**Hannah Budge**

**Examining Women in Agriculture in the Scottish and Maritime Canadian Islands Summary**

Historically, agriculture has been seen as a masculine occupation. However, women have always played a key role in industry, despite their contributions being largely overlooked (Shortall, 1992; Little, 1986; Coughemar and Swanson, 1983). This is relevant in both Scotland and Canada, with wider programmes and research implemented by the respective governments (Government of Canada, 2019; Scottish Government, 2019). Current research lacks a specific island perspective, which this thesis seeks to fill. The comparative nature of this research project allows identification of social patterns and for parallels to be drawn regarding the current barriers which women in the industry face in both the Scottish and two Canadian islands.

Methods

Throughout the research, due to COVID-19 there had to be several changes to the original research plan. This was due to not being able to travel to the research sites (Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland Island), therefore the interviews were conducted over the phone and online video chat platform, Zoom. This was a sufficient substitute in these extraordinary circumstances. However, this led to issues with poor internet connection for some, highlighting the ever-present digital divide in remote rural areas. A total of 10 interviews were conducted with various people connected to the agriculture industry in these islands.

Initial Findings

Each interview was transcribed and subsequently analysed using thematic analysis, with various themes emerging throughout this process. Several points were raised, with the overarching message being that although there has been much progression in the agriculture industry in both P.E.I and Newfoundland, there remains several barriers still in place for women. These include but are not limited to the following:

* A need to increase the number of women on agriculture boards and for them to be in leadership positions.
* Unconscious bias training should be encouraged for agriculture sales reps. Several participants told stories of how they’d been ignored by the reps, or the salesperson had repeated addressed the man they were with, despite it being evident that they as a woman was the one with the cheque book and decision-making power.
* Women mentors should be encouraged, to act both as mentor for new farmers and as an example to women and girls that they too can be successful in an agricultural career.
* Women only groups were broadly seen as a positive, but not flawless, stepping-stone to encourage women to take part in meetings and training opportunities.

Therefore, the subsequent policy recommendations in this area are:

* To increase inclusivity, there should be a larger focus on research to examine and encompass all marginalised groups within the agricultural industry. As raised by one interview participate the term ‘women in agriculture’ is normally associated with a white, heterosexual women, whereas experiences may be different for trans, migrant and LGBTQ+ women. Therefore, a greater emphasis on intersectionality should be a focus of future research.
* Ensure that when there are capped numbers for women on boards, that they are not made to feel like a simple tick box exercise. Instead ensure there is an inclusive and welcoming environment. Rather as asking women to be a board simply to fill a space.
* Create or support women mentoring programmes and provide schools with access to women in the agriculture industry. For instance, talks in schools to highlight the breadth of career opportunities in the industry.
* Promote women only groups but see then as short-term solutions. They should help build confidence and provide training opportunities. But should not be seen as a replacement to mainstream groups. Therefore, ensure they work closely with existing farming groups, to highlight co-working and sure that all voices are being heard.
* Ensure internet access to all those in rural areas. This is key policy objective with working practices changing post-COVID, mainly a move to permanent or flexible online homeworking for some companies.

To conclude, the research has provided insight into the current issues which women face in the agriculture industry in these islands. Throughout the next and final year of my PhD research I will seek to fill out these initial findings to provide a comprehensive comparison between the two Canadian islands and Scottish islands.

**References**

Coughemar, C.M and Swanson, L (1983) ‘Work statuses and occupations of men and women in farm families’, *Rural Sociology,* 48, pp. 23-43

Government of Canada (2019) *Minister Bibeau highlights Government support for women in agriculture,* Available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/agriculture-agri-food/news/2019/03/minister-bibeau-highlights-government-support-for-women-in-agriculture.html> (Accessed 15th December 2019).

Little, J. (1986) 'Feminist Perspectives in Rural Geography: an Introduction', Journal of Rural Studies, 2, pp. 1-8.

Scottish Government (2019) *Women in Agriculture Taskforce: final report*, Available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/final-report-women-agriculture-taskforce/> (Accessed 15h December 2019).

Shortall, S. (1992) ‘Power Analysis and Farm Wives - An Empirical Study of the Power Relationships Affecting Women on Irish Farms;, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 4, pp. 431-452.