

The Austrian Female Farmers' Perspective on Cooperation between Partners and Generations

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Family farms are still the prevailing form of farming in Austria. The success of a farm family depends predominantly on the cooperation within the family both between generations and between the partners. The literature on partner and intergenerational cooperation is scarce although unfavourable demographic trends have brought the issue of cooperation among partners and generations into the limelight. Furthermore, recent studies have revealed that partner and intergenerational cooperation is very complex and ambivalent. Moreover, many social scientists stress that partner and intergenerational cooperation is increasingly important in caregiving and parenting. Female farmers have, therefore, a key role on farms. Most of the time female farmers are the first contact person in caregiving and children care issues, but who is responsible for caring for the female farmers in need. This paper presents how cooperation between partners and generations and life on farms are perceived by female farmers in Austria. Select data from the survey 'Life and working conditions of female farmers in Austria' conducted in the year 2016 is analysed. The results show not only considerable consistency but also ambivalence in the respondents' views on partner and intergenerational cooperation and solidarity. However, the issues raised in this paper have considerable implications for our understanding of the nature of cooperation on farms.

1. Introduction

On farms, it is customary to live within a mix of different generations. Compared to the general population, large families are traditional on farms. For this reason the number of children per woman and the number of marriages are above the national average. Several people live together in a household or in close proximity (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017). Farm life is clearly family-centred. The family is a reciprocal relationship of two generations, or even three (or four) generations (Ecarius, 2002). The farm and family form a residential and economic unit and stand for cooperation and continuity. The farm is usually inherited by the younger generation and thus remains a family property. The family orientation takes advantage of the farm's profitability and ensures its continuity. The female farmer plays a key role in the family. Besides the domestic work and off farm activities, female farmers contribute significantly to the farm labour force. In Austria women constitute 40% of the total farm labour force (Statistik Austria, 2014). They have multiple, intertwined roles which make them essential for the social life on farms, but also depend on other actors within the family and the farm environment (Rheinischer LandFrauenverband and Westfälisch-Lippischer LandFrauenverband, 2016).

General and agricultural literature on partner and intergenerational cooperation is scarce although unfavourable demographic trends have brought the issue of cooperation among partners and generations into the limelight. Thus, permanent demographic changes have a significant impact on almost all dimensions of social life as is also confirmed by Schmidt and Vosen (2013). Generally, this was also pointed out by experts (European Commission, 2009, Alves et al., 2008, United Nations, 2007). Furthermore, the current trends in agriculture dictate the need for partner and intergenerational cooperation. The interdependence among generations during the life cycle can be looked at on the macro and micro generational level. In this paper the focus is on the micro generational cohesion, mainly among female farmers, partners, children and parents (in

law) within families. Relationships among these generations also include those members of the nuclear family and the larger extended family, i.e. aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings, etc (United Nations, 2007).

This paper is part of the gender-focused research on peasant partnerships (e.g. Bach, 1982, Björkhaug and Blekesaune, 2008, Goldberg, 2003, Oedl-Wieser, 1997, Oedl-Wieser and Darnhofer, 2009), in generational and farm succession research (Bengtson 2001, Blanc and Perrier-Cornet, 1993, Gasson and Errington, 1993, Hein 1998, Laber, 2007, Mueller-Harju, 2002, Pevetz, 1983, Tafere, 2013, Tietje, 2002, Vogel and Wiesinger, 2003), which have been increasingly observed since the 1980s and which are usually undertaken within the framework of sociological-ethnological research on women and gender.

Cooperation in families can happen between different actors, i.e. partner, children, parents of the female farmer etc. With this in mind, this paper aims to explore the cooperation between female farmers, partners, children and predecessors as viewed by different age groups of female farmers. The following hypothesis is presented: cohabitation, parental duties, caregiving, helpers or dialogue partners in problems and farm succession differ according to the age of the female farmers.

2. Methods

This paper draws on select data generated by the survey of female farmers 2016. It focuses on the description of the cohabitation; the division of work for parental duties and caregiving, helpers in problems and the situation of farm succession. Descriptive statistics was used to define the cohabitation, parental duties, caregiving, helpers in problems and farm succession. When analysing the differences among the respondents' views by their age, a multivariate analysis by chi-square test of independence was employed.

3. Results

In this section, we discuss the results. We focus on the domestic situation, the division of labour among female farmers, their partners and third persons in parental duties and caregiving, helpers in problems and the situation of farm succession. The focal point is the age perspective of female farmers. The findings expressed were observed via five sets of different question groups. Here the results of the year 2016 are presented and, if available, in brackets those of the year 2006.

3.1 Cohabitation

Many people of different generations live on farms; in Austria on average, five people – including the respondent. 92 percent of the respondents live in a partnership. A female farmer has on average 2.6 children. 68 percent of female farmers have two or three children, 7 percent are childless and the rest have more than three up to nine children. 50 percent of the respondents live together with one or both of the predecessors on the farm.

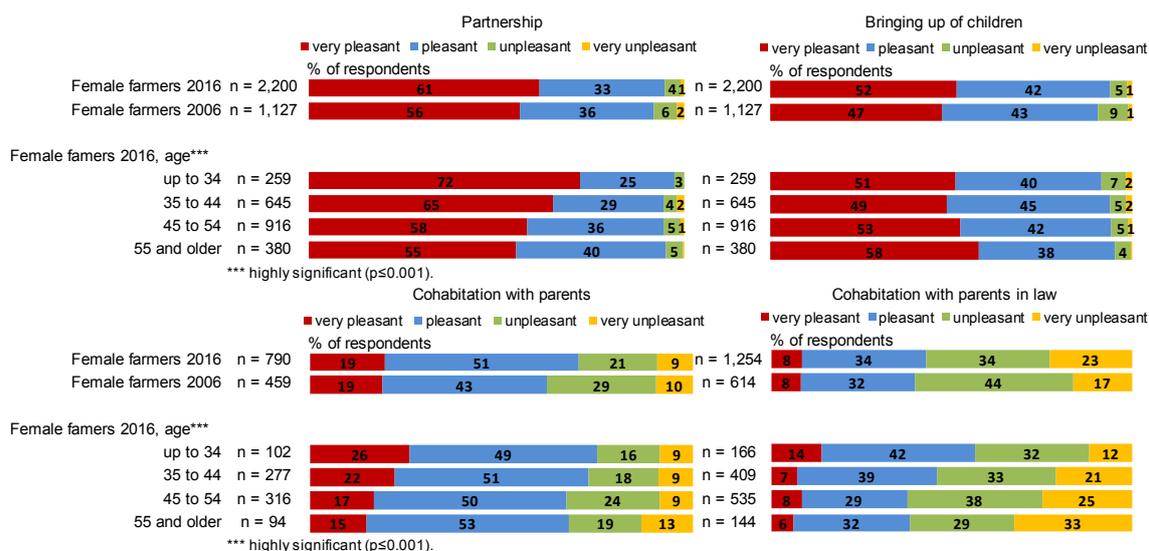


Figure 1: Personal assessment of partnership, bringing up of children and cohabitation with parents or parents-in-law from the female farmers' perspective [Survey of female farmers 2016]

The relationship with the partner was evaluated as a good one. 95 percent of the respondents (2006 92 percent) felt that the partnership was pleasant; including 61 percent who felt it was very pleasant. Definitely,

compared to the survey of 2006, the partnership is assessed as more pleasant and with increased age, less female farmers assessed the partnership with very pleasant. A similar picture was given for bringing up children. For 94 percent of the respondents (2006 91 percent) the situation was pleasant and 42 percent of them judged it as very pleasant. Regarding the age of the female farmer, more female farmers of the age 45 and older assessed the bringing up of children with more pleasant, namely 58 percent (55 and older) and 53 percent (45-54), as the younger ones do. Female farmers of the age 35 to 44 had with 49 percent the lowest score of very pleasant but with 45 percent the highest of pleasant. Female farmers up to the age of 34 judged the bringing up of children with 51 percent as very pleasant and 49 percent as pleasant (Figure 1).

The cohabitation on the farm with the parents or parents-in-law was evaluated differently. 70 percent of the respondents (2006 62 percent) generally felt comfortable; including 19 percent who felt it was even very pleasant. It is interesting to note that the reverse was true when the cohabitation applied not to one's own mother but one's mother-in-law. Living with the parents-in-law was perceived as pleasant by 43 percent (2006 40 percent) and by 57 percent as unpleasant. It turns out that living together with one's own parents was mostly considered agreeable; living with the parents-in-law was assessed by the majority as being unpleasant. Compared to the survey of 2006, cohabitation was assessed more positively, i.e. as more pleasant. With increased age, cohabitation on the farm with the parents or with the parents-in-law was less appreciated (Figure 1).

3.2 Parental duties

The second set pertains to the assessment of the distribution and design of parental duties and further assistance. Children, who need parental duties, live on four of ten farms. On five of ten farms the children are grown up and the remainder have no children. Our data shows that in the respondents' view, the persons in charge for the care of preschool and school children are the female farmer and her partner; they cover 78 percent (2006 93 percent) of the parental duties. The main care work, according to 62 percent of the respondents (2006 77 percent), is in the hand of the female farmers. 22 percent (2006 7 percent) is done by third persons and 16 percent by the partner (2006 16 percent). 13 percent of the third person assistance is enlisted mainly from parents, followed by parents in law, kindergarten or day nursery and other relatives. In comparison, the German Country Women's Association (Rheinischer LandFrauenverband e.V. and Westfälisch-Lippischer LandFrauenverband e.V., 2016) found out that every second interviewee confirms the use of extra-family care services (day-mothers, day care centres, kindergartens, post-school care).

Grouping these results according to the age of female farmers, the data shows significant differences in the distribution (Figure 2). Whereas the contribution of the partner is a relatively constant one by age of female farmers, female farmers up to the age of 34 do more child care than female farmers of the age 35 and older. There is also a significant increase of contribution to child care by third persons depending on the age of the female farmer. The older the female farmer the more they tend to employ third parties for child care. Statistics would suggest this be in order to accommodate an increase in off-farm engagements (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017). Childcare is a family thing, mainly in the hands of the female farmer. This is also confirmed by the German Country Women's Association (Rheinischer LandFrauenverband e.V. and Westfälisch-Lippischer LandFrauenverband e.V., 2016).

3.3 Caregiving

Furthermore, the family is obliged to care for the elderly. 85 percent of all Austrians maintain and look after their relatives at home. 5 percent are provided for by 24 hour care, 25 percent by mobile services and 55 percent are maintained exclusively by relatives (Anselm and Nagel, 2016). On 16 percent of the farms (2006 28 percent) there are relatives which need to be cared for. 80 percent of female farmers (2006 91 percent) with people in need of care are not supported by professional nursing staff. There is, however, a significant increase with age in the amount of support enlisted from professional nursing staff in the caregiving. The female farmers up to the age of 44 ask less, namely 87 percent require none, for professional nursing staff than female farmers of 45 and older. Here the figures for 'no support required' are 78 (45-54) and 72 (55 and older) percent. The older the female farmer the more professional nursing staff is hired. Nevertheless, female farmers do most of the caring for elderly people in need, namely 49 percent. They are supported by third persons and the partner, 35 percent (2006 9 percent) and 17 percent (2006 9 percent), respectively. Again the contribution of the partner is a relatively constant one for all ages of female farmers. With age female farmers do more caregiving and the work done by third persons decreases (Figure 2). In detail female farmers up to the age of 34 do 35 percent of the caregiving work, between 35 and 44 40 percent, of the age 45 to 54 52 percent and 55 and older 57 percent. In contrast the workload for third persons decreased according to the age of female farmers as follows: The female farmers up to the age of 34 ask more, namely 53 percent, for third party support than female farmers of 35 and older: The figures are 42 percent (35-44), 31 (45-54) and 27 (55 and older) percent. As with parental duties, caregiving is almost exclusively done within the family and lies

mainly in the hands of the respondents (Rheinischer LandFrauenverband e.V. and Westfälisch-Lippischer LandFrauenverband e.V., 2016: 31).

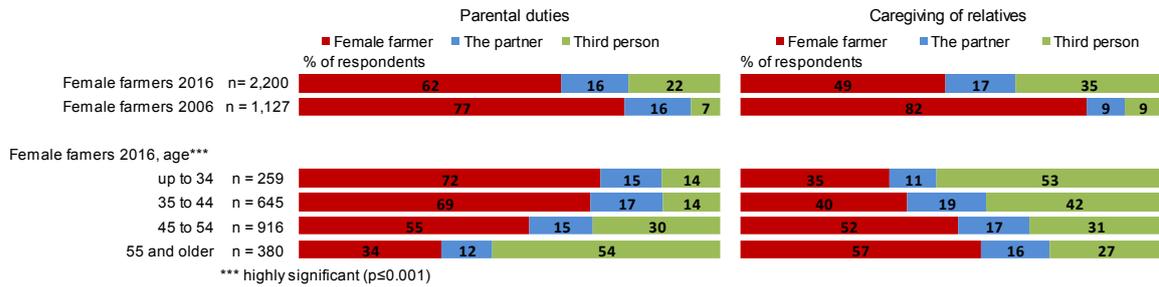


Figure 2: Division of work between female farmers, the partner and third persons for parental duties and caring for relatives from the female farmers' perspective [Survey of female farmers 2016]

3.4 Helpers in problems

Help and support networks, i.e. social networks, are important for female farmers when dealing with everyday problems and influence their assessment of their personal life situation. 86 percent of respondents turn to the partner for help in personal problems, in the case of health problems it is 87 percent of the respondents. In financial matters the house bank is contacted, followed by the partner; 55 percent and 51 percent, respectively. All in all, the helpers are mainly found within the family, followed by the circle of friends. Only 4 percent of the respondents do not have someone in case of personal problems, 3 percent in case of illness, and 8 percent for financial problems. The situation according to age is the following: The younger female farmers discuss personal problems with the partner more than the older ones do. In the case of sickness and confinement, the older female farmers are more likely to contact their children than the partner or other helpers. The younger female farmers are most likely to address their parents when in financial straits before taking other options into consideration (Figure 3).

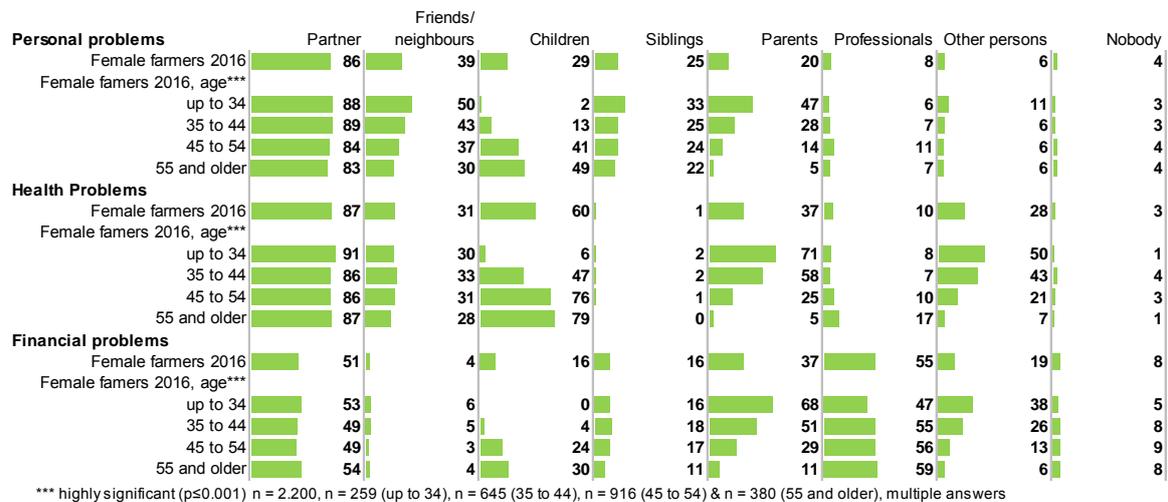


Figure 3: Helpers in problems from the female farmers' perspective [Survey of female farmers 2016]

3.5 Farm succession

The final set relates to farm succession. Most Austrian farm families assume that a family member will take over the farm. The decision of which child will take over the family farm operation and how the duties of the farm will be passed down is something of a longer process. It tells us something about the relationship between parents and children and whether they will continue the tradition.

For most of the farms, namely 70% of respondents (2006 71%), the succession was not regulated at the time of the survey. As expected, the farm succession is more often regulated when the female farmer is older: in the group of over 55 and older, the succession was already regulated by 45 percent of the farms, and up to the age of 34 22 percent of female farmers said that the succession was regulated. Although the farm succession is increasingly becoming an issue among older female farmers and is more clarified than by the young ones, the result gives rise to thought: for every third female farmer between the age of 61 and 70 the succession has been clarified, or the other way around, for two thirds of this age group it is uncertain who will

continue the farm business. This is at an age when retirement is already due. For those farms with the succession clarified, children are taking over the farm. 66 percent of respondents say the son will take over the farm. The daughter plays a subordinate role with 13 percent, and the partner will take over in 8 percent of the farms. The transfer of the farm is felt by 67 percent of the respondents (2006 54 percent) as pleasant; including 27 percent as very pleasant. With age, the positive feelings in connection with the transfer process decrease. The younger the female farmers the more pleasantly disposed they are to the transfer of the farm as shown in Figure 4.

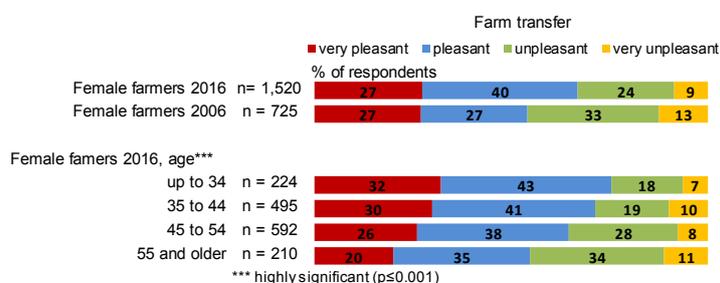


Figure 4: Personal assessment of farm transfer from the female farmers' perspective [Survey of female farmers 2016]

4. Conclusions and Policy Implications

The findings of this study provide a deeper understanding of the cooperation between partners and generations from the perspective of female farmers.

At a time of the unprecedented transition of Austrian agriculture into the global system, Austrian farming is still very traditional in the case of partnerships. Most of the female farmers are in a partnership. The relationship is evaluated as a very good one. The support of female farmers in parental duties by their partner is constant over the years, whereas in the case of caregiving the support has increased. In the case of problems, personal, health and financial ones, the helpers or dialogue partners are firstly found within the family, followed by the circle of friends. It is only in the case of finances that the first recourse is the house bank, followed by the partner and family. Although the parental duties are mostly experienced as pleasant by the female farmer, the transfer of the farm is regulated for one third. Nowadays the transfer of the farm is evaluated as more pleasant than in the year 2006.

According to age the following is evident: (i) With increasing age, living on the farm with parents or parents in law is felt less and less pleasant. (ii) The younger the female farmers the more pleasantly disposed they are to the transfer of the farm. (iii) The relationship with the partner and the bringing up of children are evaluated as good. (iv) The younger female farmers do more child care than older female farmers. The older the female farmers the more third persons care for their children. (v) The older the female farmer the more professional nursing staff is hired. With increasing age female farmers do more caregiving and the work done by third persons is decreasing. (vi) The younger female farmers are more likely to ask their partner for help in case of personal and financial problems, whereas in case of health problems the older female farmers are more likely to contact their children than the partner or other helpers.

Partnerships and cooperation between generations ensure continuity. On the other hand, they show room for improvement and development opportunities. New cooperation models, which are adapted to economy and society, increase the chances of female farmers for the future. But this innovation should be negotiated and not assigned. It should correspond to the interests and abilities of the people and must be balanced out according to the activities and workload.

The empirical findings bring focus to the kind of further research. Since the nature and cause of these changes are not easy to identify, there is clearly room for additional empirical analysis. Important fields of research include (i) the measurements and evidence-based practices of cooperation between partners and generations on farms as well as their relationship (ii) also far-reaching, comparative and cross-cultural studies are essential. These would form the basis for experience-based decision making and would help to improve mutual understanding as well as the ability to learn from each other.

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