their inaction, the lack of information provided by the boards to the members etc. Only in a few cases it was argued that gender inequality plays a role.

*I do not go. There is no trust (Roula).  
Nobody inform us about the assembly! I do not even vote (Dionysia).  
The coop is inactive (Anastasia)*

Beyond the issue of participation, such views should sensitise and puzzle about the role of coops and the restoration of a trust towards them

## **8. The ‘young farmers’ programme: women’s views**

The evaluation of a programme on the part of the ones who participate in it is of extreme importance since such information can be utilized for its improvement. 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 generalizing 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. staying at the area and farming for a 10-year period) does not seem to bother but very few among them. Quite some 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 to it (many documents to be gathered in a short time in order to submit their candidature). Quite a few claim that the financial assistance provided is rather low. Many argue that a more intensive information campaign should have been undertaken on 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 do not bother 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 moments 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).*

On the access to information and the behaviours 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 an incidence 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 by 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 in agriculture and could not have a clear picture.

*If you take care of the bee-hives then they will take care of you – you will get a good income (Evanthia).*

*I work 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 allow securing a satisfactory standard of life for the family. The main reason behind their dissatisfaction is the low prices of the produces. Especially in cases in which the farmer does not own the farm making a living for the family is rather impossible.

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

*I cannot support the family with farming only (Roula).*

*You can make a living only if you have a big farm (Matina).*

Despite such difficulties all of them (with the exception of a divorced woman who may abandon agriculture when married again) believe that they took the right decision. Each has her own justification – securing employment, being her own boss on her own business, establishing a good business to be later inherited by the children. Therefore, most of them make plans for investments some of which are interesting as they correspond to policy targets such as the multifunctionality of agriculture and quality produces. Vasso, for example, wants to turn to organic animal production and agrotourism in conjunction with horse breeding; Elli wants to get involved with honey marketing; Georgia to extend the winery with a distillery; Evanthia 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 as far as the quality of products and the treatment of animals are concerned. The interpretation of the term by the interviewer and the discussion on it revealed that

some women while ignoring the term altogether practiced some of its constitutive parts; however, this applies to a minority. This, points to the general problem of information about 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.

## **9. Conclusion – are there enough swallows to make a summer?**

In the French film "One swallow made a summer" the 30-year old Sadrine, living in Paris, is a successful professional who being fed up by the routine decides to leave the French capital, move to the countryside and become a farmer. She attended courses in a higher agricultural school and bought the farm of an aged animal breeder in southeast France. She had to overcome the stereotypes and prove both to the local society and herself that 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 is 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, that they have the professional qualifications, which Sadrine acquired, along with strong will, perseverance and are fond of 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 easy to overturn in conservative social environments such as the rural ones. Sadrine almost quitted; but she finally made it.

In the area of West Macedonia it is difficult to find cases alike Sadrine. Most of the women in the sample – out of which the 16 women discussed here – despite the fact that officially are the farm heads they do not constitute a social group differentiated vis-à-vis the traditional farmer's assistance in the family farm. Moreover, some of them are totally alienated from agriculture. 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, as a 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 but a 150-hour course required by the programme (which may have taken place quite some time after they joined the programme). They had minimal own lands mainly through land transfer from parents; in most cases land was rented to them by parents/parents in law.

Within the agrarian ideology the farming occupation relates to men; this reflects not only on the succession practices and the division of labour within the family farm but on the practices of the extension services and the practices of the mass media which present and consolidate farming as a male world. For example, occupational training in agriculture since the establishment of Extension Services in Greece was thematically organized

around gender discrimination; courses for women revolved around home economics while for men around farming. In advertisements women never appear to promote farming inputs or produce.

In Greece, the ‘young farmers’ programme in order to support the farming family unit to utilize the family resources (i.e. land) through the available EU funding did not take serious notice of gender issues. 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 points to young women in the evaluation of candidatures (3<sup>rd</sup> SCF). The turn of rural policies since the mid-80s 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 in the framework of multifunctionality 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 present research illustrated that the so-called ‘feminization’ of farming holdings as depicted in the numbers of women who appear as farm heads in national statistics, a phenomenon common in small farms and in South (π.χ. 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.

It was also shown that the ‘young farmers’ programme helped a few, among the numbers of young women who joined it, to utilize 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 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 along with their husband the holding, believe that they have taken the right decision in becoming farmers and intent to continue farming. Some invested significant private capital in addition to the programme’s investments and, in general, have grown their farms. Some seem aware of the current policy reforms and the demands for high quality production and multifunctionality, and plan for organic farming and the diversification of their activities. Thus they can make significant contributions to local and regional development. It has to be noticed that during the interviews their discourse revealed that these women are knowledgeable of their own farms’ situation as well as of their specific field of activity/production as well as that they are very concerned about their businesses’ future. Most of them talked about their farm using the term “enterprise” thus also showing their pride about their endeavours. They did not consider that the ‘young farmers’ programme had major negative aspects but bureaucratic bottlenecks; secondary negative aspects concern some suspicion on the evaluation procedures and the restrictions imposed on off-farm jobs



while they might utilize their free time owed to the temporal nature of agriculture to further support the family income. Their criticism towards the cooperative movement (malfunctioning, inactive, not trustworthy and the like) pose the general, known in Greece, problem of disdain for the cooperatives. Their ignorance of the 'Good Farming Practices' reflects a general problem in 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 abolished (given both the practical and symbolic restrictions women face in getting involved in agriculture as professional farmers). It should rather make policy designers and decision makers revise their conceptualization of rural women's roles and thus the occupational opportunities presented to them. Do women's roles have to do with para-agricultural and off-farm occupations or with farming as well? The latter does not seem to bother policy. This is probably owed to the fact that the agrarian ideology through its dialectical relationship with policy, sustain an image of women as assistants of the male farmer into which women are also trapped by abolishing agriculture and (male) farmers altogether. However, the current research findings indicate that through the 'young farmers' programme worthwhile cases which deserving intention and further support emerge.

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## Sites

The Greek Economy in Figures ([www.economics.gr](http://www.economics.gr))

The Innovation Observatory of West Macedonia ([www.innowestmac.gr](http://www.innowestmac.gr))

## APPENDIX

*Eugenia is the one in the family who operates the farm. She prefers to be her own boss as well as to be in the field rather than confined in a closed space – office. She takes the decisions and hires the necessary machinery, believes that she gets a good income despite the fact that she started farming by renting land from her father in law and bought the tobacco quota from a relative.*

*Elli is passionate with apiculture, has plans for a honey processing unit and actively seeks information about the trends in honey marketing.*

*Anastasia who in the first place hated agriculture is nowadays involved in organic viticulture and bottles her wine production. She claims she loves every single sprig of her vines as she nurtures them. She is interested in organic farming and wine marketing; she is an active information seeker. Her discourse is compatible with modern agriculture; she talks about diversification, quality, updated information.*

*Matina, with only primary schooling, became an animal breeder due to her affection to animals. “I love animals” she says “I see people punishing them and I tell them: do not punish the animals, talk to them”. She is a dynamic woman, active, industrial, with her own strongly held views. She intends to make improvements in her farm despite the fact that she works alone since her husband is seriously ill. She feels that she is belittled because she is an animal breeder.*

*Christina failed in the university entrance exams and became a farmer out of necessity. Now she claims she is the boss, an autonomous person who carries out all farming tasks but tilling.*

*Anna was initiated to agriculture by her father as the son of the family. She performs all farming tasks hiring labour when necessary; her parents in law also give a hand. She drives the tractor and operates all machines. She likes the fact that she is independent. She travelled to Albania to bring workers.*

*Evanthia, an industrial exuberant person, claims to be – and appear as – the farm head. She works with 150 bee hives, makes plans for her business, knows the problems of apiculture. She initiated the establishment of an apicultural coop; she is the president of the coop but she complains about the indifference of the members.*