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## **Women on... Combine Harvesters? Women as Farm Operators in Contemporary Poland<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

The authors discuss the main characteristics of women as farm operators using national sample studies conducted in 1994, 1999 and 2007. After an analysis of literature and various research results some hypotheses were formulated, i.e.: the better education of rural women than rural men, women as “unnatural” or “forced” farm operators due to various household circumstances, the “weaker” economic status of farms operated by women. Basic results of the studies carried out in 1994, 1999 and 2007 confirm the hypothesis about the weaker economic position of female operated farms. Moreover, women farm operators were slightly older and far better educated than their male counterparts. On the contrary, the males were more active off the farms in the public sphere. In addition, the circumstances of becoming farm operators did not differ significantly between males and females. Finally, there were no significant differences between “male” and “female” styles of farming.

**Keywords:** women, farm operators, education, market position, entrepreneur, style of farming.

### **Introductory Remarks**

Let us start with a statement formulated by one of the leading Polish female rural sociologists, a specialist in analyzing the problems of rural families. She points out: “[...] roughly 60 per cent of agricultural production [in Poland – K.G.;

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Z.D.; P.N.] has been an effect of work performed by women” (Tryfan, 1996: 93). Such an opinion obviously contradicts existing ideas about the traditional and social roles of Polish rural inhabitants who perceive “agriculture” as a typical “male” area of economic and social activity. This particular stereotype, as many others, shows little relation to social reality. Furthermore, the same stereotypes may also be found in the social and political fields, concerning not only important issues characterizing Polish society in the late 1980s and 1990s but many others at other times (see for example: Brandt and Haugen 1997, 1998; Modelmog 1998; Shortall 1996, 2002; Flora 1988). Women in various societies and different historical periods have formed an important part of the agricultural workforce. They have managed to combine outdoor farm work with running the rural household. In an ironic way, one may stress that in the case of women, the unity of economic enterprise and the household that form the identity of the family farm have become a kind of economic and social reality. However, we are forced to limit our consideration to one dimension of this multi-aspect problem (see more: Gorlach 2001). In our article, we will focus on selected characters of women who only perform “traditional” male roles as farm operators in one country, i.e. Poland.

### Women in Present-day Rural Poland

Getting rid of traditional habits, stereotypes and social relations focused on the dominant role of men, has been a complicated process in the lives of rural women. Various constraints, tensions as well as contradictions mean the process is far from complete. Changes for rural women also seem to depend on their attitudes and activities. Advancement and the types of changes have been different in various contexts of particular rural communities and in the country. In many regions of Poland, despite changing economic and social norms, the relatively stable traditional patriarchal model of social relations inside rural families and communities can be observed. For example, based on research in the Lublin region (eastern Poland) Krystyna Gutkowska states emphatically that: [...] *the traditional relation between man and woman has not changed despite social and economic transformations* (Gutkowska 2004: 95). In fact, a double standard is still in effect. As the author points out: [...] *one might observe the co-operation of husband and wife in the area of “the household financial management”* (Gutkowska 2004: 96), while women still play the “service roles” for other members of the household.

The situation of rural women in Poland is different in various regions and communities. The situation of rural women who decided to start their own rural businesses is not quite so laden with traditional requirements. Such women have a higher self-esteem in comparison with women who limit their economic activity to work on the farm. Rural businesswomen have become more confident, and perceive themselves as full participants in social life. However, as Gutkowska (Gutkowska 2004: 97) again stresses, such businesswomen have been confronted with the negative attitudes presented by males and also other rural women (!) who do not undertake such an activity. Such attitudes show the strength of mental barriers still existing among rural inhabitants.

In our opinion, it is also important to take a look at the more general characteristics of rural women in Poland in the mid-1990s. That particular time is important because the first visible results of major social and economic transformation following the political breakthrough of 1989, had just taken place. Based on the results of national random samples of rural inhabitants, including persons being 15 years or older, Barbara Perepeczko (Perepeczko 1996: 7–11) listed some main characteristics of rural women. First of all, there was an under-representation of younger women, since more rural young women than men decide to migrate to urban areas. Rural women are usually better educated than rural men, but there is also a category of women without occupational training. Both particular characteristics seem to be playing a growing role in the case of multi-functional rural development. On the one hand, better education may be a kind of valuable resource for new economic opportunities in rural areas. While on the other – the lack of particular occupational training may hinder the ability to adjust to a new situation as well as activities for change. As in world-wide literature (see for example: Wells 1998; Alston and Wilkinson 1998), Polish authors point out that multi-functional rural development may result in growing employment as well as public participation at decision-making level of rural women and introducing more equal relations between rural males and females. As Grażyna Kaczor-Pańków puts it in the context of post-communist transformation: *One might assume that with the multi-functional rural development resulting in a more heterogeneous occupational structure, rising political and economic pluralism as well as cultural changes, etc. – women's significance will grow in the future* (Kaczor-Pańków 1996: 21). Rural women hold some attitudes that may play a significant role in their potential activities under the new type of rural development. Women seem to be more critical of the changes resulting from

the political breakthrough of 1989 and the subsequent economic reforms. They especially present a more critical opinion about the level of material satisfaction for family needs (see also: Kaczor-Pańków 1996: 20). However, critical assessments are often followed by positive attitudes. Other authors stress the process of occupational emancipation among rural women who use various sources to improve their occupational training including mass media and particularly TV programmes (see for example: Perepeczko 1996: 28).

In turn, Barbara Fedyszak-Radziejowska draws our attention to the traditional rules of inheritance of family farms, including rural women in Poland. As she writes: *Let us remember, that Polish rural tradition concerning the general rules of inheritance [...] stressed the equality of rights for sons and daughters. This is quite contrary to protestant societies (for example Scandinavian ones) with their preference for the sons. Moreover, current habits treat the rural woman, the male owner's wife, as an equal partner in the process of running the farm. Male farmers also declare that their wives help them run the farms, and should be treated, in a legal sense, in the same way as males who legally are owners of the land* (Fedyszak-Radziejowska 1996: 32). Such a long citation deserves comment. It appears that the Catholic tradition did not legitimize a fundamental inequality between males and females concerning ownership of farmland, whereas in at least some Protestant societies, unequal ownership was prevalent. However, in our opinion, the author's conclusion about the equal status of men and women in farming households drawn from this tradition, goes too far. It is important to focus on some other relations of rural women to farms and farm work.

The particular "entrepreneurial" capacities of rural women in various types of activity have been especially valued in general. Considering this issue Maria Mydlak (Mydlak 1996: 75) says that such capacities have been, first of all, limited to the abilities of having "good relations" with other people as well as the capacity for breeding domestic animals and taking care of farm gardens. Thus, the role of "entrepreneurial" women has been perceived mostly in the context of a traditional division of labour between "his" and "her" type of farm work. A woman is treated here as a member of the farming team. Her own particular tasks included caring for domestic animals, the garden (vegetables) as well as filling in as an "emergency" member of the workforce (for example in the case of absent men). Rural women are also expected to be on good terms when dealing with outsiders. The last issue seems to suggest that women have been in charge of the particular "social capital" of the farming families. It is also important to note that according to international comparative research,

rural women in Poland have been more directly involved in farm work than their counterparts in France, Brazil, Canada or Tunisia (see: Lamarche 1992: 169–170).

Many researchers observed particular changes in the situation of rural women resulting from the processes of major economic and social transformation. According to Mydlak: *Women started to undertake new kinds of independent economic activity in rural communities. They became not only the “heads” of the farms but also initiated activities corresponding to the new ecological philosophy of rural development* [underlined by authors – K.G.; Z.D.; P.N] (Mydlak 1996: 86). Such women usually start their businesses later than rural men, but they are better educated than men, as we have already mentioned (see also: Chyłek and Lewczuk 1996: 99). These more competent women have a higher level of cultural capital, contributing to the multi-functional rural development, namely: to the development of entrepreneurship among rural women. Based on the results of their own research Zbigniew Brodziński and Aleksander Lewczuk (Brodziński, Lewczuk 1996: 113) describe such tendencies as: work in the household that has been connected to the rural development, working off-farm, work in the area of legal and organizational issues, activity leading to the development of agriculture and agro-tourism, infrastructure, education and environment.

One may put forward the hypothesis that the explanation of this phenomenon lies in the better education of women. Education seems to be extremely important in the case of entrepreneurial women with their own businesses. A financial background as well as development of creative activities which focus on innovative solutions for their farms and/or families are perceived as opportunities for persons with a high level of cultural capital. But does it lead to a major division of labour among male and female members of the rural household? If it does, such a division might result in work on the farm dominated by males and a kind of “supportive” as well as “multi-functional” work dominated by women. Such a hypothesis seems to be supported by the results of research carried out on the women who own farms and these women may be recognized as the “heads” of the farms.

The hypothesis mentioned above seems to be supported by various circumstances shaping the process of women becoming the “heads” of farms. Starting with an analysis of the circumstances and the direct reason leading to the decisions by women to be “the heads” of farms. This particular issue has been analyzed in an interesting way by Barbara Tryfan (see: Tryfan 1987: 77–78) who describes various categories of women running farms.

In particular their common characteristic seems to be their unmarried status. Such a category may be divided into three following sub-categories. The first one are unmarried women as “heads” of families in which there are no other persons of “productive” age. These are women who simply have no choice. When they decide not to take on the role of farm operators, the alternative is to go out of business or sell the farm. Two other categories also include unmarried women who are not the “heads” of families, or these women are members of households with other persons of productive age. According to Tryfan, the largest number of unmarried women belong to this category and the number is growing. Are male-run farms decreasing? The research results do not seem to provide a positive answer. For example, in many cases the women mentioned above, may in fact be treated as an “additional” or “supportive” type of workforce. They may take over when other (male and female) members of the household are working in other sectors of the economy (manufacturing, trade, etc). These positions have been confirmed by numerous cases of married (!) women who have also played the role of farm operators. The married or unmarried women are farm operators because the men (husbands, partners) have been working away from the farm or have been unable to work full-time because of their age and/or health conditions. Again, in both cases, women have been “forced” to take on the role of farm operators due to their household circumstances.

Such statements also seem to be confirmed by other research and analyses (see for example: Ostrowski 1998: 119). Ostrowski notes the stabilization of a number of farms run by women from the late 1980’s to the mid-1990’s. This was a critical period in Poland’s transformation process. In this particular period, every fifth farm in Poland was run by a female. Roughly 25% of such farms were operated by single women or marriages without children. These facts mean the role of head farm operator resulted from the constraints experienced by these particular households. The majority of farms “run by women” do not produce for the market. The minority that do produce for the market are quite similar to the farms “run by men”. The leading role of women has resulted, using Ostrowski’s words, from “rational calculation”. What is this “rational calculation”? Is it an indicator of the declining importance of the rural/peasant traditional farm business being “male territory” or as a result of men working away from the farm? The analyses taken into consideration by the author (see again: Ostrowski 1998: 119) do not provide us with a conclusive answer.

However, an answer may be found in the earlier research by the same author carried out by the Institute of Agricultural Economics and Food

Economy in 1992. There were 72 purposefully selected rural communities from a random national sample concerning the types of farms in Poland that were studied. A picture of the “female farms” based on the results of this particular research (see: Ostrowski 1994: 52 – 53) is as follows.

First of all, the typical situation in which women become head farm operators happens by accident (for example, the death of the husband/partner) or due to economic necessity, when the husband/partner works off the farm. Such circumstances need to be treated as an effect of decisions taken by the household members rather than as a result of females’ occupational ambitions. The changes on such farms are extremely interesting. In the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a declining number of small non-market farms in this category. These particular farms were characterized by the younger age of their operators. The “female” farms actually underwent the same process as all farms in Poland under the new market economy. This process involved the elimination of those which were unable to cope with new economic mechanisms as well as a kind of generational change among their owners and operators.

Another important issue can be taken into account. Farms operated by women have usually been “weaker” economically. The value of produce from 1 hectare has been 25% lower than in the case of farms with male head operators. “Female” farms have a lower level of mechanization and infrastructure (buildings, etc.). On such farms the level of investment and use of loans have also been lower. At the same time, hired labour and neighbourly cooperation has been higher than in the case of “male” farms.

The results mentioned above seem to confirm the hypothesis that farming is still treated as a typical area of economic activity mainly “for men”. Moreover, one may also state that farms operated by women seem to be rather “atypical” or even “unnatural”. Women who became head farm operators were given their roles due to particular circumstances. Their farms have been more “problematic” weaker economically, dependent on external hired labour or the system of neighbourly cooperation. There is little, if any development and few investments, use of loans, etc.

However, these facts should only be treated as a kind of background for introductory hypotheses. More detailed research questions for further consideration are presented below. The major hypothesis focuses on the idea of preservation of male dominance as head farm operators at least until the mid-1990s. Such a dominance might be supported by the observation of the “unnatural” character of situations in which women have become the



main farm operators (as explained above). There is also less ability to adjust to the market economy in the case of farms operated by women. Finally, it is important to note the negative attitudes (even among women) to those women who decided to undertake their own, independent rural businesses. This evaluation immediately leads to the following question: is this situation still the same twenty years after the 1989 transformation? In the last twenty years, Poland has witnessed major economic and social change as well as, at least, some changes concerning the perception of women's issues. With the above in mind, it may be hypothesized that there is now a rather different image of rural women playing the role of main farm operators.

### **Women as Head Farm Operators in 1994–2007: an Analysis of Research Results<sup>2</sup>**

In order to answer the above question and testify the hypothesis we will try to make a comparative analysis of farms operated by males and females. Several various areas of analysis will be focused on. We will reconstruct a kind of sociological profile of female head farm operators. In turn, we will present a mock image of farms operated by women perceived from the “market position” (for a detailed analysis of constructing the “market position” variable refer to: Gorlach 2001, 2009). This particular part of our analysis is connected with the hypothesis formulated on the base of Ostrowski's considerations. This section will focus on the character of farms operated by women as head operators. However, in such a context we have to stress one important issue: Ostrowski's research and our own are based on national random samples of farms. Both research studies were, of course, conducted on different samples prepared in quite a different manner (for more details see: Ostrowski 1994, 1998; Gorlach 2001, 2009)

Another area of analysis will cover the identity of the social role of the main farm operator. The social role issue will be considered in the context of the statement in the previous part of this paper: that women usually take the position of main farm operators when men are “absent”. We will discuss the constraints and pressures associated with women's role as head farm operators.

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We will also analyze the different types of thinking about farms and farming between male and female operators. The question is: are there two different types of social roles for main farm operators or have farming conditions forced a similar view about the role of farm operator despite the gender?

### *Images of Operators and their Farms*

**Table 1.** Head farm operators

<b>Gender/Research</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2007</b>
Males	574 (71.8%)	470 (68.9%)	356 (69.8%)
Females	226 (28.2%)	215 (31.1%)	154 (30.2%)
Total:	800 (100.0%)	685 (100.0%)	510 (100.0%)

Source: Authors' own research.

Data contained in Table 1 show an interesting phenomenon. The percentage of women-operators in the analyzed period has remained the same: 28.2%; 31.1% and 30.2%, respectively, despite some major changes in the analyzed group of farm operators<sup>3</sup>. These results suggest that the gender issue was insignificant. Males are still dominant among farm operators (in the numeric sense), but there has been no increase in the dominance.

Does the relative stability of the proportions between male and female farm operators suggest a visible similarity of their social characteristics as well as types of reasoning and activities? The analysis of gathered data does not give any definite answer to such a question. Let us start this analysis from some basic information about the investigated farm operators.

The data have shown that as far as age is concerned there have been practically no significant differences between male and female farm operators. The group of women was slightly older (a higher percentage being 55 or over). These differences were not statistically significant. However, as regards level of education (Table 3), it was the women who have been much better educated than the men. A higher percentage of women graduated from high school and college. The differences were statistically significant. These facts confirm the statements concerning the education of rural women mentioned in literature presented briefly, in the previous part of this paper.

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<sup>3</sup> We write extensively about these changes while making comments concerning the data in Table 8.

**Table 2/3.** Age and education of farm operators (in%)

	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
<b>Age</b>		
18 – 34 years	16.0	13.7
35 – 54 years	62.1	58.8
55 and more years	21.9	27.5
<b>Education*</b>		
Basic	27.2	27.9
Occupational	51.2	32.1
High school	16.3	31.8
More than a high school	5.3	7.9

Source: Authors' own research.

Other aspects of sociological portraits of male and female farm operators have contained some characteristics showing visible differences between the two categories. Men are more engaged in various organizations and associations in the public sphere (Table 4). Moreover, more men participate in professional farmers' organizations (Table 5), and work in off-farm jobs (Table 6). Since the data showed similarities in the ages and differences in level of education, it was unexpected that differences would be statistically significant.

**Table 4/5/6.** Public roles of farm operators in 2007 (in%)

	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
<b>In NGOs*</b>		
Yes, currently	12.4	3.2
Yes, before	9.8	4.5
Never	77.8	92.3
<b>In producer organizations*</b>		
Yes	8.5	2.0
No	91.5	98.0
<b>Off-farm job**</b>		
Yes	23.9	14.3
No	76.1	85.7

\* significant correlations  $p < 0.01$

\*\* significant correlations  $p < 0.05$

Source: Authors' own research.

The last aspect of this introductory image of farm operators details their market positions<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 7.** Market position of the farm in 1994–2007

Year	Operator/ gender	Market position of the farm (in%)		
		Negatively privileged	Medium privileged	Positively privileged
1994	Males	45.2	36.8	18.0
	Females	57.6	29.9	12.5
1999	Males	42.3	33.0	24.7
	Females	60.9	25.6	13.5
2007	Males	31.8	35.9	32.4
	Females	46.3	34.7	19.0

in all cases significant correlations  $p < 0.01$

Source: Authors' own research.

Our analysis based on the data presented in Table 7, confirms the hypothesis formulated earlier in this paper. The hypothesis is that farms operated by women have been “weaker”. Women’s farms have a “negatively privileged position” on the market. The percentages of such farms operated by women have been significantly higher in each year of our research, compared to those farms operated by men. Quite the opposite situation can be observed in the case of positively privileged farms. The percentage of women operating positively privileged farms was lower than those operated by men. This was the situation during the years of research, i.e. 1994, 1999 and 2007.

However, the situation mentioned above has had its own peculiar dynamics. The difference between percentages of negatively and positively privileged farms operated by men and women has changed. It increased between 1994 and 1999 and decreased between 1999 and 2007, thus, it was higher in 2007 than in 1994. There is another important dimension to mention. In the whole period under investigation (i.e. from 1994 to 2007) there has been a systematic decrease of negatively privileged farms from 45.2%

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<sup>4</sup> The variable named “market position of the farm” has been constructed according to the area of land, level of mechanical farm equipment as well as the age and education of the main operator. Larger and better equipped farms operated by the younger and better educated have been labelled as “positively privileged”. See details in: Gorlach 2001.

to 42.3% to 31.8% among those operated by men. In turn, the percentage of positively privileged farms has increased from 18% to 24.7% to 32.4% for male operators. The tendency for female operators was slightly different. The percentage of positively privileged farms run by women increased from 12,% to 13,% to 19%. This is the same pattern as for men but, as we stressed before, such positively privileged farms run by women formed a significantly smaller sub-category among female-operated farms. Another pattern can be observed in the case of negatively privileged female-operated farms. The percentage increased from 57.6% in 1994 to 60.9% in 1999, but decreased in the next few years from 60.9% to 46.3% in 2007. These percentages show the relatively worse situation of female operated farms in the whole period under investigation. The worst period of the 1990s shows the results of the economic reforms undertaken at the beginning of that decade. Based on the figures, our conclusion is that the critical period had a stronger negative impact on the situation of farms operated by women. The impact of this period can be treated as an additional argument supporting the statement about the “lower status” (market position) of female-operated farms.

### ***Perception of the Role of “Owner”***

In this part of our paper we will focus on the analysis of three aspects of the role of owner and main operator of the family farm. We will start with an analysis of essential circumstances. According to the opinions of the investigated farmers, there were certain crucial circumstances which led to them becoming the principal farm operators. The perceptions of the role of farm “owners” will be reconstructed. Finally, we will consider owner opinions concerning the peculiarities of farming as an occupation. Farmers’ perception of differences and similarities between farmers and entrepreneurs in other sectors of the economy will be presented.

Such an analysis has been made in order to verify two hypotheses. The first one concerns the statement that women become principal farm operators as a result of some external, objective circumstances, as we mentioned earlier. In turn, the second hypothesis may be formulated in a more general way according to the literature mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The core assumption is that farming is considered a traditionally “male” type of activity connected to modernization and based on the development of entrepreneurial skills. Male operators should see their activity as entrepreneurship. Running farms would then be recognized as simply running a business. Male operators

would more often stress their similarities to other types of entrepreneurs than female operators would.

Before we go into detail about the information in Table 8, it is necessary to make some methodological remarks that should be kept in mind for further analysis. All numbers in Table 8 are presented as relative ones, i.e. as percentages. However, the real numbers, hidden behind the percentages, were quite different in the consecutive years of our research. At the beginning of our project in 1994, we had a national representative sample of 800 farm owners. The percentages in the first edition of our research were based on a large sample. In later editions of our research project on family farms in Poland in 1999 and 2007, we used the same list of farmers from 1994. We tried to contact them again following the rules of panel study. We were not able to contact every respondent investigated in 1994. Some farms were sold, rented or simply liquidated. Some farms which formally existed had gone out of business, and those who were supposed to be taking care of them were living elsewhere. The principal goal of our research project was focused on following the history of particular Polish farms, and their operators after the 1989 political breakthrough. Therefore, we decided not to change or make substitutions in our sample. As a result of such a procedure the number of farms and farm operators under consideration decreased from 800 to 685 units in 1999 and decreased again to 510 in 2007. It should also be pointed out that in some of the original farms that “survived” through the whole study period (1994–2007), the person playing the role of principal operator had changed. Sometimes the farm had been passed down to the next generation or the farm had been purchased by a new owner who decided to live on the farm. We observed 104 such cases between 1994 and 1999 as well as 157 from 1999 to 2007. These differences mean that the absolute numbers of the investigated cases are quite different in particular editions of our research project. Also, the various opinions analyzed below have not been expressed by the same people in all three editions of our research project.

Information concerning the presence of women among those “new” owners and principal farm operators was noted. In both periods of change i.e. 1994–1999 and 1999–2007, women comprised 38% and 37% respectively. Such percentages are higher than numbers showing the presence of women in the whole population of farm operators under consideration (see again Table 1). Does that mean that farming has started to become more female dominated on the Polish agricultural scene still shaped by significant traditional patterns?

**Table 8.** How did she/he become a farmer (in%)?

Year	Gender	Inheritance	Being my own boss	Other reasons	Nobody was there
1994	Males	50.0	24.6	5.7	19.7
	Females	43.4	22.1	6.6	27.9
1999	Males	69.2	16.9	0.0	13.8
	Females	79.5	2.6	2.6	15.4
2007	Males	79.8	10.1	2.0	8.1
	Females	82.8	6.9	3.4	6.9

Source: Authors' own research.

A more detailed focus on the data is needed. The circumstances of becoming farm operators have not differed significantly between males and females (Table 8). Therefore, we did not generally confirm one of the main hypotheses mentioned earlier and stressed in Polish literature. However, one may point out some interesting dissimilarities and tendencies in both gender categories. On the one hand, it should be stressed, that in both categories the percentages of those who inherited farms from their predecessors were the highest. Inherited farms have been even more visible in the later years i.e. 1999 and 2007. There was a decrease in the percentages of respondents declaring that they had been forced to take the role of principal farm operator because there were no other persons able or willing to take the job. In 2007, such a percentage was lower among female operators, which was quite the opposite of the situation in 1994 and 1999. There was also another category of respondents who declared that they wanted to be farm operators since they wanted to run their own businesses. Such declarations have been treated by us as an indicator of entrepreneurial attitudes among male and female farmers. They are generally more visible among men in all three surveys, but women also wanted to operate farms, which is an interesting tendency. While the percentage of male respondents wanting to operate farms decreased systematically from 1994 to 2007, in the case of women it decreased radically from 22.1 to 2.6 (!) between 1994 and 1999 but later increased from 2.6 to 6.9 between 1999 and 2007.

Data contained in Table 9 show three main types of farm operator self-identities. Based on the expressions and opinions presented by the questioned farmers we decided to group them into three broad categories, namely: "traditional", "entrepreneur" and "marginalized". Because of minor changes in the questionnaire we decided to consider only data gathered during the two

**Table 9.** Self-identities (in%)

Year	Gender	Yeoman	Entrepreneur	Marginalized
1999	Males	29.1	31.5	39.4
1999	Females	30.2	24.7	45.1
2007	Males	34.6	54.4	11.0
2007	Females	33.5	51.0	15.4

Source: Authors' own research.

last editions of our research project, namely: 1999 and 2007. There were not significant differences between male and female operators concerning their self-identities. The “traditional” identity, in our opinion, is strongly connected to the family farm tradition. Percentages addressing the “traditional” category were almost identical in both of the years under consideration. There are more differences in the two other types of self-identity: entrepreneur and marginalized. We believe these two categories were associated with modern farm ownership, the status of his or her farm, market orientation as well as the economic situation. One may observe that percentages of male operators identifying themselves as entrepreneurs have been higher than percentages of female entrepreneurs both in 1999 and 2007. In turn, percentages of female operators identifying themselves as marginalized persons have been higher than those of males, in the same period. The differences in both cases, though, were not significant, and have been lower in 2007 than in 1999. Does that mean that there has been a process of convergence between male and female operators concerning their self-identities?

There are perceived similarities and differences between farm operators and non-farm operators who also run their own businesses. Such perceptions are another aspect of the farm operator's identity. There were significant

**Table 10.** Similarities between farmers and entrepreneurs (in%)

Year	Gender	No similarities	Similarities
1994	Males	55.9	44.1
	Females	59.3	40.7
1997	Males	63.4	36.6
	Females	66.0	34.0
2007*	Males	37.4	62.6
	Females	50.0	50.0

\* significant correlations  $p < 0.05$

Source: Authors' own research.



differences in these perceptions between genders only in 2007. In the two previous editions of our research, the differences were not statistically significant. The numbers presented in Table 10 are the basis for our comments on the farmers' responses. We have assumed that differences between the situation of farm operators and other types of people running their own businesses, indicate a more traditional perception of farm work as in the family farm tradition of the old days. This perspective of farm work makes it hard to compare with running a business such as a shop, manufacturing enterprise, service facility, etc. However, similarities may be considered as proof that a farm is a kind of business. The farm may be treated roughly as any other enterprise.

It is worth taking another look at the differences between male and female farm operators that were already significant in 2007 (Table 10). Before turning to a more detailed analysis it must be noted that changing of opinions under consideration have been similar in both gender categories. In 1994 more than half of the investigated men and women did not stress any similarities between farmers and entrepreneurs. Five years later such an opinion has been even more visible since it has been shared by roughly 2/3 of both the investigated male as well as female farm operators. Opinions did change in the later period. In 2007, only slightly more than 1/3 of male operators did not feel there were similarities between farmers and entrepreneurs and for women the percentage reached 50%. This particular difference has been, as we mentioned earlier, statistically significant. This particular aspect of farmer identity became quite different between the two gender categories. Many more male operators perceived their position as the same as any other entrepreneur. The question is, will such a tendency continue in the future? Of course, the answer lies in the results of the next edition of our research project. It is possible to argue that in 2007 compared to 1999, the position of the farmer in modern society was more visible in both categories. There was a slight increase in the more "traditional" view of the farmers' position in the years 1994–1999. The reason for this slight increase was a result of significant changes in agriculture and the experiencing of major difficulties. This slight increase reversed after 1999. The majority of men and half of the women viewed their positions as typical for farmers in a market economy. However, in all three years of the investigation, the percentages of female operators expressing a more traditional perception of their positions was higher (slightly in 1994 and 1999) and significantly (in 2007) than in the case of males. This may confirm the statement by various authors, that male operators have been more mentally modernized and more

inclined to “entrepreneurial” thinking and activity. Or, may it prove that this has been the result of a generally higher level of education among female operators that enabled them to perceive the whole situation as more complex and contextual. As a result of such perspectives, were farms not simply seen as a copy of the non-agricultural enterprises?

Moreover, some analysts see a potential for improving the situation of rural women as a result of new ideas in rural development, also expressed in a new approach to the Common Agricultural Policy (see for example: Wells 1998; Alston and Wilkinson 1998). To what extent are the various EU rural and agricultural schemes and programmes taken advantage of by both male and female farm operators? Have women seen their chance here? The answer seems to be: no. It was not until 2007 that we asked a whole series of questions concerning the EU programmes. Only 23% of our respondents (almost the same percentage among males and females) had some very general knowledge concerning such programmes. The percentage of those who declared a more advanced knowledge concerning this issue was 14% of men and 12% of women. And only 1% of men (and no women) declared that they know how to apply on their own (without any assistance) to such programmes. Therefore, in this area the similarity of male and female operators is almost equal. Quite a similar picture may be constructed as a result of questions concerning participation in some EU programmes. In this particular case, males have been slightly more active (74.2%) than females (70.8%) but such a difference remains statistically insignificant. This part of our analysis has shown that both gender categories knew little about the important available EU information for farmers. This was true, despite the fact that both genders stated that they participated in various programmes. This reflects the performance, participation and high esteem held for the agricultural extension services in Poland after EU accession.

### ***Style of Farming***

In the next part of our analysis, we will consider some select results of our research concerning possible various styles of farming presented by male and female operators. The concept of “farming style” has been borrowed from the works of Dutch sociologists. This particular concept has been invented to include the diversity among farmers running farms in particular types of production. Let us quote Jan Douwe van der Ploeg: *The increase in variation [of farm structure and activity – K.G; Z.D.; P.N.] has not occurred accidentally. It is the expression of (and informs in turn) underlying “patterns of coherence”,*

which we will analyze here in terms of farming styles. A farming style is, generally, a mode of ordering: a systematic and continuous attempt to “create” congruence within those domains in which farmers and their families have to operate (van der Ploeg 2003: 101). As a result of such reasoning, farming style may be regarded as a socio-technical network, comprising social and material elements as well as relations between them. Another author introduced this concept as the “management style” (Ventura 1995: 220). In our analysis we have not drawn extensively from these complex concepts. We have not elaborated a complex set of indicators in order to grasp various dimensions of farm management and relations among various components of decision-making processes. Instead, we decided to use only two rather general indicators focused on the use of bank loans as well as informal advice provided by neighbours, friends and family members of farm operators.

Lech Ostrowski is one of the Polish authors mentioned earlier. In his analysis, he pointed out that men more often than their female counterparts used bank loans. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon he and some other authors stressed the general weaker market position of farms operated by women. The results of our research also confirmed the above statements (Table 11). At the same time we should recall the results presented in Table 7 above, showing the market position of female operated farms that support Ostrowski’s theses.

**Table 11.** Taking credits (in%)

Year	1994		1999*		2007**	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Males	67.9	32.1	53.2	46.8	62.6	37.4
Females	71.7	28.3	63.3	36.7	74.7	25.3

\* significant correlations  $p < 0.05$

\*\* significant correlations  $p < 0.01$

Source: Authors’ own research.

However, the analyzed issue has not been entirely clear. Data in Table 7 show significant differences between the market positions of farms operated by men and those by women in all three editions of our research project. Data concerning loans (Table 11) show the increasing difference between males and females. In 1994, one could not observe any significant differences. In 1999, relatively moderate differences emerged ( $p < 0.05$ ). Not until 2007 did these differences show up as statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). Does this mean that

male and female operators have “different” styles of farming? Do women show less of an inclination towards risk? Have they run their farms in a more secure or cautious way? We decided to learn about the decision-making processes of the investigated farm operators. Only one peculiar aspect of this process was focused on. This was the use of advice from neighbours, friends and colleagues while deciding about changes on the farm and/or in farming. Asking friends, neighbours, colleagues, etc. in an informal way for advice was treated as an indicator of a more secure though not “professional” type of playing the role of farm operator. In turn, those who did not ask for advice from those around them, but instead turned to professional agencies may be treated as more entrepreneurial and/or professional types of persons running farms as businesses.

**Table 12.** Using neighbours’ and friends’ suggestions while making decisions (in%)

<b>Research in 1994</b>			
<b>Gender</b>	Yes, always	Yes, sometimes	No
Males	36.6	52.4	11.0
Females	39.4	46.5	14.2
<b>Research in 1999</b>			
Males	37.4	50.2	12.3
Females	44.3	42.5	13.2
<b>Research in 2007</b>			
Males	11.7	55	33.3
Females	16.3	45.1	38.6

Source: Authors’ own research.

The data presented in Table 12, reveals that women slightly more often than men, approach their neighbours, friends and colleagues in a more systematic way, looking for advice from them. Men, in turn, more often asked for advice in the occasionally and from time to time bracket. The percentage of women who did not approach their neighbours, friends or colleagues but instead turned to professional agencies was higher than among men. Such an observation may lead to the conclusion that females are more diversified than males in this particular area. An explanation also mentioned in the literature, is that female farm operators (and also in other types of independent economic activity) often face a negative evaluation from their counterparts in rural communities. When we combined categories for males and females who use this advice occasionally and systematically, the percentage was higher among males in

all three editions of our project. Definitely, such results do not confirm the hypothesis about a particular, more “cautious” style of farming among female operators.

### Conclusion

Our analysis should only be treated as an attempt to discuss some selected hypotheses that may be found in literature concerning the issue of female farm operators. The basic question focused on was: Are female farm operators different than male ones? Our data gathered under the frame of this research project, that has not been especially focused on gender issues, have shown some significant differences. At the same time, these differences were not noticed in other variables. There were differences in the level of education, and the level of activities in the public sphere. In general, women have been better educated but men have been more active in various associations and organizations as well as in off-farm jobs. A significant difference may also be observed in the case of the market positions of farms. Our research has confirmed the hypothesis found in literature that female-operated farms were usually in a worse market position.

However, the differences mentioned above seem to have no impact on the definitions of owners as well as circumstances of becoming farm owners/operators. The hypothesis that women usually become farm operators out of necessity and not as a result of their own decisions has not been confirmed. Moreover, we have not observed any significant differences concerning the definitions of farm owners. In turn, it should be stressed that we have observed such significant differences concerning the perception of the social position of farm operators. Quite recently (in the last edition of our research project), male operators more often than female operators perceived their position as comparable with other types of business. As we stressed, such male feelings of having comparable positions may result from the better market position of their farms in general. It has also been connected to some elements of farming style, concerning the use of bank loans more often used by male operators also influenced male views in comparable positions. Moreover, other analyses of farming style which focused on the role of informal advice in the process of decision-making did not show any significant difference between the two gender categories concerning this particular issue.

Therefore, a general conclusion may be formulated as follows. Despite some differences between men and women running their farms there have

been no significant differences concerning the definitions of the role of owners or their style of farming, It is hard to say that there is a particular “male” or “female” style of farming. Does that mean that “femininity” and “masculinity” should be treated mostly as simply social constructs with a limited impact on events and processes under consideration?

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