

Role of women in agriculture and rural areas

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The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted the report by Elisabeth JEGGLE (EPP, DE) on the role of women in agriculture and rural areas.

Members recall that about 42% of the 26.7 million people working regularly in agriculture in the European Union are women and at least one holding in five (around 29%) is managed by a woman. They also emphasise that for both men and women, employment rates are low in rural areas and indeed many women are never active in the labour market, so that they are neither registered as unemployed nor included in unemployment statistics, which disadvantages them.

To address the specific needs of women working in agriculture, Members propose a series of recommendations which take account both of their living conditions and their role and contribution to the development of the rural economy.

Living and doing business in the rural world: Members point out that efforts are needed to create living conditions in rural areas which correspond to those in urban areas while reflecting the realities of the countryside, in order to offer women and their families reasons for staying and making a successful life there. The rural world needs to be promoted as a multifaceted, integrated setting in which people can work and do business, and for the key function of women, their expertise and their competence to be used to this end. Members therefore call on the Commission, in the negotiations on the next multiannual financial framework, **to refrain from further reducing the proportion of the total budget accounted for by agricultural expenditure.**

Members call for several measures to promote rural living conditions for women:

- the promotion of local services via the common agricultural policy in order to open up new prospects and paid employment opportunities for women and significantly facilitate the reconciliation of family life and work;
- the promotion of development strategies that have their own momentum, as a means of supporting the particular creativity of men and women in the countryside,
- framework conditions to be provided in rural areas that will enable women of all generations to remain in their own immediate environment and contribute to revival and development there;
- the importance of early retirement arrangements for farmers and farm workers with regard to living conditions for women in rural areas;
- further efforts to be made to equip all rural areas with the most
- up-to-date IT infrastructure, above all adequate broadband access, to stimulate competitiveness and improve e-business in rural regions;
- improve the quality and accessibility of infrastructure, facilities and services for everyday life in rural areas such as childcare facilities, healthcare services, educational facilities (including for lifelong learning), institutions and care for the elderly and other dependants;
- use the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund to remedy the lack of good transport infrastructure in rural areas;
- support for projects promoting and advising on the creation of innovative primary agricultural production enterprises in rural areas that are able to provide new jobs for women in innovative sectors, research and development, etc.);
- the new EAFRD Regulation to provide for specific measures to support women in the 2014-2020 programming period which would have a beneficial impact on female employment in rural areas.

Women in the rural economy: Members call on the Commission and the Member States to contribute to an informative database on the economic and social situation of women and their involvement in business in rural regions. They also consider it desirable to work towards the creation of a European rural women's network (or a network of women's associations) and to promote their training. Other measures are called for including support for the increased involvement of women in the political processes, including their proper representation on the boards of institutions, companies and associations.

As regards the issue of spouses and life partners of farmers, Members call for the rapid transposition of [Directive 2010/41/EU](#) on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity, to ensure that they receive social protection and that self-employed women farmers and female spouses of farmers are guaranteed adequate maternity benefits.

Underlining the role of women in the diversification of the rural economy, Members call for women's entrepreneurial spirit and initiatives to be encouraged, in particular through the promotion of female ownership, networks of female entrepreneurs, and provision in the financial sector for facilitating access for rural businesswomen.

Women in agriculture: Members call for greater account to be taken, in company-level and regional-level development strategies, of women's agricultural and non-agricultural vocational skills. To encourage the continuing training of women, Members call for initiatives for additional training in rural areas, under Axis 3 of the rural development programmes. This would help to combat social exclusion in rural areas and the risk of poverty.

Among the measures to promote the role of women in agriculture, Members suggest:

- support for women's and farmers' organisations;
- support for better representation of women in political, economic and social organisations in the agricultural sector;
- support for social protection strategies for women in agriculture (women-farmers, -rural workers, -seasonal workers, etc.);
- support for specific measures to take account of living and working conditions of migrant workers employed as seasonal workers (lodging, social protection, health insurance and health care).

Members also consider that, as part of the forthcoming reform of the CAP, the needs of women in rural areas and the role of women working in agriculture should be taken into account and given priority as regards access to certain services and aid, in line with territorial needs in each Member State. In this regard, they call on the Commission to include in its summary report to be presented in 2011 in accordance with [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1698/2005 on the EAFRD](#) an in-depth analysis of the impact of the measures taken regarding the situation of women in rural areas.