

FEMINISM'S

FIGHT

**CHALLENGING POLITICS AND POLICIES
IN CANADA SINCE 1970**



EDITED BY BARBARA CAMERON AND MEG LUXTON

Feminism's Fight

Challenging Politics and Policies

in Canada since 1970

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5

Fifty Years for Farm Women

Gender and Shifting Agricultural Policy Paradigms in Canada

Amber J. Fletcher

Although women's underrepresentation as farm operators in Canada is well documented, Canadian agricultural *policy* is often depicted as gender neutral. In reality, agricultural policies interact with particular gender roles and ideologies on the farm and throughout the food chain, creating very different experiences for women and men farmers. Although women currently comprise only 29 percent of farm operators in the country (Statistics Canada 2017), little scholarly attention has been paid to the role of policy in either reinforcing or challenging women's underrepresentation.

With its four-page section on "farm wives," the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (RCSW 1970) was one of the first official government documents to acknowledge Canadian farm women's needs and concerns. However, the report offered no gender analysis of agricultural policy specifically, focusing instead on legal and technological issues. In this chapter, I argue that federal agricultural policy paradigms have indeed been gendered, even from their earliest days.

A policy paradigm is a set of deeply embedded ideas that govern policy goals and instruments (Hall 1993). These powerful frameworks determine which issues "count" as policy problems, which options are considered, and further, whose voices are heard (or not) (Skogstad and Whyte 2015). Changes to these paradigms are effected by actors and events, both within and outside the state (Hall 1993). As I discuss in this chapter, women in agriculture were often excluded from formal state and non-state mechanisms, but still found ways of expressing their views on agricultural policy.

The Late 1800s to the Second World War: Gender, Race, and Class

The history of Canadian agricultural policy is fraught with power dynamics of gender, race, and class. Prior to colonization, agriculture was practised by some Indigenous nations, such as the Haudenosaunee (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996) and the Wendat (Anderson 1993; Wyandotte Nation 1999). Farming later became a main activity of the French and English colonists (Morton 2001). However, it was during the late 1800s that the newly formed dominion government became determined to expand the agricultural system by systematically settling the prairies with European and American farmer-settlers. It achieved this goal through a targeted effort to colonize Indigenous people, appropriating their lands and implementing policies that intentionally excluded them from agriculture (see Tang 2003). Recruitment of new farmer-settlers also followed a racial hierarchy that deliberately discouraged Black Americans from coming to Canada (Shepard 1983). Thus, agriculture, at least as we know it today, was established by and for white settlers. Contemporary demographics reflect this colonial history.

The settlement process was also premised on class and gender inequality. One of the dominion government's key reasons for "settling the West" – in addition to building a domestic economy based on staple exports and protecting the west coast from encroaching Americans – was to create a captive market for tariff-protected manufactured goods, including farm implements produced in Ontario and Quebec (Fowke 1957). In this sense, agricultural settlement in western Canada served the "demands and interests of the commercial and industrial East" (McCrorie 1964, 16). In an attempt to complete the railways needed for settlement, private railway companies received massive financial contributions and land grants from government (Fowke 1957). The state's aim of agricultural settlement, therefore, proved very lucrative for private industry. Meanwhile, farmer-settlers eked out a living, paying high prices for tariff-protected implements but receiving low remuneration for their commodities on international markets – a situation still known to farmers as the "cost-price squeeze."

Settlement-era policy also contributed to women's marginalization in agriculture. Through the Dominion Lands Act of 1872, the government enticed homesteaders with free land, and although this offer was open to

any person over the age of eighteen, women were not legally considered “persons” and therefore could access a homestead only if they were the sole household head (Rollings-Magnusson 1999). Women’s work was instrumental in agricultural settlement, often adapting to the needs of the farm and its financial situation (Rollings-Magnusson 1999), yet they were largely excluded from the formal processes and sites of power in the agricultural system (Carter 2016).

Few farm support programs existed from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, as the dominion government focused primarily on immigration and settlement (Hedley 2015). However, to achieve its goal of settling the West, the government still attempted to balance the needs of farmers with those of corporate interests. For example, in 1897 it legislated the “Crow Rate,” a flat shipping rate for western Canadian grain heading to eastern ports by rail, which helped reduce farmers’ transport costs. The government considered the Crow Rate to be a concession for the large amount of government funding the railway companies had received to build the rail lines in the first place.

By the early 1900s, farmers had become increasingly outspoken and active on agricultural policy. They established and acted on shared class concerns in opposition to corporate interests. For example, concerned about corporate corruption in the grain-handling and transport sectors, they created cooperative grain companies. Changes in agricultural policy were sometimes prompted by “policy windows” – openings or opportunities through which advocates of certain policy options could advance their claims (Kingdon 2003). The onset of the First World War opened a policy window in grain marketing; a single-desk (monopsony) grain-marketing agency was created as a temporary wartime measure, which ignited farmer agitation for a permanent version. However, this proposal was flatly rejected by the Royal Grain Inquiry Commission (1925), as it interfered with the government’s preference for open export markets.

The combined crises of the Great Depression and the prolonged drought of the Dirty Thirties served as a focusing event that prompted agricultural safety nets and market stabilization measures, suggesting a shift toward a more interventionist approach to public policy in general. The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration was established in 1934 to address water management and soil quality, but this move also set the stage for an era of

increased government intervention (Marchildon 2009). For example, the federal government maintained a public seed-breeding program to provide farmers with new varieties of seed (Kuyek 2007). Perhaps most notably, a policy window that had previously been firmly shut now opened: the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) was permanently established as a marketer of Canadian grain in 1935.

Despite the importance of the new interventions, women were not formally at the helm of agricultural programs. For example, very few CWB commissioners have been women (Manitoba Historical Society 2019). They were also excluded from the agrarian protest movement of the early twentieth century. For instance, in 1911, women could attend meetings of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association only as “visitors” or by bringing refreshments (Taylor 2007).

Farm women were not silent, however: they responded to this marginalization by starting their own agricultural organizations such as the Women Grain Growers, established in 1913, and by forming women’s auxiliaries of the main farm groups (Taylor 2007). Their contributions during the early decades of the 1900s are documented through the work of notable farmer-activists such as Violet McNaughton (Hobbs and Wurtele 2009) and first-hand narratives of homesteaders such as Georgina Binnie-Clark (Binnie-Clark and Carter 2006), who challenged androcentrism and sexism in agriculture. Historians have also demonstrated how farm women used the women’s pages of agricultural publications to communicate and even politicize their concerns about various issues, including homesteading law and unequal gendered work roles (Hobbs and Wurtele 2009; Kelcey and Davis 1997; Strong-Boag 1986). Despite their marginalization in policy decision making, farm women were openly critical of policy from the early days of Confederation.

1945 to the Early 1970s: The Commission and the Keynesians

The period following the Second World War (1945–70) brought further opportunity for farm women to voice their opinions on agricultural policy. During this time, the federal government increased its role in agriculture through support programs and price control mechanisms. In some cases, this meant maintaining wartime measures, such as the Feed Freight Assistance Act (1941), which facilitated the supply of western feed grains

to assist livestock producers throughout Canada. New policies and programs were also introduced; for example, the Agricultural Stabilization Act (1958) supplemented farm incomes on some commodities when they dipped below a certain historical average. The federal government ensured that the program supported family farms, not the few large corporate ventures that existed at the time (Hedley 2015). By instilling some price stability, such legislation provided farm families with a measure of security.

The 1960s and 1970s also saw a strong focus on supply management, which intended to stabilize farmers' incomes by aligning supply and demand in the domestic market. Supply management systems were established in the dairy, poultry, and egg sectors. In 1966, the government passed the Canadian Dairy Commission Act to regulate milk prices. Some of these systems still exist today, but are frequently challenged by market liberalization advocates.

By the 1970s, signs of a coming paradigm shift were starting to appear. In 1969, in the context of oversupply issues and low farm incomes, the Federal Task Force on Agriculture had released a report recommending an overall decrease in the number of family farms and a shift toward industrialized, large-scale agriculture. However, the task force emphasized that "this in no way implies a reversion to anything approaching a simplistic *laissez faire* system" and recommended the creation of national marketing boards and stabilization programs (Federal Task Force on Agriculture 1969, 10). The recommendation for larger and fewer farms has since come to fruition, and the neoliberal era brought a simultaneous reduction in marketing boards and price controls, as discussed later.

Keynesian-era agricultural policy was largely the domain of (white) male policy-makers. As one example, the 1968 election sent a single female MP to the House of Commons, Grace MacInnis from British Columbia. It is notable, also, that the task force report made no mention of women. Fortunately, the RCSW report did.

Visualizing "Farm Wives": The Royal Commission

The RCSW (1970, 40) report's section on "farm wives" began with the important acknowledgment that "the farm wife plays a virtually indispensable part in the successful operation of the farm." The report went on to

describe the challenges that plagued Canadian farm women, from geographical isolation to lack of childcare. The commission also focused on farm women's legal rights because, at the time, women were not legally entitled to a half share in their family farm or ranch.

Technology was by far the most prominent topic in the section on farm women. It noted the importance of household labour-saving devices and lamented that farm women had less access to them than their urban counterparts. It also described how farm mechanization had decreased farm women's manual labour. A common thread connecting the diverse topics in the report was a strong recognition of women's work and its significance at home and on the farm.

Nonetheless, the report did not acknowledge the impacts of agricultural policies – or even of political-economic conditions more generally – on the lives of Canadian farm women. Beyond a brief mention of increasing mechanization and how this might change women's roles (raising the question of whether the commissioners may have read the task force on agriculture report), the analysis of women's work remained mostly at the micro level and was not strongly linked to broader political and economic events. The only policy analysis in the section is related to matrimonial property law, not to agriculture. This omission could potentially be explained in several ways: perhaps, as marginalized farm “helpers,” women had little to say about agricultural policy. Or perhaps the commission itself failed to perceive “farm wives” as farmers who might have something to say about agriculture. It is also possible that the high level of government intervention in agriculture had produced a general satisfaction with current policies and programs. Interestingly, the data that informed the RCSW report provide some evidence that farm women were indeed concerned with agricultural policy issues, and they did have something to say about it.

The *Family Herald* Survey of Canadian Farm Women, 1968

The four-page section in the RCSW report was based on a far more extensive survey of farm women. In 1968, 865 Canadian farm women completed a questionnaire published in *Family Herald* magazine, and their responses informed the RCSW section on farm women. Like the RCSW report, the *Family Herald* survey (Rioux 1969) focused mostly on micro- and

meso-level issues, such as work, access to education and health services, and involvement with organizations. As with most survey research, responses were inevitably shaped by the questions and answer options available.

Overall, the survey found that farm women valued their lifestyle. Over 81 percent reported that their ideal was to live on a farm as opposed to a city; however, they also expressed concerns about their property rights, financial security and independence, and access to information about agriculture. The survey also explored their work activities on-farm, off-farm, and in the household.

Nearly 20 percent of the respondents worked off-farm, most part-time. Interestingly, whether a woman worked for pay was not associated with the farm's revenue. Women stated that they worked for various reasons, including to earn extra money for the family (32.1 percent), for personal reasons such as meeting people or for a change in surroundings (25.0 percent), to pay for basic necessities (20.5 percent), or to gain financial independence (16.7 percent). These data contrast starkly with later studies conducted during the neoliberal era (Kubik 2004; Martz 2006), in which respondents worked primarily to support the farm or the household finances.

The majority of *Family Herald* respondents were not working off-farm, because of other responsibilities with children, home, and farm. Household chores clearly occupied a large amount of their time. Almost 86 percent revealed that they had "no help at all" with housework, and when aid was available, it was usually provided by relatives (10.6 percent) rather than male partners, thus revealing a stark gendered division of labour (Rioux 1969).

The survey examined participation in six types of work: bookkeeping, milking, feeding livestock, poultry, driving truck or tractor, and gardening. Most respondents (90 percent) were involved in at least one of these jobs, and 53 percent reported doing more than ten hours of work on the farm each week. The chores that consumed most of the women's work hours were driving a truck or a tractor and milking. Although they performed many tasks for which they were not primarily responsible, women were more likely to be responsible for gardening (56.2 percent), bookkeeping (37.2 percent), and work with poultry (14.8 percent). Surprisingly, although

they typically handled the bookkeeping, 60.7 percent reported that they devoted less than one hour per week to this job. As we will see below, paperwork and accounting tasks increased substantially in the neoliberal era, especially for women.

The *Family Herald* data clearly support the royal commission's emphasis on property rights. Although 41.5 percent of all respondents said that they had personally invested money in the farm business, this did not always translate into ownership: only 34.6 percent had some legal ownership in the farm itself. Without it, women could potentially lose everything, since matrimonial property laws did not ensure them a legal share in the farms or ranches on which they lived. Over 71 percent agreed with the statement that "legislation should be introduced which would automatically make the wife half owner of the farm, even if she does not contribute to it financially" (Rioux 1969).

The survey did not explicitly seek respondents' views on macro-level agricultural policy or economics. However, the results do provide insights that did not appear in the RCSW report: one of the most commonly mentioned suggestions ($n = 798$) in the survey's open-ended question was that "farm wives should have say in political affairs." In another open-field question, which asked for the top three priorities to address farm women's concerns, the second-most mentioned priority (after legal partnership for wives in the farm) was "price controls or government farm subsidies" (Rioux 1969). Although the RCSW report emphasized individual-level issues, women farmers were clearly trying to put political and economic issues on the agenda. Even more significant is that they not only favoured market controls and farm supports, but also advocated for more of these measures.

The 1968 *Family Herald* survey was a rare opportunity for some women to express their views on farm economics and policy. It found that very few respondents were active in farm organizations; 70.6 percent did not belong to any farm organization at all. This may be due to issues of male dominance in these groups and the pervasive marginalization of women as "farm wives." It is important to note, however, that farm women's organizations did exist during this period; unfortunately, because the survey report distinguished only between farm organizations, women's organizations, and community organizations, it is unclear how women's farm

organizations (e.g., women's auxiliaries) were defined. Survey respondents were much more active in women's organizations and community groups than in farm organizations.

The Late 1970s to the 2020s: Neoliberalism and Farming as a Business

The late 1970s marked the advent of a neoliberal approach to Canadian agricultural policy. Financial pressures from rising oil prices and the end of a boom period were beginning to take their toll, and across the country social safety nets were targeted for cuts (McBride 2001; see also [Chapter 3](#) in this volume). Neoliberal principles, including deregulation, privatization, free trade, and market liberalization (Harvey 2005), became the new status quo in agriculture. Associated with this paradigm was a growing ideology of farming as a business like any other. In 1989, the government released *Growing Together: A Vision for Canada's Agri-Food Industry*, in which the minister of agriculture presented the vision of "a more market-oriented agri-food industry," with "government programs that encourage a more self-reliant sector that is able to receive a reasonable return from the market place" (Agriculture Canada 1989). The report argued that farm safety nets reduced the independent decision making of farmers and distorted market signals.

Internationalization and the free trade fascination of the 1980s further exposed farmers to the vagaries of international markets while simultaneously forcing more reductions in the farm safety net that had been established throughout the post-war period. Countervailing challenges from the United States reduced the number of commodity support programs. Farm support policy shifted toward voluntary pay-in programs (such as the Net Income Stabilization Program and later AgriStability), which were based on shared contributions by farmers and governments. Such programs are premised on an individualized responsibility approach that is quite characteristic of neoliberalism and is favourable to higher-income producers. Unfortunately, lower-income farmers were often unable to generate sufficient income to participate in these programs (Roppel, Desmarais, and Martz 2006).

Throughout the neoliberal period, government contributions to farm programs were gradually reduced (Hedley 2015). Trade-motivated deregulation prompted the cancellation of some agricultural policies and

programs. For example, the historic Crow Rate policy, which had been in place since 1897, was eliminated in 1983, increasing transportation costs for farmers (Fletcher 2013). The Western Grain Transportation Act, which had mitigated some of the impact of the Crow Rate loss, was later abolished in 1995. As a result, farmers began to pay the full cost of rail transport in an industry that was dominated by only two large railway companies. Interestingly, this change also corresponded exactly with the privatization of the Canadian National Railway that same year. The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration was discontinued in 2008, the effects of which are still being felt in the loss of community pastures, water management infrastructure, shelterbelt programs, and other environmental services. In 2011, Stephen Harper's Conservative government eliminated the "single desk" selling capacity of the CWB, facilitating the entrance of large agribusiness corporations into the grain-handling sector. Although the move was applauded by some large producers with a free-market orientation and the capacity to self-market, others in the farm community derided the decision for its effects on small- and medium-sized farms.

The neoliberal policy paradigm is not only deregulatory, but also "re-regulatory." The phenomenon of new constitutionalism, defined as "a governance process that effectively locks in national and international commitments to market-based frameworks of accumulation and distribution" (Bakker and Gill 2008, 19), is clearly visible in agriculture. One key example was Canada's reorientation of its domestic policy to align with international intellectual property regimes such as TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) and the UPOV (International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants), which ensure the rights of seed and plant breeders to profit on their new varieties. These policies created new opportunities for corporate profit in the seed- and plant-breeding sectors while simultaneously governing how farmers use their seed (Fletcher 2013).

Whereas the household technology gaps discussed in the RCSW report have largely been addressed, new agricultural technologies have proved a mixed blessing. Seed and machinery innovations have increased the productivity of farmers, but in doing so, they have also fuelled a productivity treadmill. Under the current governance regimes, new seed and agri-chemical sets tie farmers into usage rules that restrain their agency and

raise their input costs while benefitting the large agri-corporations that produce these inputs. Crops are often inspected to ensure that farmers are not violating terms of use by reseeding patent-protected crops rather than purchasing a new supply of patent-protected seed for every growing season.

As the cost of farm inputs rises to account for corporate profit margins, farmers have adapted by increasing the size of their farms – an approach commonly described as “get big or get out.” The overall number of farms across the country is steadily declining as small- and medium-scale producers retire or leave the industry. The average size of the remaining farms has exploded. Between 2006 and 2011, the average farm size in Canada grew by 6.9 percent (Statistics Canada 2012). In Saskatchewan, the average farm size expanded by a historically unprecedented 23.0 percent from 2006 to 2016 (Statistics Canada 2006, 2016). A study conducted in 2012 with Saskatchewan farmers (Fletcher 2013) found that farmers’ main motivation for increasing farm size was to remain financially viable.

The effects of corporatization and industrialization in agriculture became highly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two large-scale meat-processing facilities in Alberta became the site of coronavirus outbreaks. Together, the plants comprised 70 percent of Canadian beef-processing capacity (Canadian Press 2020), and their workforces were heavily dependent on immigration from lower-income countries (Bouka and Bouka 2020). Critics such as the National Farmers Union (2020) noted how corporate concentration and loss of small-scale abattoirs negatively affected resilience of the food system during the crisis. The NFU showed that closures and slowdowns in the two facilities, which are owned by large multinational corporations, created a “choke point,” with ripple effects throughout the sector – including for farmers who needed to sell their cattle. The COVID-19 pandemic therefore revealed deep-seated problems and vulnerabilities in the corporatized structure of the Canadian agri-food system.

Gender on the Contemporary Farm

By time of the 2016 census, women’s historical exclusion from agriculture was still reflected in statistics. According to the 2016 Census of Agriculture, the percentage of female farm operators had increased by just 3.0 percent

during the previous twenty-five years to a total of 28.7 percent of all Canadian farm operators (Statistics Canada 2017). Only 7.2 percent of farms were run solely by women. In contrast, 60.1 percent had a sole male operator (Statistics Canada 2017). It is important to note, however, that many of these farms may still involve spouses (usually women) whose work contributes in various ways but who do not identify as operators on the census. Among young farmers under age thirty-five, women were still underrepresented in the 2016 census: only 8.2 percent of young sole operators were female, whereas 68.3 percent were male (Statistics Canada 2017). Amid this generally disappointing statistical representation, there is some good news: young sole female operators were a fast-growing demographic group, increasing by 113.3 percent between 2011 and 2016 (Statistics Canada 2017).

Women's farms tend to be smaller than men's – in both size and income. A special tabulation of Statistics Canada 2011 data showed that farms run solely by women averaged 296 acres, whereas men's averaged 875 acres (Fletcher, Kubik, and Corman 2017). Accordingly, women's farms also made considerably less money: the average net farm income per female operator was \$8,924, compared to \$43,242 for men (Fletcher, Kubik, and Corman 2017).

Despite these inequalities, gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) – an approach for identifying the gendered and intersectional impacts of policies – is still developing in the agricultural policy sphere. In 2003, the federal government eliminated the Farm Women's Bureau, which had facilitated GBA in agricultural policy. Although the decision was made in the name of “gender mainstreaming” – integration of GBA throughout all departments, rather than in centralized units such as the bureau – there is little evidence that much GBA (now GBA+) was occurring in the area of agricultural policy during the 2000s.¹ Audits of Canada's GBA+ process in 2009 and 2015 did not mention Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, focusing instead on departments that had an explicit commitment to GBA+. Federal departments were able to decide whether a particular policy issue required GBA+; therefore, it was sometimes simply determined that GBA+ was not necessary. The general lack of emphasis on GBA+ in agricultural policy helped to reinforce the false assumption that it was somehow gender neutral.

In 2015, however, the election of a Liberal government under Justin Trudeau brought increasing integration of gender considerations into the policy paradigm. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada released a departmental policy statement committing to gender analysis in its policies and programs. In 2018, 2019, and again in 2020, it produced plans for GBA+ training, implementation, and reporting in selected programs (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2018, 2019, 2020). The requirement for mandatory GBA+ on all memoranda to Cabinet and Treasury Board submissions appears to be a driving factor in departmental GBA+ efforts (e.g., Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2020). Further research is needed to examine the depth of GBA+ initiatives in such proposals.

As governments continue to develop strategies for identifying gendered policy effects, research has revealed the consequences of policy in the lives of farm women during the neoliberal period. In 2002, Wendee Kubik conducted a large-scale mixed-methods study to document Saskatchewan farm women's work and its relationship to physical and mental health and well-being. Overall, she found that the three most important factors affecting farm women's health were financial issues, overwork, and stress (Kubik 2004, 2005; Kubik and Moore 2002, 2005). Her study revealed that farm women felt pressured to achieve a "traditional farm wife" ideal that included home gardening, canning, and baking from scratch – the kind of activities observed in the 1968 *Family Herald* survey, where women stated that they were too busy with domestic work to take off-farm employment.

For Kubik's participants, working solely in one area was not a realistic option. Their work exemplified Nettie Wiebe's (1995) phenomenon of the "triple day," in which farm women work on the farm, perform the majority of domestic and caregiving work, and hold a paying job elsewhere. Most of the women in Kubik's study did not view this situation as ideal. Their triple day was largely the result of financial pressures, with 67 percent reporting that the farm depended on their off-farm income for survival or would survive only with difficulty if deprived of this income (Kubik and Moore 2005). Most participants found their lives stressful as a result. This corresponds with Kubik's (2004) finding that only 16.8 percent of farm women were working off-farm for personal reasons or fulfillment (compared to 25.0 percent in 1968). The contrast indicates that pressures simply

to stay afloat were more relevant for Kubik's 2002 participants than for the 1968 *Family Herald* respondents.

Studies show that women's on-farm work has also increased over time. Diane Martz (2006) conducted a large-scale national study of farm women's work in Canada and compared the findings to a 1982 study by the National Farmers Union (Koskie 1982). Martz's study found that women's overall participation in farm work – defined as fieldwork (e.g., driving machinery, running errands), livestock work, and farm management (e.g., bookkeeping) – had increased since the 1980s. Like their counterparts in 1968, farm women in the 2010s were most likely to perform tasks such as running errands, hauling grain, looking after livestock, and bookkeeping and management (Fletcher 2013; Kubik 2004; Martz 2006). As farms became larger, all of these tasks increased. Indeed, women's participation in and responsibility for bookkeeping and farm management had grown substantially since the 1968 study. For this reason, women in the 2010s were more likely than past generations to be aware of the farm's financial situation. At the same time, however, Saskatchewan women in Amber Fletcher's (2013) qualitative study noted that the paperwork burden had worsened dramatically in their lifetime and that it constituted a major burden, particularly as farms grew larger and were increasingly responsible for their own marketing.

Fletcher's (2013) study also identified a paradox related to government intervention in agriculture: although the women attributed their increased paperwork mostly to government programs, they simultaneously felt abandoned by government and wished for more intervention to ensure market fairness. De-emphasizing safety nets, they wanted to see greater control over the cost of inputs (such as seed and transport), as well as more price stability. In open-ended interviews, their most frequently proposed solution was "policies to encourage small-scale farming" (186).

These findings are consistent with a 2006 study by Carla Roppel, Annette Desmarais, and Diane Martz (2006). In this study, farm women (approximately half of whom were associated with the National Farmers Union, a politically progressive membership-based farm organization) clearly identified the role of weak safety nets and corporatization in exacerbating the cost-price squeeze. This trend resembles that found by Fletcher (2013), wherein women placed less emphasis on safety nets than on other

forms of government intervention. Most did so because they perceived programs as disproportionately benefitting larger farms. The participants in the study by Roppel, Desmarais, and Martz (2006) also emphasized market stabilization for fairer prices.

Martz's (2006) analysis similarly shows the significant impact of the political-economic context on farm women's lives. Her results suggest that families diversified their activities and income strategies to cope with financial pressures associated with political-economic restructuring. Fletcher (2013) also found that as farms grew in response to broader political-economic pressure, uncertainty, and lack of control, women's labour was increasingly called upon. For example, one woman on a very large farm reported driving forty minutes each way to deliver meals to workers in the field (Fletcher 2013). Just as women in the early homesteading days adapted their labour to fit the needs of the farm, women's work continues to flex, accommodating the needs of the farm in the neoliberal period.

Kubik's participants reported a high dependence on their off-farm work for farm survival. Although 86 percent of Martz's participants worked off the farm to supplement household or farm income, 33 percent also reported "desire and enjoyment" as a motivator for doing so. By contrast, Fletcher's (2013) participants were more likely to identify personal desire and fulfillment as their main reasons for taking off-farm employment. A probable cause of this difference is that, in the years that elapsed between the previous studies and Fletcher's, many struggling family farmers had left the industry. When Fletcher's (2013) participants were asked about ideal work arrangements if money was not an issue, most stated that they would not relinquish their paying jobs. Indeed, Fletcher (2013) found that they took off-farm work mostly for reasons of personal fulfillment and goals, with a secondary aim of earning money for the household. Although their enjoyment of paid employment might be uncritically attributed to "choice," Fletcher found that their decision to work off-farm was linked to deeper issues of gender ideology and divisions of labour on the farm, which position women as "employees" who have little influence over farm practices and decision making. The study concluded that neoliberalism in agriculture had led to a loss of control by farmers generally, as they were increasingly at the mercy of price fluctuations on international markets, lack of control over the cost and use of inputs (such as seed protected by intellectual property rights)

and transportation, and climate disasters linked to climate change (Fletcher 2013). Because women were less likely than men to be seen as the “main farmer” on their operation, they became progressively more detached from its decision making and shifted their attention to paid employment elsewhere.

The four studies from the 2010s showed that women performed increased on- and off-farm work in conjunction with household and caregiving labour, for which they were still primarily responsible. Indeed, household gendered divisions of labour did not appear to have changed much since 1968. Participants in all the studies mentioned a lack of recognition for their work on the farm and in the household. Women’s responsibility for domestic and caregiving work reinforced their disconnection and lack of involvement over conditions at the farm level, creating a perpetuating cycle of their detachment and underrepresentation in farming.

In stark contrast to the agrarian protest movement of the early 1900s, farmers’ adaptation to the neoliberal paradigm has been much more individualistic, rather than collectivist, and has mostly revolved around expanding individual farm size for economies of scale. Thus, competition for land continues to create tensions between farmers in some regions. Large commodity groups funded by producer check-offs (which automatically receive a portion of profits from farm commodities unless farmers opt out) are an increasingly powerful voice. Most of these commodity groups exemplify a neoliberal free-market ideology and claim to represent all producers of that commodity. Further, various industry-sponsored public relations campaigns have recently emerged under the pretext of dispelling myths about agriculture. While playing on farmers’ legitimate concerns about feeling undervalued and disrespected in Canadian society, these campaigns ultimately promote agricultural chemicals and other inputs produced by large corporations. Because these campaigns use neutral names that promote pride in agriculture, identifying the corporate interests that lie behind them can be difficult.

The combination of corporatization in grain marketing and inputs, loss of small farms, farm stress, and neoliberal individualism has been detrimental to progressive farm women’s organizations. The Saskatchewan Women’s Agricultural Network, United Farm Women of Alberta, and the

Canadian Farm Women's Network all ceased operating in the 2000s. Like other volunteer-based equality-seeking associations, farm women's groups experienced difficulties with lack of core funding from governments and member burnout due to busy lifestyles (Rogers 2003). Farm women's organizations were affected by rural depopulation (fewer members) and an aging membership. In the early twenty-first century, however, a new breed of organization gained prominence. Groups and conferences targeted at "women in agriculture" – a category that includes agronomists and representatives of agricultural corporations – increasingly offer networking, mentorship, leadership, and business skill development opportunities for women. With support from private sources, these associations and events eschew critical political analyses, focusing instead on relatively apolitical and individualized issues (such as leadership) to enhance women's participation in the business of farming within neoliberal frameworks.

Resistance and Alternatives

In response to the powerful voice and influence of corporate actors in agriculture, some farmers have turned to alternative agriculture as a form of resistance (Beingessner and Fletcher 2020; Jarosz 2011; McMahon 2002; Sumner and Llewelyn 2011). Alternative agriculture encompasses various practices, including organics, community-supported agriculture (CSA), local marketing, and urban agriculture. Very little research has examined gender dynamics in Canadian alternative agriculture, but statistics show that women are slightly more likely to operate organic farms than non-organic ones (Fletcher, Kubik, and Corman 2017). Because it rejects the dominant paradigm, alternative agriculture holds potential as a place where unequal gender relations can also be challenged (McMahon 2002).

Localized and CSA models may foster more connection, and even risk sharing, between producers and consumers of food. Since women still perform most food-related domestic work in Canadian households, the alternative paradigm suggests the possibility for more interconnection and understanding between women as producers and consumers. It is important, however, not to romanticize or reify this paradigm. As Angela Tregear (2011) points out, even localized and direct marketing involves a buyer-seller connection and is not automatically free of exploitive relations, including self-exploitation by farmers who become responsible not only

for producing food but also for selling, processing, and even packaging it. The limited research on gender in Canadian organic agriculture warns that organic production is not necessarily a panacea for women's empowerment and may in fact reproduce some of the gendered divisions of labour found in conventional agriculture (Hall and Mogorodoy 2007).

Attention to gendered divisions of labour among consumers is also crucial: because local and CSA food tends to be unprocessed (CSA carrots may even come complete with garden soil), preparing it may require more labour and skill than for mainstream food. Consumers will often spend extra time purchasing local or organic food from a greater number of sources (Tregear 2011). In many households, cooking and grocery shopping are done primarily by women, so considering such issues through a gender lens is important. Further, the high cost and reduced availability of local or organic food can make access difficult for low-income consumers.

The Next Fifty: Conclusions and Recommendations

The Canadian agricultural system, as we know it today, was built through a series of policies and policy paradigms – from the settlement era through to Keynesianism and neoliberalism – that displaced Indigenous people, marginalized women, and gradually led to the exploitation of farmers by large multinational corporations. Far from being gender, race, or class neutral, the system was premised on exclusion and even oppression. Settlement-era policy actively prohibited most women from owning farms, and the effects of this policy reverberate today in women's underrepresentation as farm operators.

Although alternative agriculture poses a new opportunity for challenging this status quo, we must not simply assume that it is inherently more egalitarian. Developments in this area should be assessed through a gender and equity lens, paying attention to how policies and practices may disproportionately benefit or disadvantage certain groups. We must consider, for example, the emotional labour required on the part of alternative farmers, many of whom are female, as they market their product and provide the kind of interpersonal connection that local consumers seek. Future research should also critically examine how the alternative food paradigm may (or may not) be exclusionary to low-income people. Attending to these issues through the lens of gender, race, and class does

not mean dismissing the alternative agriculture paradigm; rather, it means building a more inclusive, fair, and just paradigm from the ground up.

This also does not mean “writing off” conventional or even industrial agriculture. Future policy must be created through a gender lens, which means expanding and mainstreaming GBA+ capacity in all units, but especially those that appear to be gender neutral, on the surface at least. Researchers should carefully examine the depth of current GBA+ efforts in agricultural policy. Does GBA+ provide deep analysis of political-economic and patriarchal structures? Or, is it limited to relatively straightforward accounting of women’s representation in certain sectors or programs?

An underlying theme throughout this chapter is the importance of recognizing women’s knowledge and expertise. Recognition is important, along with further training to encourage women’s full participation in agriculture. But recognition and education are not enough: it is necessary to acknowledge the deeply structural factors that affect women’s and men’s lives in agriculture. Equality on the farm means more equal sharing of domestic tasks to allow women’s full participation in farming; it also means targeting the socialization that still discourages young girls from becoming farmers. At the social level, attention must also be paid to availability and access to childcare and other services in rural areas.

Finally, a structural critique of corporatization in the sector is urgently needed. As governments increasingly embrace the science and technology agenda, the governance regimes for such technology must be carefully addressed to balance power between its creators and its users. Although multinational corporations are increasingly present in the agricultural technology sector, priority should be given to public programs (such as public seed breeding) that benefit all. Without limits on the ever-expanding power of large agricultural corporations, farmers will continue to lose control and will cope in whatever way they can – including practices that are unsustainable for the land and those who work it.

Note

- 1 In 2013, Ottawa converted its GBA process to a “GBA+” process. The “+” represents a recognition of intersectionality and considers how gender interacts with other categories of identity such as race, age, ability, and sexuality.

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