



BOOSTING ECONOMIC GROWTH

*A REPORT ON WOMEN
AG ENTREPRENEURSHIP
IN SASKATCHEWAN*



Women
Entrepreneurship
Knowledge Hub

Portail de connaissances
pour les femmes
en entrepreneuriat



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This report was completed by Dr. Amber Fletcher, Christie Newton and Dr. Gina Grandy. It has been prepared by the Saskatchewan regional hub of the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) at the Hill and Levene Schools of Business, University of Regina, in collaboration with the central WEKH hub at Ryerson University. This report has been prepared through the Centre for Management Development* operating within the Hill and Levene Schools of Business at the University of Regina.



Dr. Amber Fletcher is Associate Professor of Sociology & Social Studies at the University of Regina. Her research examines the gender dimensions of policy and environmental change in agriculture. Amber has served as a delegate and consultant to the United Nations on issues of gender, environment, and rural women. Her book, *Women in Agriculture Worldwide* (with Dr. Wendee Kubik), was published in 2016. She grew up on a farm in Saskatchewan.



Christie Newton is a graduate student in the MSc (Organizational Studies) with the Levene Graduate School of Business, University of Regina. Christie's research interests span several areas. She has published work in health psychology and is currently researching how thinking styles influence religious beliefs and political behaviour.



Dr. Gina Grandy is Dean and Professor (Strategy & Leadership) for the Hill and Levene Schools of Business at University of Regina, SK. Gina is the lead for WEKH in Saskatchewan. She is the co-editor of two books and has published widely on leadership, gender and women's experiences at work, stigmatized work and case writing. Gina's leadership, research, teaching, and consulting experiences are international in scope. Gina has taught at seven universities across Canada, the United Kingdom and Ukraine.

*Website <http://www.uregina.ca/business/cmd/index.html>



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agriculture and agri-food industries represent approximately 10% of Saskatchewan's gross domestic product.¹ Despite increasing interest in women in ag, the representation of women entrepreneurs in these industries remains low in the province and across the country. For example, only 25% of farm operators in Saskatchewan, and approximately 30% nationally, are women.² Underrepresentation of women entrepreneurs in ag is a missed opportunity. This report examines the current status of women ag entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan in 2020. This report has been prepared by the Saskatchewan regional hub of the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) at the Hill and Levene Schools of Business, University of Regina, in collaboration with the central WEKH hub at Ryerson University.

Data for this report was gathered through secondary and primary sources. Secondary sourced data included a review of available statistics, programs devoted to women in ag, and both academic and non-academic research. Primary sourced data included interviews with 32 individuals employed in ag in Saskatchewan; these interviews were conducted between March and May 2020.

For the purposes of this report, ag entrepreneurs are those who develop an ag-related business venture, whether it be primary production, small business, home-based business, value-add activity, processing activity, online-based business, or product-based business.³ This definition includes farm operators.

Women contribute to the ag sector in various ways; however, most existing research focuses on on-farm work. A review of existing literature reveals that as of 2016 the majority of farm partnerships do not have a written agreement (17% without, compared to 5% with a written agreement).⁴ Thus, many women ag entrepreneurs are likely overlooked in accounting for women ag entrepreneurs in the province and across the country.

Women account for 33.3% of Métis and 36.8% of First Nations farm operators, while in comparison women comprise approximately 30% of farm operators in the broader population.⁵ The notion of the “traditional” farming couple, with distinct gender roles for men and women, is still intact—both in practice and in the social imagination.⁶ This ideology has effects on women's work on-farm, off-farm, and in the home and family.

Women are also underrepresented in ag corporations and associations. Women represent only 25% of ag managers and 29% of business owners.⁷ Of 65 national and provincial ag associations, only 12% have a woman as their Board Chair or President, 12% have a woman in the “second in command” role of Vice-President or Vice-Chair, and 28% have at least one woman on their Board's executive committees. In 2017, women accounted for only 36% of managers in food processing.⁸

The individuals interviewed observed considerable progress toward women's inclusion in ag; however, their accounts also indicate there is room for improvement. Women in Saskatchewan face barriers that hinder their participation as ag entrepreneurs. The interview findings presented in this report align with many of the challenges reported from other sources. Many of these barriers stem from structural issues of power and inequality and, in particular, the continued construction of ag as a male dominated industry.

Key reported challenges include: socialization and gender roles; time and work-life balance; stereotypes, sexism and discrimination; credibility and confidence; networking; and, access to capital and financing.

Despite the many reported challenges, women ag entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan were optimistic.

The major opportunities they reported include: the importance of women ag entrepreneurs role models and building support for each other; opportunities for women's contributions to key areas of ag; women ag entrepreneurs taking a leadership role in advocacy and mental health; increasing access to financial resources and support programs; and, men supporting change as it relates to women ag entrepreneurship and ag more broadly.

This report also outlines several recommendations to address the challenges that women ag entrepreneurs confront and to continue the advancement of women ag entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan. It is recommended that we need to better account for women ag entrepreneurs and that includes valuing the work that woman farmers do as ag entrepreneurs. Increased child care support and child friendly spaces are also major facilitators of successful women ag entrepreneurs. In addition, progress and change are not solely the responsibility of women – it is recommended that men work to support and advance women ag entrepreneurship in the province. Women ag entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan can increase their power and space by building coalitions through ag organizations and networks. It is also recommended that programs aimed to increase access to training and financing to women ag entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan are continued and expanded. Finally, it is recommended that attention be directed to policy work so that the advancement of women ag entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan represents both an espoused and enacted commitment to change.

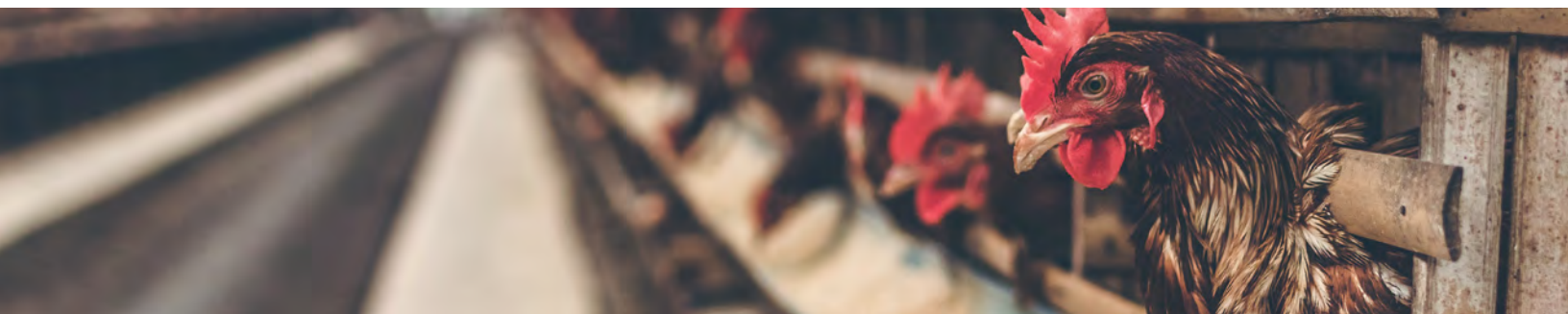




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01

INTRODUCTION



“I would say that the sky’s the limit. While there are barriers there, none of them are insurmountable. If you are unsure of what your place could be as a woman [entrepreneur] in agriculture, that there are many women like myself who would be happy to act as a mentor, or have a conversation about what has worked for us in the past.”

1.1 Purpose

Often referred to as the breadbasket of Canada, Saskatchewan accounted for more than two-fifths of Canada’s total field crop acreage in 2016.⁹ Saskatchewan’s agriculture and food exports in 2018 totaled more than \$13 billion or 20% of Canada’s total agri-food exports.¹⁰ Agriculture and agri-food industries represent approximately 10% of Saskatchewan’s gross domestic product.¹¹ Despite increasing interest in women in agriculture, agri-food, and related industries—as evidenced by a number of provincial and national conferences devoted to women in agriculture and agri-food, and growing numbers of women graduating with agriculture degrees—the representation of women entrepreneurs in these industries remains low in the province and across the country. For example, only 25% of farm operators in Saskatchewan, and approximately 30% nationally, are women.¹²

Women entrepreneurs contributed approximately \$148 billion to the Canadian economy in 2011¹³ and narrowing the gender gap could add \$150 billion by

2026.¹⁴ Underrepresentation of women entrepreneurs in agriculture, agri-food, and related industries is a missed opportunity. Women provide new insights and innovative practices that increase economic and social value for farms, agri-food industries, and society in general.¹⁵

This report examines the current status of women’s entrepreneurship in agriculture, agri-food and related industries (hereafter referred to as women ag entrepreneur/ship) in Saskatchewan in 2020. The purpose is to define women ag entrepreneur/ship, assess the barriers and opportunities facing women ag entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan, and outline recommendations to strengthen the impact of women ag entrepreneur/ship in the province. This report has been prepared by the Saskatchewan regional hub of the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH)* at the Hill and Levene Schools of Business, University of Regina, in collaboration with the central WEKH hub at Ryerson University.

* The Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) shares research and resources on women entrepreneurs in Canada. It is comprised of 10 regional hubs and includes a network of over 250 organizations, reaching more than 100,000 women entrepreneurs. WEKH is a part of the Government of Canada’s Women Entrepreneurship Strategy that aims to increase women entrepreneurs’ access to financing, talent, networks and expertise. <https://wekh.ca/>

1.2 Methodology

The agriculture and agri-food industry broadly construed—including primary production, processing, value-add activities, agricultural financing, corporate agriculture (e.g., inputs, production, marketing, export), advocacy, and other activities—will be collectively described in this report as “ag”. Data for this report was gathered through secondary and primary sources. Secondary sourced data included a review of available statistics, programs devoted to women in ag, and both academic and non-academic research. Primary sourced data included interviews with 32 individuals employed in ag in Saskatchewan; these interviews were conducted between March and May 2020. The interviews focused on the experiences of Saskatchewan women ag entrepreneurs, and identified challenges and opportunities for women ag entrepreneurship.

Participants included 31 women and 1 man representing the following types of organizations:

- **Women ag entrepreneurs in the primary production sector, including farm and ranch owners and operators;**
- **Women in agri-food processing, including food and beverage products;**
- **Representatives of financial institutions and funders serving ag;**
- **Researchers in ag, industry leaders in ag, and livestock veterinarians;**
- **Representatives of organizations supporting women’s entrepreneurship;**
- **Leaders of advocacy initiatives; and,**
- **Social media and technology entrepreneurs promoting women in ag.**

Of the 32 individuals interviewed, 25 were women ag entrepreneurs. Further details on the project methodology can be found in Appendix A.



02

LITERATURE REVIEW



2.1 Defining Ag Entrepreneur/ship

Broadly speaking, an entrepreneur is understood to be an individual who “innovates by *recognizing* opportunities, makes moderately risky decisions that *lead* into actions requiring the efficient use of resources and contributing an added value.”¹⁶ Typically, entrepreneurial activity is measured by business ownership, but a broader interpretation would also include self-employment.¹⁷ In Canada, women-owned businesses account for approximately 16% of all small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and approximately 38% of self-employed Canadians.^{18 19} A 2018 report by Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan (WESK) revealed that women entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan lag slightly behind the national average in some benchmarks. In 2018, 98.3% of all businesses were small businesses,^{20 21} and they accounted for 24% of the province’s GDP.²² However, only 13.7% of SMEs in Saskatchewan were women-owned, 2% lower than the national level. In addition, compared to men-owned businesses, women-owned businesses in Saskatchewan grew slower than the national average. A 2018 report on women-owned enterprises in Canada, however, showed that the ratio of equally-owned to male-owned businesses increased the most in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and that the growth rate of equally-owned and women-owned businesses was largest in Saskatchewan.²³

Ag entrepreneurship has been characterized as including:²⁴

- (a) **The generation of new opportunities or expansion of existing business into new ventures;**
- (b) **Diversification activities, whether on- or off-farm;**
- (c) **Businesses or income-generating initiatives conducted in addition to “traditional” agricultural production; that is, pluriactivity.**

Ag businesses in Canada remain driven by individuals and families, with sole proprietorships comprising more than half of all ag businesses (51.7%), followed by partnerships (22.9%), family corporations (22.5%), and non-family corporations (2.7%).²⁵ For the purposes of this report, ag entrepreneurs are those who develop an ag-related business venture, whether it be primary production, small business, home-based business, value-add activity, processing activity, online-based business, or product-based business. This definition includes farm operators.

Ag entrepreneurs are those who develop an ag-related business venture, whether it be primary production, small business, home-based business, value-add activity, processing activity, online-based business, or product-based business. This definition includes farm operators.

2.2 Women in Ag & Women Ag Entrepreneurs

It should still be noted that as of 2016 the majority of farm partnerships do not have a written agreement (17% without, compared to 5% with a written agreement). Thus, many women ag entrepreneurs are likely overlooked in accounting for women ag entrepreneurs in the province and across the country.

There is a notable gap in the literature pertaining to women, ag, and entrepreneurship. Studies exist on women entrepreneurs generally, and on women in ag (e.g., farm women, farm operators); however, very little research connects these three topics. Most of the existing literature does not refer to farm operators as entrepreneurs and this, in part, may explain the lack of studies formally connecting the topics.

According to Statistics Canada, in 2018, 99% of businesses in ag were small businesses.²⁶ Across the country, women-owned SMEs have experienced faster growth than both men-owned enterprises and enterprises owned equally by men and women.²⁷ In the ag sector, however, equally-owned businesses grew faster than women-owned enterprises.^{28 29} Considering the strong history of family farming in Canada and the fact that many farms are run as spousal partnerships or family corporations, a rise in equally-owned farm businesses can still serve as an important indicator of women's formal ownership and involvement as ag entrepreneurs. Indeed, while nearly 92% of Canadian farms were operated as sole proprietorships in 1971, by 2016 that number had dropped to 52% in favour of more partnerships and family corporations.³⁰

Nonetheless, it should still be noted that as of 2016 the majority of farm partnerships do not have a written agreement (17% without, compared to 5% with a written agreement).³¹ Thus, many women ag entrepreneurs are likely overlooked in accounting for women ag entrepreneurs in the province and across the country.

Indigenous people are underrepresented in ag, largely due to the negative legacy of colonial policies such as the Permit and Pass systems.³²

In the 2016 Census of Agriculture, only 3.0% of Aboriginal* led firms were ag businesses. According to the 2011 National Housing Survey, 2% of the ag population identified as Aboriginal. Of these, a majority (58%) were general farm workers or harvesting labourers, while 38% were managers in ag or horticulture. By 2016, 2.7% of the ag population identified as Aboriginal and 1.9% of ag-operators were Aboriginal, which reflects a 53.7% increase from 1996.³³

Aboriginal women constitute only 0.19% of all ag managers and 0.014% of ag representatives, consultants, and specialists in Canada.³⁴ They comprise 0.02% of supervisors in food and beverage processing. Statistics do suggest, however, that Aboriginal women are better represented amongst Aboriginal farm operators compared to their non Indigenous counterparts. Women account for 33.3% of Métis and 36.8% of First Nations farm operators, but in the general population, women comprise approximately 30% of farm operators.³⁵

Overall, data suggests that Indigenous peoples' representation in ag sectors is growing. Many Indigenous communities and First Nations have developed thriving ag initiatives, such as the Muskoday Organic Growers Cooperative in Saskatchewan. Statistics indicate that there may be more opportunity for women's representation in Indigenous ag than in the broader ag population. Recent initiatives, such as WESK's Matchstick program in Saskatchewan, offer support for Indigenous women entrepreneurs in all sectors.

* Statistics Canada uses the legal term "Aboriginal"; therefore, we use this term when discussing Statistics Canada data.

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Invisible, Unpaid and Underpaid Work

The notion of the “traditional” farming couple, with distinct gender roles for men and women, is still intact—both in practice and in the social imagination. This ideology has effects on women’s work on-farm, off-farm, and in the home and family.

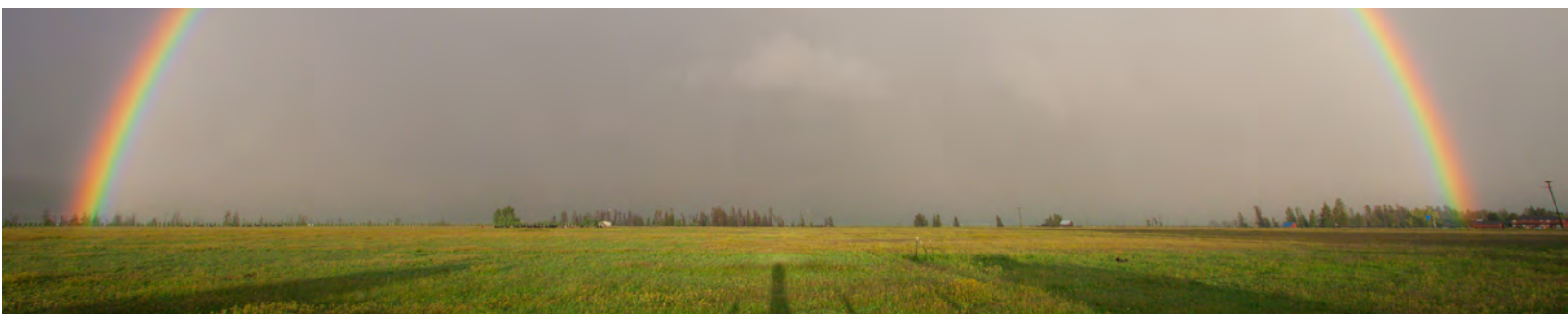
Women contribute to the ag sector in various ways; however, most existing research focuses on on-farm work. Women contribute to the overall well-being of the family farm through a variety of tasks, including management and operation of the farm, off-farm employment and domestic and caregiving work.^{36 37 38} Despite women’s many and diverse contributions, academic studies show that gendered divisions of labour remain strong in industrialized ag settings.^{39 40 41} Women struggle to be recognized as farmers because the discourse of the traditional family farm positions them as primarily responsible for unpaid work, such as domestic and caregiving work⁴² or other undervalued tasks. On the farm, they are often viewed as helpers or supports.^{43 44}

In most male-dominated industries, the perpetuation of stereotypes remains a barrier to women’s advancement. Previous research has demonstrated how stereotypical ideas about masculinity and femininity reinforce gender roles in ag. For example, in industrialized societies, the notion of a “farmer” connotes masculinity, while the traditional notion of the “farm wife” has made women’s farm activities less visible.^{45 46} These notions may hinder women from either becoming farmers or being recognized as such. Stereotypes portray women as “incomplete farmers” who lack certain physical, psychological, or social attributes vital for farming.⁴⁷

Women are also underrepresented in ag corporations and associations. Women represent only 25% of ag managers and 29% of business owners.⁴⁸ Of 65 national and provincial ag associations, only 12% have a woman as their Board Chair or President, 12% have a woman in the “second in command” role of Vice-President or Vice-Chair, and 28% have at least one woman on their Board’s executive committees. A 2015 Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council report indicated that in 2014, women accounted for 25% (or less) of managers in all sectors of ag except horticulture, at 38%.^{49 50} Only 33% of ag service contractors, farm supervisors, and specialized livestock workers are women. Increasing workplace diversity in ag is essential to productivity and retention.⁵¹ Additionally, women-led companies have been shown to perform financially above average.⁵²

Existing statistics also show a significant gender wage gap in ag employment. For example, although women represent nearly half of agrologists in Saskatchewan (48%), female agrologists working full-time earned nearly \$20,000 less, per year, than their full-time male counterparts.⁵³

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Women in Primary Production

The proportion of women farm operators has increased over the past 20 years. Prior to 1991, only one farm operator could be identified on the Census of Agriculture. Due to the common identification of men as the primary farmers, women's contributions to family farming were uncounted and invisible. In 1991, Statistics Canada first allowed reporting of multiple farm operators on the Census, which increased the official recognition of many farm women.⁵⁴ In 1996, women in Canada accounted for 25% of farm operators, and this proportion has only increased to approximately 30% as of 2016.⁵⁵

The data from the 2011 Census of Agriculture reported that women farm operators were more likely to work part-time on the farm than male operators.⁵⁶ About 60% of women farm operators, compared to 40% male operators, reported working less than 30 hours per week on the farm. However, the contributions of women often become overshadowed by the image of the independent male farm owner who is responsible for making decisions related to the farm.⁵⁷ Further, many tasks performed by women, such as cooking meals for hired workers, moving machinery, or driving for parts, are not necessarily recognized as farm work.

Data from Statistics Canada 2011 National Household Survey shows that there is a strong division of on-farm labour, with men performing 75% of production and operations and women representing 82% of business, finance, and administrative workers.⁵⁸ This division of labour and framing of women's on-farm work perpetuates the invisibility of women farmers by promoting the idea that certain on-farm jobs are less essential than others.

Many contemporary farmers diversify income streams and mitigate financial risk through off-farm work.⁵⁹ In 2016, 44.4% of all operators and 58.7% of young women farm operators (under 40 years of age) reported working off-farm. Young farm operators who seek off-farm work tend to be employed in management occupations (22%), business, finance, and administration occupations (21%), education, law, and social community government services occupations (13%), and health occupations (13%). Off-farm income is often used to supplement farm and household finances;^{60 61} however, off-farm employment may also provide a source of fulfilment for women,⁶² particularly considering the ongoing lack of recognition for their on-farm work. Since more off-farm opportunities exist in urban areas, an increasing number of young farm operators are moving away from rural areas and seeking education more than in previous years.⁶³

In 1996, women in Canada accounted for 25% of farm operators, and this proportion has only increased to approximately 30% as of 2016.

Women in the Agri-Food Industry

Agri-food, which includes agriculture, fisheries aquaculture, and food and beverage processing, contributes 2.9% to Canada's GDP and 12% of exports.⁶⁴ The industry has major challenges in remaining competitive on the global market, including labour shortages and continued market pressures to innovate and seize value-added opportunities.⁶⁵

Canada has relied on foreign workers to off-set the labour shortage. To help meet market demands and diversify the workforce, the Economic Strategy Table—Agri-Foods recommended that Canada increase the proportion of women managers in the food processing industry to 50% by 2025.⁶⁶ In 2017, women accounted for only 36% of managers in food processing.⁶⁷

Innovation and Women Ag Entrepreneurs

The changing landscape of ag in Saskatchewan has brought new opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Value-added activities, speciality agriculture, organics, and alternative marketing arrangements offer innovative alternatives. Agritourism is also expanding. Value-added activities differentiate the raw product or commodity by capturing or creating novel value, which increases economic or social value of the product. Recent government investments have sought to increase value-added activity in the province from its total revenue of \$3.5 billion in 2012.⁶⁸ Speciality agriculture activities in Saskatchewan include differentiated, “niche” commodities, like wild rice or spices, which are produced for smaller sub-markets.⁶⁹ Value-added, speciality agriculture, and alternative marketing arrangements — like direct-to-consumer (e.g., farmgate sales; farmers’ markets) or community supported agriculture (CSA) — may offer access to new markets, reduced competition, and reduced exposure to market fluctuations.⁷⁰ Organic ag also provides market incentives for producers who adhere to specific guidelines about environmental practices and animal welfare.⁷¹

Producers are drawn to these activities for a variety of reasons. While market factors are important, studies have shown that personal values— whether environmental, social, or political— are major motivations for producers who go organic or market locally.^{72 73} Although further research is needed on the gender dimensions of such activities, previous studies suggest that organic or “niche” ag activities may prove particularly appealing to women.⁷⁴ Women’s participation in CSA may be informed by an ethic of care.⁷⁵ Women may also be drawn to organics through a concern for the environment and health.^{76 77} Considering the barriers to conventional ag, especially for women, the smaller-scale or less capital-intensive nature of some alternative activities may offer exciting windows of opportunity for women ag entrepreneurs.

Women ag entrepreneurs are also expanding into agritourism. Agritourism helps inform the non-farming public of farm issues, which may help to make connections between these two populations⁷⁸ and reshape societal expectations of farmers and farming.⁷⁹ Women farmers with higher education or previous career experiences are innovative, tend to diversify farm operations, and branch out into farm tourism.⁸⁰



2.3 Barriers for Women Ag Entrepreneurs

While some observers have argued that women's underrepresentation in the ag sector is due to lack of interest or different priorities,⁸¹ such explanations disregard the structural barriers women experience in a male-dominated industry.

A 2018 report by WESK identified several barriers that women in Canada face when pursuing entrepreneurship.⁸² These barriers include access to financing, networking challenges, lack of business training and mentors, and maintaining work-life balance. In a 2015 Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council survey of 532 men and women in agribusiness, 95% of women reported having experienced or witnessed all of the following barriers (in order of prevalence): facing double standards; pursuing off-farm income to help support the family; being denied the opportunity to advance; managing the traditional tasks of child-rearing and performing farm tasks viewed as "support" work; few women role models at senior levels; remoteness of location; access to training; breaking into the "old boys club"; stereotypes about capability from co-workers/senior management; lack of mentoring opportunities; and lack of confidence to pursue more senior roles.⁸³ In addition, a study conducted by the Agriculture and Food Council in 2016, which intended to increase economic outcomes for women in ag in Alberta, identified finance (e.g., access to capital) as the number one barrier to women ag entrepreneurs.⁸⁴

Women, however, have found ways to facilitate their entry into ag, such as borrowing farmland to reduce some financial risk.⁸⁵ In 2016, Canadian women primary operators reported renting or leasing, on average, 233 acres more land than males. Borrowed land accounted for 71% of women operators' total land on average. Not many farms are solely owned by women.⁸⁶ Furthermore, women-owned farms tend to be below average in size and have above-average turnover rates in ownership. Based on the 2016 Canadian Census, 80% of farms with women operators had two or more operators: independent women operators only account for 20% of women operators, whereas that proportion was 50% for independent male operators.⁸⁷ As farms grow larger and require more capital, it may be even more difficult for women to become primary operators in the future.

Women entrepreneurs in general are more likely than men entrepreneurs to rely on internal funding such as savings or loans from family and friends instead of external funding (e.g., loans from banks).⁸⁸ Internal sources of capital may not be as large as external sources; therefore, women entrepreneurs may not have sufficient capital to develop new products or grow their businesses to the same extent as men.⁸⁹ Additionally, women-owned businesses tend to receive less venture capital and experience higher rejection rates for financing than male competitors.⁹⁰ This disparity in access to capital may, to some extent, dictate the career opportunities for women ag entrepreneurs: women ag entrepreneurs may be more likely to operate in lower value-added fields that demand less capital funding.⁹¹



03

FINDINGS



Challenges:

- socialization and gender roles
- time and work-life balance
- stereotypes, sexism and discrimination
- credibility and confidence
- networking
- access to capital and financing

Opportunities:

- role models and building support
- women's contributions to key areas of ag
- advocacy and mental health
- access to financial resources and support programs
- men supporting change

This section presents the key findings of interviews conducted for this study. It highlights both challenges and opportunities for women ag entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan.

Interestingly, some women farm operators interviewed for this report do not readily identify as or feel comfortable with the label of entrepreneur. Further, some women in primary production also do not identify themselves as farmers. A leader at a financial institution described a woman client who: “makes all the financial decisions for the operation. And I would say probably even a lot of the operational decisions as well, but still doesn't necessarily view herself as a full time farmer, which kind of blows my mind, because she is a full time farmer.”

Those interviewed frequently expressed that women's contributions to farming should be readily seen as farming and business. “If you're running the business, you're running the business. If you're making the decisions and you're deciding what crops you're going to plant and you're making the decisions, you're certainly a farmer”. We extend this line of thinking to women's ag entrepreneurship.

3.1 Challenges Facing Women Ag Entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan

“Let’s paint the picture of what’s happening in rural Saskatchewan on these farms. How do these women get access to daycare? How do these women farm everyday and keep our kids safe? How could we find somebody else to feed the crew instead of the women always having to do it? Why can’t the guy go into the house and put a roast in the crock pot? I think that’s what our biggest struggle with social media is, showing the great side of agriculture, but it’s showing not what’s happening on the day to day farm.”

The individuals interviewed observed considerable progress toward women’s inclusion in ag; however, their accounts also indicate there is room for improvement. Women in Saskatchewan face barriers that hinder their participation as ag entrepreneurs.

The interview data presented here align with many of the challenges reported from other sources. Many of these barriers stem from structural issues of power and inequality and, in particular, the continued construction of ag as a male dominated industry.

Socialization and Gender Roles

Historically, women have not been recognized as farmers, and their contributions to ag have often been unacknowledged or discounted.^{92 93 94 95} Despite some positive changes in recent years, many interview participants reported that ag continues to be a male-dominated industry: “I work in a very male-dominated industry. That’s just the nature of agriculture”.

Another commented that there is still “an old boy’s club.” Another acknowledged, “this is a primarily male industry. So yes, just with anything, I guess that comes with being a woman. There’s people that don’t think that it’s your place, and [that] you should have a man there who’s making all the decisions.”



The underrepresentation of women at farm conferences and meetings was another common theme in the interviews. The women ag entrepreneurs interviewed were accustomed to being the only women in some ag meeting rooms. One noted, “I do find the rooms, no matter what, are predominantly male-dominated for attendees.” The dominance of men in the sector is partially attributable to gender roles on the farm, which position men as the primary operators and women as supportive labour. Participants reported women’s strong involvement in farm management, marketing, and accounting, but noted that these tasks are less visible than operational tasks commonly done by men, such as seeding, spraying, and combining. A leader at a financial institution observed, “Often times what we find from a financial level is, it tends to be the spouse, the woman, who is making the financial decisions, doing the books, making sure that the profitability is there. But when it comes to the operational decisions of how that business is run, it tends to be the man.”

Gender roles on the farm are often subtly reinforced: “When I look back at when I was growing up, while I was never discouraged from learning to drive tractors or anything like that, just the natural division of labor was that the girls were more asked to help in the house, and the boy was more asked to do equipment or farm things.”

Gender socialization, both past and present, proliferates gendered roles and divisions of labour. Some of the individuals interviewed for this report noted that women may seem less interested in ag than men. The apparent lack of interest by young women could ultimately be linked back to childhood. Women, they noted, may not even see ag as an option because it is not presented to them as such. These effects of gendered socialization are subtle, but have an enduring effect on the industry.

One woman ag entrepreneur recounted, “I don’t even know where I got that idea from, but it was just the idea that if I wanted to ever farm, I would have to like marry someone that was a farmer and I don’t even know where that came from.” Ag requires specific knowledge and skills, which are often acquired through socialization: “It’s much more difficult for somebody to start farming who doesn’t have the entrance in that we would have had. I can’t imagine just starting and going and buying land and doing things”. Yet, with the exception of conferences organized specifically for women, most farm meetings and conferences were seen to perpetuate the masculinization of ag. When asked about any barriers for women ag entrepreneurs today, one immediately responded with: “Women’s representation. I guess being a farmer, what I come to think of first is going to meetings and conferences and things like that. I do find the rooms, no matter what, are predominantly male-dominated for attendees.” Overrepresentation of men at ag meetings was a common theme in the interviews.

For some of the women ag entrepreneurs interviewed, it was difficult to attend conferences and meetings due to childcare responsibilities—yet another effect of gender roles. Although women appreciated that farming allowed them to spend time with their children, including in the tractor or combine, childcare was a barrier to many activities:

“We knew early on I could not work with my children. It was so difficult. What I get done in the office in eight hours I would maybe get two hours of that done at home with my kids. And I was so stressed, and I wasn’t doing the work properly, and I wasn’t being a good mom. So I recognized early on, if I was to have any part in this company, that I needed to have someone watching my kids. [...] If I didn’t have that, our business would not be as far ahead as it is now. There’s no way. I think childcare is needed if you want to have an active role.”

“I was the only female at these meetings and it happened all the time. And honestly, you walk into the room and it’s like people have seen a black sheep, like I don’t understand it. It makes you feel uncomfortable because you’re like, ‘wow, where are the rest of the women?’”

Time and Work-life Balance

Women in primary ag frequently pursue off-farm income and, in addition to farm work, are responsible for managing the traditional tasks of child-rearing and domestic work, including types of domestic work that specifically support the farm.⁹⁶ These multiple tasks can make it difficult to maintain a work-life balance, especially if women are also engaging in entrepreneurship activities. Lack of time, the need for childcare, and creating work-life balance were commonly mentioned challenges for women ag entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan.

Many women ag entrepreneurs struggle to balance farm work with caregiving and domestic work, which continue to be seen as women's responsibility. One woman ag entrepreneur, said:

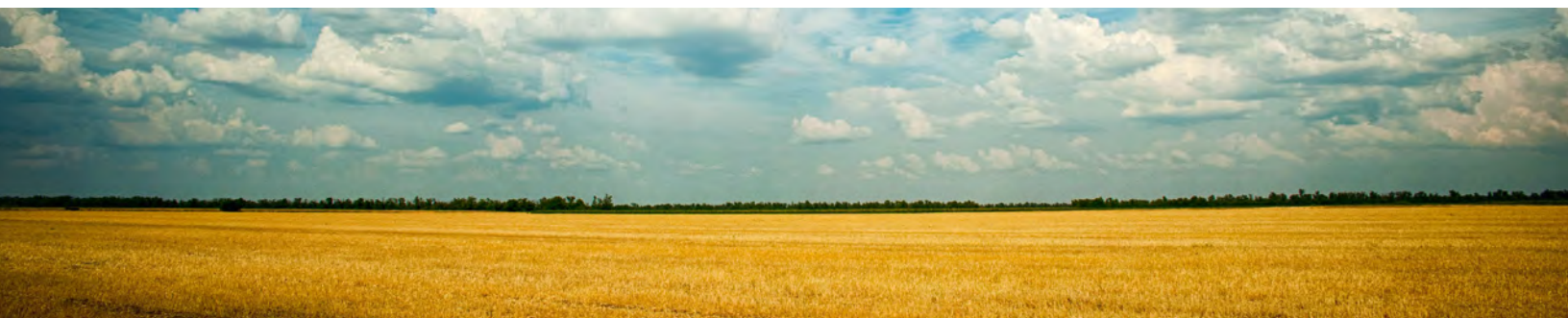
"If you want to be involved [in agriculture], you still have your more traditional duties that are expected of you [...] You certainly didn't see a lot of men in agriculture say 'I have to stay home and take care of the kids today, so I can't go out and do the fieldwork'. Whereas that wasn't even an option for me, I had to figure out how to make it work."

Another noted the heavy time requirements of starting a business:

"One of my biggest challenges was finding time [...] I had to learn to take the time to make sure the business strategy was in place and I was able to maintain a healthy

growth, but not too rapid that it challenged me to make sure everything was very strategic. I had to find the time and I had to learn how to take the time. When you are a young entrepreneur that is growing a business, those are two things that are hard to do because you get so busy executing projects, sometimes it's hard to do the paperwork."

Many of the successful ag entrepreneurs interviewed expressed that they were fortunate to find reliable childcare, which allowed them to take the necessary time to build their business. Some women enjoyed the opportunity to engage their children in their work, noting that ag is unique for its family orientation: "That has got to be the biggest advantage in agriculture is that our children grew up alongside us, doing exactly what we're doing". However, with childcare still seen primarily as women's responsibility, there remains a need for strong childcare support to help more women advance in the industry. Women repeatedly confirmed that access to childcare had been crucial to their success: "When I took on that full time role [...] I wouldn't have been able to have done that, had I not had some strong support systems and some good childcare options available to me." Another expressed, "[Women] do all the emotional labor of running a household. I think that still falls primarily to the female. Is that changing? Yes. Has it changed in our family over the years? Yes, but I'm still the one who thinks of what goes on in the house."



Stereotypes, Sexism and Discrimination

“My co-founder was a man and even though he had no knowledge of agriculture whatsoever, when we were in a meeting or in front of people—whether it be farmers or other businesses or investors—they would naturally default to him [for] all of their agriculture questions. And he would have to say, actually, you need to talk to my co-founder because she’s the farmer.”

Those interviewed frequently reported being disregarded or overlooked. Gender stereotypes are at the root of this problem, as one woman ag entrepreneur pointed out, “I often feel like everyone still likes to talk to the man because they just assume [men] are the ones who run the company, do everything. Women are still making meals for the crew—that’s the general consensus of what a woman’s job is on the farm.” Indeed, gendered stereotypes about women in ag perpetuate sexist behaviours. A common theme from the interviews was women not being spoken to, even when they were equal partners or leaders in their businesses.

Lack of recognition for women’s knowledge and expertise is an ongoing problem. Another reported similar experiences with sexism in the industry:

“In some of my roles, within the ag industry, and even just being an equal partner in our farming operation, there have been times where men have not wanted to deal with me because I’m a woman. ‘How could you possibly know as much as Joe about chemicals and cropping rotations and things like that?’. There’s a stigma about a woman having such an active role in a farming operation.”

Although many of those interviewed felt that conditions are improving, sexism and discrimination still exist. Participants experienced sexism from salespeople, lenders, insurance providers, and even their own employees or customers. One noted that, “Even in the last year, there were a couple of things where [customers] didn’t want to talk to me. They wanted to talk to the ‘man of the house’ kind of thing.”

Another had experienced sexism from employees on her operation: “There are still some people out there that will not listen to women. Some barriers I personally have at the ranch is we have had past employees [...] that do not take any direction from a woman whatsoever.”

When they attempt to assert their expertise and authority, women ag entrepreneurs experience a common catch-22 reported in other male-dominated sectors: they are viewed as overly aggressive. Gender stereotypes assert themselves powerfully when challenged: “[Women] just don’t get taken as seriously. You try to be as serious as the men, and you get called names because you’re being too aggressive, but you’d never say the same thing about a man doing the exact same thing. It’s a complete double standard.”

In light of these significant challenges, women ag entrepreneurs may still face an uphill battle to establish themselves in the industry. One woman ag entrepreneur talked about when she entered the industry,

“I had to work harder. I had to work smarter. I had to put in more hours trying to convince farmers to sell through me, because they weren’t used to dealing with women”

Unfortunately, rather than progress, this woman reported what she felt was a recent deterioration of women’s status in ag, a trend of falling back into old patterns: “Since the crash of 2008, the old boys club [...] now includes a younger generation of old boys.”



Credibility and Confidence

Having confidence and demonstrating credibility are crucial to success in ag entrepreneurship. Unfortunately, both are barriers for some women ag entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan. Those interviewed for this report emphasized the need to be seen as credible to lenders, partners, and consumers, yet women ag entrepreneurs struggled to prove their knowledge and expertise. One noted that, “When you’re a woman, you have to be just that much better to be considered equal in your job, right, in your performance and your deliverables.” Many others also noted that women must work harder to prove themselves in a male-dominated sector: “There is initial, like a skepticism, but women work hard to overcome that. I think generally, the women in agriculture do have to climb a little higher mountain perhaps but after you earn that credibility, it’s solved.”

The same structural barriers that limit women’s representation and recognition also limit the confidence of those who do enter the industry. Thus, lack of confidence cannot be seen as an individual failure of women ag entrepreneurs. Sexism and discrimination hamper women’s confidence and reduce the very recognition of women as credible in the first place. One woman ag entrepreneur rejected the idea that women need to “prove themselves” in ag, noting that women have “proven themselves over and over and over again.” The problem, she noted, is sexism in the industry itself.

Another stated, “It’s a bit of a glass ceiling at the leadership levels and it’s coming, it’s improving, but I think we still have some of that glass ceiling. You’re not considered an expert in agriculture if you’re a woman.” Lack of recognition for women’s expertise may hamper their confidence, which then diminishes their credibility in a self-perpetuating cycle. These confidence concerns may also link back to gender socialization. For many women, lack of confidence stems from not being encouraged or trained in ag to the same extent as men: “I think I myself put myself on a back burner a little bit because I didn’t grow up in ag, and it’s taken me many years to feel comfortable even with the language and the lingo and how farmers talk.”

Women ag entrepreneurs must navigate the male-dominated worlds of business and ag. If women lack procedural knowledge about how to engage in ag entrepreneurship, their credibility and confidence may be undermined. Due to gender roles, men may be more familiar with the processes and practices of public life: “Because everywhere you go in the world there are processes. But it depends how often somebody goes out to have to use them.” Interacting with structures and processes in a new culture adds an additional layer of challenge for immigrant women ag entrepreneurs.

Networking

Networking is one the most commonly reported contributors to the success of women ag entrepreneurs⁹⁷ and this was echoed by the women in this report. Women face difficulties when trying to join knowledge networks that enable access to materials, production information, and specialized skills. As a result, access to new capitals, new markets, and opportunities to build their reputations are not easily attainable by women. Women ag entrepreneurs may struggle to network and navigate in the farming industry, which may perpetuate the belief that they do not belong there.⁹⁸

Historically, business networking happened in very masculine spheres or through masculine activities to which women didn’t have access. One individual reported that, fortunately, this practice may be changing:

“I do think a lot of times business is not always conducted in the meeting rooms, and a lot

of times, business is conducted afterwards, and for a long time, women weren’t included in those afterwards meetings, and I think that’s where they really got excluded. ... I still believe that a lot of business gets done outside of conferences, outside of everything. Like we’re all equal in that conference room, but when the people end up in the bars or in those kind of places where they’re sharing information that a lot of times drives further business, further respect, further everything, that in the past, women weren’t included in that, and I think they are now.”

“Network, build a network, go to events, understand who key players are, understand key influencers within the niche that you’re trying to grow within. Get your name known. It’s an industry that is 100% built on networking.”

In recent years, a variety of conferences, organizations, and social media groups for women in ag have been established. These initiatives provide opportunities for networking and education, facilitate access to resources, and provide support for women in the industry. By increasing connection, capability, and confidence, they help address some of the barriers women face in the ag sector. Importantly, however, networking initiatives must facilitate

women’s representation and power in the industry as a whole. Women in ag events are helpful, but should not entrench “women in ag” as an auxiliary space. Networking initiatives should be carefully designed to propel women into agricultural entrepreneurship, policymaking, and leadership. As one woman ag entrepreneur put it: “Networking with an eye to make things better; I think has value. Networking for us all to just feel really good about ourselves is useless.”

Access to Capital and Financing

Ag entrepreneurship often requires access to land, labour, financing, and capital. Due to the high cost of land, equipment, and inputs, financing is particularly important for women entering primary production. The cost of land is a major factor that inhibits women from becoming farm owners,⁹⁹ particularly since women have not historically inherited farms. Previous studies have indicated that women ag entrepreneurs in Alberta found it difficult to access loans and grants.¹⁰⁰ One woman ag entrepreneur interviewed for this study expressed: “the biggest drawback for agriculture, for me, always has been just the cost. It’s a very expensive business. I guess every business person would say, “Well, so is mine.” But when you think about the cost of equipment alone, oh my goodness. You’re paying for this stuff forever.”

Because of the lack of access to significant capital, women entrepreneurs may pursue ventures that require less capital and in turn, return lower profits than male competitors. In ag, women may adopt low-input or mechanization-light agriculture because they do not have access to the same capital or amount of land as men. A woman ag entrepreneur interviewed for this study reported:

“The biggest problem I think with just entering into farming is that the costs are so high. It’s not impossible, but the costs are high, and unless you’re going to go into something that is fairly specialized—I’m talking as in food processing or something like that—there’s still a lot of the costs are lower in that you don’t need thousands of acres of land to make it pay and everything else. But yes, it’s a high-value entry into farming.”

Despite the barriers, there was a desire by one individual interviewed to see women’s entrepreneurship move beyond the small scale: “[Women’s businesses] tend to be small, I’ll call them almost cottage industry style initiatives. We’re trying to get women to see themselves outside of that; thinking of employing other people, rather than just employing themselves.” Many of those interviewed also felt that some of the barriers related to access to capital and financing for women ag entrepreneurs were being dismantled – this is discussed more in the Opportunities in Women Ag Entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan section.



3.2 Opportunities in Women Ag Entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan

Although the interviews revealed ongoing challenges for women in ag, many of those interviewed emphasized that conditions are changing for the better.

Women noted progress in recent years, indicating there is good reason to be optimistic about the future for women ag entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan. Several factors contributed to this optimism.

Role Models and Building Support

For aspiring women ag entrepreneurs, role models or mentors can provide a crucial entry point into ag networks. One woman ag entrepreneur noted the mutually reinforcing relationship between women's representation, visibility, and role modelling:

"I think that there are probably more women farmers today than there has ever been before. I think it's really exciting to see that number increasing, and especially the number of women who are the primary farmer. I think that's really exciting to see and are really great role models and examples for my daughter to look to. To see that you don't need to necessarily be married or to be the co-farmer. You can be the primary farmer. But it's a slow process, and it's still women, primary farmers, are the minority. So there's lots of room for improvement and growth in that area."

Another emphasized role modelling for her daughters, to: "Just be good mentors for them. I think some of that gets lost nowadays, because everything just gets so busy. So, and I think, me being an active woman on the farm definitely gives confidence to my kids that my girls, especially, that they can do it too."

Despite the importance of role modelling for women in ag, some felt there are times to recognize gender and also times to de-emphasize it. As one noted, it is also important for women leaders in ag to be seen as leaders without the constant qualifier of gender:

"And my concern there was that [being a woman] wasn't relevant to the day-to-day operations of the organization, and it wasn't relevant in terms of being able to grow our business. It just was kind of a factor within

the selection that they made, I happened to be female. But I think that what it did help do was raise the awareness that sometimes there's only one female in the room."

Through careful and strategic emphasis on gender and role modelling, established women ag entrepreneurs can support those entering the industry. One noted the importance of women supporting each other: "Support each other, and just keep supporting each other, and keep moving forward and don't let anything slide backwards."

Increasingly, farm families are bringing their daughters into the operation. Socialization is powerful: if young women are encouraged to enter the ag sector, they not only see it as a viable option, but learn important knowledge and skills along the way. "I can't tell you how many farm clients [where] I've been part of the conversation at their dinner table, where they're looking at their daughter to take on a leading role within the business and 20 years ago that probably never would have happened." Such mentorship is crucial to overcoming the past failures of gender socialization: "mentorship was always nice, I think for young people and young women to see all the different roles and all the different things they're doing in agriculture now, and seeing there is no limit. There's nothing you can't do just because you're a woman."

Those interviewed overwhelmingly agreed that increased presence of women in ag "can only make us better. I think it will challenge the status quo. I think it will challenge old paradigms and ways of thinking of how it should be done, and ultimately bring more innovation."

Women's Contributions to Key Areas of Ag

Women's representation is unequally distributed across the industry, with some areas of ag revealing higher visibility and involvement of women than others. While women have gained a foothold in the ag sector through education, advocacy, and in specialty or niche production, they remain underrepresented in other key areas. Participants identified areas of ag where further involvement of women is needed, and also spoke of the strong contributions women are making in some areas.

Primary production, heavy equipment, corporate ag, and policy were noted as areas where women are particularly underrepresented. Although more women are getting involved in these areas, many of those interviewed wanted to see more women in primary production, which can help counter the stereotype of farming as "men's work". Heavy mechanics and equipment is another highly masculinized sector where women's participation is low. "I have a love for equipment and big steel and data and technology. [...] But the reality is that in the agriculture equipment side, it tends to be very male-dominated." Another woman ag entrepreneur interviewed had become a heavy-duty mechanic when she saw a need for this skill on her own farm: "At some point everything breaks down, and I figured that I should learn how to work on the equipment I was learning to run on our operations." She reported not having experienced discrimination in the male-dominated field of heavy mechanics, which indicates a positive step forward.

Two additional areas of future focus are the corporate and policy spheres of ag: "I feel [ag] is much more accepting now, except maybe in that corporate world. That corporate world is still a tough nut." Another expressed, "women have to get into policy. But it's really hard to get into policy if nobody will give you the respect of (a), of putting you there, and (b), of listening to you once you get there".

There is also opportunity for women ag entrepreneurs in value-added, processing, organics, and specialty ag. Reflecting the existing literature, one stated that: "Organic farming, too, is different. The only time I've felt uncomfortable as a woman in a room was when I've been in a conventional [i.e., non-organic] farming meeting or conference. I think there's definitely a difference that way as well. No inhibitions or things that prevented me, that's for sure."

Another also saw value-added production as an area with plenty of room for women's leadership: "A lot of the alternative farming, value-added farming people, are women who are running the operations." Although increased representation of women is positive overall, niche production tends to occur at a smaller scale. Some authors have questioned whether "men will continue to be overrepresented as operators of larger, profitable farms, while women operators are concentrated in smaller, financially insecure farms."¹⁰¹

Despite the opportunities presented by value-added activities for women's involvement in ag, limitations may exist. This can also be seen in other areas. Agritourism, for example, may reinforce gender divisions of labour. The role of women in tourism and direct selling tends to be related to the traditional feminine sphere of care work: cleaning, cooking, and serving.¹⁰² While these activities may increase women's visibility in the sector,¹⁰³ researchers have questioned whether they lead to women's empowerment.¹⁰⁴



Advocacy and Mental Health

Social media entrepreneurship and ag advocacy are relatively new but important sites for women's involvement and visibility in ag. In the fall of 2015, the hashtag #WomenOfHarvest first went viral. Women shared selfies while combining, working with livestock, and performing other important farm tasks, often together with their children. Several women interviewed for this report were actively engaged in media and advocacy efforts to promote agriculture, and often promoted women's contributions to the sector.

While acknowledging the importance of these visibility efforts, several farm women cautioned against creating an unrealistic or problematic picture of women in ag. There is a delicate balance between promoting ag as a real option for women and still realistically presenting the barriers women face. While visibility is an important first step, these woman ag entrepreneurs cautioned against overly romanticized portrayals.

Women are also leading advocacy efforts for mental health in the ag sector. Ag is innately a stressful job due to market uncertainties, unpredictable weather, animal health, climate change, and financial issues which directly impact crops, products, and income. As a result, it is not surprising that ag workers,

especially producers (68%), experience higher than average stress levels which lead to anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and burnout.¹⁰⁵ In a 2016 study of 1100 Canadian farmers, about 45% experienced high stress.¹⁰⁶ Overall, in that study 61.9% of participants reported that they experienced psychological distress. Anxiety and depression were reported in 58% and 35% of farmers, respectively. Men were more likely to experience normal to mild anxiety and depression, whereas women scored in the moderate to severe range. This finding suggests that women farmers may be more vulnerable to anxiety and depression due to farm-related stress.

There is still a stigma around mental health, in general, and more so in ag as a male dominated industry. Additionally, farmers tend to be apprehensive to request help and live in rural areas where access to help is limited.¹⁰⁷ To combat this issue, in 2017, two women in Saskatchewan launched Do More Ag, Canada's first not-for-profit organization focused on mental health in ag. The organization's mandate is to raise awareness of mental health issues in ag, create a community of belonging, and encourage more research in this area which will help break the stigma.¹⁰⁸ This initiative has expanded its reach across Canada and into rural areas which are typically unreached areas.

"I think the new focus on mental health in farming has been driven by women and breaking down those stigmas. I think that's been a huge part of the reason why the stigma around mental health isn't nearly as bad as it was even five years ago."



Access to Financial Resources and Support Programs

New opportunities are emerging to assist women ag entrepreneurs access financing, mentoring, training, and other support to build their businesses. Interviews with financial lenders, for example, indicated that barriers to financing are starting to break down. One spoke about more equitable practices in the financial sector:

“If we have a female come in and wants to buy farm land, we absolutely would look at that. We have criteria that we look at, and as long as those criteria are met, they would have their equity and their down payment and the cash flow, there would be no barriers outside of those types of things for a female versus a male.”

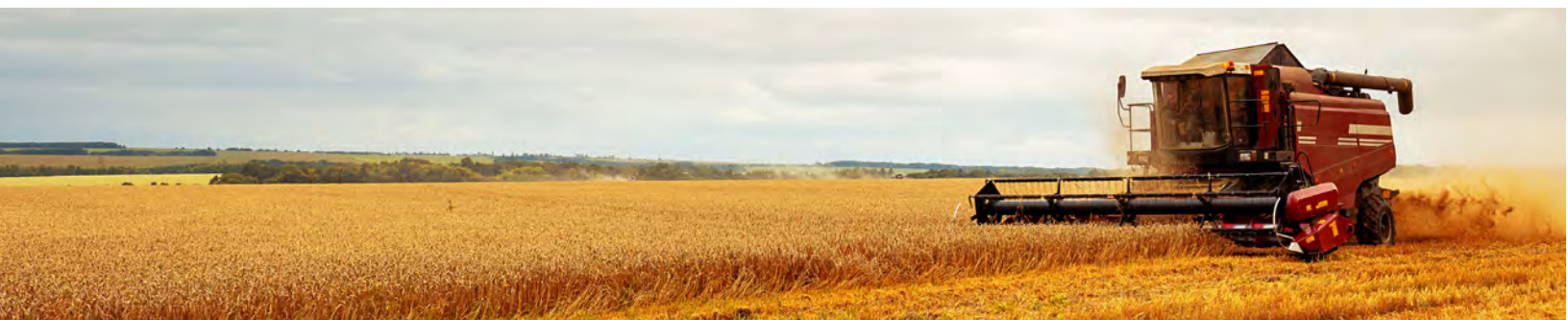
While structural barriers like access to equity or cash flow may still prevent women from securing funding, more equitable formal processes are a step in the right direction. Small behaviours can also make a big difference. One interviewee emphasized the importance of speaking directly to both women and men during financial consultations to ensure both partners are recognized equally.

Several programs offer support specifically for women entrepreneurs. Farm Credit Canada (FCC) offers loans for women ag entrepreneurs through its Women Entrepreneur Program. The program includes a loan fee waiver. The program was described in this way: “it acknowledges that you’re starting a business as a woman and loan fees will be waived. The idea behind that is you would use that money, that you would’ve used for loan fees, and take it to go and attend a conference, or take some additional training to strengthen yourself as a producer and a business person.”

Women ag entrepreneurs can also access loans through WESK, which provides financial support to majority woman-owned and controlled businesses. Nonprofit organizations like WESK and the Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre Inc. through its AWESOME program (Advancing Women Entrepreneurs through Skill Development, Opportunity Identification, Manufacturing Support and Export Marketing) provide other important non-financial supports, such as advice, training, and business planning. Some of these initiatives are supported by government investments. Through the Government of Canada’s 2018 Women Entrepreneurship Strategy funding was provided to a number of Saskatchewan women ag entrepreneurs. Women who grew up on farms or those with ag education have an advantage over women without an ag background as they enter their roles knowing the lingo or language of the business. In relation to farming, some knowledge can only be acquired through trial and error: “You can go get educated to be a grain buyer or a merchant or agronomist or whatever you’re doing, but the farm, there’s not really any education other than just doing it.” Thus, non-farm women may struggle more than other women ag entrepreneurs to be perceived as credible.

Additionally, women entrepreneurs require “specific tailored education and skills like, ‘how do I get my business from startup to a successful million dollar plus revenue targets within three years?’”. Without the appropriate training and education, women have difficulty building and accessing networks that allow women to gain knowledge and resources required to scale their businesses.¹⁰⁹ Thus, it is imperative that training and educational opportunities are created for women ag entrepreneurs.

New opportunities are emerging to help women ag entrepreneurs access financing, mentoring, training, and other support to build their businesses.



Men Supporting Change

The individuals interviewed discussed that ag is becoming more inclusive and attentive to gender equality. Women in ag today are more recognized and visible than they were 20 years ago, and they are being given a voice in public spheres and decisions related to the business. There is also less stigma and discrimination towards women ag entrepreneurs and more support from government, lenders, and individual men, both on- and off-farm. This may be linked to increasing visibility of women in ag as more women are gaining agricultural education, becoming agronomists, establishing or leading agribusinesses, returning to the family farm, and becoming farm operators.

One woman ag entrepreneur observed this change: “I think I’m seeing it change already to a more inclusive environment where everybody has a seat at the table. It’s not as traditional anymore, where the husband’s in the field and the woman’s bringing the meals. I see that changing and I think there’s a huge value in that.”

On the farm, gendered divisions of labour are weakening and gender roles are changing; for example, men are becoming more involved in childcare while more women are performing traditionally masculine tasks, like operating equipment. One noted, “the men of my generation are much more involved in child care than our parents’ generation, for example. But there’s still a long, long way to go in that regard.”

Another, whose husband is not involved in the operation, said: “My husband has [...] been changing and taking care of babies since the day they were born because they do get left with him. He’s a single parent, I’m going to say, during seeding and harvest in a role that most women would be to a man on the farm. He takes that role.”

“I think I’m seeing it change already to a more inclusive environment where everybody has a seat at the table. It’s not as traditional anymore, where the husband’s in the field and the woman’s bringing the meals. I see that changing and I think there’s a huge value in that.”



04

RECOMMENDATIONS



“So many people have seen how far gender bias has come, they don’t realize that there are still issues to overcome. But, I think it’s really important that we keep talking about it, and that studies like this one are done and money is put towards them. It’s a really important topic. Even though things are getting better, it doesn’t mean that they’re perfect, so it’s really good that we’re still having the conversation.”

Despite notable progress, gender inequality continues to exist in the ag sector. Gender issues—such as stereotyping, sexism, and lack of access to crucial resources—perpetuate barriers and challenges for women entrepreneurs. Inclusion of women is beneficial for the sector as a whole. Women bring innovative ideas and important contributions while contributing to financial growth. Based upon the findings of this report several recommendations are outlined to address the challenges that women ag entrepreneurs confront and to continue the advancement of women of ag entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan.

1) **Accounting for Women Ag Entrepreneurs.**

Women farm operators *are* women ag entrepreneurs, even if not formally recognized in the ownership agreements. We need to expand our understanding of what counts as women ag entrepreneurs and ensure women farm operators are being counted and viewed as women ag entrepreneurs.

2) **Recognizing Women Farmers for the Work they do.** Adopting language that aligns with authoritative professionals in the public sphere, as opposed to domesticated farm activities in the private sphere,

reinforces that women farmers are competent masters of their craft. Profiling women ag entrepreneurs in the media and in various industry association publications is important.

Continuing to recognize and profile women ag entrepreneurs through awards such as Outstanding Young Farmers is also crucial in recognizing the work that women farmers do, as ag entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan.

3) **Increased Child Care Support and Child-friendly Spaces.** Increased childcare support is a major facilitator of successful women ag entrepreneurship. Such support can be both informal, such as increased participation of men in childcare, but also formal access to childcare spaces in rural communities. Providing child-friendly spaces at ag conferences will also facilitate the participation of more women ag entrepreneurs at such events.

4) **Men Supporting Change.** Progress and change in ag is not solely the responsibility of women. In the changing landscape of ag, men can play an important role in equalizing gender relations and breaking down barriers.

5) Building Coalitions. Women can create power in their relations with other women farmers through ag organizations or networks and build solidarity with consumers through direct sales.^{110 111 112}

Value-added and niche production fosters power within the self so that women move from helping roles to primary operators on farms¹¹³; thus, these production modes represent an opportunity or draw for women ag entrepreneurs.¹¹⁴

6) Access to Training and Education. A 2018 WESK report recommended that Saskatchewan create policies to “fund the creation of networks of experienced business women that will act to provide mentoring, emotional support, and training to young women entrepreneurs” and “provide training and education opportunities to women in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as agriculture”.¹¹⁵ One individual interviewed for this report, noted the need for financial education and skill-building workshops (i.e., how to build a business from the ground up). Continued support for programs such as AWESOME is necessary. Accessible timing and formats to better align with the competing priorities that many women ag entrepreneurs face are also crucial.

7) Access to Finance. Loan programs designed specifically for women, such as those offered by FCC and WESK, can help reduce financial barriers and increase confidence for women ag entrepreneurs. Programs should be scaled for small, medium, and large enterprises and should accommodate diverse ag initiatives—from production and processing to marketing and promotion.

8) Policy and Commitment to Change.

Those interviewed for this report noted the importance of women’s leadership in policy and governance of ag organizations. Increased presence and leadership opportunity for women is crucial not only for visibility, but can inform more effective and beneficial decision making.¹¹⁶ While some organizations have begun to implement targets or even quotas for women’s participation, such targets may be unsuccessful without addressing the deeper barriers that constrain women’s involvement in ag.

The five year \$388m Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) between the Province of Saskatchewan and the Government of Canada is another means through which to enact change and to advance women ag entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan. For example, there is an opportunity to recognize and celebrate women ag entrepreneurs specifically through the existing *Agriculture Awareness Initiative Program*, *Next Gen Agricultural Mentorship Program* and *Agriculture Student Scholarship*. Other opportunities to direct attention specifically to women ag entrepreneurship through CAP related programs undoubtedly exist. Further, increased participation by men in childcare is important, but formal policy support for childcare is also required. Ideally, child care in rural areas should be designed with agricultural schedules in mind.

“I think we just have to tell our story and just keep doing our everyday work. I think eventually the stigma has to disappear if we just keep doing it, and showing that we can do it just as equal as a man.”





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The funding for this report was provided by the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub.

The authors would like to thank all of the individuals who agreed to be interviewed for this report. Your contributions to this report and to advancing women ag entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan is greatly appreciated. Those who wished to have their names listed are noted below.

Lexie Adamson
Todd Andries
Tannis Axten
Deanne Belisle
Melanie Boldt
Adele Buettner
Cassie DeMars
Kathryn Elliott
Chelsea Erlandson
Muriel Garven
Jessica Gerrits
Jean Harrington
Adrienne Ivey
Jill Jenkins

Kim Keller
Lisa Klassen
Jennifer Lindgren
Shannon McArton
Bernadette McIntyre
Prabha Mitchell
Leah Olson
Megz Reynolds
Neelu Sachdev
Laura Shoemaker
Barb Stefanyshyn-Coté
Natasha Vandenhurk
Brenda Walde

The authors would also like to thank Amy Pilon for the design work in this report.



APPENDIX A

This study involved a two-part methodology consisting of a literature review and qualitative telephone interviews with 31 women and 1 man representing a range of ag sectors, roles, and entrepreneurial activities.

- 1. Literature review.** The literature review included searches of both scholarly and organizational literature. The following databases or websites were searched: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, CountryGuide.ca, GoogleScholar, National Center for Biotechnology Information, Producer.com, ResearchGate, Saskatchewan Outstanding Young Farmers, Sask Sheep Breeders, Statistics Canada, Turkey Farmers of Saskatchewan, Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub, Women Entrepreneurs Saskatchewan. The literature search used the following keywords: “agrologist”, “entrepreneur”, “entrepreneurship”, “farmer”, “farm operator”, “farm research”, “farm women”, “mental health advocacy”, “ranchers”, “women leaders”, “women-led”. Sources were included if they addressed several key criteria, including entrepreneurship in ag, women operators, women as owners or co-owners of agri-business, and women-led initiatives.
- 2. Interviews.** A semi-structured interview guide was developed, reviewed, and revised by a team of three researchers. A preliminary list of 27 individuals and organizations was identified through Google searches, scans of agricultural magazines and websites, and recommendations from two researchers with expertise on the topics of women in entrepreneurship and women in ag. From this initial list, a snowball sampling method was used in which each participant was invited to suggest others with appropriate experience and expertise. A diverse range of participants was sought, including balance between corporate or organizational representatives (e.g., lenders, agri-business, advocacy organizations, entrepreneurs in communications or media) and women engaged in primary production or processing (e.g., farmers, ranchers, butchers, distillers, vintners), or other forms of ag entrepreneurship (e.g., social media). All interviews were conducted by telephone and transcribed verbatim.
- 3. Analysis.** All transcripts were coded using an inductive approach and NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software. This resulted in a total of 37 codes, which were aggregated to produce the key themes presented in this report.

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