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Making Changes and Coming Full Circle: A Look at How Women Farmers in Oregon and Washington Define Their Own Identities, Realities, and Contributions

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MAKING CHANGES AND COMING FULL CIRCLE: A LOOK AT HOW WOMEN
FARMERS IN OREGON AND WASHINGTON DEFINE THEIR OWN IDENTITIES,
REALITIES, AND CONTRIBUTIONS

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PIM 69

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Master of Intercultural Service, Leadership & Management at
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Advisor: Ryland White

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how women farmers in Oregon and Washington define their own identities, realities, and contributions as farmers, and it looks at how those definitions may be changing. Primary data was collected by interviewing 14 women farmers in the states of Oregon and Washington. Participants were selected to represent a variety of age groups, cultural backgrounds, years of experience farming, and farm size and type. Thus, in investigating the experiences of women farmers, the realities of young and beginning farmers; aging farmers; immigrant farmers and farmers of color; and small and family farmers are also explored.

Findings reveal that participants closely link why and how they farm, as well as how they define their own contributions as farmers, to family, community, and land. Interviews suggest that women farmers have become more public in their work and identities as farmers and that in doing so, they are changing the historically masculine image of the farmer. This paper also explores the great variety of barriers participants continue to face in their efforts to build and sustain successful careers and lives as farmers. And findings examine disparities in access to resources experienced disproportionately by beginning farmers new to agriculture and by women farmers of color who were interviewed.

Introduction and Personal Interest in Topic

I became interested in the experiences of women farmers during my internship with the SIT Farm in Brattleboro, Vermont. Through our community projects, I worked closely with several women farmers. Some were new to farming, just starting out on a borrowed piece of land. Others were more experienced, running larger operations with multiple employees. Some farmed with their partners; others farmed on their own. But all of these women had something in common, something that struck me as unique. They all called themselves farmers, not farm women or farm wives or gardeners – farmers, full stop, no qualifiers. And even though I come from a farming background and was raised around farmers from the time I was born, meeting women who identified themselves as farmers deviated from my ideas about who farmers are and about the roles women play in agriculture. I have since learned that while every woman farmer may indeed be unique, women farmers are not an uncommon or new phenomenon, though much of written history, including the agricultural census, would have us believe so.

Working with these women farmers has prompted me to explore and question where my own ideas about farmers come from. It's inspired me to dig into the history of women in agriculture, including my own family history, and into the current realities of women farmers in the U.S. and around the world. And it's forced me to reexamine my own work and identity as an aspiring farmer. This capstone project is a continuation and deepening of that exploration, as well as a space for women farmers to define their own realities and identities in their own words.

Background and Contextual Information

Women farmers everywhere share a long history of invisibility and inaccurate representation of their work and extremely vital role in feeding the planet. In the book *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, Vandana Shiva points out that “women were the world’s original food producers” (1989, p. 104). Shiva goes on to discuss some significant and lasting agricultural inventions made by women, such as the hoe, spade, shovel, and simple plow, as well as other innovations like crop rotation and terracing. Women were also responsible for domesticating the eight most important grains: wheat, rice, maize, barley, oats, sorghum, millet, and rye (1989, p. 105). Today it is estimated that women produce more than half of all the food grown worldwide (Westfield-Adams, 2008, p. 2). Yet when most of us think of a farmer, we think of a man. Why is that?

Vandana Shiva (1989), Carolyn Merchant (1980), Heide Inhetveen (1998) and others link women’s disappearance from and invisibility in agriculture to the rise of capitalism. With the shift of the mode of production to capitalism, agriculture changed from a subsistence oriented, experience based field to a more highly mechanized, profit-based, and masculinized one. Women have historically been and in many places continue to be denied access to land, credit, and education – all of which are extremely important if one intends to farm in an increasingly industrialized system of agriculture. Men are typically the holders of land titles, bank accounts, and college degrees, and they have been the writers of history. The space and identity men have occupied in agriculture has been a public one. And while women have continued in their work as farmers, their space has largely been in the private realm and outside the marketplace, thus rendering their contributions invisible and, according to the international economic system, literally without value. So the story of farming most of us know features a man as the lead

character, with a woman playing a small, supporting, and marginal role. That story, as well as we may know it, simply isn't true. It never was, and that story is changing.

Women in the United States are becoming more visible in their work and identities as farmers and represent the fastest growing demographic of farmers. Nationally, the number of women farmers has risen 22 percent since 2002 (USDA, 2007). And as the story of women in agriculture is changing, women are also changing agriculture. Women are more likely to operate sustainable, diversified farms that have markets in their local communities. While many public spaces in agriculture may still be male-dominated, women are entering into positions of leadership and creating their own spaces through women's agricultural networks and organizations (Allen and Sachs, 2007, p.13).

On a global scale, many believe women are uniquely positioned to lead movements for social and environmental change and that women farmers have an important role to play in that work. Ecofeminist writers such as Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies regard the oppression and exploitation of women and nature as connected. They define ecofeminism "as a perspective which starts from the fundamental necessities of life," and they believe that "women are nearer to that perspective than men" (Mies and Shiva, 1993, p.20). They describe women as the "custodians of biodiversity" who "produce, reproduce, consume and conserve biodiversity in agriculture" (2007, p. 168). This qualitative inquiry asks women farmers how they define their own realities and identities in their own words, and it looks at how those definitions may be changing.

Research Questions

How do women farmers in Oregon and Washington define their own identities, realities, and contributions as farmers, and how are those definitions changing?

Within these primary questions, this research also explores the following sub-questions:

- *What motivates participants to enter into farming, to continue farming, and to farm in a particular way?*
- *What opportunities and resources are available to participants, and how might those be changing?*
- *What challenges or barriers do they face, and how might those be changing?*
- *At what point did each participant begin to consider herself a farmer; how does she define the work and identity of a farmer?*
- *What do participants feel are their most valuable contributions or accomplishments as farmers?*
- *How do participants think the field of agriculture has changed or is changing for women?*
- *What do participants envision for the future of farming, and where do they see women farmers fitting into that vision?*

A Brief Glossary of Agricultural Terms

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

CSA consists of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation, with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production. Typically CSA members of the farm or garden pledge in advance to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and farmer's salary. In return, they receive shares of the farm's bounty throughout the growing season (DeMuth, 1993 as cited in USDA National Agricultural Library: Defining Community Supported Agriculture, 2009).

Organic Agriculture

Organic agriculture is an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain, and enhance ecological harmony. It is also a labeling term that denotes products produced under the authority of the Organic Foods Production Act. The primary goal of organic agriculture is to optimize the health and productivity of interdependent communities of soil life, plants, animals, and people (USDA National Agricultural Library: Organic Production/Organic Food: Information Access Tools, 2009).

Sustainable Agriculture

Sustainable agriculture was addressed by Congress in the 1990 "Farm Bill" and is legally defined as "an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term:

- satisfy human food and fiber needs;
- enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends;
- make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls;
- sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and
- enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole (as cited in USDA National Agricultural Library: Sustainable Agriculture Definitions and Terms, 2009).

Literature Review

What Is Work?

Much of the farm and food related work historically and globally done by women literally does not count as work because it is subsistence oriented and does not pass through the marketplace. Feminist writer and former New Zealand member of Parliament Marilyn Waring has done much to uncover how women's work is officially not counted in the international system of economics. According to the United Nations System of National Accounts, subsistence production and consumption is "of little or no importance" (as cited in Waring, 1995). Nations wishing to belong to the United Nations, and who wish to be able to borrow from the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, must use this system of economics, which explicitly and completely fails to recognize the work that most women in the world do (ibid).

Vandana Shiva addresses the same issue in the book *Ecofeminism* (1993). She says women's agricultural knowledge and work are central to the conservation of biodiversity because they do so many different kinds of work which bridge multiple sectors. According to Shiva, "Statisticians and researchers suffer a conceptual inability to define women's work inside and outside the house – and farming is usually part of both" (p. 166). Ultimately, women's contributions as farmers are discounted "not because too few women work, but too many women do too much work of too many different kinds" (ibid).

A Look at the Histories of Women Farmers in North America

Jensen (1981), Haney and Knowles (1988), and others have written extensively on the lives of women farmers in the United States, covering pre-colonial times to the 1980s. Jensen writes that women have been:

active participants in every stage of agricultural production and in every stage of agricultural history. They are the deities who bring seeds and who teach agricultural practices in Native American communities. They are the farmers who control agriculture and land in these communities. They are field workers who labor in the hot sun. They are the administrators of small and large landholdings. They are the processors of food. They are the shapers of social customs which define and order the relationships of those who live on the land (1981, xxiii).

Jensen and Haney and Knowles maintain that throughout history women have always contributed to the success of farms through subsistence production, from the money generated from off-farm work, and very often from performing farm labor that was considered men's work.

In 1978, Carolyn Sachs interviewed 21 women farmers in Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. She asked them about why and how they farmed, the kind of information they had access to, the obstacles they faced, and how they defined their own identities as farmers. This research project is structured similarly to Sachs', and I reference her work throughout this paper. Sachs' findings from three decades ago compared to the findings here offer useful insights into how the ways women farmers define their own realities, identities, and contributions may be changing.

Like Jensen and Haney and Knowles, Sachs found that the farmers interviewed tended to perform a wide variety of both production and domestic work. One farmer described her roles on the farm like this:

You name it, I do it. I've mended shoes, quilted, sewn, mowed hay, plant and set tobacco, done carpenter work, done wood carvings, used a chain saw, used a mattock, and harvested ginseng. I've got curiosity. The difference between Ed and I is that I do everything that he does but he can't do everything I do (p. 101).

Most of the farmers in Sachs' study were farmers because they had grown up in agriculture and didn't know anything else. Overall, they had little access to new information about farming, were excluded from networks of men farmers, and had very little if any contact with other women farmers. Other major challenges these farmers faced included managing both farm and household responsibilities, machinery, lack of control over their land, lack of access to credit and capital, and sexist inheritance tax laws. Sachs writes that until laws changed in 1981, women were often unable to retain the farm after their husband's death because of what was called the "widow tax". The Internal Revenue Service did not recognize a wife's contribution to the farm unless she generated income from an off-farm job for the maintenance of the farm. Physical labor or farm-related work like accounting or management did not count and did not satisfy the "contribution clause" of the federal tax code. Conversely, if a wife died before her husband, he was considered a business partner and co-owner of the farm and paid no inheritance tax (p. 115).

Many women who inherited farmland and were able to keep it were not able to maintain control over it. Sachs writes that first law and then custom prevented women from maintaining decision-making power and that women landowners very often transferred the power they had from land ownership to men. Women who did have the resources to purchase their own land frequently had difficulty accessing credit. One farmer explained her experience attempting to secure a loan to purchase cattle. She said she really expected to be treated like a person at the bank, but the loan officer couldn't even believe she was a farmer (p. 115).

Much of the literature on the lives women farmers, past and present, focuses on white women farmers. Women farmers have always been and continue to be an extremely diverse group, though racist and sexist policies and practices have contributed greatly to the decline in

numbers of farmers of color, particularly women farmers of color. Jensen's work explores the lives and histories of Native American, Black, and Hispanic women farmers in the United States. She writes that before Europeans arrived, Native American women were central to agricultural production, so much so that creation stories like Sky Woman and Corn Woman were developed to explain how female deities influence the development of plants (Jensen, 1981, p. 6). After the arrival of Europeans, the United States was built and accumulated wealth as a nation through the system of slavery. Jensen says historians in the past have sometimes given the impression that Black women under the system of slavery typically worked in the "Big House," or the plantation owner's house, and tended to work less in the fields. But by 1860 most Black women did work in the fields. Without their intensive and crucial labor, cotton cultivation would not have been profitable for plantation owners (1981, p. 72). Hispanic farmers also have a long agricultural history in the United States. Before 1846, when the United States invaded what was then Mexico and is now the U.S. Southwest, there were more than 100,000 Hispanic farm and ranch families farming in this area on individual plots and communal pastures (Jensen, 1981, p. 105-106.)

Through a long series of racist laws and land policies, farmers of color were systematically removed from their lands or prevented from ever acquiring land. Even since laws changed to protect the civil rights of farmers of color and women farmers, they have continued to experience discrimination in their efforts to access credit and farmer support programs, particularly from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Since 1997, Black, Hispanic, Native American, and women farmers have filed four separate class action lawsuits against the USDA alleging discriminatory practices. In a Congressional Research Service Report, Feder and Cowan state that allegations of discrimination against minority farmers under

USDA's management of programs have been "long-standing and well-documented." They go on to say that the USDA was "one of the last federal agencies to racially integrate and one of the last to include women and minorities in leadership roles" (2010).

In the United States today, women farm and food workers, most of whom are Hispanic immigrant women and women of color, still have some of the worst, lowest paying, most dangerous, and most degrading jobs in the country (Allen and Sachs, 2007, p. 7). Nevertheless, within the recent increase in the overall numbers of women farmers in the United States, there has also been an increase in the numbers of women farmers of color. While they still comprise less than one percent each of all farmers, the numbers of Native American, Black, and Hispanic women farmers have grown 77 percent, 27 percent, and 24 percent respectively since 2002 (USDA, 2007). There is much opportunity for research into why and how these particular groups of women are now entering or re-entering the field of agriculture. And considering that people of color in the United States are among the most food insecure and experience some of the highest rates of food-related disease, the fact that more women of color are becoming farmers seems of particular importance (National Council of La Raza, 2010; National Relief Charities, 2006; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Office of Minority Health, 2011).

The majority of the research on women farmers discusses their invisibility and lack of empowerment in the field of agriculture. While this is certainly an important part of the stories of women farmers, it is equally important to note that they have also played key and often public roles in farm-related political movements, particularly those in support of the family farm. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, hundreds of thousands of women participated in rural reform efforts through organizations like the Grange, the Farmer's Alliance, the Populist and Socialist Parties, and the Farm Union (Jensen, 1981, p 144). Haney and Knowles write that using a

variety of communication forms – speeches, letters to newspaper and magazine editors, songs, poems, novels, and essays – women mobilized “farmers and their supporters on the issue of farmers’ discontent with farm economics and with macroeconomic policies such as unregulated credit, farm-to-market transport rates, coinage, and international trade” (1988, p. 5).

By the 1950s, farmers of color began to organize as well in protest against unsafe working conditions and unfair wages. Political activists like Dolores Huerta, along with Cesar Chavez, formed the United Farm Workers of America and fought for the rights of Hispanic farm workers in California (Jensen, 1981, p. 195). The United Farm Workers is still a strong organization today, and the work of Huerta and Chavez continues to inspire and fuel movements for social justice.

Women Farmers in the United States Today

A common theme in much of the recent literature about women farmers is the tractor (Brandth, 1995; Leckie, 1996; Trauger, 2004). The tractor symbolizes an important division of labor between women’s and men’s work on the farm, historically and currently. It represents a masculinized agriculture which values progress, technology, efficiency, and domination over nature. In G.J Leckie’s research, women who grew up on farms explained that they were not allowed to learn how to drive the tractor and were often not allowed to learn carpentry or equipment maintenance, which were skills their brothers learned at an early age. Many of the women felt “the information kept from them was the most crucial knowledge needed to farm, and that because they were girls, they were not fit to share in it” (1996, p. 319).

Not being allowed to learn to drive a tractor certainly may inhibit a woman’s ability to farm, but in not being allowed into male-dominated spaces – the often public spaces of mechanized agriculture – women are also excluded from broader opportunities for learning and

knowledge-sharing. Leckie explains, “In farming communities, knowledge about farming is exchanged within public spaces of the agricultural community, such as equipment dealerships, grain elevators, and the local town halls, which are largely dominated and occupied by men (Leckie, 1996, p. 310). In Trauger’s research with Pennsylvania women farmers, she notes that these were the same places the women she interviewed felt most “out of place.” Several women Trauger interviewed said they avoided doing business in or visiting these places when they could or had their husbands or trusted male friends go for them (2004, p. 299-300). Trauger states that “public space becomes the site of the articulation of power in patriarchal communities by excluding women from these sources of knowledge, legitimacy and affirmation” (Trauger, 2004, p. 296).

The United States Census of Agriculture represents another space from which women farmers have been excluded and misrepresented. Gender wasn’t included in the U.S. agricultural census until 1978. It wasn’t until 2002 that the number of people working on a farm was counted, instead of just counting a single operator, which has allowed for more women farmers to be represented (Ahearn and Tempelman, 2010). Changes in the way census data is collected have allowed hundreds of thousands of women farmers to finally be counted in their work and contributions. Nevertheless, as we will see in the *Discussion of Findings* section of this paper, some women farmers are still left uncounted in the agricultural census because of the way it is structured.

Despite remaining challenges, it is clear that the number of women farmers is increasing in the United States. Many link this increase to the shift from conventional to sustainable or alternative agriculture. Trauger says that “the sustainable agriculture community provides spaces that promote and are compatible with women’s identities as farmers” (2004, p. 289). It seems

fitting then that women are up to three times more likely to run sustainable agriculture operations than to use conventional models (ibid). Women have been central in shaping alternative agrifood movements and institutions, they are better represented in sustainable agriculture organizations, and they are often the leaders in urban agriculture efforts. They also represent the largest number of workers on CSAs (Allen and Sachs, 2007, p. 12).

There is much discussion about what draws women farmers to sustainable agriculture. One reason could be an increase in consumer demand for local and sustainably grown products like organic eggs, cheese, and milk, as well as wool, soaps, honey, and herbal products, which are items traditionally managed by women on farms (Trauger, 2004, p. 292). Sustainable agriculture also focuses on human and environmental health, and since women have historically been the caregivers in families, some argue that the focus on health is particularly attractive for women (Inhetveen, 1998, p. 280-281). Inhetveen writes that:

ecological farming always reflects the social role of agriculture and issues of social and individual emancipation. . . Women commit themselves to this realm frequently also because they want to have more control over the conditions of their lives and to experiment with alternative forms of living (ibid).

Sustainable agriculture methods also require less machinery and do not employ chemical fertilizers and pesticides, all of which are typically considered men's domain in farming. So while some connect women farmers to sustainable agriculture through their cultural and historical roles as nurturers and caregivers, others argue that women choose sustainable farming methods for more practical reasons. One woman farmer interviewed by Trauger explained, "Men think women like sustainable agriculture because they are nurturers, but women like sustainable agriculture because they can do the work" (2004, p. 299).

Young and Beginning Farmers

The average age of the American farmer is 57 and has been rising for decades. It is estimated that over the next twenty years, nearly a quarter of farmers in the United States will retire (Shute, 2011, p. 9). Who will take their places as food producers? What will happen to their land? The future of agriculture, of farmland, and, many would argue, the future of this country depend on a new generation of farmers who are willing to take on immense agricultural, economic, and environmental challenges. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of aspiring young and beginning farmers, many of them new to agriculture and many of them women (Shute, 2011, p. 10). Organizations such as the National Young Farmers' Coalition and Greenhorns Radio are sprouting up across the United States. And young farmers are finding creative ways to learn to farm, acquire land, and start their own farming enterprises. This renewed interest in farming as a profession seems promising. But there are many barriers to entering and succeeding in the field of agriculture, particularly for beginning farmers who are new to agriculture.

In 2011 the National Young Farmer's Coalition surveyed 1,000 beginning farmers and found the greatest barriers they face in farming are access to capital and credit, land, and health care (Shute, 2011, p. 4). The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers lending and savings match programs for beginning farmers through the Farm Service Agency, the Farm Credit System, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service. But beginning farmers participate in government programs at a lower rate than established farmers. They are more likely to participate in conservation programs than in commodity programs, and the bulk of government funding goes toward commodity programs (Ahearn and Newton, 2009, p. 15). Shute's report for the National Young Farmers' Coalition indicates beginning farmers face major obstacles in their attempts to

access funding from government programs, particularly Farm Service Agency loans. Farmers surveyed for the report cited inconsistency of knowledge among Farm Service Agency offices, slow payment, low loan limits, and inability to get small operating loans among the barriers they encountered (Shute, 2011, p. 23).

Many young and beginning farmers come from non-farming backgrounds and very often do not have access to family farmland. Between 2000 and 2010, the average value for farmland in the U.S. doubled, affecting both purchase and rental prices. Additionally, 88 percent of farmland owners are not farm operators. These “absentee landowners” own 40 percent of the nation’s farmland and, seeking tax exemptions, typically rent their land for haying or corn. They are less likely to rent their farmland for livestock or vegetable operations, making it less likely that the land will be made available to young and beginning farmers who typically start their farming careers in row crop production (Shute, 2011, p. 27).

The National Young Farmers’ Coalition calls for national policy reform through the Farm Bill and other avenues to provide support for young and beginning farmers. Some of these proposed reforms include increased and improved training programs, greater and more accessible funding and credit opportunities, tax credits, student loan forgiveness, and land transition incentive programs (Shute, 2011, p. 31-37).

A Look at Agriculture in Oregon and Washington

Rich soils along with widely varying climates and landscapes make Oregon and Washington two of the country's most agriculturally diverse states, each producing nearly 300 different crops each year. Both states rank among the top in production of many fruits, vegetables, and herbs. Washington produces 60 percent of the country's apples and ranks number one in production of sweet cherries, pears, concord grapes, red raspberries, and hops, among other crops. Oregon is number one in production of many berry crops, hazelnuts, and several seed crops. Livestock, dairy, and aquaculture also make up a significant portion of both states' production. Agriculture accounts for 15 percent of Oregon's state economy and 12 percent of Washington's (Oregon Department of Agriculture, 2011 and Washington State Department of Agriculture, 2011).

While Oregon and Washington are two of the most agriculturally productive states in the country, local residents see only a fraction of what is produced there. In Oregon, 80 percent of agricultural products are shipped out of state; one third of all exports are shipped out of the country. Washington is the third largest exporter of agricultural products in the country (ibid). These statistics place participants for this research project among a minority of farmers who produce nearly exclusively for local markets.

There is a strong and growing local food economy in both states as well. Oregon and Washington are home to hundreds of farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture programs, particularly near urban centers like Portland and Seattle (United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service, 2011 and Local Harvest, 2011). Restaurants and grocery stores also offer an increasingly local and seasonal selection for consumers. And there

are a growing number of organizations and programs dedicated to supporting and promoting local agriculture, educating consumers, and connecting farmers to local markets.

According to the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture, Oregon and Washington are home to approximately 130,000 farmers, including principal and other operators. More than 50,000 (38.5 percent) of those farmers are women, putting Oregon and Washington above the national average, which is 30 percent. More than 16,000 farms in Oregon and Washington have a female principal operator, representing a 22 percent increase from 2002. Women farmers in Oregon and Washington tend to operate smaller farms; approximately 75 percent are less than 50 acres. They are also likely to run diversified operations, including livestock, vegetables, fruits, and other crops (USDA, 2007).

Practitioner Inquiry Design

My research design included qualitative research methods to hear first-hand experiences of women farmers in the states of Oregon and Washington. I conducted in-depth interviews with 14 women farmers. I used an interview guide consisting of ten questions and conducted the interviews using a semi-structured approach. This allowed space to explore related topics as they arose, while maintaining consistency across interviews through common central questions. In an effort to both accommodate participants' busy schedules and to bring farmers together to share their experiences, some participants were interviewed individually and some were interviewed in small groups. Five participants were interviewed individually; six were interviewed together in pairs; and one group of three farmers was interviewed together. Participants also completed a short questionnaire consisting of five questions. When necessary, I contacted participants via e-mail, telephone, or in person to ask follow-up questions.

Interviewee Selection Process

Because of my own agricultural work and connections in the states of Oregon and Washington, this research examines the experiences of women farmers in this area. In an effort to explore a diversity of experiences among women farmers, the participants selected represent a range of ages; cultural backgrounds; years of farming experience; and farm size and type. My first sources for locating potential interviewees were my own farmer colleagues. Two of the participants interviewed are farmers with whom I work directly, and several others were referred to me through them. I connected with the rest of the participants through a local conference and by reaching out to various agricultural organizations, such as Southern Oregon's League of Women Farmers and *Adelante Mujeres*, an Oregon-based organization that provides agricultural training and support for Latina immigrants.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

12 of the 14 interviews were conducted in English, and two were in Spanish. I speak Spanish proficiently and did not use an interpreter. I did, however, work with a translator to prepare an informed consent form in Spanish. All of the interviews were recorded on a digital recorder with participants' consent. Each interview was between 45 and 120 minutes in length and was later transcribed and coded for overarching themes. Participants' names have been changed, with their permission, to protect their privacy.

Limitations

The participants in this project represent a fairly diverse group of women farmers. Nevertheless, the pool of participants is still largely dominated by small-scale farmers of European descent who use and espouse sustainable farming methods. The responses in this paper may more heavily reflect these perspectives and experiences.

Additionally, the sample size for this research project was small, and the data is not intended to represent the experiences and opinions of all women farmers. The purpose of this project was to explore the experiences of individual women farmers and to give each one the space to define her own reality in her own words. I have attempted to include participants' own words as much as possible through the use of full, direct quotes. But the length of this paper limits the degree to which each participant's voice can be fully included. I feel it is important to state that while I could not feasibly include every word shared by every participant, every word was indeed valuable. Despite the limitations, my greatest hope for this project is that it represents the words and experiences of these farmers as accurately and wholly as possible.

Discussion of Findings

Each participant's account of her own experience as a woman farmer intersects with other parts of her social identity. In exploring the realities of women farmers, we also explore the realities of young and beginning farmers; aging farmers; immigrant farmers and farmers of color; and small and family farmers. The results offer rich, textured, and often contradictory accounts of the multiple and changing realities of women farmers.

In attempting to examine how women farmers' definitions of their own experiences, contributions, and identities might be changing, I used a few different methods: I compared participants' responses based on their ages; I compared participants' responses to historical data; and I asked participants how they think things are changing for women farmers. A discussion of what has changed or may be changing is woven throughout the paper and in the *Conclusions* section.

This paper was written through the theoretical lens of ecofeminism, which sees the experiences and histories of women and nature, including their oppression, as connected. Ecofeminism is a movement against the interconnected oppressions of gender, race, class, and nature under the current global economic system. Mies and Shiva describe ecofeminism as part of a subsistence perspective, or a "perspective which starts from the fundamental necessities of life" (1993, p. 20) and "propounds the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of co-operation, and mutual care and love" (p. 6).

The Participants

Lillian

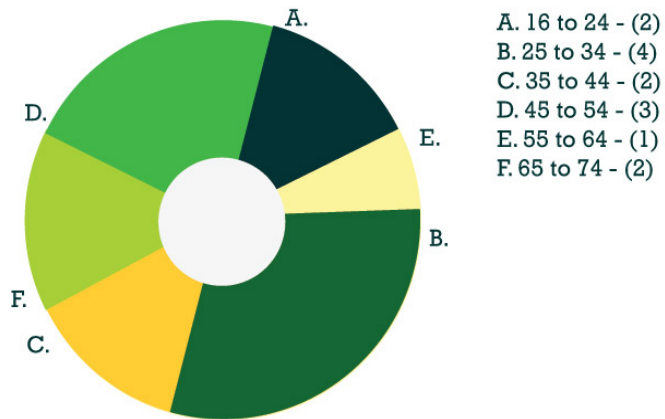
Lillian is in her late 60s. She comes from a farming family and grew up farming alongside her father in Battle Ground, Washington. Lillian moved away from the farm as an adult. She married, had children,

and worked as a nurse for many years. But she always had a garden and says she always intended to return to her family's farm. Since 2006, Lillian has operated her own farm on her family's property, which she inherited. The farm consists of eight acres in total, only two of which are cultivated. Lillian grows vegetables, flowers, and herbs for her CSA customers, to share with friends, and for her own consumption. She also raises chickens, sells eggs, and has a few goats to help keep the blackberries at bay. Lillian was interviewed individually at her home in April 2011.

Heather

Heather is in her early 30s. She is from Portland, Oregon, and does not come from a farming family. Heather studied landscape architecture in college and got into agriculture through her interests in environmental and social justice issues. Heather has been farming for seven years and has worked on a variety of farms, as well as with agricultural and environmental education initiatives. She and her partner Natalie (see below) started their own organic urban farming business in Portland two years ago. They cannot afford land, so they have implemented a business model in which they grow produce for CSA customers in their customers' own yards. They have CSA members across the city of Portland and grow on plots sized between 50 and

Farmer Ages



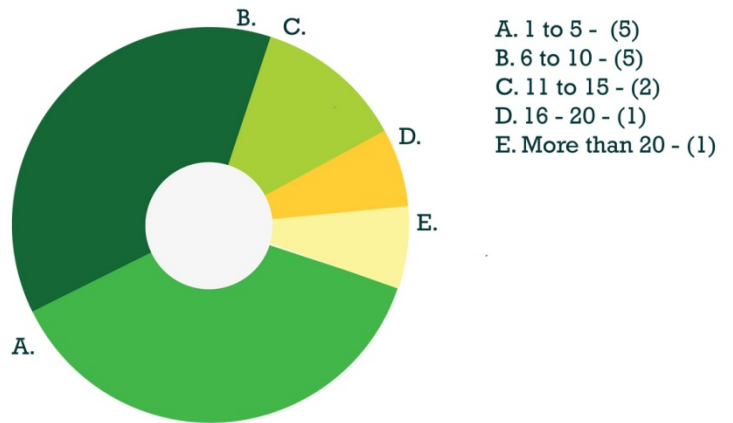
1,000 square feet. They grow additional produce on a leased urban plot, which they sell at a local farmers' market and to restaurants. They also grow produce and raise chickens for their own consumption.

Natalie

Natalie is in her early 30s and is from

Portland. She is married to Heather, and they run their urban farming business together. Natalie also works full time as an environmental educator in Portland area schools. She did not grow up farming but spent time in her grandfather's garden as a child and says those memories are some of her happiest. Natalie has been farming for three years and, like Heather, got into farming through her involvement in environmental and social justice issues. Natalie is also half-Thai and feels strongly about being public in her identity as an urban farmer who is a woman of color. Natalie and Heather were interviewed together in their home in April 2011.

Years of Experience Farming



What They Produce



Lou

Lou is in her mid-30s and has owned and operated a certified organic farm on 24 acres in Ridgefield, Washington, since 2007. In addition to growing for her own consumption, Lou grows vegetables and some fruit for the farm's CSA program and for local restaurants and grocery stores. She also raises heritage hogs and a few chickens and ducks. Lou worked as a civil engineer before she began farming. Though her parents are not farmers, both sets of Lou's grandparents were farmers. She grew up gardening, raising animals for 4-H, and helping on her neighbors' dairy (the farm she now owns). In the interest of full disclosure, it should be noted that I am one of Lou's farm employees.

Madeline

Madeline is in her early 30s and has worked on Lou's farm for three years. Madeline is a trained graphic designer but began doing farm work near her hometown of Seattle five years ago. She grew up spending time on her grandfather's three and a half acre farm in Woodland, Washington. Four years ago, she decided to move back to the farm and start her own operation. Now, in addition to working for Lou, Madeline grows vegetables and raises chickens and turkeys with her brother on their family's farm.

Emily

Emily is in her early 30s and has run a five acre organic farm in Brush Prairie, Washington, with her mother for the last six years. Together they grow vegetables and herbs for farmers' markets and for CSA and internet customers. They also raise a few animals, mainly for their own consumption, and have a couple of horses. Emily has worked for Washington State University's agricultural extension program and now, in addition to farming, works full-time at a local university. Emily comes from a long line of farmers and says she fell into farming as a function

of being a gardener. Emily, Madeline, and Lou were all interviewed together at Lou's farm in April 2011.

Sophia

Sophia is in her late 40s. She is originally from Canada and comes from a European background, to which she credits her love of growing and celebrating good food. Sophia was an avid gardener for many years before starting her own farm business with her husband five years ago. Now she primarily runs their certified organic farm in Hockinson, Washington. She grows a wide variety of vegetables and raises chickens for her own consumption and for her farm's CSA program, which is one of the largest in Clark County. Sophia was interviewed individually at her home in April 2011.

Patricia

Patricia is in her early 60s. She grew up in Wisconsin and does not come from a farming family. She and her husband were home gardeners for many years before they began farming. Patricia says they decided to start their own farm because there was never enough room in their garden to grow everything they wanted to grow. Patricia worked in economic development for the government for many years before she retired and began farming exclusively. She and her husband have operated their seven acre certified organic farm in Gales Creek, Oregon, since 1999. There they grow more than 300 hundred varieties of vegetables and herbs, which they sell mainly at farmers' markets and to restaurants. In addition to farming, Patricia is also an active leader in the local agriculture community.

Kelly

Kelly is in her early 20s and has worked and lived on Patricia's farm for nearly a year. She comes from a farming family but did not grow up farming in her home state of Minnesota. She got into farming as a teenager when she and her sister started their own garden. Since that time, Kelly has done community work around farming and food issues and has worked with youth farming programs. Now in addition to farming, Kelly also does advocacy work for young and beginning farmers. Her goal is to have her own farm someday, but she is still unsure of how she will overcome the financial barriers that stand in the way. Kelly and Patricia were interviewed at Patricia's farm in April 2011.

Regina

Regina is in her late 30s and runs a certified organic vegetable operation with her husband. Regina grew up farming in her home country of Mexico. She and her husband have lived in Oregon for 17 years and have run their own farm for the last seven years. They currently farm on a 60 X 30 foot plot which is part of a collective 12 acre farm in Forest Grove, Oregon. They grow food for their own consumption and sell produce and value added items like salsa and tamales at farmers' markets in Washington County and in Portland. Regina was interviewed individually at her farm in May 2011.

Catalina

Catalina is in her early 50s and runs a four acre organic vegetable and fruit farm/nursery on two separate rented plots in Washington County, Oregon. She grows produce for her own consumption and sells vegetables and plant starts at farmers' markets outside Portland and on the Oregon coast. Catalina grew up farming in her home country of Mexico and has farmed her whole life. She has lived in the United States for 30 years and has run her own farm in Oregon for the last 15 years. Catalina was interviewed individually at her home in May 2011.

Janet

Janet is in her mid-40s. Together with her husband and three daughters, she runs an 800 acre farm on northern Washington's Whidbey Island. Janet grew up on a farm in eastern Washington and moved to Whidbey Island with her husband to take over his family's farm after college. Their farm has been in the same family for over 100 years, which places it in a special class of farms called Century Farms. For many years they were dairy farmers, but 11 years ago they switched to raising grass-fed beef and selling it directly to local markets. Now they raise 600 head of cattle, 100 pigs, and 300 chickens. They also grow their own grass and grains for feed and raise cabbage for seed which is exported to Asian markets.

Amy

Amy is 16 years old and is Janet's youngest daughter. She and her sisters own and run the farm together with their parents. Amy has lived and worked on the farm her whole life and is the only student at her high school who lives on a farm. Amy plays an instrumental role not only in the daily activities of the farm, but also in planning and decision-making processes. She says she will stay involved with the farm as an adult but plans to study accounting in college and eventually work as a Certified Public Accountant. Janet and Amy were interviewed together in Seattle in June 2011.

Peggy

Peggy is in her mid-60s. She comes from a long line of farmers and grew up on a dairy farm outside of Medford, Oregon. Peggy says she couldn't wait to leave the farm as a young person, but since she's come back to it later in life, she has found that she truly loves it. For the last 10 years, Peggy has run a 10 acre lamb farm in Roseburg, Oregon. She also grows a garden and has fruit trees for her family's own consumption. Peggy was interviewed individually at her farm in June 2011.

Defining Their Own Identities

Why and How Participants Farm

Family, community, and land are major themes inextricably woven throughout each interview and within this paper. While each participant named a variety of motivating factors which led her to enter the field of farming, the majority are directly related to family, community, and land. Participants connect their decisions to become farmers with the desire to continue a farming heritage. They see farming as a way to care for and connect with their families, their communities, and the earth. And they farm because they find the work and lifestyle fulfilling.

A common feeling among all participants is that while farming is extremely hard work, they also love it and find it very satisfying. This sense of satisfaction is what keeps many of them farming. Lillian says, “It is just the most fun. I just love presenting people with their beautiful vegetables and herbs to go with them. That’s what keeps me.”

Why Participants Farm

*Most Common Responses*¹

- Desire for fulfilling work and life (14*)
- Access to land/desire to care for land (8)
- Desire to contribute to community (7)
- Desire to continue family farming heritage (7)
- Desire to care for family (6)

**Indicates number of participants who gave response. The total number of participants was 14.*

¹ **A note about the “Most Common Responses” boxes:** These boxes are intended to provide a quick snapshot of common themes that arose throughout multiple interviews. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions. Each participant offered complex and nuanced accounts of her own experiences and opinions as they came up for her during the interviews. The responses in the boxes are not ranked in any order of importance; they are listed according to the number of participants who offered the response. Responses are also not mutually exclusive; participants could and most often did offer multiple responses to each interview question. More in-depth discussions of responses can be found in the accompanying text.

Peggy says:

It's something I really like doing. And I get very personal with my sheep. I've delivered many babies and doctored and even had to put some down. And so I really like it, and that's why I stay with it because it's real rewarding.

For some participants, farming is not only fulfilling work, but also offers an alternative to a previous career or lifestyle that was less satisfying. They described careers in which they had long commutes, sat at desks all day, and didn't feel as though they were making a difference.

Here Lou explains her feelings of fulfillment as a farmer and how part of that comes from contributing to her community:

I worked a white collar engineering job for many years, and I loved the work, but there just wasn't that connection. I was doing great. And I was taking care of myself, and I was building a nice lifestyle. But at the same time, I didn't feel I was really making a difference. . . And so farming gave me an opportunity to really do something that I felt personally fulfilling but also I could really look myself in the mirror everyday and say – 'Yeah, I'm doing something that is a good thing. It's good for my community.

Regina and Emily both have young children. Farming gives them control over their schedules and allows them to take their children with them to work. "I work here and distribute my time," Regina says. "I decide if I bring my daughter or not to the field. Here I can look after her and make sure she is safe." Similarly, Emily says when her son was born, she could just strap him on her back and take him out to the field. She says as a farmer, including her family in her work is very feasible.

Of the farmers interviewed for this project, half say a desire to continue a family heritage of farming influenced their decisions to become farmers and to continue farming. Historically for many women farmers who were typically born into or married into farming, carrying on that agricultural tradition was more of an obligation or a necessity than a choice. Comparatively, nearly all of the farmers interviewed for this project are farmers by choice. The only exception is

Amy. At 16, Amy is the youngest farmer interviewed. Her family owns one of the few Century Farms, or farms that have remained in the same family for 100 years or more, in the United States. As a young farmer, Amy is carrying on a long and increasingly rare tradition. She is proud of that but admits that farming for her has never really been a choice. “I was born on a farm,” she says. “I grew up on a farm, and that’s where I’ve been my whole life. I never really got to choose. I just am.”

Lillian and Peggy both grew up farming alongside their fathers in the 1950s and 1960s. Echoing some of Amy’s sentiments, here are their thoughts about farming as children.

Lillian says:

I helped. I was a reluctant farmer. It’s not very fun to do it when it’s not your farm. The most resentful thing was that the other kids they were off picking strawberries and beans and raspberries and having a social time. And my mother went to work in Portland from Battle Ground everyday, so my brother and I were home with our dad, and it wasn’t very fun because [he was] kind of depressed and angry, and we had to work. . . It was like a lonely thing rather than a social thing.

Peggy says:

It’s really funny because when I was a teenager and young adult, I could not wait to get off the farm, the dairy farm I grew up on. I just never wanted anything to do with the farm. And now in my old age, I discover that I really do love it. It’s not just something I have to do. It’s something I really like doing. . . But the thing was he [her father] is the one who made the decisions. I was just a worker, so things are a little different now.

There are some notable differences in Amy’s experience as a teenager farming now compared to Lillian’s and Peggy’s. Lillian and Peggy link their negative experiences farming as children to not being empowered and not having any authority to make decisions. Amy and her two older sisters, on the other hand, all own the farm together with their parents. They play instrumental roles in making decisions, and their input was key when their family decided to switch from dairy farming to direct marketing of grass-fed beef several years ago. While Amy has the professional goal of becoming an accountant and is not sure if she wants to stay on the

farm full-time as an adult, she says she will remain committed to the farm. “I always want to be a part of it,” she says. “It’s my life, so I don’t think I’ll ever turn away from it.”

Related to carrying on a family tradition of farming is the desire to preserve that heritage on a particular piece of land. Madeline, Lou, and Lillian describe their gaining access to land and wanting to take care of it as a major part of their decisions to farm. Here Madeline discusses why she moved back to her family’s farm:

I remember playing hide and go seek in the corn on my grandparents’ property, and there is a lot about that piece of land that has drawn me to move down here and want to stay connected to that and to do it for my family and the people who I love and care about.

Lou says for her the “real instigating factor was land, that I had access to this land, and that was the driving force in terms of wanting to do right by it and wanting it to live up to its potential.”

Participants describe their approaches to farming most often as combining their philosophies about how to farm with what will work on their land, market opportunities, what they can financially afford, and what they enjoy and are good at doing. All of the participants also use and espouse sustainable farming practices. This philosophy heavily influences their approaches to farming. Regina says at her farm, “It’s all organic. We don’t use any pesticides or anything. We do everything by hand.” She says her farming philosophy is “*Come sano. Vive sano*” (Eat healthy. Live healthy).

Again we see that common themes like land and family are interwoven. Here Emily explains that for her farming organically is a way to preserve the biodiversity of her land, which in turn preserves a space she can enjoy with her family:

I have a two and a half year old and we look at snakes and bugs, and we have a little wildlife sanctuary in the backyard of our farm. And we have kestrels, and he

loves to watch birds. And we wouldn't have any of that stuff if we were out there spraying chemicals.

Participants who have been farming for many years related how their own approaches to farming have changed over time, and in Peggy's and Lillian's cases, how their approaches are different from their fathers' generation. Lillian uses organic growing methods and explains how difficult it was to refuse to let her father spray chemicals on her property:

When my father was alive, living up the hill, before I was a farmer, he would come down with his sprayer. And he was coming to help me, and I always had to refuse to let him spray, and it was always just so hard for me to do, my gosh. But he was from a generation where nothing was really that poisonous, they didn't think, cigarettes or anything.

Peggy relates similar thoughts:

I'm really concerned about sustainability and organic and less chemicals, less everything. My dad, on the other hand, back when I was a little kid, oh man, DDT was the answer to all his prayers. And he used to use Broadleaf, some kind of herbicide that would kill all the broadleaf plants so that his grass would thrive. I think about all the chemicals he used when we were kids. So that's a big difference. And it was really pushed and the co-ops and the feed stores and all really pushed these new products – 'Oh, this will make your life so easy, and just spray this on and spray that on.' And we don't do any of that.

Janet, Emily, and Kelly all described how their families' approaches to farming have changed over time and have in some ways come full circle. Emily says:

I remember my mom's mother, my Grandma Gaffy, she actually said to me one time. . . she said something about saving seeds. And I was like – 'We don't do that anymore.' And yet now people are starting to get back to that.

Here Janet explains how things have changed on her farm in recent years:

Many, many things have changed over even the 25 years that we've been back on the farm: protecting the environment, protecting the soil structure, things like that. Gas, diesel prices keep going up and down, so we've tried to moderate how we do things, and so we've come almost full circle back to the way that generations ago that they did some of their farming. That's been an interesting thought pattern for us to have here, just recently in the last two or three years.

Kelly comes from a farming family. Even though she did not grow up on her family's farm, she sees farming as an important part of her heritage that she would like to carry on. Here she describes her family's struggle to remain in agriculture, how they were forced to make changes she doesn't agree with, and how she hopes to follow that farming tradition and also to change it:

I come from a farming family, actually just my mom's parents. My mom grew up on a dairy in South Dakota, and her brother still farms. And my grandpa had a small scale dairy, like maybe 80 to 100 cows and did things without antibiotics and stuff for as long as he could. But then the way the system changed, you just had to change with it or else get out. Get big or get out. . . Now my uncle runs the farm, and I don't particularly like it that much. . . So I have all of this and want to be able to follow that farming tradition but do it in a way that's best for the earth and for the people who are eating the food.

Women farmers share a long history of involvement in movements for change in agriculture. As mentioned in the *Literature Review* section of this paper, women played instrumental roles in the Populist Party's work for agricultural reform, in the establishment and work of granges, and in the United Farm Workers of America, among other movements. Many of the farmers interviewed here are carrying on that legacy. Ten out of fourteen participants connect their choices to farm and approaches to farming to movements for change. Movements they identified include the Slow Food, organic, local food, and urban agriculture movements. Sophia says she is an absolute advocate for the organic movement and that her farm is certified organic because she truly believes in it. Similarly, Patricia sees being certified organic as a way to support the organic movement.

Natalie and Heather run a farming business in Portland. They associate their work as farmers with the urban agriculture movement. Heather says they are "working to increase the visibility of urban agriculture and promote a sustainable food system in Portland."

Natalie elaborates:

The more lawns that get transformed there, especially front lawns, it's like they're really making a difference to what their community thinks is okay. And so I think it's fun to farm; it's fun to grow their food; it's rewarding. . . But this is a movement that we have to start doing this.

Claiming the Farmer Identity (and Changing It)

Historically, women farmers were not called farmers, but instead were referred to as farm wives or farm women. In Carolyn Sachs' 1978 interviews with women farmers, she found that all but three of them were reluctant to call themselves farmers; most of them considered themselves 'helpers'. Even though they did the same work that their husbands or other men did on farms, and in some cases said they did more work, they still struggled with identifying themselves as farmers (p. 96-97).

A goal of this research project was to ask participants how they define being a farmer. Each farmer interviewed was asked at what point she first considered herself to be a farmer. Participants who grew up farming were more likely to answer without hesitation. Janet, Amy, and Catalina all say they grew up as farmers and have been farmers their whole lives. Peggy says she became a farmer "the minute those sheep landed on the property." Lillian says she became a farmer when she took money from her first CSA member. "Before that," she adds, "I was a gardener."

The rest of the participants say they have struggled to claim their identities as farmers. While this bears some similarity to Sachs' interviews three decades ago, the reasons farmers in this project gave were different. This discussion highlights the complex and often contradictory spaces farmers occupy in society and within the farming community (or communities). Farmers are highly regarded experts who have a deep connection to nature cultivated over many seasons -

not just anyone should be able to call oneself a farmer. At the same time, farmers are thought of as ignorant and provincial, with little regard for or knowledge about nature - should one even want to call oneself a farmer?

Most participants were reluctant to call themselves farmers because they felt as though they hadn't farmed enough seasons or gained enough expertise to have earned the farmer title.

Here Lou explores her image of a farmer as someone who is deeply connected to nature:

I guess the hesitancy to claim the farmer title is more personally I feel like I have so much to learn, and I feel like that title should be one that's not bestowed lightly. So personally that's where I come at it. I feel like maybe in 20/30 years I'll have seen enough seasons come and go. . . You know I have this vision of a farmer who can walk outside and hear the lark and know it's time to put peas in the ground. . . And maybe that's just nostalgia, but I think being highly skilled in something that you love balanced with experience, that gets you to the place of the farmer.

Heather expresses a similar feeling of lack of experience and says that for her, being ready to promise people she could grow food for them meant being ready to claim her identity as a farmer:

I feel like it was a hard thing for me. . . part of deciding to start our own business for me was saying – 'I'm ready to do this. I'm ready to commit. I can make a commitment to someone else, like I can grow you food. I can promise you that I will till this ground and plant seeds, and I will grow you food.' And so in a way when I decided I was ready enough to make that promise to people and to start a business on my own, it was like, then I better be ready to claim my identity as a farmer. . . I think it's easy to feel like I need to know more. I need to learn more, like I'm not ready. I don't know enough to be a farmer yet. And so for me, it was saying – 'Okay, I'm ready.' You will never know enough. You can farm your whole life . . . and there will be things that you won't understand or something that happens that takes you by surprise, so farming is a continual learning process. But I definitely think I claimed that identity when we started this business, and I knew I was going to have to promise people. And we made good on all our promises last year.

Sophia and Natalie struggle with their identities as farmers because of negative stereotypes associated with farmers in the United States and because of the historically

masculine image of the American farmer. Here Sophia describes how she wrestles with her own ideas about who farmers are and where she fits in:

I don't consider myself a farmer. And the reason for that is because every time I think of a farmer, I think of someone who does not really understand nature. Farming to me, what I have seen, most farmers in the U.S. are extremely ignorant when it comes to what they are doing. . . Most farmers, traditional farmers, they did not grow nearly as many vegetables as a CSA has to, first of all. They grew four or five and that's what they grew. . . it was all dictated by USDA or somebody else. So therefore they really don't understand. They took their tractors out and they did the same thing every single year, kill the soil, put a lot of material in and then sow their seeds and for the most part, watch them grow. While I do not sit and watch anything grow necessarily. . . I have seen farmers, a lot of huge, huge farmers like the corn, they actually don't do a lot of work. . . They have machines that take a lot of their physical labor out of the equation. And so I don't consider myself a farmer because of that reason, because traditionally that is U.S. farming.

Sophia says the kind of farming she does is considered gardening in Europe, and that in the United States gardening is considered a hobby. "I don't know where I fit," she says. "When someone asks me -- 'What do you do?' I don't like to say I'm a farmer because it's my perception of what a farmer is. So I like to say I grow food that heals."

As an urban farmer and a woman of color, Natalie grapples with how she thinks she would be judged by a more traditional or conventional farmer. She envisions an old man who would laugh in her face and say, "You're not a farmer. You don't know about tractors." For Natalie, part of being a farmer involves being public and working to change the farmer image. She explains:

I think when we started the business, it's like we have to be public and we have to talk about it a lot. We have to claim it, and so I started getting really excited talking to people. . . Once you say you're an urban farmer, people usually ask interesting questions after that. So it's fun to paint a new picture of what farming can be.

In addition to describing their own struggles in claiming their identities as farmers, several younger participants also said their families have had difficulty understanding and

accepting their decisions to farm. Family and friends often wondered why participants would choose to be farmers when they have the skills, education, and opportunities to choose ‘easier’ and likely more ‘profitable’ careers.

Here Lou describes her family’s confusion at her decision to become a farmer:

What I find most interesting is that I had both sets of grandparents that farmed. My grandparents on my dad’s side grew up in South Dakota, and I can remember my grandfather multiple times joking about coming from Hand County. And he always said – ‘We called it Hand County because you did everything by hand.’ For him, the reason to go to college and become an electrical engineer and move to Chicago was to get as far as possible away from that because it was just such, he was the oldest of 11 kids, and it was just a life of tedium. And likewise I have other relatives who look at what I’m doing and you know they’re supportive, but they’re also kind of like shaking their heads, thinking – ‘Why on earth would you choose this?’ You have an engineering degree, you have an MBA, so what’s happening here?’

Natalie’s family had similar doubts. She says they thought her decision to become a farmer was like “taking a backwards step.” She adds though that perceptions are starting to change:

Family and friends are starting to really get more information about why this is valuable, and you know her (Heather’s) dad is starting to say – ‘I’d buy eggs from you.’ . . . It’s such a community builder for most people, and so I really feel like there is support under us that feels nice that wasn’t there at first.

What Is a Farmer?

In addition to discussing their own identities as farmers, participants were asked to give their definition of what a farmer is. This question proved the most difficult for some participants to answer. Janet and Amy decided farming is “undefinable.” Farming is such a broad word and looks so different from farm to farm, they say, that it is impossible to come up with a definition that would accurately represent all farmers. Likewise, several other participants struggled with the question because it highlights issues of inclusion and exclusion. How much land does one

need to have in order to be a farmer? Does one have to produce for market in order to be considered a farmer? What about large-scale agribusiness and conventional versus organic? And what about all of these new young people, many of them from urban or suburban backgrounds and with college degrees completely unrelated to agriculture, who are suddenly interested in farming? What makes a true farmer?

Participants tended to focus their discussions on how one farms and the level of expertise one has, rather than on how much one produces or how much land one has. Peggy thinks being a farmer is a state of mind. She says:

You don't have to have a lot of property. You just have to be in tune with the cycles of the seasons and what can grow and how to take care of it. A person wouldn't have to have property and have a lot of animals to be considered a farmer in my mind. It's just how they approach it.

Most of the farmers interviewed for this project are small-scale growers. For some of them, their definition of farming does not include large-scale agribusiness. Emily explains:

There is even a break within the farming community as a whole that now farmers are almost trying to fight farmers because it's like small versus large. And they're scared of the small farms because we're not corporate. We're not big agribusiness. And I guess I kind of try to be more inclusive, but my values and my principles do not include large agribusiness. I don't exactly call it farming. I realize that they're making a living. Good for them. But from my point of view, I think they could do better. To be really frank, I think they could do a better job.

Over the last few years across the United States and especially in the Pacific Northwest, a new wave of young and beginning farmers have begun to pursue agriculture as a career and lifestyle, so much so that farming has developed somewhat of a trendy status. Several of the farmers interviewed for this project have mixed feelings about farming becoming something that is in fashion. It's a good thing, they agree, that more people are interested in farming and food. But some question where the standards and rigor are for becoming a farmer.

Sophia's thinks farming's trendy reputation is a good thing. She says, "I hope it stays that way, and I hope more young people get involved in small farming and educate the next generation." Janet feels farming has become glamorized. As someone who is part of a long farming tradition, that is hard for her. She says she thinks people like the *idea* of farming. Like Sophia, Janet also sees a positive side in that more people are excited about and interested in her products.

Lou explains similar feelings and thinks there should be some rigor associated with earning the title of farmer:

You have a whole generation of people now, at least in our area of the country, that are excited and stoked and want to be farmers. They come with some background in maybe something related to farming, but for me, I think the challenge is, so okay our society isn't really holding farmers in high regard in a lot of ways. Yet I think that's partly a challenge because we aren't as a community of farmers saying there should be high standards for what it takes to be a farmer or to use that language even, you know? Just because you get out of college in underwater basket weaving and you plant twelve carrots in your backyard, I don't think that makes you a farmer. And so where is the rigor and the standards and the ability for somebody who has that passion, you know any of us that started, to go and either get formal education or training or anything that meant something? . . . So I think a huge challenge for the farming community in general, but also specifically for women farmers, is to figure out how to come at that from a place that promotes our own profession from within, that holds it in high regard from within.

All participants agree that being a farmer is important work that one should be proud to do. But, as Lou mentioned, some also feel the work farmers do is not valued by society, and that often farmers themselves do not place enough value on the work they do. Sophia elaborates:

How are you going to respect me if I don't even respect my work, meaning my labor? Because obviously we work seven days a week. And we do not get paid obviously because nobody would be able to afford food if that was the case. But there should be a price that comes with good food, excellent food, not cheap food, not manufactured food. Europeans understand that. They pay for it. Americans need to wake up because they are a very sick, very sick nation.

Heather expresses similar frustration. She says the way many farms operate is not sustainable and that things eventually have to change:

At some point we have to value our labor and our skills and our knowledge and what we're giving to our communities and value it enough to believe that people should pay us what it costs to do that. And at some point I think it's going to turn. . . And particularly small, organic farms have been subsidized by free labor from apprentices and interns and whatever else they call people. And so it's like you're either underpaying immigrant workers, or you're underpaying educated, white college graduates who want to learn how to farm and are willing to learn for free. . . It's fascinating and it's got to change at some point. It just has to, and it's going to take a lot of education though. And maybe the cost of fuel will help even things out at some point.

Defining Their Own Realities

Educational Resources and Mentors

While the number of women enrolled in agricultural sciences at U.S. universities has increased in recent years (Sager, 2010), none of the farmers interviewed for this project studied agricultural sciences in university. For these participants, finding other educational resources and mentors to share knowledge and to provide support is essential. This kind of informal or community-based exchange of agricultural knowledge has historically taken place in public, male-dominated spaces and has been largely unavailable to women. The experiences of the farmers interviewed for this project indicate that things are changing, that some women farmers have greater access to educational resources and that they are more able to access each other as

Educational Resources and Mentors
Most Common Responses

- Family (13*)
- Agricultural organizations, businesses, and networks (8)
- Other farmers (7)
- Internships and classes (6)
- Other women farmers (4)
- Books (4)

*Indicates number of participants who gave response. The total number of participants was 14.

resources. Interviews with beginning farmers and farmers of color also explore the reality that not all women farmers have the same level of access to educational resources.

Participants named a number of Oregon and Washington-based agricultural organizations and businesses, such Friends of Family Farmers, Oregon and Washington State Universities' Extension Programs, Oregon Tilth, and the Clark County CSA Group. Peggy is the only farmer interviewed who said she is a member of a farming organization specifically for women, Southern Oregon's League of Women Farmers, and she has to drive two hours to get to the meetings. Several farmers, however, did mention that many local agriculture organizations and networks, while not existing specifically for women, are very often led by women. One example is the Oregon-based organization Friends of Family Farmers, which, according to their website, has a staff and board comprised almost entirely of women (Friends of Family Farmers, 2011).

Half of the participants say other farmers, often other women farmers, serve as a crucial resource and source of support. A common feeling among these participants is that other farmers are generally willing to share information and help in any way they can. Here Patricia explains that in her experience, farmers in Oregon and Washington are particularly open to sharing knowledge and helping each other:

This is a characteristic of this part of the world, that other farmers are so open and helpful. And I know that's not true for example in the places I worked in California. The people were much more into business secrets and intellectual property and that sort of thing. So it's really a treasure that we're here. . . You ask these people questions, and they answer them. You learn so much.

Madeline, Emily, and Lou talked extensively about how other farmers serve as a primary resource for them. Madeline says:

I don't think I've ever met a farmer that is not completely generous and giving and willing to just help everyone around them, and it makes me very emotional. Farmers are just inherently good people, and it's such an honor to be associated with so many of them.

Madeline goes on to say that other women farmers have been especially supportive and helpful. She says that “it doesn’t have to be women farmers, but it happens to be a lot of them.”

Most participants interviewed come from farming or gardening families. For these farmers, family members serve as a primary resource and source of mentorship. These participants typically learned to farm by watching and working alongside family members. But beginning farmers, farmers who don’t come from farming families, and Hispanic immigrant women farmers interviewed all discussed unique challenges in gaining access to resources, especially mentors.

Heather does not come from a farming background. She has pieced together her own farming education and philosophy by working on a number of different farms, as well as with several agricultural and environmental nonprofits and businesses. Here Heather discusses a lack of women farmer mentors as well as a lack of public figures in agriculture who are women:

I’m trying to think of a role model or mentor that was hands-on in the dirt, and that’s harder. . . I don’t feel like there’s as many women farmers that are put in front of us as these kinds of role models or more kind of publicized figures. And I know there’s a lot of women out there farming and a lot of women doing a lot of great work and a lot of hard work, and it’s kind of like why don’t we know about them?

Regina faces a similar challenge in finding mentors. She says she has taken farming classes but that they only offer theory. There is no one she can turn to as a practical resource or mentor. Regina would also like to start a CSA but cannot find any resources or other farmers who can give her advice about how to do it. As a farmer, Catalina says she has no resources. “I have never had any resources or any help from other farmers or anything,” she says. “*Yo sola ando*” (I’m on my own). There are farmer training organizations for Hispanic and immigrant farmers in Oregon and Washington, such as *Adelante Mujeres*, Mercy Corps, and Washington

State University's immigrant farmer programs. However, Catalina's and Regina's experiences suggest there may still be a lack of adequate support for minority farmers.

Challenges

The majority of participants feel there is an overall lack of adequate educational and financial resources for farmers, particularly for small farmers. Sophia says as a small farmer, she feels as though the majority of resources go to the large farms and that the government doesn't even see the work small farmers do.

Heather thinks having limited resources in some ways breeds creativity and flexibility, which is a good thing for agriculture. She and Natalie have developed an innovative business model and are running their own farming enterprise, even without their own land or much access to additional resources. But having such a new and creative type of farming business also means they don't easily fit into established agricultural categories, which often precludes them from qualifying for funding opportunities. As discussed earlier, many participants have struggled to come to terms with where they fit in as farmers. The same is true for some of their farming businesses. Natalie and Heather's challenge in accessing resources highlights a need for the availability of credit and support programs to reflect the changing realities of farmers and their businesses. Their story also further emphasizes how difficult it can be for young and beginning farmers, particularly those who do not have access to family farmland, to establish sustainable farming businesses and long-term lives and

Challenges

Most Common Responses

- Lack of resources (11*)
- Acquiring, keeping, preserving land (7)
- Financial challenges (7)
- Time/Balancing multiple priorities (7)
- Isolation (7)
- Physical challenges (6)

**Indicates number of participants who gave response.
The total number of participants was 14.*

careers as farmers. Nearly all of the younger farmers interviewed for this project work multiple jobs now in order to continue farming. And they all know other young farmers who eventually gave up on their dreams to farm because, as Kelly puts, “It just seemed like it was never going to happen.”

Getting, keeping, and preserving land were some of the most pressing challenges participants faced. Regina and Catalina both shared emotional stories about investing in and growing their farming businesses using rented or borrowed land, only to have it taken away from them unexpectedly. Regina and her husband rented property belonging to a local university with the belief that they would be able to use it as long as they kept it up and paid the rent and utilities. She explains:

What they did to us was not right. We planted our trees, invested money, invested a lot of work, a lot of effort. The land obviously was not in good condition when we got it. It was land that had been abandoned, so it cost a lot to improve it and make it able to produce. . . For three years that we were there, we didn't have any problems. But for some reason or another, just like it was nothing, they took the land back.

Catalina used a neighbor's land in exchange for cleaning his mother's house twice a week. Catalina related an emotional story about how the mother wrongfully accused her of stealing fruit trees, and how she was locked out of the property. It was the beginning of the growing season, and Catalina had already planted her crops. She was unable to get them back and lost an entire season's worth of production and earnings, as well as food for her own consumption. Neither Catalina nor Regina had written agreements associated with the land they were using. They were left with no legal recourse and with no other option but to start over from scratch somewhere else. Regina says the next time they rent land, they will do it with signed documents. She says, “In this country, you don't do anything without papers. On word alone does not work.”

While some of the other farmers interviewed experienced challenges related to obtaining and keeping land, none of them related experiences like Regina's and Catalina's. Farmers of color, particularly Hispanic women farmers, often face great difficulties and discrimination in their efforts to access resources such as land, loans, and support from government-funded agricultural programs. Catalina's and Regina's stories highlight related barriers and risks these farmers face in attempting to gain access to land through more informal means, such as verbal agreements. Neither Catalina nor Regina gave up on their dreams to farm. While neither has been able to purchase land, they are both renting plots now and feel as though they are in more stable rental situations.

Even for farmers who do own land, protecting it and keeping it in agriculture once they retire can be major challenges. Lillian isn't sure what will happen to her land once she can no longer farm. She says:

The dream is that either a bunch of old ladies come living communally or some young woman comes and wants to do it here, somebody young and strong and can take off with it. I don't know who it'll be or how to do that.

Patricia says the biggest challenge her farm has faced has been the threat of being destroyed by a natural gas pipeline. Through collaboration with local environmental organizations, Patricia and her husband have been fighting implementation of the gas pipeline for nearly five years. She is hopeful that they will be able to stop it, but the project is not dead yet. Here Patricia describes the experience and the stress of protecting her land and investments in it:

What I've told many people is that I thought I could give up sitting at a computer typing bureaucratese when I was a farmer, but those skills have come into great use. . . So dealing with that we certainly had our sleepless nights just thinking about, oh my gosh, everything. Should we invest? Should we make this addition to the barn? That was the same time that we made the decision to switch over to drip irrigation, which was a huge investment. Should we do it if they're just going to come rip it up?

Issues around time, balancing multiple priorities, and isolation are interconnected challenges more than half of the participants experience. Historically, isolation has been a major challenge for women farmers. A combination of living in rural areas and having their roles restricted to the farm and home made it difficult for women farmers to connect with other farmers or even with other people. Of the farmers interviewed for this project, half named isolation as a challenge. As discussed earlier, Regina and Catalina feel they are largely on their own as farmers. Even for participants who have support networks among other farmers, many find it difficult to connect with or utilize those networks because of the time-consuming and isolating nature of farm work. Emily, Lou, and Madeline all say it is important for farmers, particularly women farmers, to support one another. But finding the time, they all agree, is difficult.

Balancing farm and off-farm responsibilities is a challenge, particularly for women farmers. In talking with farmers about their day-to-day experiences, it also quickly becomes obvious that operating a farm requires a lot more than just farming. Farmers do not just grow crops and raise livestock; they are also expected to be mechanics, electricians, plumbers, builders, managers, marketing experts, and salespeople. Here Janet describes the challenges of managing farming and marketing:

The work is never ending. In fact the other day, my husband asked me, he said – ‘You think back now, when we left the dairy industry knowing that we were going to switch over to this direct marketing, with all the work that we have done, the hours and the hours of phone calls and writing and just constant marketing and stuff,’ he says, ‘would you have done it?’ That’s a tough question to answer because when we were milking cows, the milk truck came. We sold it to Dairigold. It’s a local co-op for us here in the Pacific Northwest. They did all the distribution. They did all the marketing for us. Like somebody said, this wasn’t a learning curve. This was just straight up and down for farmers that do not have marketing degrees. We do not have advertising degrees, so it’s been quite a challenge to get a bunch of this stuff up and going, and a lot more hours than we ever, ever anticipated. And we’re still trying to farm at the same time.

Essentially, I've taken on a completely different role. I have left a lot of my actual outdoor farming behind, which I really, truly love, so I get torn. I have some issues with that that I don't get to do quite what I want to do or hope to do. But yet on the other hand, I really love the whole marketing end of it too. I really enjoy selling my products.

Challenges Specific to Women Farmers

When asked if they think women farmers face a unique set of challenges, only a few participants said they don't think so. Here Peggy explains her own experience in the farming community. She says, "I've found all the old men farmers that I know and go to for advice always really helpful and kind. And there's a lot of women farmers around here. I don't think there's any discrimination really."

Challenges Specific to Women Farmers

Most Common Responses

- Physical strength (5*)
- Lack of access to knowledge (4)
- None (3)
- Not being taken seriously (3)
- Equipment (2)
- Inaccurate representation in agricultural census (2)

**Indicates number of participants who gave response. The total number of participants was 14.*

Those participants who do think women face unique challenges count among them physical strength; lack of access to knowledge; not being taken seriously; equipment; and lack of recognition in the agricultural census. Physical strength was the challenge most commonly mentioned and was usually qualified with an explanation that women farmers can still do the same work, but that it may take longer or that heavy tasks may require creative adaptations.

Sophia explains:

I need my husband here on the weekends, and he takes care of the very heavy, laborious jobs that otherwise it would definitely be a challenge for me. It would take many, many hours. I'm sure I could do it, but it would take a long time.

When Janet said strength was a challenge for women, her daughter Amy jokingly disagreed by saying, “No, never.” In the end, Amy agreed with Janet that strength is a challenge for women. Here Janet explains that managing equipment and animals can be particularly difficult:

Don't let anyone fool you. Women can be strong, and I mean all of us are big gals, and being strong enough to manage the animals sometimes, being strong enough to manage the equipment, getting it hooked up. Those are huge challenges. I always just dread the day when my husband says – ‘Will you go out and rake hay?’ The rake, you have to open and close it, and part of it is manual, and it is hard for me. I have to learn how to use the tractor for backing up because I cannot manhandle. My husband just walks over and pushes it down and it goes right in. It's no problem. That for women is a huge challenge.

Much of the research around women farmers deals with their lack of access to knowledge, particularly related to machinery. Lillian, Amy, Natalie, and Heather all mentioned lack of access to knowledge as a challenge for women farmers. When Lillian was in high school she was not allowed to take auto shop. Today she says she still struggles with machinery. While Lillian was excluded from gaining mechanical knowledge, she thinks girls now may be “more informed on how to fix mechanical things.”

When asked what challenges she thinks women farmers face, Amy's first response was knowledge. Here she explores her own thoughts about women's level of access to agricultural knowledge and how that may have changed over time:

In that time, like when my dad went to college, it was more of a guy's thing to go into the whole farming. So girls didn't get that knowledge. And my mom who's basically the same age as my dad, she didn't have that. I don't know if it was the opportunity. You could have gone and done it, but it wasn't a common thing to do it. Nowadays, I feel like women and men kind of do it.

Sophia, Natalie, and Heather all related stories about how as women farmers they are sometimes not taken seriously. Sophia said at her local CSA group, which is comprised mainly of women, she and other women farmers have been told they're not ‘real farmers’ by male

colleagues. As two women who operate a farming business together, Heather and Natalie say they struggle to be taken seriously in ways they feel men would never have to. An example they provided was on their business Facebook page, someone left the comment “You two are so cute.” Heather and Natalie wonder if two men started a business together, would somebody say “You’re so cute”?

Patricia and Kelly described how the agricultural census is still a challenge for women farmers. Patricia says when she fills out the census she never says her farm is a woman-owned enterprise. She has to leave it blank because there is no way to name more than one principal operator. Patricia also noted how the structure of the census can impact more than just census figures. Here she talks about how at a farm-related conference at Portland State University, conference organizers modeled their questionnaire after the agricultural census:

These are some of the most enlightened people in the world, and yet they composed a questionnaire based on agriculture department questionnaires, and they wanted it to match so they had some comparable data. But sure enough, they have – ‘Who’s the principal operator?’ Well sorry, we don’t have one. We have two.

Defining Their Own Contributions

Participants were asked to discuss what they consider to be their most valuable contributions as farmers. Centered mainly around family, community, and land, the answers they gave correlate strongly with their motivations to enter into farming. The most common contributions named involved being an educator or a mentor and sharing knowledge about food and farming.

Contributions

Most Common Responses

- Educating others/being a mentor (10*)
- Growing healthy food (8)
- Preserving and caring for land (6)
- Contributing to community (5)
- Staying in business/developing business (4)
- Developing own skills and knowledge (3)

**Indicates number of participants who gave response. The total number of participants was 14.*

Madeline says she feels like it's a success every time she's able to share how much joy it gives her to grow and eat her own food. She says, "It's really fun and exciting to be able to say – 'Well yeah, you could totally start your own seeds or you could visit the farmers' market.'"

Here Kelly echoes Madeline's thoughts:

I feel like even just by telling people that I'm a farmer or talking about food and the way that I view food and having conversations with my friends or just random people who I meet who start asking me questions about it, I feel like by being able to give someone that perspective and get them thinking about that is a pretty cool contribution.

In addition to being a farmer, Natalie also works as an environmental educator in Portland area schools. She considers being public in her identity as a farmer and teaching kids to value farming to be some of her greatest accomplishments:

As a leader and a woman of color too, it's like being up there, they're looking up to me for that 45 minutes or hour I'm there, and for me to be like – 'I'm a farmer,' is really radical. . . A letter I got the other day from a kid said – 'You changed my life. Thank you for changing my life'. . . When you walk away from kids and knowing they're the ones, you know, they can value farmers if adults come in and tell them that farming is cool.

Several other participants talked specifically about the value of sharing knowledge and a love of farming with children, often their own children. Catalina hopes her daughters will choose to study agriculture and become farmers. Regina and Sophia talked extensively about the value of sharing a love for the land and for food with their children. Regina explains:

My kids see me work and learn, and they have developed a love for the land. She (her daughter) loves the land. We've been coming to the field since she was in the womb. . . She told me, 'Mommy, buy me a shovel.' Here you see her shovel and her rake. It's not because I make her work. She is here to play and explore, but she is developing a love for the land, care for the land, and with time she is going to know that caring for the land is important for her own future.

Sophia described a similar accomplishment. She says none of her daughters plan to take over the farm as adults, which makes her a bit sad. But she has instilled in them a deep connection with nature, concern for the environment, and a tradition of celebrating good, healthy food, which she believes they will carry with them.

Nearly all of the farmers who own land say one of the most important contributions they make is preserving it. Part of that involves how the farmers treat their land. Part of it also involves the community and creating a connection between eaters and where their food comes from. Lou explains:

My other big accomplishment is just the community of people that care about this particular piece of land now, that have a personal stake in it, that every year I grow that community I feel that's a success because you've got a group of people now that have a stake in farmland, that they know something about, that they know somebody that's actually growing food. And I think that is really important in terms of just protecting our farmland. . . It's personally impactful to these people, and that I think is the way we're going to effect change in terms of land use issues and in terms of just being in a position where we have food security in our country and locally.

How Agriculture Has Changed for Women

Participants were asked how they think the field of agriculture has changed for women and why so many women are becoming farmers now. A common feeling is that women have more access to all kinds of professional fields now, as well as more access to education. Kelly, Patricia, Natalie, and Heather also link women's increased involvement in agriculture, particularly sustainable agriculture, to their involvement in other related fields, like education and nonprofit work.

The majority of participants also say farming for women "is a nurturing thing." Some, like Janet, Lillian, and Sophia, say women are naturally nurturing. Others, like Natalie, say women are socialized to be nurturing. Either way, participants agree that a nurturing perspective is a positive one to bring to agriculture. Natalie says, "I feel like the only way our species can survive when it comes to farming and the future of farming and the future of food is that we have a new perspective that's much more nurturing to the earth."

Connected to the idea of women farmers as nurturing is the perspective that women enter sustainable agriculture because they want to have more control over their lives and over what they are feeding their families and communities. Lillian says for women "it's important to make clean food available." Lou thinks farming for women is about self-reliance and taking matters into one's own hands. She adds, "That's what women have always done."

In addition to being nurturing, participants named other areas of farming in which they think women excel. Several participants said they think women tend to be better at marketing than men. All of the farmers interviewed for this project distribute their products directly to customers. The ability to market to and connect with consumers is a vital component of running a successful operation.

None of the participants seemed to think women farmers are an uncommon phenomenon in their geographic areas. Farmers who have been in agriculture for many years agree that there are more women farmers than there used to be and that the field of agriculture has changed for women. Below Peggy describes the changes she's seen over the years. Her statement addresses the possibility that not only is there more space for women in farming now, but that there may also be more space for femininity in farming:

I think we were probably considered somewhat inferior workers. I could drive a tractor, but I couldn't buck hay. There were certain things I could do, and other things I couldn't do just because I was not strong enough. And I think in my dad's time, and we're talking 40 years ago, if you were an independent woman farmer, you were probably looked at kind of like – 'What are you, trying to be a man or something?' And now I don't think there's any of that. I feel very comfortable. I wear my overalls and my costume jewelry to the feed store.

Patricia says it's more common for women to run their own farms than it used to be, but also adds that women have always been farmers:

Certainly, it's less unusual for a woman to be a sole proprietor probably than it was 10 or 20 years ago. But women have always been involved in agriculture. Maybe they called themselves farmers' wives instead of farmers. But in terms of the actual substance of women's involvement, I don't think it's changed that much.

In response to Patricia's statement Kelly says:

I feel like what you just said about changing from calling themselves farmers' wives to farmers, that's the key point of it -- the idea that we can have that primary role and title rather than having to signify a relationship to a male.

Vision for the Future

Participants shared many hopes for the future. They want to grow their business and grow as farmers. They want to find ways to get land and make sure the land they have is protected. Across the board, they also want to see more women, including their own daughters, entering the field of agriculture. This is no small statement considering the risks associated with farming and the struggles each of these farmers deals with everyday and every season.

In addition to an increase in women farmers, several farmers say they want to see more small farms and more value placed on the work small farms do. Participants feel strongly about the value of small farms and about their potential to feed the world. They also recognize their opinions are controversial. Sophia says she thinks large farms will always be here “because there’s this perception that we need them to feed the world, which I do not believe.”

Similarly, Peggy says:

I would love to see more small farms, and it could be men or women. Carefully crafted products that people really care about. I don’t know, I hear that this is just a foolish vision because that would never feed all the people in this world. I don’t know about that.

Here Patricia shares her vision for the future of farming. She envisions new ways of farming that also take many lessons from the past:

I see a lot more people farming the same amount of acreage, producing maybe twice as much food per acre using the sun and human hands as input, instead of fossil fuels and machinery, although we use machinery and we love it, but small scale. And connecting with markets in a whole variety of ways. You know there’s a lot of talk going around now that farmers’ markets and CSAs are not really very efficient, and you know that’s probably true, but efficiency is what got us where we are today, which is not where we want to be. . . So you know I don’t see the direct farm part of the food system staying at around one or two or three percent as it is now, but maybe getting as high as 30 or 40 percent at some point. And that’s because we just can’t keep doing it the way we’ve been doing it. We do not have cheap fuel. We can’t continue to use the feedlot system for animals, and we can’t be transporting food thousands of miles. So I don’t think we’re going back to an old way. I think we’re going on to a new way which takes a lot

of good lessons and ideas and methods from the old ways. But I think it'll be different than it's ever been.

Conclusions

Throughout the interviews common themes of family, community, and land came up again and again and were often intertwined. Participants closely link why and how they farm to these three areas. In Sachs' 1978 interviews with women farmers, she found two similar areas. Some of her participants said they farmed because of a desire to care for their land or to hold on to it for their families or children. Most of them said they farmed because they were brought up farming and didn't know anything else (p. 109-110). None of them mentioned farming as a way to contribute to their communities, which gets at women farmers' isolation and invisibility. Interviews for this project suggest that women farmers have become more visible, and that how they define their work and identities goes beyond the farm and into public spaces. These interviews also suggest that women farmers today are more empowered to choose their work as farmers in the first place.

In the contexts of family, land, and community, participants describe a powerful intersection of roles they play as farmers, of what is important to them as farmers, and of how they value their own accomplishments. Vandana Shiva says it is difficult for economists and statisticians to measure the value of women farmers' contributions because they do so many different kinds of work (Mies and Shiva, 1993, p. 166). It is certainly true that the farmers interviewed for this project all wear many different hats and perform a wide variety of duties. But when asked, they didn't have any trouble describing how they value their own contributions. The majority of participants consider some of their most important work to be, as Madeline puts it, "passing it on," serving as food and agriculture educators and mentors. At the same time,

some participants say finding mentors has been a challenge and that there remains a lack of women role models in agriculture. These two findings highlight remarkable opportunities for research into how women farmers are serving as mentors and how what they're already doing can perhaps be expanded or replicated to reach a greater number of beginning farmers.

Interviews with Catalina and Regina highlight unique challenges around gaining access to land and other resources farmers of color and immigrant farmers may experience at disproportionate rates. In addition to improving efforts to make resources available, it seems equally important to recognize what these farmers have to give. In the cases of Regina and Catalina, both have not only been farming longer than many of the other participants, they have been farming in Oregon longer than many of the other farmers. They have a tremendous amount of agricultural experience and expertise to share, but both Regina and Catalina feel as though they are on their own as farmers. And considering that women and children of color in the U.S. experience the highest rates of food insecurity and suffer the most from food-related disease, women farmers of color seem like an invaluable resource and group to engage around these issues. There is much opportunity for research into how that may be happening or how it can happen.

It should be noted that multiple Northwest organizations are making support for minority farmers a priority. *Adelante Mujeres* is an organization based in Washington County, Oregon, that offers an organic agriculture training program, among other training and support opportunities, for Latina women and their families (*Adelante Mujeres*, n.d.). Portland-based Mercy Corps provides training for refugee community members who would like to start their own farms (Mercy Corps, 2012). Both organizations connect participants with land and market opportunities. Additionally, Washington State University's agricultural extension program now

includes a division designed to support immigrant farmers, focusing specifically on Latino and Hmong farmers (Washington State University, 2012). Tilth Producers of Washington's annual conference includes many workshops delivered in both English and Spanish (Tilth Producers of Washington, 2011). And Oregon-based Friends of Family Farmers is launching a new project designed to make information, land linking, networking, and other resources available to minority and immigrant farmers (McAdams, personal communication, November 8, 2011).

All of the participants are proud to be farmers and feel that what they contribute to their communities and to society is extremely valuable. They also feel that their contributions and that farmers in general are enormously undervalued. Financially, what they produce is undervalued, making it nearly impossible to make a living as a farmer without any additional source of income. This paired with the already high and rising cost of farmland make establishing and sustaining a farming business, particularly a small, family farm, a tremendously risky endeavor.

Many participants also feel that within American society farming as a profession is not held in high regard and that farmers do not get the respect and appreciation they deserve. Participants seem to be calling for a widespread reevaluation of how we value our farmers. And, as women farmers have in some ways always done, some participants are taking on the work themselves. As Natalie puts it, kids "can value farmers if adults come in and tell them that farming is cool."

There are many conversations that need to happen around recognizing who farmers are and what they contribute to our communities and to our planet. This project is a small piece of those conversations, a small step towards acknowledging who does the work of feeding us all. And while women farmers in the United States are becoming more visible and empowered in their work and identities as farmers, globally women farmers still face enormous challenges and

injustices. It is estimated that women grow more than half of the world's food, but they continue to be denied access to resources such as land, credit, and education (Westfield-Adams, 2008, p. 2). There are many opportunities for comparative research examining the experiences of women farmers around the world, as well as how women farmers can perhaps join in solidarity to support and learn from each other.

In addition to formal research on the subject of women in agriculture, we can also do our own research. Throughout the early 20th century more than half of the U.S. population lived on small family farms, which means that many of us likely come from a long line of women farmers. We can research those histories ourselves; we can ask our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, neighbors, and elders to tell us their stories and to share with us their knowledge. What they know is relevant from the standpoint of preserving our histories. And it is also increasingly relevant to informing how we farm today and what we want farming to look like in the future. Just as Emily's Grandma Gaffy told her about saving seed, what was once considered old or outdated has become new again. Saving seed is but one example.

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