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### *The role of women in United Kingdom farm businesses*

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# The role of women in UK farm businesses

## Abstract

The global empowerment of women has been, and remains to be, a continuing issue, especially within the workplace. The agribusiness industry is no exception, where continuation of gender bias and stereotypes positions women as under-represented. Whilst the significance of women in farm businesses is evidenced, their relative invisibility in policy discourse is clear, despite the number of women developing careers in the industry increasing. This qualitative study examines the self-identified roles of women in United Kingdom (UK) farm businesses through interviewing individual participants in the sector (n=8). The literature highlights four roles: the farmer, farm manager, off-farm income careerist and entrepreneur with an on-farm diversified business which forms a theoretical framework to structure the interviews. Findings show five emergent self-identification of role characterisations as being the mother, a decision-maker, a supporter, a labourer and an entrepreneur within a personal role profile. Thus, while externally identified roles consider women's status and contribution in a siloed job role structure, the multiplicity of roles that women undertake are much more nuanced and contiguous. The research contribution is an understanding of the variance and multiplicity of tasks undertaken which indicate the extensive work and contributory efforts that women instinctively provide to the farming business and the farm household structure. Findings contribute by establishing a new conceptualisation of the contributions of women to farm businesses informing rural policymakers, to consider the roles of women at farm household level rather than simply focussing on the gender characteristics of the principal farmer.

24       **1. Introduction**

25           Globally the empowerment of women continues to be an issue, especially within the  
26 workplace. The agribusiness industry is no exception with women being underrepresented, due  
27 in part to the continuation of gender bias and stereotypes (Ball, 2020; Glazebrook et al., 2020).  
28 The farming environment is heavily gendered in favour of males, where it is more likely that  
29 farmers and farm employees are male (Smith et al., 2020). Despite this, the number of women  
30 entering careers in the industry are increasing, even given the stereotypical transition via  
31 succession between males. 28.5% of employees in UK elementary agricultural operations are  
32 female, with the total number increasing by 40% since 2004 (Nomis, 2020). In addition, the  
33 number of female students studying in UK higher education in agriculture, food and related  
34 study programmes during the 2019/20 academic year is almost double that of males (HESA,  
35 2020). Whilst the numbers of women in agriculture are increasing, only 22.4% of managers  
36 or proprietors in UK agriculture and horticulture are female (Nomis, 2020), raising questions  
37 about the status of women within the industry, their roles and their overall contribution to  
38 corporate and family businesses. Whilst studies have examined the role of women in farm  
39 businesses, previous research has suggested there are still many gaps in the literature (Dunne  
40 et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). With the exception of literature reviews (Ball, 2020; Dunne et  
41 al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021) and book chapters by Shortfall et al. (2017; 2019; 2020), recent  
42 literature on developed nations such as Ireland and the UK are limited to, for example, Cush et  
43 al. (2018). Generally, research on the role of British women in the farming/agri-business  
44 industry is aged, such as work by Gasson (1980; 1992) or Shortall and Kelly (2002). Research  
45 on the role of women within agriculture and agribusiness in the global North includes the  
46 United States (Carruth and Logan, 2002; Trauger, 2004; Keller, 2014), France (Saugeres,  
47 2002), Sweden (Pettersson and Cassel, 2014) and Germany (Lehberger and Hirschauer, 2015).  
48 Although this research has been conducted in countries with similar farm business typology to

49 the UK, cultural differences may still exist in terms of national policies and the perspectives of  
50 women in the industry. The lack of contemporary empirical research reflecting UK women's  
51 contribution to the overall resilience of the farming business including their financial  
52 contribution towards household income, their roles and role characteristics makes this a topic  
53 of interest, and as such, the primary data gathered during this study is both timely and  
54 necessary.

55 This qualitative study examines the self-identified roles of women in UK farm  
56 businesses through interviewing individual participants in the sector (n=8). Their contribution  
57 is assessed in terms of their level of responsibility, the time they allocate to the business and  
58 the particular tasks they undertake. This research also explores the self-reported challenges and  
59 barriers experienced by women involved in agriculture. The structured literature review that  
60 informs this paper led to the conceptualisation of four job roles: the farmer, farm manager, off-  
61 farm income careerist, and entrepreneur of an on-farm diversified business. The data is  
62 analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This study is situated in the  
63 experiences of those interviewed and it is those experiences that drive the empirical research.  
64 The work informs both industry and policy of the multifaceted contribution of women on  
65 farms, notably in the context of the UK, and further contributes by establishing a new  
66 conceptualisation of the contributions of women to farm businesses as an entrepreneur,  
67 decision-maker, supporter, mother, and labourer. Based on the findings of this research, we  
68 argue that the role of women in agriculture has evolved to one which is of multi-skilled/multi-  
69 characterisation. Indeed, the study finds that the ways in which women performs these role  
70 characterisations varies between farm businesses and also for the individual lived experiences  
71 of the women interviewed. For each women role characteristics can change over a woman's  
72 working and personal life, especially the role of mother, support and carer.

73

## 74        2. Theoretical Framing

75        Historically, the role of women in a farm business is a ‘house-wife’ or an ‘assistant farmer’  
76        (Gasson, 1980) where very few women work the land as a full-time role. Wisner (1975; cited  
77        by Tanner, 1999) states that “women make a more important contribution to agriculture than  
78        they do to any other single industry”, but whilst women are said to have a significant role (Tara-  
79        Satyavathi et al., 2010), their contribution is unrecognised and their work invisible with males  
80        being dominant (Brandth, 2002; Damisa and Yohanna, 2007; Nain and Kumar, 2010; Annes  
81        et al., 2021). However, much of this research took place in the global South including Nigeria  
82        (Damisa and Yohanna, 2007), and India (Nain and Kumar, 2010), where the farming and  
83        family context is different from that of the developed North. Indeed, women’s contribution is  
84        positioned as low value compared to men’s (Alston, 1990; Lewis, 1998). Dunne et al. (2021)  
85        reviewed 184 studies published between 1970 and 2020 that considered women’s roles in  
86        agriculture with the most recent being focused on developed nations, such as Ireland and the  
87        UK (for example, Cush et al., 2018; Shortall et al., 2017, 2019, 2020; Ball, 2020). Job roles  
88        cited across these studies include: the traditional farm housewife, working farm member (farm  
89        assistant, subordinate manager), woman farmer (traditional women farmer, professional  
90        woman farmer); and off-farm occupation (dual or off-farm occupation with limited  
91        engagement with the farm), where women have limited access to land, education and  
92        organisations. Gasson (1980) bases her evaluation of women’s contribution to farm and rural  
93        life using three identified role types: farm housewife, working farmwife and woman farmer.  
94        Brasier et al. (2014) uses work from Burton and Wilson (2006) and McGuire (2010) to develop  
95        a theoretical model for role identities of farming women highlighting: *primary operator, farm*  
96        *wife-helper and off-farm income careerist*. Combining these sources with the work of Brandth  
97        (2002) and Barlett (1993), four roles are positioned in this research: a farmer, a farm manager,  
98        an off-farm income careerist and an entrepreneur of a diversified business. Some terms have

99 been positioned specifically in this paper and are now described for clarity, contribution and to  
100 explore each role.

101         The term contribution can be defined as “the action of contributing or giving as one's  
102 part to a common fund or stock... to bring about a result” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021).  
103 It is the input and involvement that a person provides for a given role, and the impact that they  
104 have on their surrounding environment. In relation to a woman’s contribution to a farm  
105 business, it could involve her physical work and skillset, the influence she has on decision-  
106 making or even the emotional support she offers. Contribution can also be considered through  
107 financial aspects, i.e., the monetary value provided to farm household income, whether that  
108 income is generated within or outside of the farming business. Generating income through off-  
109 farm activity is a recognised resilience strategy for farm-based households (Gasson, 1988;  
110 Shucksmith et al., 1989; Morris et al., 2017). However empirical evidence of female  
111 contribution is scant in related studies.

112         Definitions of role are multiple, addressing the commitment of an individual to a  
113 specified job with the responsibility to carry it out with the highest degree of one’s ability; the  
114 “functional niche assigned to each member of a group, carrying the expectations of peers  
115 regarding individual contributions to that group” (Kurian, 2013, p. 263); “a socially expected  
116 behaviour pattern usually determined by an individual's status in a particular society,” a  
117 given duty, or “a function or part performed especially in a particular operation or process”  
118 (Merriam-Webster, nd). This suggests that a role could be defined as a job description or as  
119 a group of functions or tasks that create a self-identified role. Farming is not just an  
120 occupation for many farmers and farm workers, it is often positioned as a vocation, a way of  
121 life that extends beyond employment to provide personal meaning (Groth and Curtis, 2017).

## 122 **2.1 Farmer**

123           One role of women within the farming/agribusiness industry is as the farmer. Smith et  
124 al. (2020) define a farmer as operating a farm or cultivating land, i.e., the physical work within  
125 the farm environment where mechanisation has made tasks physically easier than centuries ago  
126 (Smith et al., 2020). In her study forty years ago on farm women role types, Gasson (1980, p.  
127 171) identifies the woman farmer to be “farm centred... regarding farming as their most time  
128 consuming, most important and most enjoyable activity”. They are not the assistant to another  
129 farmer and participate in tasks that were perceived at the time to be masculine, they value their  
130 work, and gain satisfaction from the independence and pride that farming sustains (Gasson,  
131 1980). Other sources suggest difficulties for the female farmer including self-identity  
132 especially in communities “where masculinity and femininity have been shaped over time by  
133 the gendered symbolic categories of farmer and farmwife” (Keller, 2014, p. 2). This was often  
134 reinforced where physical strength requirements forced farming women into the house  
135 (Trauger, 2004), and where women traditionally had a role in feeding large numbers of manual  
136 farm workers. As mechanisation increased, this role of feeding workers on the farm reduced,  
137 in line with a reducing work force. Female work was perceived as lesser, secondary, and  
138 complementary to physical work (Saugeres, 2002), and where women undertook work on farm  
139 it was work such as handling and caring for small livestock that were kept indoors. This  
140 stereotyping is interpreted by Pini (2005) who suggests that women cross the traditional gender  
141 division of labour if they partake in physical on-farm tasks, deemed to be men’s work,  
142 especially if this includes the use of large farming machinery. This notion of the farmer in a  
143 male sphere in the global North is considered by Smith et al. (2020) and Glazebrook et al.  
144 (2020) when considering farm productivity, but not by Dunne et al. (2021).

## 145 **2.2 Farm Manager**

146 The farm manager is the individual who ‘manages’ the day-to-day operations of the  
147 farm, i.e., their role in combining [available] resources appropriately (Nuthall, 2010), the land,  
148 the labour and the capital (Dexter and Barber, 1960), focusing on business aspects rather than  
149 land custodianship. An analysis of the role of farm manager recognises that management is  
150 complex, requiring sufficient knowledge of the external industry environment as well involving  
151 factors such as the market, economics, decision making and implementing strategies based on  
152 dynamic changes that occur (Malcolm, 2004). He stated, “the outstanding characteristic of the  
153 most successful [farm] managers... is their mastery of information” (Malcolm, 2004, p. 53).

154 Societal presumption, that women are the principal family caregivers, will position that  
155 this caregiving role interferes with their role as a farm manager (Lehberger and Hirschauer,  
156 2015; Dunne et al., 2021). A lack of rural childcare is also a challenge for farm managers, both  
157 male and female, so the physical nature of being a mother can be a career barrier. Having to  
158 take time away from a farm managerial career during maternity periods can lead to career  
159 downgrading creating social pressure or financial risks (Lehberger and Hirschauer, 2015), as  
160 with a female’s career in many other sectors.

## 161 **2.3 Off-farm Income Careerist**

162 Off-farm income can be considered as dual occupation, i.e., either working both on the  
163 farm and off the farm or solely in an off-farm occupation (Dunne et al., 2021). Thus, a woman  
164 can be an off-farm careerist where their primary role is in employment off-farm, and also work  
165 on the farm, i.e., the woman’s role involves pluriactivity (Brandth, 2002; Dunne et al., 2021).  
166 According to Gasson (1992), the greatest number of women in the farm labour force are  
167 married to farmers and assist their families in roles, differentiating from women farming  
168 independently, as farm managers or farm workers, or from female farm workers. Off-farm  
169 income generated by women often supports farm survival, aiding the male farmer through



170 supplementing the household income (Carruth and Logan, 2002; Price, 2010), and providing  
171 additional economic security. Therefore, the role of a woman as an off-farm income careerist  
172 is an important contribution to overall business performance and earning their own money  
173 encourages women to have self-assurance, visibility and autonomy (Brandth, 2002). Although  
174 they provide additional income off-farm, many women are also actively involved in the farm  
175 business.

#### 176 **2.4 Entrepreneur involved with an On-Farm Diversified Business**

177         The female family member generally instigates and manages entrepreneurial (non-core)  
178 farm diversified activities (McElwee, 2006), as they generally have had greater transferable  
179 skills, are not tied to the day-to-day activities giving them more time and energy for a new  
180 business and are more innovative, recognising the potential for business opportunities  
181 (Bosworth and Wilson-Youlden, 2019; Smith et al., 2020), compared to their male  
182 counterparts. Diversification can be driven by combined and interconnected economic, social,  
183 and personal motives, but primarily the driver is as an alternative economic strategy to support  
184 and enable the farm business' survival and socially and personally, is a preferred option as  
185 women can be independent and work from home, important for those with children and limited  
186 rural childcare (Pettersson and Caseel, 2014). An example of this is seen through the female  
187 managing the agritourism activities of the family business as a means of supplementing farm  
188 income (Stirzaker et al., 2022).

#### 189 **2.5 Summary**

190 The literature suggests that one role is not mutually exclusive of the others over the course of  
191 a women's life as the role of farming woman may change in line with the business and family  
192 demands and their position in the family, indeed they may have multiple roles simultaneously.  
193 This notion of multifunctionality is found in the current literature (Brandth, 2002; McElwee,  
194 2003; Pettersson and Cassel, 2014), but there is also an aspect of fluidity and circularity as the

195 women substitute one role for another, or in a family business may take one role as farmer's  
 196 daughter, but over time could become farmer, farm manager or farmer's wife, then in time  
 197 farmer's mother (Smith et al., 2021). The methodology is now defined.

198 **3. Methodology**

199 The research exercise now presented is predominantly a descriptive one with the objective of  
 200 providing a new conceptualisation of women farmer' types that can inform future empirical  
 201 work. Based on the research aim, a qualitative methodology is adopted involving semi-  
 202 structured interviews with representatives of the four roles positioned in this research and  
 203 informed by the structured review of literature namely a farmer, farm/office manager, off-farm  
 204 income careerist, and enterprise entrepreneur. A purposive sampling method is used, to identify  
 205 for the interviews, women that associate themselves with the aforementioned four roles, i.e.  
 206 they represented cases of the roles (Yin, 1989). The interview guide is designed to gather data  
 207 focussing on the primary role, self-reported contribution and experiences of the eight female  
 208 participants in their farming businesses (Table 1) distinguishing participants by allocated job  
 209 role, age and farm business type.

210

211 **Table 1: Profile of interview participants**

Participant	Self-identified role	Age	Farm business type
P1	Farmer	20	Dairy
P2	Farmer	24	Dairy and beef
P3	Farm manager	52	Cereals and poultry
P4	Farm manager	51	Potatoes, carrots, cereals and maize
P5	Off-farm careerist	56	Chicken, beef and sheep
P6	Off-farm careerist	54	Cereals and maize
P7	Entrepreneur of a diversified business	51	Beef and pigs Diversified business: farm shop
P8	Entrepreneur of a diversified business	28	Beef and sheep Diversified business: vineyard

212

213 The UK is chosen as the setting for this research due to its multifunctional and non-  
214 homogenous farm business structure. The use of semi-structured interviews is a method that is  
215 consistent with related research on the role of women in agriculture (Keller, 2014; Petterson  
216 and Cassel, 2014). The interviews (n = 8) provide rich data and this research is similar in sample  
217 size to previous studies in the subject area (for example, see Morris et al., 2017; Joosse and  
218 Grubbström, 2017). Maximum variation sampling is used for participants to be purposively  
219 selected to ensure that each of the four roles identified in the theoretical framework are  
220 represented with interviews being conducted at the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021.  
221 Due to the Covid-19 regulations, which restricted travel and contact with individuals,  
222 interviews were conducted virtually using video technology. Interviews were recorded, and  
223 transcribed verbatim, with consent of the participant, to ensure that data obtained was a true  
224 representation of the interviews. Rigour was sought at all times through the research process,  
225 from the formulation of the interview guide based on the literature review, to the sampling  
226 method, and use of a structured analysis process. Interview data is analysed through the six-  
227 step Braun and Clarke (2006) process of thematic analysis. Firstly, on a case-by-case basis  
228 comparing the similarities and differences of the interviewees' roles, contributions,  
229 experiences and perceptions, this comparison involved a number of factors such as role type  
230 and age. The thematic analysis process includes first and second cycle coding (Miles et al.,  
231 2014) of the interview transcripts, establishing initial codes, evaluating the codes and  
232 facilitating the formulation of themes. NVivo 12 is used to ensure that data analysis is  
233 conducted in a structured and rigorous manner. Initially, 98 unique codes were outlined from  
234 the interview data, which related to 10 themes, as shown in Table 2.

235 **Table 2: Thematic Analysis Findings**

236

Motherhood	Decision-making	Capability	Experience	Entrepreneurial	Community	Driving Force	Physicality	Stereotypes	Change
Children	Discussions	Prove	Education	Entrepreneurial	Community	Driving force	Physicality	Stereotypes	Change
Family	Contribution	Hard work	Awareness	Creative	Social media	Inspiring	Labour	Perception	Positivity
Mother vs. career	Input	Determination	Development	Confidence	Networks	Encouraging	Arable vs. livestock	Hesitation	Mechanisation
Support	Involvement	Capability	Skills	Determination	Interaction	Supportive	Husbandry skills/motherly	Masculine	Respect
Responsibility	Ideas	Break barriers	Experience	Hard work	Influences	Teamwork	Caring	Inequality	Generation differences
Work from home	Inclusion	Passion	Opportunities	Skills	Role models	Positive	Gentle	Sexism	Valued
Paperwork	Family business	Presence	Encouragement	Initiative	Inspiration	Looking ahead	Mechanisation	Judgemental	Equality
	Equality	Resilience	Equal	Opportunities	Connections	Initiative	Masculine culture	Derogatory	Easier than ever before
	Decision-making	Extra effort	Upbringing	Endless possibilities	Confidence	Calming	Help	Arable vs. livestock	Self-infliction
		Attitude			Reality	Valuable		Shock/surprise	Social media
		Perseverance			Awareness				Education
		Control			Respect				

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The 10 themes from the data analysis process include motherhood, decision-making, capability, experience, entrepreneurial, community, driving force, physicality, stereotypes, and change. Further evaluation of these themes, and a consideration of the 4 main roles of women in agriculture emergent from the literature review, led to the identification of 5 key contributions of women in agribusiness, based on dominant role characteristics which emerged from the data. These are contributions as an entrepreneur, decision-maker, supporter, labourer and mother, which are discussed in the following section.

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## 4. Findings and Discussion

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### 4.1 Entrepreneur

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One of the job roles that arose from the literature was on-farm diversification entrepreneur. The respondents asserted that if women are creative, determined, hard-working, resilient, forward-thinking and have a positive attitude, they can prove themselves in the industry and be successful, i.e., that the traits of entrepreneurship extended beyond a diversified enterprise into the agricultural enterprises too. It was more common for off-farm careerists and diversified entrepreneur participants to comment on this theme outside of farming activities.

253

*“Women have the entrepreneurial and creative skills to work close with the market.” (P5)*

254

*“Women have definitely proved themselves as being equal in farming. Anything is possible,*

255

*which I think is wonderful.” (P7)*



280 On the other hand, it is identifiable that farm managers and diversified entrepreneur  
281 participants, whose roles consist of having more control in the business, discuss their thoughts  
282 with their male family members, but then proceed to make the final decision themselves.

283 *“Decisions are all with me in the business. We will chat over machinery purchases and then*  
284 *discuss and decide from there, but everything else is with me.” (P3)*

285 *“I have full control on decision-making... but I always run all decisions through my dad and*  
286 *brother, so we work together to figure out a solution for any problems.” (P8)*

287 These findings agree with Bokemeier and Garkovich (1987), who determined that a woman’s  
288 role in decision-making varies depending on their defined roles in the farm business. The  
289 participants in this study actively involved in the day-to-day farm operations demonstrate more  
290 control in decision-making, compared to those who are not.

### 291 **4.3 Supporter**

292 The role of women as drivers and supporters of the farm business emerged from the  
293 interviews. Participants used vocabulary such as inspiring, encouraging, teamwork, positive,  
294 initiative and valuable to describe a woman’s role in a supportive manner to her family and  
295 colleagues. Off-farm careerist and diversified entrepreneur participants are much more likely  
296 to articulate a sense of support to the family business as they are not immediately involved in  
297 the day-to-day operations of the farm itself as much as farmer and farm manager participants.  
298 Supporting could be achieved through off-farm work, bookkeeping, or alternatively being a  
299 driving force by supporting and encouraging other family members to succeed by having a  
300 positive attitude. Findings suggest that the supporter role means the woman brings new and  
301 innovative ideas to the farm business.

302 *“I do a lot of the accountancy paperwork, [and] so my husband and I discuss the finances*  
303 *together and see if affordability would cause an issue when coming to a final decision.” (P6)*

304 *“All of the [local] farms that are moving [forward] are the ones that have got strong women*  
305 *who are interested in the farm and continually driving from behind. I think that’s where the*  
306 *woman makes it a team.” (P7)*

307 Comparing with Gasson’s (1980) three role types, supporting farm accounting and paperwork  
308 historically was seen as a role of a ‘farmer’s wife,’ but four decades later, Smith et al. (2020,  
309 p. 9) suggests the supportive nature of being a ‘farmer’s wife’ allows the husband to undertake  
310 farm work, through the woman “doing necessary logistical, organisational and office work”.  
311 The respondents articulated notions of the farmer and wife as a team (Gasson, 1980); and  
312 providing mutual emotional support (Pini, 2005). Similarly, the extended family surrounding  
313 females in the farm business plays an important role in developing women in the industry.  
314 Respondents highlight the importance of inclusive, encouraging and supporting females in a  
315 community and/or family environment as being crucial to personal and business success.

316 *“In rural communities, there is still a ‘village’ feeling and there is a lot of support across*  
317 *generations, even if there is not necessarily any relation between the women.” (P5)*

318 *“In a family business with women, there is a real social fabric of networks supporting each*  
319 *other and it’s really important.” (P6)*

320 The local agriculture and rural community can also impact a woman’s experience, which in  
321 turn will affect her level of presence in the industry.

322 *“I’ve only ever really had positive comments from people when I’ve said I work in*  
323 *agriculture.” (P8)*

324 Gasson (1980, p. 166) recognised the contribution that women make through the provision of  
325 support “to maintain the stability and enhance the quality of life” of other men and women’s  
326 lives within their local rural community. The literature highlights that in some remote UK  
327 locations, a lack of support can cause deterioration in the quality of life. Women are more likely  
328 to contribute their attention to the community due to a perceived natural instinct to nurture

329 (Morris and Evans, 2001). Trauger (2004, p.301) found that many US female farmers believed  
330 they would not be able to farm without community support so “public spaces of recognition  
331 and support are crucial not only for women to maintain their identities as farmers, but also for  
332 legitimating and valuing the work of women farmers and providing a space of public  
333 representation and resistance to traditional constructions of farm women femininity.”

334 Therefore, the role of a woman as a supporter is vital for other females. Recent  
335 developments in social media have also helped to support women in the wider UK farm  
336 business community and further increase the concept of women supporting each other on a  
337 national level.

338 *“The support online nowadays is incredible and for women to have that network and be able  
339 to interact with people of similar backgrounds to them really encourages them to continue  
340 their work in the industry.” (P6)*

341 *“There are so many female role models to follow on social media who are showing  
342 everything good about British agriculture. It’s so positive and the best way of linking  
343 everyone together; it’s just amazing.” (P7)*

344 There is little investigation into the impacts of social media on UK female farmers, however,  
345 Daigle and Heiss (2021) found in the US that the power of social media improves information  
346 accessibility, improves problem solving on farm and the development of effective marketing  
347 strategies. Social gratification was created through social media platforms via “exchange of  
348 emotional support among farmers... [by] sharing celebration, sharing struggles or sharing the  
349 commonality of being a woman farmer” (Daigle and Heiss, 2021, p. 15). This network of  
350 people connecting provides a sense of motivation for individual women farmers, and a  
351 woman’s involvement in supporting other women on social media is important for the national  
352 agriculture community, promoting positivity throughout the industry, which in turn is reflected  
353 into individual farm businesses.



#### 354 4.4 The Mother

355 One female family farming role characteristic in particular emerges from the literature  
356 and the interviews, that of the mother. The role of the farmer's mother exerts influence on other  
357 family members, including as a mentor and advisor, especially to the other women in her  
358 extended family (Smith et al., 2020). A common issue highlighted by many interviewees was  
359 their role within the family as a mother, birthing and caring for children. The older participants  
360 (P3, P4, P5, P6, and P7) have experienced being the main caregiving parent in the family whilst  
361 the husband continues to work on the farm.

362 *"I made the difficult decision to stop working off-farm to look after the children and lose the*  
363 *additional household income. This [childcare] became my main responsibility."* (P6)

364 Being female means becoming pregnant if the couple wish to have a family, so the woman has  
365 no choice but to take a break from her career progression to support the maternity, birthing and  
366 initial childcare processes. Gasson (1980, p. 166) states that the "role of [women] in producing  
367 and rearing successors, and in socialising them to accept that role, is crucial to the survival of  
368 most family farming businesses". Two decades ago, Morris and Evans (2001) highlighted the  
369 lack of recognition and celebration of women as the mother whilst still continuing to carry out  
370 duties. However, it is difficult for a woman to fully undertake the prime caregiver role whilst  
371 fulfilling other role characteristics identified in this study, for example an entrepreneur, off-  
372 farm careerist or labourer.

373 *"Women are expected to take a break from their careers to have children, and because of*  
374 *this, I believe women are overlooked in the industry."* (P1)

375 *"Farming is not part-time in any shape or form and it's very difficult to maintain a high*  
376 *business level when you're female and trying to bring up a family because it's not easy."* (P4)

377

378 All these factors highlight the issue with being a woman in a hardworking and  
379 physically demanding 24/7 working environment. It makes women dependent on others during  
380 motherhood, for either the support with childcare, in the workplace, or both. The interviews  
381 highlight a woman's reluctance to ask for assistance on the working farm, but due to the  
382 demands of the work and the demands of being a mother not corresponding, they often had no  
383 choice. The size of the family and the stage of the family lifecycle will both influence the extent  
384 of a woman's role as a mother (Gasson, 1980), so a woman with more children and of a younger  
385 age will have a more saturated motherly role with respect to time, commitment and emotions,  
386 in comparison to a woman with fewer children who are older and independent.

387 This research finds that the older participants have experienced the former, more  
388 concentrated mother role and now that the children have grown and have gained more  
389 independence, they have more time to focus on the work of the farm business, entrepreneurial  
390 activity or off-farm careers. However, caring for younger or older generations tend to be  
391 allocated via "a 'natural' distribution of work on the basis of certain gender specific attributes"  
392 (Brandth, 2002, p.184).

#### 393 **4.5 Labourer**

394 The final role characteristic that emerges is the labourer. The role of a labourer in the  
395 farm business is one that most of the participants highlighted, whether it be full-time, part-time,  
396 permanent or temporary role. There are many aspects involved with being a woman as a  
397 labourer on the farm business. Firstly, their capability and passion to work hard and to a high  
398 standard is prominent throughout the interviews.

399 *"I'm a workaholic. I work seven days a week: but that's just farming. And I love what I do."*

400 (P7)

401 *"I do all of the labour: the pruning, the tractor-driving and the spraying."* (P8)

402

403           The labourer role interrelates with notions of the contribution that women provide to  
404 the farm household income. Most participants who could comment on their economic status  
405 stated that their financial contribution was equal to their male partner. One farm manager  
406 participant explained that she contributes two thirds with her husband contributing the  
407 remaining third of the financial contribution from his separate business. It should be noted that  
408 the traditional perception of working farm women can still influence the way that they work.  
409 The study found that women, particularly younger participants (P1, P2, P8), believe that they  
410 need to prove themselves in terms of labour because of the traditional stereotype perception of  
411 women by older male farmers.

412           *“It’s wrong to think that women can physically do the same things as men because we are*  
413 *built different... I feel I have to prove myself more than the men, so I always put extra effort*  
414 *in and work harder” (P1)*

415           *“There’s always that classic older generation view of girls in agriculture that we’re not as*  
416 *strong or intelligent as men.” (P2)*

417 Although there is agreement between participants regarding negative perceptions and the need  
418 to ‘prove oneself’, younger participants assume this is the same for all female farmers.

419           *“To begin with there may be hesitancy with regards to females in agribusiness, but if they*  
420 *prove themselves, then that soon goes away.” (P4)*

421  
422 Tara-Satyavathi et al., (2010) compare work ethics between males and females stating that  
423 women work harder on more tasks and for longer hours. Findings on emotional strength was,  
424 with participants who note that their motherly traits were beneficial for caring for livestock and  
425 crops, concurring with Morris and Evans (2001).

426       *“We have a female touch when it comes to handling livestock. You’ve got to be quieter,*  
427       *gentler and understand things, which I think women are better at because they’ve got the*  
428                 *patience for it, and men don’t have that much patience.”* (P2)

429       *“Women have an advantage because we’re often seen to have better husbandry skills for*  
430                 *looking after plants and animals.”* (P8)

431       Translating this into a woman’s role with respect to their involvement in particular areas of  
432       farm business, the research finds that certain sectors of the agricultural industry embrace and  
433       empower women more than others due to the nature of such businesses.

434  
435       *“Machinery and arable... [has] always been a man’s job... but if you look at livestock-based*  
436                 *areas, you have got more females.”* (P2)

437       *“Entry into arable farms and the red meat sector, where they are not family businesses and*  
438       *have a masculine culture, is a challenge. It’s hard for women to get into these sectors, not*  
439                 *impossible, but you have to be resilient... Horticulture, poultry and pigs have a strong*  
440                 *presence of women”* (P5)

441       Smith et al. (2020) recognises the higher number of women connected to agri-  
442       industries, such as equestrian, horticulture and dairy, rather than in those perceived to have a  
443       more masculine culture, such as arable and red meat, with the focus on men and machinery  
444       being described as the ‘tractor-gene’ (Heggem, 2014). Perceptions of limited labour skills can  
445       damage women’s reputation, confidence, involvement and ability to work hard and means they  
446       constantly need to justify their credentials. Mechanisation, advancements in technology and  
447       machinery for physically demanding day-to-day operations means that women can carry out  
448       the same tasks as men.

449       *“Now, women are active and involved on the farm...I think mechanisation has reduced the*  
450                 *differences between men and women.”* (P5)

451 *“Because of modern farming, you don’t have to be as physical because so much of it now is*  
452 *equipment.” (P7)*  
453

454 In summary, the five role characteristics that emerge from the primary research  
455 underline the augmented and diversified roles of women in farm businesses. This research  
456 positions that role descriptions alone e.g., farmer, farm manager, etc. do not fully capture the  
457 multi-faceted contributions of women within the farm business and the plurality of  
458 contributions (Braisier et al., 2014). Additionally, this research underlines the key role  
459 characteristic of women as mothers, emphasizing the multi-dimensional contributions of  
460 women to the farm business, and farm household. Rather than defining job roles within the  
461 farm, this research shows the nature of multifaceted contributions that are invisible if farm  
462 businesses are characterised solely in a hierarchical job description approach.

## 463 **5. Conclusion**

464 Our research study investigates the role and contribution of women in UK farm businesses  
465 adopting a qualitative semi-structured methodology. This research expands debates within a  
466 growing body of research on rural women entrepreneurs (Becot, 2015; Elkafrawi and Refai,  
467 2022) which discusses empowerment and roles of women in entrepreneurship. Whilst previous  
468 studies on this topic have primarily examined the job role of women in farm businesses  
469 (Gasson, 1980; 1992; Shortall and Kelly, 2002; Dunne et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021), this  
470 research explores the roles women play in the farm business; the extent that women contribute  
471 to the farm business through these roles or characteristics of roles; the woman’s contribution  
472 to decision-making in farming businesses and the perceptions of women themselves of their  
473 roles in the agribusiness industry. This socially embedded nature of family and business has  
474 been identified in other studies (Salder, 2022; Stirzaker et al., 2022). Based on the findings of  
475 this research, we argue that previous literatures’ portrayal of the role of women (notably

476 Gasson, 1980; Brasier et al., 2014) in agricultural businesses is outdated, as the role of women  
477 in agriculture has evolved to one which is of multi-skilled/multi-characterisation. Therefore,  
478 this research establishes a new conceptualisation of the roles and contribution of women to  
479 farm businesses, defined as an entrepreneur, decision-maker, supporter, mother, and labourer.  
480 The way in which a woman performs these role characterisations will vary as farm businesses  
481 demonstrate wide heterogeneity and the role characteristics for an individual can change over  
482 a woman's working and personal life.

483 This research suggests that a woman's status, involvement and decision-making  
484 participation levels within the farm business is highly dependent on their family and business-  
485 related role. Within the study population, tactical day-to-day decisions are made by those who  
486 identified as farmers, farm managers and entrepreneurs of diversified businesses, whether they  
487 are male or female. The farm managers may also delegate operational decision-making to an  
488 employee if they have several staff. With long-term financial decisions, female farm managers  
489 and entrepreneurs had most control, often with input from their significant male counterparts.  
490 Off-farm income careerists tended to be involved in decision-making through discussions, but  
491 not necessarily in the final decisions. For the farmer who works on her family farm business,  
492 she is involved in decision-making more than the farmer who works for a larger commercial  
493 farm business. Therefore, it should be noted that the type of farming/agribusiness can also  
494 affect a woman's status and decision-making involvement. In addition, the off-farm income  
495 careerist often takes on the role of administration and office activities and so their association  
496 with large financial decisions is still valuable (Braiser et al., 2014).

497 The interviews identify that there is a variation in industry perceptions of women in  
498 farming/agri-businesses. Most of the participants receive positive feedback from the external  
499 community, with some experiencing praise for their efforts. However, participants have also  
500 experienced negative remarks and behaviour including actions presenting concern over a

501 woman's capability and their physicality. These perceptions if they extend to bias may be  
502 barriers to entry for women in the sector. Despite this, the barriers that currently exist are  
503 beginning to be broken down as evidenced by the participants. Whilst the study provides  
504 evidence on the role and contribution of women on UK farm businesses, the findings allow for  
505 further exploration. The exploratory nature of this research has limitations in its scope, and  
506 future research should look to expand on these findings on a larger scale and in different  
507 contexts.

508         The work informs both industry and policy of the multifaceted contribution of women  
509 on farms, notably in the context of the UK, where this research was conducted. For those who  
510 contribute financially through off-farm income, this income stream provides stability and  
511 security to a potentially sporadic and fluctuating farm business income. For policy makers,  
512 consideration must be given to increasing the number of female farmers, and the increased,  
513 evolving and fluid role characteristics for women working in agricultural businesses. As such,  
514 policies should consider farm household structure and dynamics in a more holistic approach  
515 where previously they have focused mainly on the principal farmer.

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