IS THERE ROOM FOR WOMEN FARMERS IN THE CAP?

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Lawmakers in the European Parliament believe that women have a key role to play in helping to revive rural areas. However, discrimination against women in the farming sector is still widespread.

How could women be encouraged to join the sector? And what’s the role of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?
Croatian MEP: Women farmers should be 'key element' of the new CAP
Poor access to credit prevents women from entering European farming
Hogan urges EU member states to include rural women in their CAP strategies
Women rural entrepreneurs deserve greater attention to keep European rural area vibrant
Women are innovative entrepreneurs in farming, but barriers persist
Empowering women in rural areas will contribute to boost entrepreneurship, self-employment and innovation in European agriculture, argues Marijana Petir, a Croatian MEP from the centre-right European People's Party (EPP).

“Innovations are there to make our daily life easier and to lower costs. Current developments in agriculture, for example precision farming and e-farming, could help women farmers and also contribute to this goal,” the politician from Croatia’s Peasant Party told EURACTIV.com.

The gender pay gap cuts across all economic sectors but the problem gets even worse in agriculture because the average income there is significantly lower, the MEP pointed out.

Around 30% of farms in Europe are managed by women, according to Eurostat. The differences among EU countries are remarkable, ranging from just over 5% in the Netherlands to around 47% in Lithuania.

Several reports have pointed to the multi-functional role of rural women. In addition to the management of their farm, a rural woman also has to be a mother, a homemaker, a worker and an educator.

And their role is often invisible, Continued on Page 5
especially for assisting spouses, who “are most often economically dependent” on their husband, Petir said. “They do not get any remuneration for the work they do on their family farm and do not have any social entitlements,” she pointed out.

At the same time, rural women are faced with a number of everyday challenges, ranging from limited access to finance, poor infrastructure and gender inequality in the field.

Copa, the EU farmers’ union, says women’s farms are on average 40% smaller than men’s while they get paid 16% less and receive less training. The gender pension gap reaches 51%.

“Women are key players, working towards the economic and social sustainability of the farm and the farming family. It is vital to support and showcase the positive role of women in farming,” Copa said.

Similarly, a global study by Corteva Agriscience, published in October, found that discrimination against women in the farming sector is still widespread. In India for instance, 78% of women believe there is discrimination in the sector. 52% of women in the US hold the same view.

Almost 50% of female respondents said women and men are equally successful in farming while 36% believe they have less access to finance than men.

CAP INSUFFICIENT

Petir, the Croatian MEP, believes women’s issues are not sufficiently addressed in the European Commission’s proposals for the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The EU executive even proposed dropping the thematic subprograms for women in rural areas as part of the reform, she said.

“I consider that those thematic sub-programmes need to be kept in
Poor access to credit prevents women from entering European farming

By Sarantis Michalopoulos | EURACTIV.com

Access to credit and financing is one of the most important obstacles women farmers are facing in order to take the risky leap to join Europe’s agricultural sector.

Several reports have highlighted the multidimensional role women can play in giving the EU’s farming sector a boost. However, a number of challenges, including the lack of access to financing, are putting obstacles on their way, the Women’s Committee of Copa, the EU farmers union, told EURACTIV.com.

Copa cited as an example Christina Bauer, one of the shortlisted applicants of last year’s Innovation Award for Women Farmers of Copa, who recently said it took her two years to get access to credit to implement her project, which is now thriving in Austria.

“Having access to credit and financing, women can have more easy access to land, to new machinery to invest in modernisation or new methods of production and new projects (like agritourism, social services, direct selling (in the farm and through platforms in the internet),” Copa said.

For Marijana Petir, a centre-right MEP from the European People’s Party (EPP) on the Women’s Rights

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committee (FEMM), access to finance has always been among the first few problems that farmers raise in any debate.

“This problem also affects women in rural areas even more since their share as family-holding owners is significantly lower in some parts of the EU. Therefore, in my FEMM opinion, I have proposed flexibility for member states to prioritise women if such intervention could contribute to EU specific CAP objectives,” she added.

Copa said access to credit could be improved by setting up financial instruments in the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) targeting women from rural areas and women farmers.

“Synergies can be created at EU level between the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Investment Fund (EIF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD),” it said.

“At the national level, member states would support the implementation of these financial instruments, while they can also help encourage banks to offer preferential services to rural women,” Copa added.

A PRACTICAL ISSUE

In practice, the problem arises as many women in rural areas do not have their own income and therefore they have not been able to get assets to guarantee their own credit.

Inmaculada Idañez, a Spanish farmer from the European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC), which represents smallholders, said women working on family farms are rarely registered in the social security system.

“In terms of legislation and financial guarantors, this means they don't work and lack resources to guarantee the loans,” she told EURACTIV.

Idañez added that the assets they might have acquired are typically matrimonial assets and therefore, in order to request the credit, they would have to do it using the family resources as a guarantee.

“This means their partner would have to intervene, being the husband the ultimate beneficiary of the loan.”

Another problem, according to Idañez, is that there are no financial instruments for small investments.

“We are forced to rely on big investors, as models allowing small loans for companies are not even considered. We are forced to request personal loans with much higher interest rates,” she said.

AN ‘INEXHAUSTIBLE’ SOURCE OF IDEAS

Contacted by EURACTIV, socialist MEP Paolo De Castro said EU women farmers represented a “precious resource” in the field of research and innovation.

“This is why in the new CAP we are working to ensure that there is a real change of pace and agriculture can become an increasingly attractive choice for EU women. We can no longer afford to do without their intelligence, sensitivity and versatility,” he said.
Hogan urges EU member states to include rural women in their CAP strategies

By Sarantis Michalopoulos | EURACTIV.com

EU Commissioner for agriculture Phil Hogan has encouraged member states to take advantage of the new Common Agricultural Policy’s (CAP) flexibility and tackle issues related to rural women.

Hogan also hinted that there are already some policy tools in place, but the member states do not use them. “In the Commission’s proposal for the CAP after 2020, member states will have increased flexibility to address the specific needs of rural women in their national CAP Strategic Plans, and I would strongly encourage them to do so,” Hogan told EURACTIV.com in an interview.

The position of women farmers in the future EU farming has taken centre stage lately. Stakeholders are pushing for an increased role for women farmers, saying that they can have a positive impact on innovation and other relevant sectors such as agro-tourism.

However, several challenges lie ahead, ranging from lack of access to credit and gender equality to poor rural infrastructure.

The difficulties female entrepreneurs face in terms of access to finance are recognised by DG GROW and Justice.

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Although admitting that more should be done under the CAP, Hogan said the reality was that the CAP alone could not deal with all these challenges.

“That is why my services play an active role in several Inter Service Groups within the Commission to ensure that other EU Funds sufficiently target rural women’s specific challenges. The idea is to ‘rural proof’ gender equality interventions across the board,” Hogan said.

Hogan said women could play an “indispensable” role in rural areas and the agricultural sector. “It is true that there are particular challenges that women sometimes face, and the CAP has options for providing solutions,” he added.

**POINTING THE FINGER AT MEMBER STATES**

The EU Commissioner hinted that member states already have some options at their disposal which have not been utilised.

He said under Priority 6 of the current Rural Development Policy, the CAP supports social inclusion and economic development in rural areas.

“Under this priority, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) supports inter alia, the development of basic services in rural areas as well as for local initiatives; it finances the start-up of non-agricultural and agricultural activities and promotes the cooperation between local actors.”

“For the 2014-2020 period, member states have full freedom to include programmes targeting women in rural areas under rural development funding. However, this option has not been taken up by member states,” Hogan noted.

He added that the CAP also finances the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), which has supported activities related to challenges facing women in the agricultural sector and in rural areas.

“For example, in 2017, the ENRD gave voice to rural women in its spring edition and in its Workshop on Social Hubs in Rural Europe, and in 2018 published a project brochure on digital and social innovation in rural services that I believe can be of high relevance for rural women.”
Women rural entrepreneurs deserve greater attention to keep European rural area vibrant

By Lotta Folkesson | Copa Cogeca

The International Women’s Day is the right opportunity to show the active contribution of all women, from farmland to cities. Now more than ever, rural women and especially women farmers have a key role to play in the development and preservation of vibrant rural areas.

This is why I believe, together with the Women’s Committee of Copa, that it is essential to better highlight rural women’s contribution and support them with the adequate measures at local, national and EU level.

Lotta Folkesson is Chairwoman of Copa’s Women Committee, and Board Director at LRF (Federation of Swedish Farmers). [Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund]

In the EU, 96% of farms are family run and yet women represent roughly

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30% of the total EU farm managers. We know at local level that women face specific obstacles to starting up farming and forest activities, we all have examples of projects that could not come to fruition because of a lack of supports. This is why, we need more assessments and pan European studies on the needs of women living in rural areas to design more targeted policies. Concrete strategies integrated in the national plans linked to agriculture and EU regions are essential to empower rural women who will help to enhance EU’s contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.

CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR RURAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Challenges to starting up farming and forestry activities are quiet common for rural women since the access to credit and financing is difficult. This impacts women's ability to acquire labour-saving and innovative production inputs, for instance. This is why we are calling for better access to credit and financing without which women farmers cannot achieve their full potential in terms of productivity gains. As we are currently discussing the future of the CAP, we hope that future national CAP Strategic plans financed by EAGF and EAFRD will take into account all aspects of women's activities in agriculture through specific measures on gender equality. In addition, we call for increased synergies between the various policies impacting this objective, including research, social policies and Erasmus+.

The EU programmes of Erasmus+, the European Social Fund, the European Social Fund+ must target education, advisory services and lifelong training adapted to women's needs. These measures will most definitely contribute to closing the gap in female entrepreneurship and will result in creating innovative agricultural activities in rural areas due to the dual challenge of population growth and the consequences of climate change.

Throughout Europe, public services are moving away from rural areas. For us it is a critical issue as it will impact the structure of rural families and restraint men and women farmers entrepreneurial capacity. Therefore we call for more and better services especially in regards to childcare and elderly care which could be supported through regional development policies and by the European Social Fund.

Women are contributing to the development of social farming but also to further evolution of agricultural models. Rural women are often in the forefront of innovation, developing the concept of multi-functionality and diversification in rural areas by proposing new activities, production lines and services. Therefore, it is essential to give them a fair access to infrastructures like broadband internet which is essential to enhance living standards in rural areas, to avoid isolation, to foster direct selling of rural products and to enable full use of digitalisation in agriculture.

We strongly believe that women in rural areas and women farmers are the backbone of rural communities. Women bring diversity, stability, creativity to rural families and businesses. We make a difference and we want the European Institutions and Member States to support women living in rural areas towards a more sustainable Europe!
Women are innovative entrepreneurs in farming, but barriers persist

By Gerardo Fortuna | EURACTIV.com

Supporting women farmers requires several types of support, and not only economic, as obstacles to gender equality persist in the sector, farmers said at an event held at the European Parliament on Thursday (7 March).

Women’s Committee of Copa, the EU farmers organisation, set up the conference “Strong rural women 4 strong rural Europe” to highlight women’s contribution to agriculture, ahead of International Women’s Day.

Gender equality must be addressed in rural areas as a long-term project, said socialist MEP Maria Gabriela Zoana who hosted the event together with her centre-right colleague Marijana Petir.

“We should pay more attention to education, facilitating woman to access agricultural training and life-long learning,” the former said.

More has to be done to increase the number of female entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector, ensuring that women are not facing social exclusion in rural areas, Petir said.

In a video message Agriculture Commissioner Phil Hogan gave at the beginning of the conference, he described the entrepreneurial skills of women as ‘absolutely vital’ and also

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In an interview with EURACTIV earlier this week, the EU Agriculture boss also hinted that policy tools are already in place when it comes to tackling issues related to women in rural areas, but he that member states are not using them.

Copa-Cogeca secretary-general Pekka Pesonen described cooperatives as a powerful tool to empower women farmers in the rural economy, agriculture and forestry, ensuring women’s better involvement in all business decisions within the agri-forest value chain.

BARRIERS PERSIST

During the event, Clara Serrano from Corteva, the agriculture division of DowDuPont, presented the outcomes of a survey on 800 women in agriculture in 5 EU countries.

One in three of those surveyed reported earning less than men while two in three reported widespread gender discrimination.

Although they mentioned the persistence of certain barriers to equality that are higher than the global average, 90% of respondents said they were proud to work in agriculture.

38% of those questioned said that gender discrimination is equal to or worse than it was 10 years ago and 75% of them believe it will take 10 to 30 years to achieve full equality.

Among the issues to address in order to remove those barriers and achieve gender equality, Serrano mentioned technology and improved access to financing.

BEST PRACTICES

Some women farmers took the floor sharing with the audience their personal success stories, but also the hurdles they faced in their working experience.

Polish agricultural entrepreneur Magdalene Wiegel, who received 2018 Innovation Award for Women Farmers, spoke about the central role in family farms for women.

Within the EU, 96% of farms are family run, but only 30% of European farm managers are women.

Half of the population of EU rural areas is composed of women and she stressed that there will not be any future for a rural Europe without strong female farmers.

“And as women, we are strong, but also intuitive,” she said, “We just need a little bit of support sometimes,” she said, mentioning not only funds but also proper working tools.

Italian Laura Bargione spent many years abroad before decided to come back to her region Sicily, where she took over a family farm and local food manufacturing Marisco that today she runs together with her parents.

She is involved in different projects of social farming, taking care of vulnerable and disadvantaged people and helping them to integrate into society.

She presented one of this project, named ‘Il coraggio di amare’ (the courage to love), with which to give an opportunity of seasonal work to migrants from Africa.

“Some of these migrants have chosen to go to school in Italy after joining our project and we have been experiencing a better integration with locals,” she said.

But he reported that developing this kind of project in Italy is still tough, as there is no law on social agriculture.
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