



GRASS CEILING

D6.8

Practice abstracts
batch n.1
The Netherlands



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Is Dutch agriculture still a man's world? Addressing the invisibility and lack of recognition of women in farm ownership, politics and policy

7.1. Introduction

This practice abstract examines a crucial yet often overlooked aspect of Dutch agriculture and rural areas - the role of women. It presents current data and measures aimed at promoting gender equality while emphasising that, despite their substantial contributions, women remain largely invisible in statistics, policies, and politics.

7.2. Key Statistical Findings

7.2.1. Women's legal position and ownership of capital in agriculture

Dutch women play a vital role in agricultural enterprises, contributing approximately one-third of farm labour. However, most of these contributions are unpaid and occur as family members, without profit-sharing or formal co-ownership of property.

Interviews reveal that a significant number of women work as partners in farming enterprises. Yet co-partners have not been included in official statistics for years, limiting women's visibility. Only the partner who works the most hours is designated as the head of the farm, and in 94 % of cases, this role is held by a man. As a result, women farm managers are represented in only 6 % of farms, and data collection focuses exclusively on these few women.

Additionally, comprehensive data on women's participation in cooperatives, farm unions, or decision-making bodies is lacking. This absence of recognition may contribute to the male-dominated nature of policy negotiations and the underrepresentation of women in shaping agricultural policy.

7.2.2. Women's involvement in innovative initiatives

Women contribute significantly to economic, social, and environmental prosperity through both on-farm diversification and off-farm employment.

However, there is a substantial gap in data regarding their engagement. Case studies repeatedly illustrate the vital role women play in multifunctional agriculture, regenerative farming, and social innovation initiatives, including participation in local action groups and rural start-up ventures. Despite their importance, data on women's involvement remains scarce.

7.2.3. Gender dimension in strategic documents

The 2023-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) promotes gender equality, which is addressed in the Dutch National Strategy through initiatives such as support for female farmer networks, the strengthening of female agricultural entrepreneurship, and the incorporation of gender considerations in LEADER projects and local action groups. However, there is currently no data available to assess the results of these measures.

Dutch women are entitled to paid maternity leave if they are employed or registered as entrepreneurs with the Chamber of Commerce. The payment is based on their salary or declared profit, while state contributions to childcare costs are income-dependent and available for both employees and entrepreneurs.

7.3. Conclusion

The GRASS CEILING analysis highlights the significant lack of official data while also showcasing the resilience and innovation of women in Dutch agriculture. A more comprehensive understanding of the sector, including the diverse roles of male and female farmers, is essential. Achieving this requires rigorous data collection and analysis. It is crucial to examine the reality of women farmers, establish baseline data, and leverage this information to recognise and support their contributions—an essential step for the future of the sector.

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