

WOMEN ON FINNISH DAIRY FARMS:  
HARD WORK IN THE MIDST OF TRADITIONS AND CHANGES

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## WOMEN ON FINNISH DAIRY FARMS: HARD WORK IN THE MIDST OF TRADITIONS AND CHANGES

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### ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the work, working conditions and role of women on dairy farms in the context of agricultural change and traditions. The qualitative, case study sample is comprised of work observations and interviews of women on ten dairy farms. The women typically worked on the farm as a consequence of marriage or courtship with a farmer, and most selected 'farm entrepreneur' as their professional title. Women were involved in a wide range of different work tasks, mainly in cattle barns and at home. It was observed that whereas men operated machinery in cattle barns, women performed physical, manual work tasks. One of women's tasks was to monitor and take care of the health and living conditions of farm animals. Nearly all the women considered work with animals and being 'close to nature' rewarding, but half assessed the workload as too heavy. General strategies used to avoid exhaustion were to employ salaried workers, utilise networks and/or use contractors. Nearly all respondents had experienced some kind of problems related to organising absence from farm work during sickness or holidays. To improve women's work situation and facilitate their valuable contribution to agriculture, this article concludes by offering a number of suggestions to inform future research and practices.

Key words: agriculture, women, dairy farm, working conditions, Finland

### INTRODUCTION

During recent decades, agriculture has undergone restructuring in many parts of the world. The process of globalisation, changes in the international markets for agricultural products and emerging neoliberal policies have all changed the operational environment of agriculture (Bock, 2006; Alston, 2004). For example, since Finland joined the European Union (EU) in 1995, one in three farms have ceased agricultural production and the average size of the remaining farms has rapidly increased (Väre, 2010). However, the production volume has remained approximately the same

because of more efficient production methods, enlarged farms and the use of new technology (Heikkilä & Nurmikko, 2005).

Due to the northern climate and still rather small average farm size, Finland has a challenging starting point for competition in agricultural commodity markets, which are predicted to undergo further change worldwide towards greater market orientation (Niemi, 2010a). The changes have also had social consequences, as the farming population has become marginal, the social status of farmers has declined and simultaneously they are struggling with the integration of modern and traditional norms and ways of life (Elger, Wonneberger, Lasch, Fuhr & Heinzl, 1995). Traditions demonstrate certain norms; they are elements of socialisation processes and products of common agreement (Hobsbawm, 1983; Otto & Pedersen, 2005). During periods of social change the invention of tradition “occurs with particular frequency” (Otto & Pedersen, 2005, p. 14). Agriculture is still based on family farming with most (90%) farms being privately owned (Kyyrä, Mattila & Väre, 2011). In terms of working hours, dairy farming is the most labour-intensive production sector in agriculture, and farm family members perform nearly all (89%) of the working hours (Tike, 2011).

In this article we will focus on the work, working conditions and role of women on dairy farms in the context of agricultural change and traditions. First, we review earlier research literature on the work and role of women on farms and then we introduce our qualitative study. This article is based on a research project on women’s occupational safety and well-being at work on dairy farms conducted during the period 2007–2009 by MTT Agrifood Research Finland (MTT = Maa- ja elintarviketalouden tutkimuskeskus). Gender-sensitive research is needed within the agricultural sector because women have an important, but too often unrecognised, role on farms. Women’s accounts of the reality of life on farms are not the ones that are usually presented. A challenge for research is to make women’s work on farms more visible and to present the contribution of women to agricultural production. In addition, the distribution of work tasks, and therefore the exposure to health risks, often differs between farm women and men. Although the number of women working on farms has decreased, those women who remain are responsible for a greater share of food production than before because of enlarged farm size (Väre, 2010).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In developing countries, women represent nearly half (43%) of the agricultural work force (FAO, 2011). In Europe, farm work has enormously decreased during recent decades (Morris & Little, 2005). During the past ten years in Finland, the number of people working in the agricultural sector has decreased by 30%, whereas performed working hours have decreased only by 13% (Kyyrä et al., 2011). Within the EU, women in rural areas are ageing, but their contribution to the total working hours on farms is almost one third (31%) (European Parliament, 2003). In 2007, women accounted for one-third (34%) of all insured farm entrepreneurs in Finland (Farmer's Social Insurance Institution Mela, 2010). In Australia, women contribute nearly half (48%) of the farm income when household work, voluntary work and work outside the farm are also included (Teather, 1997). According to results of Statistics of Finland for the years 1999-2000, the annual working time per year of female farmers, 1,728 hours, was the second greatest among all the socio-economical sectors after other female entrepreneurs (Pääkkönen & Hanifi, 2011). If time spent on household work is also included in working time calculations, female farmers worked even more hours per year than male farmers.

Work and family life, the farm and home, fellow worker and husband, as well as professional life and leisure time, are all interwoven on farms (Elger et al., 1995). According to Sireni (2002), farm women consider it to be an element of freedom that they can live a family-centred life and take care of the children themselves when they live on a farm. On the other hand, the work tasks on the farm and at home, together with voluntary responsibilities and possible salaried work off the farm, may create a situation that is difficult to balance (McCoy, Carruth & Reed, 2002; Teather, 1997), and the total workload of women may be considerable (Dahlberg, Karlqvist, Bildt & Nykvist, 2004; Kubick & Moore, 2005). The situation is described as comprising many and partly overlapping responsibilities (Carruth & Logan, 2002; Heather, Skillen, Young & Vladicka, 2005). Perhaps because of this special working environment, role conflicts are assessed as a stress factor among farm women (Keating, 1987) and the many responsibilities as a risk factor for depressive symptoms (Carruth & Logan, 2002). On average, women have a lower capacity to perform physical farm work than men (Engberg, 1993; McCoy et al., 2002; Taskinen et al., 1999). The physical work load has been assessed as a health risk for women (Ahonen, Venäläinen, Könönen & Klen, 1990; Stål & Englund, 2005), and farm equipment is considered to be designed more for male users (Reed, Westneat, Browning & Starke, 1999; Stål & Englund, 2005).

Few studies have reported on women's work tasks on Finnish farms; we have no detailed information on the work role of women on farms today. According to a survey (N=143) by Karppinen (2005) in southwestern Finland, women took part in various tasks on the farm, including field work, book-keeping, payment transactions, animal husbandry and forest work. Several studies have reported that women handle various tasks using computers on farms, including accounting, administrative work and the use of IT in modern cattle barns (Karttunen, 2003; Sireni, 2000). Historically, women carried out the majority of farm work in Finland until the 1970s (Högbacka & Siiskonen, 1996; Niskanen, 2001).

### *Women's role on farms*

Based on a literature review, Brandth (2002) presented three discourses related to gender identity within family farming in Europe. First, 'the discourse of the family farm' (Brandth, 2002) describes women's role on farms as dependent on their husbands when they compromise their own rights and needs (Whatmore, 1994). Gasson and Errington (1993) assessed the position of women on family farms as consistent with family enterprises in general: women usually work without any regular salary and as partners they are eligible to part of the earnings, but this opportunity is often unutilised. Women's role on farms has been expressed with the words "marginal" (O'Hara, 1994, p. 51), "farm homemaker" (Reed et al., 1999, p. 320), "multiple and varied" (McCoy et al., 2002, p. 46), and "invisible or farm housewife" (Morell & Bock, 2008, pp. 5-6). A woman may work on a farm in different positions: as the main farmer, as the main farmer's spouse, a family member or an employed worker. Over half (57%) of all women working on Finnish farms (N=48,889) are officially farmers' spouses (Table 1, Tike, 2011). According to the administrative categorisation in Finland, there exists only one 'main farmer' per farm, who is described as the person who has the main responsibility for farm-related affairs (Tike, 2011). A recent survey (Palmgren, Kaleva, Jalonen & Tuomi, 2010) of female entrepreneurs in Finland revealed that female farm entrepreneurs (N=77) had experienced unequal treatment relating to gender. Studies on farm family violence underline how the dynamics of inheritance, farm property, economic security and traditional gender roles make women neglect their own health and well-being (Lindqvist, 2009; Wendt & Hornosty, 2010).

Table 1. Workers on Finnish farms in 2007. (Source: Tike, 2011).

Year 2007	Total, N	Women		Men	
		Number, N	Proportion, %	Number, N	Proportion, %
Farmers	73354	9436	13	63918	87
Farmers' spouses	32092	27991	87	4101	13
Other family members	32504	8729	27	23775	73
Salaried workers	6264	2733	44	3531	56
Total	144214	48889	34	95325	66

Following the first discourse, Brandth (2002) introduced two other discourses. The second discourse is 'masculinisation', in which farming has become a male-dominated work sector concurrently with increasing mechanisation. In 2007, men represented over half (66%) of all persons working on Finnish farms and nearly all principal farmers (87%) were male (Table 1, Tike, 2011). Internationally, sons are often raised as future farmers and men usually buy or/and inherit farms (Alston, 2004; Sireni, 2002; Whatmore, 1994).

The third discourse, 'detraditionalisation and diversity' (Brandth, 2002), is a new phenomenon whereby women simply do not approve of the traditional roles on farms. They are 'active agents constructing and shaping their roles' (Shortall, 2006, p. 21). Based on interviews with women (N=100) on small-scale family farms in Finland, Sireni (2002) described women's position as being strong according to their own perceptions; they took part in decision making on the farm, they received at least half of the farm income and the farm men defined their wives' profession as that of a farmer. According to the survey by Högbacka and Siiskonen (1996, N = 1,282), rural women had a higher educational level than rural men.

Two main implications may be drawn on the basis of the ongoing structural change. The work environment on enlarged farms utilising new technology may improve the working conditions, or alternatively, the amount of work tasks may increase, causing difficulties in coping and overall management of the situation. In addition, farms are special working environments representing one type of small enterprises. The previous review by Brandth (2002) revealed different, partly contradictory positions of women on farms. In this study our aim is to clarify the present situation

on dairy farms related to distribution of work tasks, work conditions and the position of women farmers.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The need for more detailed knowledge about tasks performed by women and their work conditions on farms has been suggested as future research by Reed et al. (1999). A qualitative research method was selected in order to provide holistic research material including context, social relations and intricacy of work conditions (Berry, 2011; Willig, 2008). Our research questions were: a) What kind of work tasks did women farmers do and what were the conditions of their work on dairy farms? b) What titles did the women select to describe their professional roles? c) What suggestions can be made to improve women's work situation on Finnish dairy farms?

Personal face-to-face discussions within the women's own living and working environment allowed the respondents to provide more aspects about the complexity of the work environment than, for example, if using a postal survey. Work observation, notes, photographs, discussions and personal interviews provided different interpretative sources in order to reach a better understanding about the target (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Fontana & Frey, 2003). However, a limitation was the small sample size, and therefore the results may not be considered as representative of all Finnish dairy farms. On the other hand, the sample was thoroughly selected using the criteria presented in the following sampling frame.

We included three types of dairy farms having different technologies and working environments: tie stall barns (N = 4), loose housing barns (N = 4) and automatic milking system barns (N = 2). The farms were located in three separate regions of Finland. Farm women represented different ages and worked full-time on the farm. The visit to each study farm in the summer of 2007 was intended to be as typical a day as possible and during the growing season. The milk production advisory person of a dairy co-operative assisted in identifying seven suitable farms, while three farms were identified by a local worker of the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners. A confidentiality agreement was signed by each respondent and the researcher. The guidelines for farm visits (The Association for Animal Disease Prevention ETT ra, 2011) were followed during farm visits.

The visit started by observing work in the barn during the morning work period, then a semi-structured interview was carried out. The interview included discussion of the demographic

background of the respondent and farm, the distribution of work between family members/workers, the health of the respondent, injuries sustained during farm work and the use of personal protective equipment, work hazards, mental well-being, work satisfaction and changes at work during the previous two years. The farm visits lasted on average 5.5 hours, with a range from 3.75 - 8.25 hours, and were carried out by the first author of this article. The research data included taped interviews, in total 242 photographs, notes and video recordings.

All interviews were transcribed word by word. In this text we use pseudonyms for the respondents. Descriptions of each woman's situation were written based on the transcripts (Eisenhardt, 1989), and these texts were posted to each respondent in order to provide the possibility to give feedback and correct mistakes. We also collected information in tables in order to formulate the holistic picture and to identify differences and similarities in the sample (Eisenhardt, 1989). We compare and discuss our findings in relation to earlier research results (Laine, Bamberg & Jokinen, 2007), utilising triangulation of research material. Information from the farm visits has also been reported in an earlier article (Kallioniemi, Raussi, Rautiainen & Kymäläinen, 2011).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Women and farms in the sample*

In nearly all cases (N=8), the women worked on a farm as a consequence of marriage to, or courtship with, a farmer. In addition, two women owned and continued to run their parents' farm. Most of the women (N=6) had received an agricultural education at college or at farming school. The respondents' experience of farm work varied from 7 (Satu) to 30 years (Virpi). The largest farm (Noora) had 200 hectares field and the smallest field area was 45 hectares (Virpi). The largest number of cows was 75 (Virpi) and smallest was 17 (Tuula). The farms in the sample were larger than the average for Finland. In 2009, an average Finnish farm had 35 hectares of fields whereas the average size of the farms in our sample was 106 hectares of fields. An average Finnish farm had 49 hectares of forest (Väre, 2010) and 25 cows per dairy farm (Niemi, 2010b), whereas our sample averages were 51 hectares of forest and 45 cows. A possible reason for the difference is that full-time farm women were interviewed, and larger farms provide a better earning potential for both spouses.

### *Thematic analysis*

Three key themes emerged from the data. The first theme examined was the distribution of work tasks. The second was working conditions including the following aspects: length of working day



and location of work tasks, ergonomics and risks of work, absence possibilities, family relationships, coping and difficulties in combining farm and household work. The third theme was the position of women on farms.

*Theme 1: The distribution of work tasks*

Nearly all of the women (N = 8) were involved in, or responsible for, the following tasks: milking, cleaning in the barn, taking care of young cattle, bedding, household work and various errands in the village. The woman was the main operator of the system on both farms with an automatic milking system. Over half of the women performed work tasks such as distribution of silage, working on grain dryers, planning and follow-up of farm enterprise. A list of work tasks and information about women's participation is presented in Table 2. We observed indications of the distribution of working tasks according to gender, as in earlier Finnish studies (Karttunen, 2003; Sireni, 2000, 2002). For example, women took part in work tasks in cattle barns, but were less often involved in field work. Women also usually performed most of the household work.

The distribution of animal feed in the barn was usually performed using machines, and the husband was responsible for this task. Thus, during the work observation it was common for the woman to be doing some kind of physical work, such as carrying, cleaning stalls or distributing feed to the young cattle, while the husband was operating machinery. Heikkonen and Louhevaara (2003) also observed deficient ergonomic solutions on dairy farms; carrying was common and there was no equipment in use to relieve the heavy workload. Manninen (2006) described a historical context; new innovations on farms helping with the physical work of men, such as mowers, occurred earlier than the development of new machinery substituting women's manual labour, such as machine rakes. The women's task on farms was to monitor and take care of the health and living conditions of farm animals. Similarly, Vainio, Kauppinen, Valros, Raussi & Vesala (2007) reported how gender had an impact on attitudes about animal welfare: female farm entrepreneurs considered animal welfare to be a more important issue than male farmers.

Although there may be more 'free' time periods between the morning and evening work period in the barn, during this time the women were available for various tasks. Only one woman in our sample, Riikka, reported that she spent her own free time during the day. Other women performed errands such as extra work in the barn, farm work with the computer, errands in the nearest village, etc. According to Karttunen's (2003) survey (N=285), the majority (60%) of women considered the time between milking periods as working time.

Table 2. Women's work tasks.

Task	Cases (max 10)	Level of Involvement		
		Responsible	Involved	Not involved
Milking	9	6	3	1
Cleaning of milking equipment	9	4	5	1
Distribution of silage	5	0	5	5
Distribution of forage	5	2	3	5
Taking care of young cattle	10	1	9	0
General cleaning in barn	10	1	9	0
Bedding	9	1	8	1
Tilling	3	2	1	7
Sowing	1	0	1	9
Harvesting silage	4	1	3	6
Harvesting hay	4	0	4	1
Harvesting grain	4	1	3	5
Working on grain dryer	6	1	5	3
Book-keeping for tax forms	6	2	4	4
Filling in subsidy forms	7	0	7	3
Child care	4	2	2	0
Cooking	8	7	1	2
Cleaning	9	8	1	1
Different errands to the village	10	2	8	0
Other entrepreneurship on farm	1	0	1	2

On four farms the women also participated in field work. Two women, Satu and Noora, drove certain machines during intensive working periods such as seeding or harrowing, harvesting silage or hay with a silage chopper or forage wagon and harvesting grain with a combine. Noora described that working in the fields together with her husband made her feel more important and more equal than if they followed the traditional distribution of tasks. After hard work during harvesting periods they felt a common sense of achievement. Both women who had the skills to use machines had an agricultural education. As in the case of barn work, distribution of work tasks indicated the traditional way to divide tasks by gender. On the other hand, nearly half (N=4) of the respondents were involved in driving field machines, categorised as masculine tasks (Silvasti, 2003).

### Theme 2: Working conditions

On average, the working day started at 6 a.m. and ended at 6.30 p.m. The average working time in the barn was nearly 6 hours (5 h 40 min) per day (Table 3). When women took care of the farm animals, working days varied according to the season and the situation on the farm. For example, farm animal sickness, calving, machinery repairs or the harvesting season were typical reasons for long working days.

Table 3. Participants' barn working periods.

Time	Participant of the study (a-j), type of barn (L/T/LA) and number of cattle									
	a) T, 29	b) T, 85	c) T, 107	d) T, 118	e) L, 53	f) L, 70	g) L, 77	h) L, 136	i) LA, 200	j) LA, 203
5-5.30 a.m.	↑					↑ <sup>1</sup>			↑	
5.30 – 6			↑		↑	↑			↑	
6 – 6.30	↓ <sup>2</sup>	↑	↑		↑	↑ <sup>2</sup>	↑	↑	↑	
6.30 – 7				↑						
7 – 7.30						↓ <sup>1</sup>			↓	↑
7.30 – 8	↓ <sup>1</sup>								↓	
8 – 8.30		↓			↓			↓		
8.30 – 9						↓ <sup>2</sup>				
9 – 9.30			↓							
9.30 – 10				↓						↓
10 – 10.30							↓ <sup>3</sup>			
2 – 2.30 p.m.									↑	
2.30 -3										
3 – 3.30	↑ <sup>1</sup>							↑		
3.30 – 4	↑		↑ <sup>1</sup>		↑			↑		
4 – 4.30	↑ <sup>2</sup>	↑	↑ <sup>2</sup>	↑	↑	↑	↑	*		
4.30 – 5	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↑
5 – 5.30										*
5.30 – 6		↓		↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
6 – 6.30								↓		↓
6.30 – 7			↓	↓		↓	↓			↓
7 -7.30				↓						
7.30 – 8			C		C		↓			

Participants are presented in the order of type of barn and number of cattle. a) Tuula, b) Satu, c) Mari, d) Vuokko, e) Anneli, f) Noora, g) Heli, h) Riikka, i) Virpi, j) Kristiina. Barn type/Activity: Working periods in barns indicated with arrows. Dotted arrows represent the variation in the time needed; T, tie stall barn, L, loose housing barn, LA, loose housing barn with an automatic milking system; C, checking visit to the barn, \*, difficulties in defining exact schedules; Season:

<sup>1</sup>winter time; <sup>2</sup>summer time; <sup>3</sup>working alone.

During each interview the women were asked to assess the risks in their work. The most frequently mentioned risk was dust (N = 8). Difficult working postures, heavy lifting or loads, noise, reduced air quality, for example due to gases and preservatives and chemicals, were mentioned during seven interviews. The number of risks mentioned depended on the barn type: tie stall barns had the highest number of reported risks, on average 6.5, whereas loose housing barns had on average 4.2 risks, and in loose housing with an automatic milking system only 1–2 risks, dust and chemicals, were mentioned. Nearly all new dairy barns in Finland are loose housing barns in which the milking parlour provides more ergonomic working positions than in traditional tie stall barns. The majority of dairy farms (70%) take part in extension milk recording and most (74%) of these dairy farms (ProAgria, 2011) are tie stall barns.

Thus, despite technological development, women's work in cattle barns still includes many health risks. Four respondents had experienced difficulties in combining pregnancy and physical farm work. In a survey of female entrepreneurs, farm women (N=77) in particular considered their work as physically strenuous (Palmgren et al., 2010). A study by Peltoniemi (2005) compared the work ability between salary earners, farm entrepreneurs and other entrepreneurs. Farm entrepreneurs had on average 10% lower work ability than the other two groups, but lowest work ability was reported among female farmers. A survey by Karttunen & Rautiainen (2009, p. 353) revealed a greater decline in work ability with age among female dairy farmers than males: one-fourth of female farmers and one-tenth of male farmers had "an imminent risk of disability".

#### *Possibilities for absence from work*

Nearly all (N=8) the respondents described some kind of problems relating to holidays or sick leave. As examples, it was difficult to obtain a substitute worker particularly during sudden illnesses; sometimes the substitute worker changed during absence; pre-organising work for a holiday was demanding and arduous; a part of vacation or sick leave was spent guiding the substitute worker; or the vacation was spent during harvest time so that the substitute worker helped the working couple on the farm. Three participants only seldom spent holidays with their husband, or only for short periods, because absence from the farm was considered to be too difficult and risky. Most respondents described how during minor illnesses, such as flu or headache, they did not even try to organise absence from work. Instead, they took painkillers and tried to cope with their daily duties.

Women worried about possible absence of either one of the farming couple. Anneli's husband had a chronic illness that had recently worsened. Heli's husband had been on sick leave for three weeks due to burn-out. Vuokko's husband had required a period of hospital care and was on a long sick leave. Mari had difficulties finding a milker during her own sickness. These situations elevated the feeling of stress. To obtain guidance from a local extension worker was not considered as a feasible solution. Leckie (1996) reported that information about farming practices as gendered, for example services relating to farm machinery, is generally provided to men by male workers (Mammen & Paxon, 2000). However, solutions to these problems would reduce the risks on farms, increase women's well-being at work and ensure animal welfare.

Family members were seen as important persons to fall back on, for example during periods of sickness, and often made it possible to have a 'real' holiday outside the farm. In-laws were able to take care of the farm and animals during the absence of the farming couple. On the other hand, possible problems with family farm relationships proved difficult to resolve and cope with, because the family is such an important element on farms, since work is mainly done by family members, and work and leisure time are difficult to separate.

#### *Old concepts and new demands*

Old traditions were revealed within our sample. One example related to the concept of 'real farm work' including only physical work with a visible end result. In addition, categorisation of farmers in society according to an old classification into more influential farmers and those with less influence was considered to affect social relationships. Riikka described her solution to cope with increased duties on an enlarged farm, which was not easy as it did not follow the old practices. During the past years her mother-in-law had become older and sicker. The grandmother had helped with child care when Riikka's five children were young. Therefore Riikka felt that she should be thankful and ensure the grandmother's well-being on the farm. At first they had tried to find a worker for the barn, but none were available. The problem was solved by hiring an unemployed woman to carry out the household work. A new kind of solution was needed, despite the old tradition of the 'self-sufficient farm woman'.

Household work is often considered as part of private, family life (Howell, 2005). On the other hand, making meals for farm workers is a vital element for the functioning of the farm. Half of the farms in this study employed a worker full-time or during certain periods during the year. In addition, the former farm owners may be living on a farm, possibly as a result of a special contract

when selling the farm property (Linnainmaa, 2001). According to these contracts, former owners have the right to live on the farm, and there may also be an agreement concerning the provision of meals (Linnainmaa, 2001). Contracts such as these decrease the selling value of the farm. This seldom-mentioned system may have a significant effect on the farm woman's tasks and responsibilities. Child care problems were also revealed because of the unusual working times, long distances and lacking participation of both parents, for instance the male farmer was interested only in development of the farm.

### *Coping*

On nearly all farm visits (N = 8), coping was a theme repeatedly discussed. Half the women considered their workload to be too heavy and half had felt overworked during the previous month, feeling that work demands exceeded their personal capacity to take care of their duties. Heli, Vuokko and Anneli described how it was a challenge to take time for rest, since one had to leave home because work and home were co-located. Vuokko said that since she came to live on her husband's farm, the field area had increased five-fold and the number of farm animals had increased three-fold. The usual solutions to avoid exhaustion were to employ salaried workers, networks and/or to use contractors. Often, the farming couple also worked longer days. Riikka commented that work had an overly central position in life. All her friends were more or less 'paid' and associated with her work; hired worker, extension worker and veterinarian. On the other hand, nearly all (N = 8) described work with animals and being 'close to nature' as rewarding. In addition, nearly half of the women (N = 4) considered working with their husband to be a positive feature.

Researchers of well-being at work state that respect for work is a positive element in coping and well-being; a worker may even cope with adverse features of the work environment if the work is considered to be important and useful (Hakanen, 2005). Within our sample, Anneli wondered whether anyone still cares about farming and farms in the society. Satu noted, "On the other hand, you have to have the strength to believe that at some point we [farmers] will start to be appreciated". The women also considered wider concepts of the political and societal environment of agriculture to be basic elements creating well-being at work and motivation for everyday practices.

### *Theme 3: Professional title and role*

Discussion concerning a suitable professional title revealed an indicator of the shifting changes and trends occurring from traditional to modern farming. In our sample, most of the women (N = 6) chose 'farm entrepreneur' as their title, whereas three chose the old term 'farm wife' ('emäntä', literally translatable as 'hostess') and one chose 'farmer'. Karppinen (2005) also found that farm women under 50 years old wanted to use the more professional titles 'farmer' or 'farm entrepreneur' and only one-third (31%) chose the old title of 'farm wife'. This tendency reflects the greater professionalism now required in farm work (Pråhl-Ollila, 1995). Heli, who continued to run her parents' farm, chose the title of 'farm entrepreneur', but she explained that she had read from a book that the correct title would be 'farm entrepreneur's spouse'. Riikka was still named in prefilled tax forms as a 'laboratory assistant', although she had last worked in a laboratory 23 years ago. Noora wondered why she had different titles in different places. Thus, female farmers' title and professional role was often undefined or even misunderstood.

The interviews revealed that all the women in our sample were more or less managers and decision-makers on farms. Despite this, official interaction in Finland from authorities and co-operatives is usually directed to the main farmer, and in this context Noora marvelled how a woman 'fades' from the farm unit. Tuula described how a woman's situation on a farm may be difficult if she does not receive any money or salary for herself. Farm women have written anonymous mobile phone messages published in the newspaper of the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners. The following quote offers an example:

Oh you lucky farm women who have a joint bank account with a farm man. I have not had any money of my own, only child benefit payments for my three children. (Pienet tulot, 2009, p. 4)

Tuula described how women may consequently have to choose a particular strategy. "It may be a type of forced situation ... the oppressed person, she calmly does her own work and tries to be as invisible and silent as possible, hoping that everything will go well". Lack of money among farm women may also be a consequence of a poor economic situation or structural change; if the growth of the farm enterprise demands all available funds, it may in practice be difficult for the farm woman to obtain any money for her own purposes.

## CONCLUSIONS

Agriculture is based on family farming in Finland, and a total of nearly 49,000 women work on farms in different positions. Our qualitative, case study sample included work observations and semi-structured interviews of women on ten dairy farms. The farms were larger, on average 106 field hectares and 45 cows, than an average Finnish farm. Most of the women worked on a farm as a consequence of marriage to, or courtship with, a farmer.

Women were involved in a wide range of different work tasks: particularly work in cattle barns and at home were women's 'working areas', but four women also drove machines on fields. Women spent on average nearly six hours per day working in the cattle barns. Work days started on average at 6 a.m. and ended at 6.30 p.m. Nearly all the women considered work with animals and close to nature as rewarding. However, a theme of 'coping' recurred in the responses and half the women considered their workload to be too heavy. Common solutions to avoid exhaustion were to employ salaried workers, to utilise networks and/or to use contractors. It was observed that while men operated machinery in the cattle barn, women often performed physical, manual work tasks.

A fixed distribution of work tasks led to difficulties if either partner in a farming couple was absent. Nearly all (N = 8) respondents had some kind of problems in organizing absence during sickness or holiday. Household work is a necessary function for the farm enterprise, such as producing meals for farm workers, or it may be based on an agreement between the current and previous farm owners. Old traditional concepts, such as what qualifies as 'real farm work', or the need to be a 'self-sufficient farm woman', the traditional distribution of tasks and women's working role on the farm, may all create invisible barriers when trying to organise work in a more functional way on enlarged farm units. Although the title and professional role of female farmers was often undefined or misunderstood, most women chose 'farm entrepreneur' as their preferred professional title and all women in our sample contributed to farm management and future decision making.

These women demonstrate efforts to break out of old traditions. The EU has announced a directive 'on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity' (European Parliament, 2010). The document emphasises that men and women should be treated equally in relation to social security, and that the work of the farm entrepreneur's spouse should be recognised. We consider that women's know-how should not be lost, as new and emerging focuses, such as organic and sustainable farming (Fenton, Brasier &



Henning 2010) and the demands for better animal welfare on farms (Vainio et al., 2007), present challenges and call for women's expertise. The EU directive provides a starting point for a process in which old mechanisms, legislation and practices pushing women into invisible positions should be removed. Further, farm women should be allowed to choose which professional title they prefer to use. They should be considered as equal partners in the farm operation if they work full-time on a farm and knowledge of issues related to farm women's situation, for example social security benefits and the official roles of farm entrepreneurs and their spouses, requires attention.

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