



A RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT

# HOW WOMEN START SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSES

*Female entrepreneurs in agriculture*

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*Food processing and direct marketing are only two of many options to start a diversification business based on farm resources.*

39 %

of women in agriculture in Bavaria are in employment.

77 %

of women in rural areas in Bavaria in general are in employment.

Around 4 %

of women on farms in Bavaria toy with the idea of starting a business.

# 01

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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*The research project FEMAGREE (Female agricultural Entrepreneurs identifying barriers to equality) looked at how women can be better supported to become successful entrepreneurs with a diversification business in agriculture. For this purpose interviews were conducted with in total 35 women who had started such an enterprise about their experiences. The Case study areas were located in Eastern Bavaria and the West of Ireland. These two regions are similar in their agricultural structure and in the past had experienced the outmigration of young women. Creating new job options for women is particularly important in these areas.*

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For women in rural areas combining employment, family and household duties can be a challenge. The number of childcare facilities in rural areas has grown in the past. But particularly for women from agricultural holdings the distance between farm, work place and childcare facility can still be a barrier for employment. In Bavaria for example, only 39 % of farm-women are in employment, compared to 77 % of women in rural areas in general. Similar figures apply to Ireland.

Most women today are well educated and strive for financial and professional independence. Some farm-women start their own businesses in order to combine professional goals with family life and farm duties. Running their own businesses enables them to have flexible work times and their own income as well as a professional challenge. With their innovative business ideas they contribute to the quality of life in rural areas. Unfortunately only few women currently start their own businesses in a farm environment.

The objective of this study was to find out how women on farms can be better supported to increase the number of female-run start-up companies. For this purpose interviews and a workshop were conducted with 35 female farm-entrepreneurs in Eastern Bavaria and the West of Ireland. The case study areas are characterized by similar agricultural structures and in the past experienced the outmigration of young women. In these areas creating new employment opportunities for women would be very important.

Comparing the results of the two case study areas shows that women face similar barriers when starting or leading their own businesses. Many of the participants passionately ran their businesses with very high levels of work input. Holidays and other periods of recreation were almost non-existent. In Bavaria many enterprises were run by women, but owned by their husbands, because only the owner of the farm was entitled to apply for support funding. As a result women were often employed on a marginal salary, securing them a basic social insurance cover. While the participants didn't mind these arrangements, such arrangements put women at risk of poor pension payments in old age. Bureaucracy, access to finance, and employing people were also mentioned as key difficulties. Participants in Bavaria had made positive experiences with the educational offers by the Department of Agriculture; in Ireland some participants had taken part in the ACORNS-program and highly valued its impact on further developing their businesses.

Future support tools should focus on increasing the number of female run start ups in the agricultural domain as well as supporting already existing companies in their future growth. At the centre of this growth should be the objective to reduce women's workload, provide networking opportunities and improve their pensions. In the Department of Agriculture in the *Bundesland* Bavaria the EU strategy of gender mainstreaming should be introduced to improve gender equality in the agricultural support system.

# 02

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

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*It is the declared objective of the EU member states to improve gender equality. As part of this objective, economic independence of women and men needs to be supported. In agriculture this is a difficult issue as in many countries farm ownership is predominantly male. But farms offer a number of resources to start a diversification enterprise. Such enterprises are an attractive option for women to achieve economic independence.*

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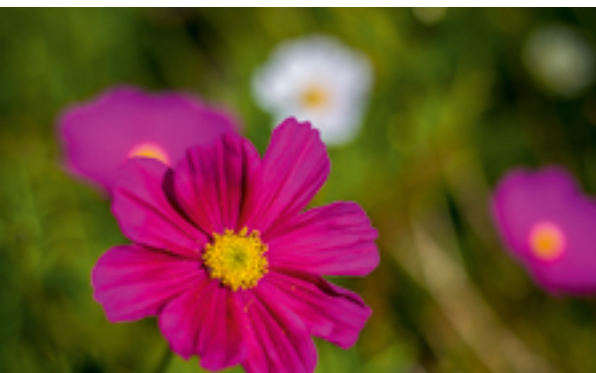
The member states of the European Union agreed upon improving gender equality. For this purpose they developed a gender equality strategy highlighting five key areas in which improvements are necessary. One of these key areas is economic independence. The strategy states, that 'economic independence is a prerequisite for enabling both women and men to exercise control over their lives and to make genuine choices. Earning one's own living is the main way to achieve this'. The strategy also identifies the dual approach of gender mainstreaming and specific measures as the way to achieve economic independence among others. Gender mainstreaming is defined as the integration of the gender dimension into all policy areas. As such it is a cross-sectional task and includes the evaluation of all newly developed regulations, laws, incentives etc. with regard to their impact on all genders. Ireland has first introduced gender mainstreaming tools through its National Development Plan 2000–2006. In Germany gender mainstreaming was introduced at state level. At the federal level the implementation of gender mainstreaming varies, with the *Bundesland* Bavaria leaving it up to the individual departments. As a result the Department of agriculture so far has not introduced gender mainstreaming into its policy development.

From other studies we know that women in Europe on average still do most of the unpaid household and care work, earn less money than men and have lower pension payments in old age (see Figures 1 to 3). Typically the

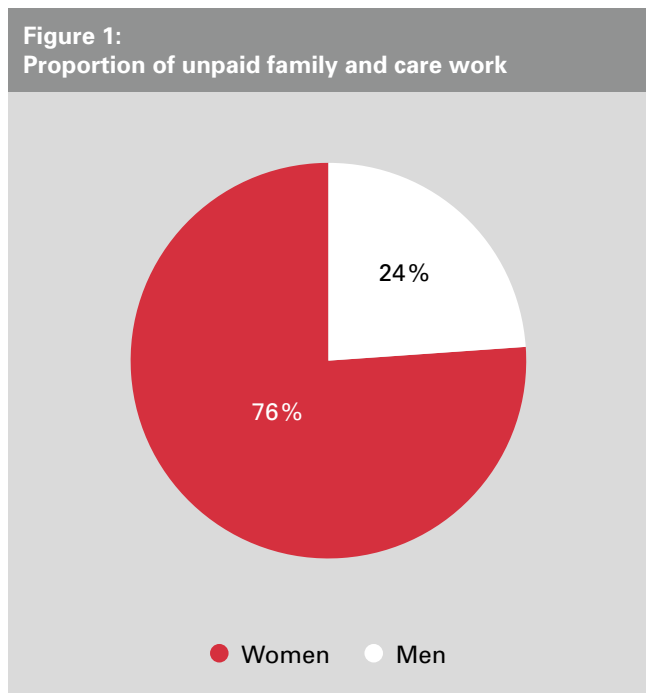
economic independence of women starts to deteriorate when the first child is born, because women tend to pause and/or reduce their paid employment. A study conducted in Bavaria about farm women showed that their employment rate was much lower (39 %) when compared to women in adjacent rural areas in general (75 %). The study did not evaluate the reasons for this low employment rate but it can be assumed, that arranging care and household duties with employment is even more difficult for women on farms, as first, there is more household work on farm, and, second, due to remote locations the access to the labor market and care facilities is restricted.

Women today have a desire for economic independence and a professional challenge, they are well educated and want to contribute their knowledge and skills collected outside agriculture into the farm business. One option to combine family, household and professional aspirations in an agricultural environment is to start a business and diversify the farm income. There usually are plenty of resources on the farm that can be used for such a business and enable the women to work from home.

Nevertheless, in Bavaria the annual female start-up rate in agriculture is only 4 %, which is equally low in the general population of women and men (5 %). For Ireland we only know the general start-up rate of women and men, which is 9 %. Looking at the group of established self-employed and entrepreneurs in the EU the proportion of women is around



Business ideas sometimes evolve from a personal interest or hobby. With the support and encouragement from family or friends they can grow in to flourishing businesses.

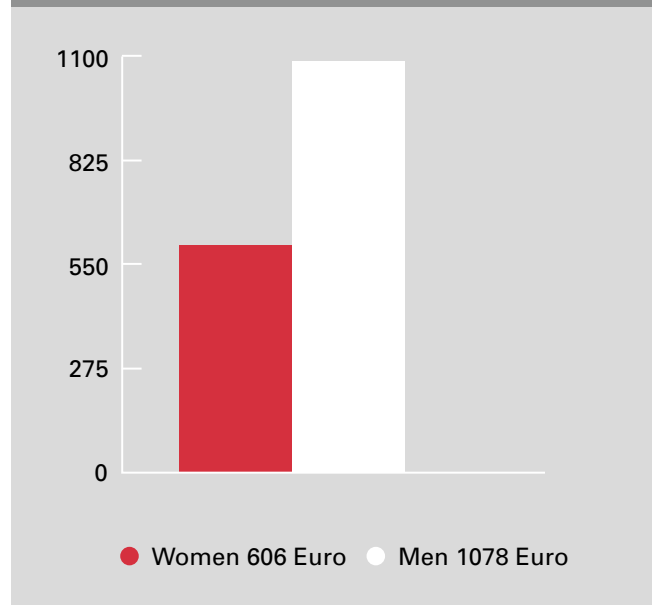


In Europe women still take over the largest share of household and care work. Their average wages are lower than those of men. This also affects economic independence in old age. (Source: Eurostat)

29%. This low female proportion has been shown to be the result of lower female start-up rate rather than female-led businesses being more prone to failure. Studies looking at reasons for this lower female start-up rate, found that the dominating role model for successful entrepreneurs in the media, education and politics is male and coming from the technology environment. This and other cultural factors can influence women in judging their own ability and potential as entrepreneurs – and those of financial supporters. It has been shown, that women have more difficulties in getting loans for similar enterprises when compared to men. If they receive loans, the sum is significantly lower. Women who do start a business typically work fewer hours in their enterprise than men. Furthermore, they have less time for networking and more difficulties to overcome bureaucracy. The simpler and cheaper it is to start a business the higher the rate of women doing so, a World Bank study found. In addition the ownership of property has a positive effect on the female start-up rate as it can be used as a collateral to access finance.

Few studies have looked at the institutional environment for female entrepreneurs in agriculture in particular. The objective of the FEMAGREE study was to find out, which barriers female entrepreneurs in agriculture are facing when starting or taking over a business and at the role that state, private and informal support resources play in overcoming these barriers. Another objective was to look at the impact

**Figure 3:**  
Average pension in Germany



of these enterprises on communities. Based on the findings recommendations were developed as to how overcoming the experienced barriers can be made easier for female entrepreneurs in agriculture.

*Weddings have become an interesting business for diversification enterprises. Farm holdings with an idyllic setting can be prime locations for these events. It is important to have a good pool of service providers such as caterers and photographers as well as staff that can be hired occasionally.*



# 03

## METHOD OF THE STUDY

*The study aimed at exploring the barriers experienced and support mechanisms used by female agricultural entrepreneurs. To cover the topic in all its facets in-depth interviews as well as a focus group workshop were conducted. The participants were chosen in order to reflect a broad range of different enterprise types. During the workshop ideas and recommendations for further support mechanisms were developed.*

The institutional environment for start-ups rooted in agriculture is predominately shaped through EU policies regarding agriculture, rural development and gender equality. The member states however are responsible for the actual implementation and design, in Germany, due to structure of the federal state, also the 16 *Bundesländer*, one of which is Bavaria in the Southeast. Conducting a study in two different regions in Europe allows for researching whether different implementations and designs of EU policies affect women starting businesses based in agriculture. Hence, the FEMAGREE study was conducted in two case study areas, in the West of Ireland and Eastern Bavaria. Both have similar agricultural structures (Table 1) and experienced the outmigration of young people, particularly women, from rural areas.

So far, little empirical data has been collected on the influence of agricultural and rural development policies on female entrepreneurs in farming. Hence the study had to explore the issue in all its facets, giving participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences throughout the whole start-up phase and give an account of the barriers and support resources having an influence on the process. For this purpose a qualitative approach was chosen, using the technique of narrative enquiry. In total 30 such enquiries or interviews were conducted with women, 29 of which had started a business, and one of which had planned to do so but decided to not go ahead with it. The participants were chosen in order to cover a wide range of different enterprises in both case study areas (Table 2).

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours, were recorded, transcribed and analyzed with a specific software package. As a starting point for the analysis a basic structure was used comprising the following topics:

- Reasons for starting the business
- Barriers
- Resources
- Results of business start-up

When analyzing the interviews sub-topics were created and subsequently added to the broad topics.

After analyzing the interviews a workshop was conducted with eleven female entrepreneurs in Eastern Bavaria, where the results were presented, discussed and recommendations developed as to how female entrepreneurs in farming can be better supported in the future. The results from the interviews and the workshop are presented in the following section.

*“Don't think that you can have a career only in cities.”*



Table 1: Characteristics of the case study areas		
	Ireland	Bavaria
Number of farms	140.000	106.700
Average farm size	45 ha	35 ha
Average farm income	31.400 €	28.800 €
Proportion of family farms	99%	ca. 94%
Proportion of female farm owners	12%	9%

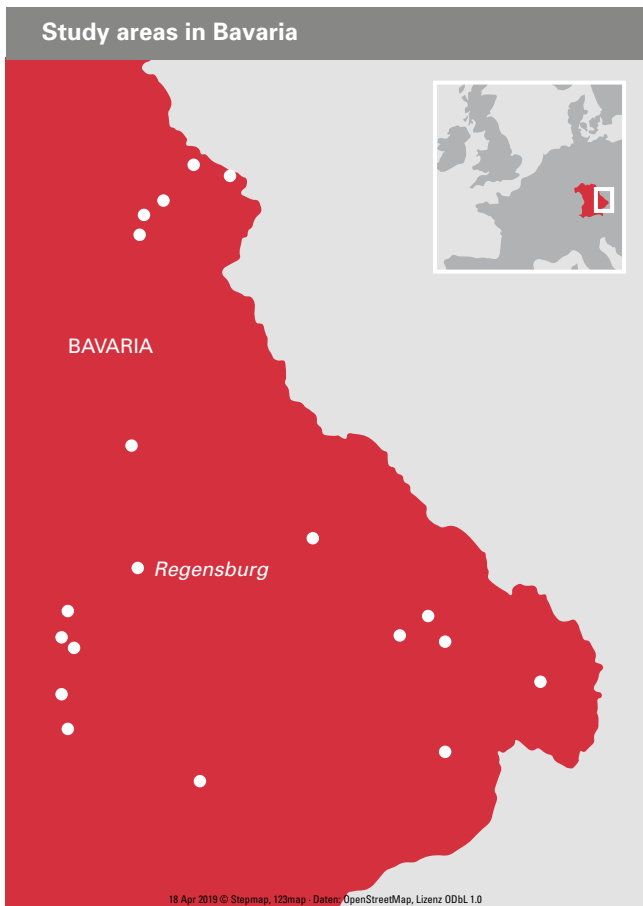
Source: Bayerischer Agrarbericht 2018, National Farm Survey 2018, Census of Agriculture 2010

Table 2: Enterprise types represented in the FEMAGREE study		
Enterprise type *	Ireland	Bavaria
Renewable Energy	0	2
Educational offers	3	6
Tourism	3	5
Direct marketing	7	6
Food processing	5	4
Social farming	2	1
Gastronomy	2	8
Recreational sports	0	1

\* multiple options possible

Honey is an attractive product for direct marketing. In direct marketing producers and customers get in touch and can exchange information about farming, but also about customers' expectations and needs.





*For the FEMAGREE study 19 female agricultural entrepreneurs were interviewed in a region in Eastern Bavaria.*



*In the Republic of Ireland the interviews were conducted in the West, where in total 11 women were interviewed.*

*Animal contact is an important experience for any farm visitor. In particular children and disabled people benefit from the positive impact of feeding and touching any farm animals.*



# 04

## RESULTS

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*The interviews with the participants demonstrated, that the women were very resourceful when starting their businesses. They were creative and worked hard to implement their often innovative ideas into practice. As a result their contribution to the vitality of rural areas is significant. Despite the high work load most participants did not regret the decision to become an entrepreneur, as overall it resulted in a positive quality of life.*

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### WHO IS STARTING A BUSINESS AND WHY?

#### Identifying opportunities

The 30 interview participants came from different agricultural backgrounds, most of them had married a farmer. About half of those, in particular the younger participants, had no agricultural connection prior to their marrying a farmer.

The motivation for starting a business was as varied as the biographies of the women, nevertheless there were repeating patterns. For example all start-ups had used existing farm infrastructures or resources. Furthermore there typically was a combination of push- and pull-factors: on the one hand women were looking for a possibility to earn their own income while at the same time being able to look after the family and the farm household. Thus, many women had started the business after the birth of their first child. All but one of the participants stated that childcare facilities were available but they nevertheless preferred to mind their children at home. On the other hand there were market opportunities opening up, such as a demand for a particular service or product. For example, a farm in Bavaria was located in a small village in semi-touristic region. Travellers were stopping by and asking whether there was a place to have a coffee, which there wasn't. At the same time the participant had just had her first baby and had quit her job,

which had included a lot of travelling. The farm couple then decided to open up a farm café and B&B.

Among the participants there were also women who were looking for a source of income or a fulfilling occupation, but did not know what kind of enterprise to start. They were actively searching for a business idea. In some cases in Bavaria the regional advisory services were able to provide and develop these ideas with the participants. These ideas were often influenced by current funding opportunities for example in the area of renewable energy or educational programs for children.

#### Being open to new ideas

Another source for business ideas were social networks. In Ireland there was a couple looking for a possibility to increase the income from their vegetable farm. A colleague at a farmers market came up with the idea of processing the vegetables into crisps, which quickly became a success. In other instances women were reporting to have 'stumbled' into their business or to have started it by 'accident'. These can be categorized as situations where women weren't actively looking for a business idea but came across it through external influence. In Bavaria educational classes or information days run by the advisory services sparked such ideas. For example one woman was visiting an open day on school tours and was hooked. She visited a course and is now running a successful educational enterprise.



A farm offers many resources based on which a business can evolve. This and the many factors influencing the development of a start-up idea lead to a great range of different farm diversification enterprises.

The 'accidental' start-ups sometimes were rooted in a particular interest or hobby of the participant. One woman in Ireland had a love for gardening and is now a successful florist. In these cases the social network can be an important accelerator, as it provides encouragement and support to develop the hobby into a business. In the case of the florist a friend had said: 'Your flowers are wonderful! You should sell them!'

## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?

### Workload

Almost every participant mentioned the average weekly working hours of well above 40 hours as the main burden. Additionally to the business work many women were taking over care work for children, elderly or sick dependents. Some also were engaged in volunteer work. One woman for example reported to regularly work until 1 am in the morning preparing the Café for the customers. These accounts confirm findings of a study conducted in Bavaria with farm women according to which the average weekly work time was 75 hours. Going on holidays was often not possible. If families went on holidays then usually for no more than one week per year and often one partner stayed behind to look after the farm or the business. There is not enough time for regeneration and also for social contacts

*"I started the business because I like a good challenge. Before we moved back to the farm I worked in a large corporation. Here on the farm I had to find a new challenge for me."*

*“At first I did everything myself. I cleaned every room, ironed the bedsheets, after one year I was wrecked. When somebody called to book a room I thought ‘Oh my god, not another booking’.”*

in the long-run this affected the physical or mental health of some participants. Some participants had started their businesses already a few years ago and had managed to grow it to a level where it was possible to employ somebody. In these cases the work load had decreased to an acceptable level.

#### **Knock-on effects of the high workload**

The high workload negatively affected other areas of business management and development as it left little time to address other issues than the day-to-day running of the business, household and family if present. Therefore dealing with bureaucracy, applying for funding, finding and managing personnel, visiting training courses, networking, strategic business and pension planning. Regarding bureaucracy the interviews confirmed results of the above mentioned World Bank study: the more time consuming it is to address bureaucratic requirements, the more difficult it becomes for women to start a business, as they still take over most of the unpaid family and household work and their spare time is restricted. Bureaucratic barriers emerged also when two or more offices were involved and passed back and forth customers with their requests. Furthermore women in Bavaria reported to have the impression that small businesses are controlled more rigorously and often than big ones. Barriers also exist when it comes to funding applications. Collecting information about funding options, finding the right fund, applying is very time consuming. Some women also pointed out to never qualify for any fund because in one year their business was still too small and in the next it was too big and there was only one application

*A farm holiday offers close contact to nature and guests value the relaxing experience of a farm stay. Many female entrepreneurs in agriculture, however, are not in a position to take time off for a holiday. Due to their high workload this would be crucial to health problems in the long-term.*



and funding deadline per year. As a result women invested their savings or got a bank loan.

### **Employment cost**

Most of the interviewees were not in a position to offer permanent full-time employment. They rather worked with part-time or seasonal staff, with external service providers but also a lot with unpaid family help to reduce the work load. Grandparents and neighbors often took over some of the child care and household work. Grown up children helped in the business or on the farm. There were even cases where regular customers helped out during holidays. Businesses in Bavaria reported an enormous amount of red tape employing seasonal staff, which is particularly difficult when employees have difficulties with the German language. One participant even remembered having armed police officers on the farm because of an accidental misinformation on an employee.

### **Gender stereotypes**

In their roles as business manager women were still encountering gender stereotyping. Almost every participant had made experiences, where for example bank employees, advisors, administrative staff, suppliers or customers were asking to speak to their husband or their 'boss'. Participants were rather amused when they told such stories and most of them would clearly position themselves as the boss in these situations. For others it was easier to actually get their husbands on the phone rather than discussing and convincing their conversation partner of their capability. Although the participants did not bother about being stereotyped it remains the question as to the effect such comments on women's self-confidence regarding entrepreneurial skills in general.

### **Income generation**

One objective of the study was to find out whether the started enterprises have the potential to improve women's economic independence. When asked directly about their income most participants stated that it is rather low but enough to make a living. Any additional profit is reinvested either into the business or the related farm. The income

was not high enough to set aside money for pension payments. Most participants were satisfied with their income or optimistic, that it would increase in the near future. Where the farm was owned or co-owned by their husband women had access to bank accounts and were involved in strategic decision. In the current situation they had economic independence. However, in case of a divorce the situation would change dramatically. In particular in Germany where many participants were running the business, but hired by their husbands on a minimum wage to cover basic social insurance payments. It also needs to be pointed out that some participants were desperately trying for years to earn a satisfying income with their diversification business and were continuing to do so out of family responsibility.

## **IMPACT ON THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

The 29 businesses studied in the FEMAGREE project together were offering 55 different products and services (Table 3). Frequently two or more offers are made by the same business. For example one participant was offering educational days for schools and adults on her farm and additionally was running a farm shop where visitors could buy products from the farm. Another participant was selling farm products and held weekly social farming days for people with mental disabilities. Many businesses who process their own farm products also sell these directly to local customers or online. Also of the 29 businesses twelve related to organic farms.

The studied businesses employed people from a wide range of professions. As the products and services offered by the businesses are often seasonal or depend on events the participants mainly employed seasonal, temporary or part-time staff. Additionally all of them used other companies, self-employed or contractors such as architects, engineers, accountants, photographers, graphic and web designers and hence significantly contribute to local employment. Only few had worked with students or au-pairs (Table 4).

*"That's the way it still is in farming. It is taken for granted that there is cooked lunch every day, that the clothes are washed, that the house is clean, the kids are looked after... It doesn't count as work."*

## OVERALL SATISFACTION OF FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

Despite the high workload all but one of the interviewed women were happy with their decision to start their own business. They highly valued the autonomy in their lives, not having a boss, having flexible work times and if they had children the possibility of being there for them after school. Quotes best illustrate the contentment the participants felt towards their business work.

“I love it. I wouldn’t be sitting up until 2 or 3 am in the morning doing stuff if I didn’t really love it. And I love the way it looks and I get so happy I’m working in it.”

“I love it that I’m always here for the kids when they come back from school, that we can do 12 hours outside, take tomorrow off if you can, do whatever hours suit us. It is not too many places that you can do that.”

“Sure, with agriculture you always need to be at home. But we are used to that. And I really do think we have a high quality of life. We are free and are not ordered around by anybody.”

“I think living in the country is fantastic. Being out in nature, in the clean air, the lovely things I get to do... I mean I’m like a billionaire! If I was to have the same quality of views and air and trees and contact with nature in a city I would have to be a billionaire!”

“You really don’t need too much. It’s a lot nicer, simpler living. Yes, you don’t have as much money in your bank account, by a long shot. But I’m much happier. Yeah, I worry about money sometimes and you would like to have a little bit more, but listen we are building a business so hopefully those days will come. I still wouldn’t trade any of it. I’m not stressed. I’m busy but I’m not stressed.”

**Table 3: Products and services offered by the participants**

Enterprise type	Number
Direct marketing	13
Restaurant or Café	10
Food processing	9
Tours, classes	9
Farm holidays	8
Social farming	3
Renewable energies	2
Sport and recreation	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>

**Table 4: Impact of the businesses on local employment**

Form of employment	Number of participants employing	Times mentioned
Companies, self-employed, contractors	24	62
Part-time employment	16	22
Temporary staff	7	10
Full-time employment	4	4
Seasonal staff	4	6
Students, au-pairs	2	5

*“Yesterday there were seven of us in one room and we were just talking about our businesses. There were so many similarities, we all had the same issues: financial, management, family. You feel you have people’s back and support. And that’s powerful.”*

# 05

## OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES

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*The women in this study overcame the barriers on their way to creating successful business with inspiration, hard work and assertiveness. They used manifold support options from their private network as well as from public resources. Based on the experience of these women recommendations were developed as to how starting a business can be made easier for women and thus the number of successful female agricultural entrepreneurs can be improved.*

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### SUPPORTING FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

#### Structure of advisory services

When comparing Bavaria and Ireland with regard to the structure of the advisory service for diversification some differences can be noticed. Both regions offer diversification advice to farms, but the offer is broader in Bavaria. In Ireland Teagasc offers an information seminar on various options for diversification. In Bavaria each regional office has a specific unit for diversification support. These units provide both individual consulting to farmers as well as a wide range of educational offers. These educational offers include information days, seminars up to whole course on basic diversification options as well as specific training programs for gastronomy, tourism, food processing, educational offers, social farming, recreational sports (horses) and household services. According to the study participants the quality of these courses is of a high standard and relevant for starting a business. It might be useful to set up similar regional structures in Ireland for Teagasc as they typically are the first point of contact of a farmer. Also they are more likely to be more open to start-up ideas based on an agricultural idea or resource than a general business advisor. It would be important though that any advisor is informed about funding sources from both the agricultural and the general business sectors, as both might be relevant to a diversification business.

#### Increasing the number of start-ups

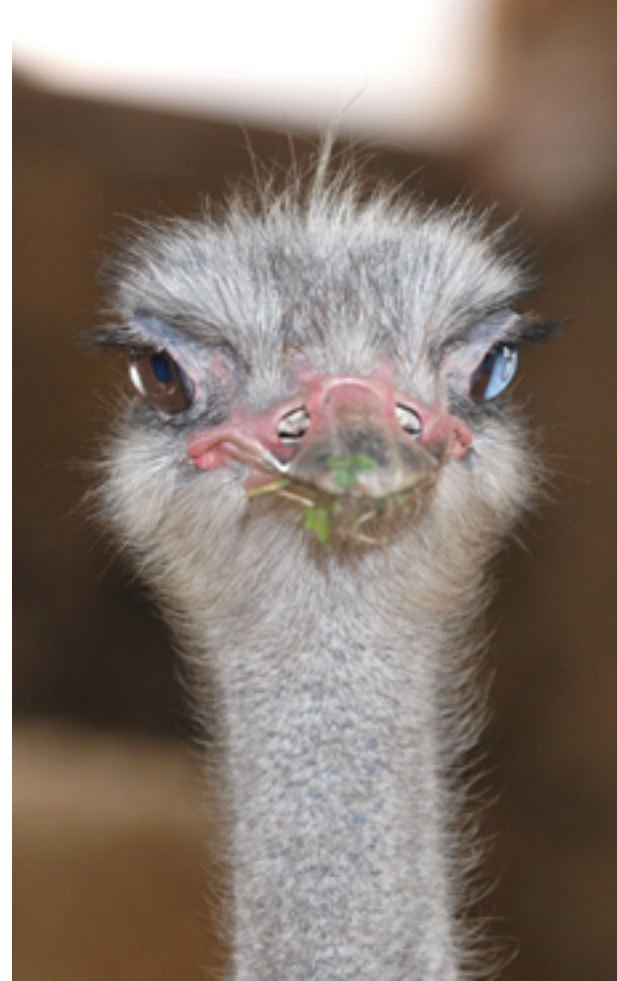
Despite the wide range of training offers in Bavaria the number of start-ups is not higher when compared to the national overall average. The participants of the training courses most likely had already made their decision to start a business. Therefore to increase the number of start-ups it would be important to make low-threshold offers such as information days or farm visits in order to get more women interested in a diversification business. Additionally basic business management courses should help interested women with a business idea to develop a business plan. Many Irish participants had used the local enterprise offices courses for this purpose, in Bavaria women would need to support outside the agricultural administration, which they frequently miss to do. These business courses should be offered online at low cost.

#### Workload

Almost every participant had to deal with an enormous workload. While this is not unusual for start-up enterprises, average weekly working hours should decrease after period, otherwise negative implications on health can be consequence.

Most women had established complex support networks for managing the family and household tasks. But in many cases help in running the business would have been necessary to address the workload. Participants with mature businesses were able to create employment and as a consequence the workload had decreased to an acceptable





*Start-up enterprises are often based on innovative business ideas. But trends and fashions can change quickly and lengthy applications for funding can be a barrier to transfer an idea into practice fast enough.*

level. Hence growing the business would in the long-term lead to the possibility of employing people and decrease the work load.

For start-up enterprises it can be financially difficult to permanently employ people. Surprisingly only very few participants worked with students or au-pairs, which could be a viable option to point out.

### **Bureaucracy and finance**

Reducing the workload could also be achieved through an easier access to information about bureaucratic requirements, e.g. regarding building regulations, hygiene, safety, funding opportunities etc. Concentrating relevant information in brief checklists written in a simple language would benefit in particular women with family and household obligations.

When it comes to public funding opportunities advance advise would be valuable as to what the chance are of the application being successful, as writing funding applications can be time consuming and frustrating if not successful in the end. Another barrier are yearly application deadlines. Many start-ups are innovative businesses and need money quickly, sometimes it is only a small amount of money that is needed. It would be an advantage to many start-ups if application assessments are carried out more frequently or even assessments are made on a continuous basis. Additionally it is pivotal for the assessments to be carried out

as quickly as possible. The option to apply for sums below 10.000 Euro is key for many small enterprises. As highlighted earlier in Bavaria it can be difficult to get an overview of all possible funding sources including those outside agriculture. An online filtering tool similar to the one in Ireland would be useful.

*“How we managed? A very long time with a lot of work. Many years with too much work really, until we decided to employ somebody. This decision has taken us as a long time.”*

## Education

Only one participant stated that the bureaucratic requirements were no problem to her. On her own accounts this was due to her education, where she learned all about the relevant rules and regulations. Hence good information and education on these items reduces the workload and stress they sometimes can evoke. Education needs to address both, the technical, specific aspects of the business (e.g. gastronomy) and business training on accounting, taxes, marketing, HR etc. Women in particular valued easy access information as they are limited in the amount of time they have available. But they also cherished courses that had a social aspect, or in other words where they could meet other women in similar situations and network with them. In the workshop women particularly favoured visiting another woman's business, as it combines learning, networking with getting out and having an interesting day off. Offering women-only courses or tours similar to the ACORNS-program is thus useful and often more likely to be visited by women than general start-up courses.

## Pensions

Planning for pensions had crossed many participants' minds, but most of them had not made any decisions on that so far. The reason was either a lack of time or a lack of money or both. In Bavaria the husbands owned some of the businesses started and managed by their wife. The reason was that diversification funding is only available to the person owning the farm and usually this is the husband. In these situations some women were paid a minimum salary to cover their basic social insurance. In case of a divorce these women are at risk of poor pension payments as in Germany pensions are calculated not only on the years of payment but also based on the amount paid in. This means the lower your salaries, the smaller your pension. In Germany four out of ten marriages are divorced, the divorce rate is a little lower still in agriculture but catching up with the general population. A good pension planning is therefore very important for the economic independence of women in old age. In Ireland where only the years of payment count towards the pension and everybody is paying into the system, the situation seems a little less precarious. But pension levels are low and without additional planning women are at a similar risk of old age poverty. Including pension planning into entrepreneurial education is therefore pivotal. Also the businesses need to grow to a certain size in order to be able to spare money for pension planning.

## Self-confidence

The interviews confirmed the literature on female entrepreneurs, which highlights the importance of self-confidence for starting a business. Not only making the decision to start a business and following through with this decision,

but also the ability to constantly motivate yourself and continue with your plan after a setback are pivotal for successfully starting a business and growing it. Strengthening the entrepreneurial self-confidence of women as well as giving them the opportunity to receive support and encouragement when necessary could have a positive effect on the number of new start-ups as well as the growth of many businesses. Among the options to achieve these are:

- Support with drafting business plans and strategic objectives
- Transfer knowledge regarding managerial tasks (accounts, taxes, regulations)
- Encourage networking of women
- Create and support awards for female entrepreneurs
- Bring media attention to female entrepreneurs and their businesses

The Irish ACORNS-program described earlier combines many of the above aspects. Study participants taking part in ACORNS rated the program as helpful and 'exactly what they needed'. Women in the start-up phase apply for a place in the program. If selected they meet every month with other women in their region over a period of 6 months. At each meeting they learn about a specific topic such as funding, marketing and PR, accounts, taxes, HR etc. They also set themselves business goals to be achieved until the next meeting. As side effect women form network groups that support each other. A similar program taking a holistic management approach could be established in Bavaria. Another positive example from Ireland is the Kerry Business Women Network, which supports female entrepreneurs from the area. The support consists of networking events, advice services and awards. Such non-agricultural offers are important in Ireland where specific diversification support from the Department of Agriculture is not as established as in Bavaria.

## OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### Collect gendered statistical data for:

- Number and categories of diversification enterprises
- Ownership and legal status of diversification enterprise
- Profit of diversification enterprises
- Social protection of family farm members in case of divorce, old age, decease

### Collect quantitative data on:

- Utilization of the diversification enterprise's profits
- Number of direct and indirect work units created

### Develop advisory and support measures:

- Always take into account the fact that women tend to have less time for education and networking than men
- Simplify access to information
- Continuous funding application
- Ensure short processing times for applications
- Introduce options for microcredits
- Point out the possibility of students and au-pairs as support
- Support growth of business after start-up phase
- Encourage private pension planning

- Combine knowledge transfer with networking and socializing, e.g. exchange visits
- Increase the visibility of female entrepreneurs as role models

### Ireland

- Explore expanding diversification advice for farmers
- Offer introductory days on specific diversification options (e.g. open days)

### Bavaria

- Develop mentoring-program for female entrepreneurs including knowledge transfer, business planning and networking
- Introduce brief seminar days on specific business management options

*Being a female entrepreneur in farming can be lonely. For women it is important to stay in touch with other likeminded women and develop a good support network. Any educational offer made should always include an option to network and socialise, too.*



## DISCUSSION

### Contribution to economic independence

The background of this study was the EU-member state's objective of achieving gender equality. In particular the study focused on the question of economic independence of women and men. As highlighted above the employment of women in agriculture is much lower when compared to that of women in rural areas in general. Additionally women are more likely to leave rural areas, probably in the search of better employment opportunities. Starting businesses rooted in agriculture is one option for women to create an income for themselves, but also to provide jobs for others and thus improve the economic independence of women in agriculture and rural areas. To increase the number of female start-ups in agriculture the study explored the barriers women experienced when starting and running a business as well as the support mechanisms used. For this purpose interviews were conducted with female entrepreneurs in agriculture in Eastern Bavaria and the West of Ireland. Because of the qualitative nature of the study results cannot be generalized. Nevertheless we can assume based on the repeating pattern of the interview results that the income made from the diversification businesses is usually

not high. During the start-up phase the income is low to non-existent, which is not unusual. Once the businesses have achieved a certain maturity the income is acceptable. When the businesses have achieved at a stage where they are making a profit the question remains as to how much of the profit is actually at the disposition of the women now and utilized for increasing their savings. The diversification businesses started and run by women are closely intertwined with the farm in terms of location, legal status and economics. Frequently the profits made are reinvested into the business, and it is not uncommon that they are used for improving the farm.

### Planning for old age

With the latter owned by the husband only – which in this study was the case in a few instances in Bavaria, not in Ireland – women are at risk in case of a divorce. Without pension planning or marriage contract economic independence is questionable after a divorce and in old age. It would be important to follow up on these results with a quantitative study and generate statistical data about how much profit the diversification businesses actually make and how much of it is available to the women now and in old age. Also data about the divorce rate in agriculture needs to be collected as well as about the ownership of the diversification businesses to better understand the number of women at risk. Furthermore both farm owner and partner should be more aware of the necessity of pension planning; any education and training in the area of diversification should contribute to that.

### Contributing to community

Another objective of the study was to explore the impact of the diversification businesses for rural communities and society. Again, due to the qualitative nature of the study, results cannot be generalized, but repeating patterns allow for identifying similarities between the studied businesses. Through their businesses many of the participants get in contact with parts of society which otherwise have no connection to agriculture. Among them are holiday farms, direct marketers, educational farms, farm gastronomy, social and recreational farming. The female entrepreneurs not only offer valuable products and services, they also automatically become ambassadors for agriculture. On the other hand they have immediate access to their customers' requirements and needs. Unfortunately official statistical data does not account for all forms of diversification business (e.g. social farming), hence at the moment evaluating their full impact is not possible.

### Offering employment

Most of the studied businesses were not in the position to create permanent full-time employment. Nevertheless they



contribute to local employment through seasonal and part-time hiring as well as contractors and other self-employed. Again statistical data would be needed in order to evaluate the full contribution to employment.

### **Supporting gender equality**

In their strategy on achieving gender equality the EU-member states have agreed upon applying the instrument of gender mainstreaming. This includes assessing policies' impact on each gender separately. In Ireland and in Germany at national level gender mainstreaming concepts have been drafted and implemented to a various degree. At the federal level in Germany, gender mainstreaming concepts have been implemented in most states or *Bundesländer*. Of the 16 *Bundesländer* ten have drafted a gender mainstreaming concept or program as well as introduced a coordination unit for gender equality, three have a concept only. In Bavaria there is a coordination unit at the Department for family and social affairs, but no gender mainstreaming concept has been drafted. The sole responsibility for

implementing the EU's gender mainstreaming strategy lies with the individual Departments. In the Department of Agriculture a gender mainstreaming strategy is currently not available or envisaged. Introducing such a strategy would enable gendered ex-ante evaluations of planned policies, regulations and support tools and analyze whether they would have different impacts on the economic independence of women and men.

**The complete report on the FEMAGREE study is available at [www.stmelf.bayern.de/erwerbskombinationen/index.php](http://www.stmelf.bayern.de/erwerbskombinationen/index.php)**

*“If I would have known in advance about the amount of bureaucracy involved. That's what made it almost collapse. Fire safety, hygiene, deadlines, the local council not passing on our forms and applications ... I even had thought of cancelling everything.”*



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