



Gender Specific Guide to Female-Led Innovation in Farming and Rural areas



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Authors

Maura Farrell
Project Coordinator
University of Galway

Louise Weir
Principal Project Manager
University of Galway

Aisling Murtagh
FLIARA Post-doctoral Researcher
University of Galway

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There were also a wide range of other contributors to this report who were authors and contributors to Work Package 3 Country Reports and Factsheets: Antonín Vaishar, Hana Vavrouchová, Jacqueline Vacková, Jan Zloch (Czechia); Teresa Komu, Tuomas Kuhmonen, Hannu I. Heikkinen, Simo Sarkki, Belyta Tembo (Finland); Susanne v. Münchhausen, Imke Edebohls, Lutz Meyer-Ohlendorf, Janna-Louisa Pieper, Felicia van Tulder (Germany); Tara Farrell, Anne Kinsella (Ireland); Silvia Sivini, Irene Leonardelli (Italy); Vitnarae Kang, Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip, Willem Korthals Altes (Netherlands); Anastasia Oprea, Laura Incze (Romania); Barbara Lampič, Sara Mikolič, Lea Rebernik (Slovenia); Michelle Perello, Víctor R. Martínez, Patrizio Ricci (Spain); Annie Roos, Helene Ahl, Viktorija Kalonaityte, Mathias Karlsson, Malin Tillmar (Sweden).

Graphic Design

Víctor R. Martínez
EU Communication Manager
Consulta Europa

Silvia Pérez Palomo
Graphic Designer
Consulta Europa

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USER GUIDE

Why this guide?

This guide aims to support the improved participation of women in rural and farm innovation. It aims to inspire and assist women thinking of taking steps on a pathway to innovation. It also aims to inspire and assist those already on that path thinking of adding new dimensions to their innovation.

This guide also aims to provide a resource for those involved in policymaking or an organisation that supports rural and farm women-led innovation. It discusses key challenges facing women-led innovation and provides good practice policy actions and measures identified by the project that can address these issues. It showcases stories of women-led innovation in rural and farming contexts providing evidence that can change the narrative relating to rural enterprise, farming and innovation.

Using this guide: For those involved or seeking to become involved in rural and farm women-led innovation, you can use this guide to:

- 1** Provide a source of inspiration and motivation. For women considering exploring a novel idea, the guide demonstrates how every innovation has a place in the rural and/or farm economy.
- 2** Find practical tips for the everyday practice of women-led innovation. This guide tells stories of women-led innovation from the ground up and aims to share lessons that can assist current and future women-led innovation in these contexts.

For those involved in policymaking or an organisation that supports rural and farm women-led innovation, you can use this guide to:

- 1** Find examples of policy support measures that address challenges facing and opportunities for women-led innovation.
- 2** Act as a resource and evidence base to help change the narrative relating to rural enterprise, farming and innovation.
- 3** Better understand key challenges facing women-led innovation and identify good practice policy actions and measures that can support women-led innovation.



Teresa Roche, Kilmore Farmhouse Cheese, Ireland.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ABOUT THE FLIARA PROJECT

The FLIARA project is about empowering change around women-led innovation in rural areas and on farms. Women have long been overlooked in this space and FLIARA responds to this issue. FLIARA does this by working to increase visibility and recognition of women's contribution to innovation in European farming and rural areas as well as improve understanding and policy action related to the needs and challenges facing women in this context. The project combines future foresight research and case studies, network building through a Community of Practice (CoP), as well as a Campaign of Visibility to spotlight women as key innovation actors. The FLIARA approach enables the identification of women-led rural and farm innovation pathways and applies this to inform policy proposals. Core FLIARA project activities include:

Future Foresight Research: FLIARA's future foresight research aimed to understand how women could contribute to innovations that would realise visions for sustainability. Emerging from FLIARA's future foresight research were a range of visions that promote sustainable farm and rural futures, addressing key challenges to long-term sustainability. The research also identified practical measures that could support women in bringing these visions to life.

Case Studies: FLIARA carried out 20 national case studies involving 200 women who lead unique innovations in rural areas and farming across ten European countries. The innovations led by the women reflect four pillars of sustainability (environmental, social, economic, and cultural) and span across three distinct rural area types (rural areas close to a city, rural villages, and remote rural regions).

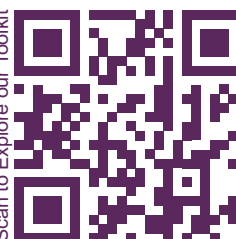
Campaign of Visibility: The Campaign of Visibility works to give increased visibility to women leading innovations in farming and rural areas, as well as the role of women in achieving rural sustainable development and promoting innovation in farming and rural economies. From across the FLIARA case study countries, 20 Innovation Ambassadors joined the FLIARA project and were part of this campaign. Innovation Ambassadors are women leading innovative practices in farming or in rural areas.

Community of Practice: The FLIARA CoP is a European platform designed to connect women innovators in farming and rural areas with policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders. Macro-regional CoP in-person networking events provided spaces for connection where co-creation activities included workshops, field visits, and structured policy dialogues. Innovation Ambassadors were central to the CoP.

Policy Assessment and Proposals: FLIARA aims to use its insights to develop evidence for more effective policy and governance frameworks and knowledge and innovation systems, developing resources to impact policy including policy briefs and benchmarking tools.

To dig deeper into FLIARA's results have a look at the [FLIARA Toolkit](#) and the detailed [deliverable reports](#) emerging from all of the FLIARA activities.

Scan to Explore our Toolkit



1.2 STRUCTURE OF THIS GUIDE

Section 2

Section 2 focuses on telling the story of women-led rural and farm innovation, as well as touching on its impacts, with each sub-section using a different lens:

Section 2.1 explores some of the personal and professional drivers and motivations that influence women taking an innovation journey.

Section 2.2 presents examples of how women-led innovation is evident in a range of farming systems, sizes and sectors of the wider rural economy.

Section 2.3 discusses how future visions for sustainability are being addressed by current women-led innovators in rural areas and farming as well as the novel ideas, models and approaches innovations present that could have relevance and learning for other contexts.

Section 2.4 profiles the FLIARA Innovation Ambassadors and explores some of the drivers, obstacles and enablers that they encountered on their innovation journey.

Section 3.1 outlines some principles emerging from the practices of successful women innovators.

Section 3.2 explores policy needs and good practice policies that can support overcoming obstacles and catalysing motivations of existing and future women innovators.

Section 3

Section 3 focuses on wider lessons and insights for practice for those involved in supporting rural innovation and development as well as women leading innovations themselves.

Gender Specific Guide to Female Led Innovation in Farming and Rural Areas



Figure 1: Structure of the Guide

Finally, some of the key terms we use in this guide are as follows:

Drivers

We understand drivers as motivations for innovation.

These can be a range of potential factors influencing women to innovate. These are more direct causes leading women to innovation in rural and farming contexts. As outlined in our initial guidelines to assess the FLIARA case studies, they could be a core values-based motivation, such as addressing sustainability challenges, addressing the realities and needs of rural areas and farming. Or they could be a more personal-level trigger such as life stage or professional background (Farrell et al., 2023b). There are often multiple drivers, for example a value-based motivation and personal level trigger can both occur in tandem to influence women in rural and farming contexts to innovate.

Enablers

We understand enablers generally as facilitating factors in the innovation journey.

Enablers come in many forms and can include social, economic, political, environmental, cultural, technological or legal factors. Innovation does not just happen at one point in time. Enablers can enhance the process of innovation from inception to a well-advanced model of success. Enablers respond to different needs at different stages of women-led innovation pathways. They may help enhance the drivers of innovation or enable women to overcome obstacles.

Obstacles

We understand obstacles here as hurdles to overcome

Obstacles also come in many forms and again can include social, economic, political, environmental, cultural, technological or legal factors. Obstacles can relate to access to economic resources, such as finance or land, which can be critical and limiting obstacles that occur at a particular point in innovation development. Or there are more ongoing obstacles that can take time to influence and overcome, such as acceptance and understanding of a novel idea. Policy supports can also play a strong role in addressing obstacles such as access to finance, new skills, networks or measures that support work-life balance, improved visibility and mindset changes.

Good Practices

Actions of different kinds that yield positive results

This term is used in relation to good practice for policy (e.g. measures, wider programmes, strategies) and good practice of innovators (e.g. ways of thinking, working, wider capacities). The idea can be understood as practices that generally have positive results, bring improvements and are also transferable, in terms of their potential adoption or adaption to other contexts (Lai, 2018).



2. INNOVATION STORIES: PATHWAYS AND IMPACTS

Three core aspects of the FLIARA project activities underpin this section.

We draw on the stories of innovators that took part in the FLIARA case studies. As part of the country level detailed case studies (for the reports see Sivini et al., 2024 and Roos et al., 2024), each national team prepared a series of Fact Sheets to showcase existing women-led rural and farm innovation. A total of 200 Fact Sheets were produced with innovators from Ireland, Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Romania, Italy, Spain, and Finland (see FLIARA, 2025b).

We can only present a selection of the 200 women involved in FLIARA in this guide, although every one of the 200 women have inspired it. Those featured in the guide each have stories that could be told across multiple sections, highlighting the diversity of their experience and the broad impact they have had. In this guide we draw on just a small portion of these inspiring stories to demonstrate the diverse opportunities and pathways

for women-led innovation in rural and farming contexts (Section 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3).

Emerging from FLIARA's future foresight research were a range of future visions that promote sustainable farm and rural futures, help overcome problems impacting sustainability, as well as evidence on women's potential stronger future contributions to this space (see Kuhmonen and Tembo, 2023). While there is strong future potential with the right support measures, what is also clear from FLIARA case study research is that women already contribute to these visions (Section 2.3).

We also spotlight our Innovation Ambassadors (Section 2.4). Each of our 20 Innovation Ambassadors is featured to share their stories and explain just some of the drivers, obstacles and enablers on their innovation journey.

2.1 PATHWAYS INTO WOMEN-LED INNOVATION

There are multiple drivers and motivations leading women to step on to a pathway and start a rural or farm-based innovation. In this guide we have identified a number of different types of drivers that form the basis of motivations for innovation. They are not intended to encompass the whole range of motivations possible but illustrate some of the drivers on the pathway into women-led innovation. For example, beyond those discussed here, women-led innovation can be strongly value-driven and have a place-based driver such as addressing a social issue or harnessing an underutilised local resource. These types of motivations are reflected in the section 2.3 'Future Inspiration for Innovation'. This illustrates the value of women-led innovation to rural areas and farms and how they see potential in these places for innovation and entrepreneurship. In this section we explore some of the personal and professional individual level factors motivating women-led innovation, such as individual circumstances, life-stage, education and career background. This illustrates the diverse pathways women take on their innovation journeys, as well as the various factors that influence them (see Figure 2). In some cases, more than one of these pathways can be part of the same women-led innovation journey. The pathways are illustrated by women in rural and farming contexts that took part in the FLIARA project case study research.

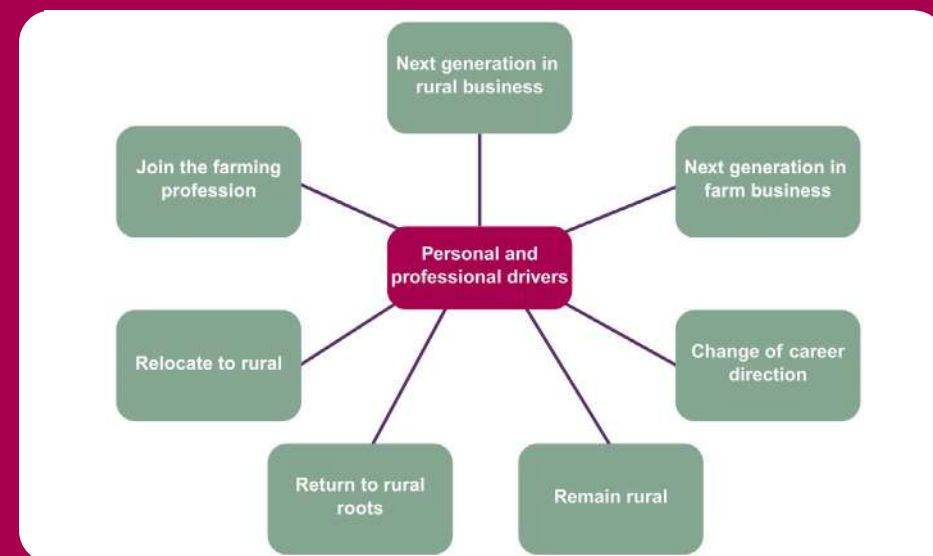


Figure 2: Personal and professional drivers on the pathways into women-led rural and farm innovation

Change of career direction

Women can move into rural and farm innovation driven by taking a change in their career direction. They often move into an area of innovation that complements and draws on their professional background and skills. Coupled with this, the career change pathway can also be driven by a desire for a different way of living, such as away from city life for a slower, nature-embedded way of life or to help combine work and family commitments. Some change-of-direction stories involve a shift in profession, enabled by personal aptitudes, interests, and passions, as well as the skills individuals have developed throughout their careers. Women often combine multiple skills and capacities to build innovative businesses. For example:



While a move into growing vegetables for local consumers might seem a world away from a career in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), former ICT professional Karin Körver based in the Netherlands used her skills to establish Plantalia, a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm that offers a variety of vegetables, herbs, and flowers, including rare varieties like black tomatoes and Siberian kale. Karin developed the website by herself and worked to attract members through local news features. Not deterred by obstacles such as access to land, her personal skills helped secure plots from sustainable, organic landowners. Inspiration from other CSA initiatives like Tuinen van Groede and CitySeeds were also important drivers.

[Learn more](#)

Moving from an office job and to the beautiful natural environment of rural Kuusamo, Finland, Piritta Liikka established the small tourism business Mun Polku that offers private, tailored nature experiences in the form of guided tours focused on wellbeing in nature. Piritta realised she had a natural gift for tour guiding acting as an unofficial guide for company guests in her former role. She also turned a hobby into a living, driven to combine her passions for nature and yoga in her business. To gain some hands-on experience she worked as an assistant guide for a couple of tourism companies. Then she was ready to establish her own business in 2016. Networking is an important enabler for Piritta who collaborates extensively with a group of all female tour guide entrepreneurs, as well as other local companies.



[More info](#)

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Next generation in rural business

Taking over a family business from a previous generation is also a clear pathway into women-led rural innovation. As businesses transition between generations, this moment often opens space for renewal and change. This can involve diversifying and adding new innovations to the business or growing its scale. Women that get into rural innovation and entrepreneurship through succession bring their skills, interests, values and passions to steer innovation in an already established business. For example:

Sisters Sirpa Kämäräinen and Katja Vira run the second-generation family business Isokenkäisten Klubi (Club of the Big-Shoe People). This wilderness lodge and wild food kitchen is located in the remote Särkiluoma village in Kuusamo, Finland. The family tourism business began in 1990's to earn additional income alongside agriculture. An initial driver for the business was the fact that the first customers in the 1990s were usually people from high-ranking positions in Finland, the so-called "big-shoe people". Sirpa and Katja took over the business in 2004, and each contributed their individual strengths to develop and adapt the business. Sirpa has been involved in developing the Wild Food Kuusamo Lapland brand since 2015. This brings together local wild food producers and experience services from the area of Kuusamo and Taivalkoski. This shows how local networks and collaboration is an important enabler.

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Anna Garofalo is the manager of Garritano 1908, a company located in a rural area near the city of Cosenza in Calabria, Italy. Garritano 1908 specialises in the processing of a particular type of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) fig: the "Fico di Cosenza". Anna inherited the enterprise from her mother in 2011, representing the fifth generation. Anna's innovative ideas, diversification of production and the supply chain means that the company, which used to work only a few months a year due to the seasonality of the fig, continues to work all year round. Anna, together with other local entrepreneurs and farmers, engaged in a long process to obtain the PDO certification for the "Fico di Cosenza". Anna is the president of the Consortium for the protection of the Fig of Cosenza PDO. She is very engaged in valourising local products and food traditions.

[More info](#)

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Next generation in farm business

Taking on a farm run by the preceding generation is also a clear pathway into women-led farm innovation. This can involve women running farms alone or in conjunction with other family members, such as partners or siblings, and taking a leading role in particular aspects of the farm business. Farm succession is also often a time of change on farms and women can implement innovative changes to improve the sustainability of the farm business, seen in these two examples for instance:



Luigia and Simona Soffritti are two sisters who, together with their brother Edmondo, run La Petrosa, located in Ceraso (SA), in the Cilento National Park, Campania, Italy. When they inherited the 60-hectare farm from their parents, driven mainly by their great sensitivity to environmental issues, they began to implement several changes. They became an organic farm and began using regenerative farming techniques. While their brother is mainly in charge of the fields, Luigia and Simona are directly involved in processing and selling the products and oversee the agritourism activities. La Petrosa is now guided by a strong focus on promoting local products and preserving the ecosystem. La Petrosa received the national “Ambassadors of Agroecology” award in 2023 from Legambiente, the most widespread environmental association in Italy.

[More info](#)

Belinda Schwarz-Wittigslager from Hechelhof in the district of Neustadt/Aisch-Bad Windsheim, Germany set up a cheese dairy to make her farm economically viable and “fit for the next generation”. The Hechelhof cheese is an artisanal speciality. With this financial support from the Aurach Zenn Municipal Alliance, Belinda was able to set up a small farm cheese dairy. Years ago, Belinda and her husband had taken over the farm from her parents. Nowadays, the couple runs two farm businesses. Belinda oversees the artisan cheese making while her husband runs the arable farm. Belinda’s cheese shop developed quickly into a village meeting place. Storytelling about farming and food production is also Belinda’s mission. In this relatively remote rural area, the farm has opened its doors to sell premium products and at the same time, welcome customers to trigger dialogues and raise awareness of farmers’ challenges.

[Learn more](#)



Remain rural

While rural areas can have disadvantages, they can also have many advantages that offer an attractive quality of life. They can be places with strong communities and close access to nature. However, building a livelihood can present challenges, particularly for women, as quality job opportunities tend to be more plentiful in more urban contexts. That said, women-led innovation can be a solution to this problem, as the stories of some of the FLIARA innovators demonstrate. For example:

Vermiduro, a company in the province of Burgos, Spain, specialises in manufacturing ecological products derived from worm castings. The journey began when Nazareth Aparicio, the founder, stumbled upon a manual about earthworms in 2015–2016. Unsure of her career path but motivated by a lack of job opportunities in her village, she and her partner embarked on an experimental journey, purchasing their first worm bin and placing it on a friend’s farm. This marked the inception of Vermiduro’s innovation. Years later, Nazareth and her partner acquired a farm in Burgos, now Vermiduro’s headquarters, housing over 800 bins for breeding earthworms. Their products, coupled with personalised support, aim to support farmers in the transition towards sustainable agriculture, expanding their range of ecological products to further benefit the land and ecosystem.

[More info](#)



Agnese Rostagno is the founder of Biula – Linfa di Betulla, an agricultural project to collect and sell birch sap located in Italy. During the lockdown of Covid-19, Agnese who has worked in mountain refuge management in the past, began to think about how to rearrange her life so that she can remain living in the small village of Melle in Val Varaita, in the Italian Western Alps. She recalled when she was little that her friend’s mother had a birch tree in her garden from which she extracted sap. In Melle, there is a birch forest owned by the municipality. In 2020, Agnese leased 15 hectares of municipal birch forest. Her experience also shows how making public land and forests available for entrepreneurial activities can enable the development of sustainable enterprises led by women.

[More info](#)

Return to rural roots

Migrating out of rural areas is a common way to gain access to education, opportunities and wider experiences. However, as time passes, due to deep connections to rurality, the internal call to return to rural roots can emerge. It can be a strong force to influence specific life choices and plans, such as seeking a slower pace of life or returning also bringing family members to start a new life, such as a partner and children. Innovation is also a facilitator of their return to rural roots. For example:



Spending her vacations with her grandparents in the countryside, Alina Zlati developed a deep connection to the land. After completing her studies in psychology, she ventured into the academic world, blending teaching with research. Her life took a turn back to her roots when she decided to move to the countryside with her husband and daughters, seeking a quieter life away from the urban hustle. In the village of Sălcea, Romania, Alina embarked on the path of Vertical Roots. This sustainable venture hosts green events, offers workshops and experiences designed to reconnect people with nature. Furthermore, Alina established another non-government organisation (NGO), Grassroot-ology, dedicated to sustainable rural development and environmental stewardship. This organisation has been proactive in the community, advocating for additional bus services, organising waste clean-up initiatives, and updating local urban plans in collaboration with local authorities.

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Andrea Tasnádi grew up in the city of Zalău, spending time as a child in Petrinzel village where her grandparents lived. After completing her studies in psychology, she moved to Austria. Inspired by ecological practices and the importance of community, Andrea decided to return to her roots in Petrinzel, Romania where her parents had retired. Andrea reflected on her life goals and realised her desire to live closer to nature. She created the Humus Association in 2022. Andrea initiated a crowdfunding campaign in Austria to start a seed bank, emphasising the importance of preserving autochthon seed varieties and educating the community about their benefits. In a village of about 60 inhabitants, most of whom are elderly, the association seeks to strengthen social connection and create a shared sense of purpose among the local community.

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Relocate to rural

Rural areas can be attractive places to relocate to and start a new pathway in life. Women-led innovation can be a driver of rural regeneration and revitalisation and women-led innovation as a result of relocating to a rural area is also a contributor to this pattern. Women-leading innovations that took part in the FLIARA project demonstrate this pattern and their innovations bring positive effects to rural places. For example:



Silvia Rovere moved to the remote village of Ostana, on the Western Alps of Italy, in 2011, with her husband and children to start a new life. Before moving to this remote mountain area, she graduated in Educational Science and worked for about 10 years in different cities, including abroad, on public health projects. Moving her family to Ostana was a courageous decision because at that time only about twenty people lived there permanently. Silvia took over the management of the Galaberna Refuge, a hotel/restaurant owned by the Municipality, ensuring its opening throughout the year. It has become a meeting centre for the community as well as a tourist reception point. In 2019, Silvia also became the first woman mayor of the village. As mayor, she was able to implement policies to attract tourists as well as to support several local initiatives.

[More info](#)

Since 2016, Darja Korelc has been running the social enterprise Makrobios Panonija, which brings new knowledge and methods to remote rural areas through various projects and trainings. Ten years ago, she and her family decided to buy an abandoned farm in Goričko, Slovenia where they moved from Ljubljana. The change of location and career was triggered by her son's initiative to create an open space for collaboration and networking in the fields of environmental protection and self-sufficiency. In 2016, they registered the social enterprise Mikrobios Panonija, which introduces innovations and changes through various projects, such as responsible use of local materials for construction, agriculture, and more. Darja also plays an important role in connecting with the local community, especially on environmental issues. The business will gradually be passed to the younger generation, but Darja still has many ideas for the future.

[More info](#)



Join the farming profession

In contrast to the pathway of family succession into farming, women-leading innovations can be new entrants to farming without prior connection to the profession. Women can navigate a path to gain crucial resources, such as access to land as well as building key knowledge and skills. Driven to establish a professional life in farming from scratch, joining and then building a livelihood in the farming profession can often involve gradual steps and novel approaches. For example:



Amelie and Franziska Wetzlar run Milchshafhof Pimpinelle a dairy sheep farm with their own cheese making and direct marketing in a small village near Berlin in Brandenburg, Eastern Germany. Although neither of them has a farming background, they have long wanted to run their own farm with dairy sheep and their own processing facilities. Driven by this motivation, in 2010, they bought a small farm, which they expanded in 2019 to include a sheep barn. This organic farm has 60 dairy sheep of the robust breed Krainer Steinschaf on 16 hectares of grassland, as well as rams and offspring. Ecological understanding and species appropriate husbandry are particularly important to them. With their idea of setting up this business in a village of 80 people in a very rural area, they are considered pioneers in the region.

[Learn more](#)

Karmen Čarman, the Slovenian Young Farmer of the Year 2023, is a mathematics teacher, farmer and miller running Vajsova domačija in Slovenia. She and her husband found and bought the farm with a mill by chance. Courage to go their own way has been an enabler for Karmen and her husband. Karmen has been gradually building her innovation journey on a small farm with a 500-year tradition since 2018. Together with her family, she is developing the production and processing of agricultural and artisanal products, tourism and educational activities at Vajsova domačija. In addition to her regular work, Karmen manages the farm where she grows new crops each year. In the future, she would like to work as an independent farmer as well as continue teaching on the farm itself, such as baking courses, handicrafts, milling.

[More info](#)



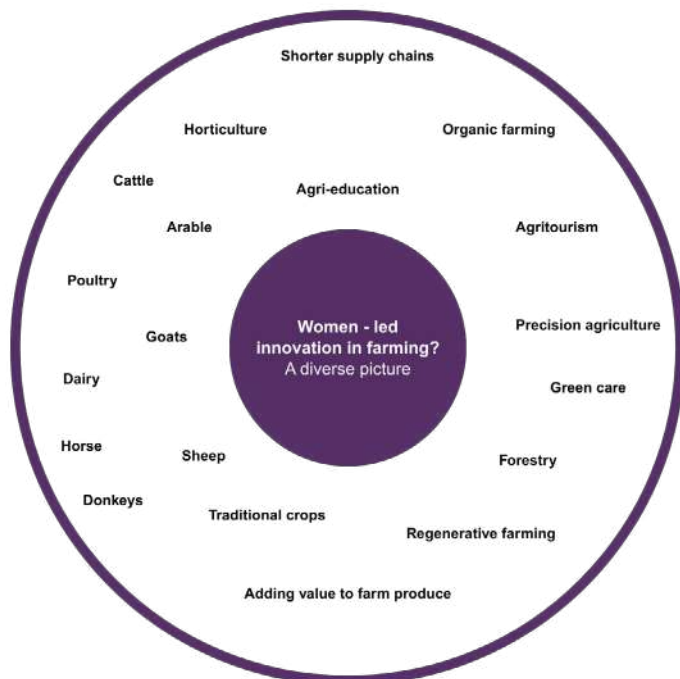
2.2 DIVERSITY OF WOMEN-LED RURAL AND FARM INNOVATION

The previous section began to illustrate the drivers and motivations that can lead women into innovation in rural areas and farming. Here, with a more focused lens, we aim to further showcase the range of opportunities women in farming and rural enterprise have harnessed to build innovations, businesses and livelihoods.

2.2.1 Women-led innovation in a diversity of farm systems

Women in farming can be associated with small farms as well as farms that add value to farm produce to create food products. Stories from FLIARA demonstrate however that women-led innovation in farming is evident in a range of farm systems. Farming activities may not always be linked to food production, such as farming with donkeys and horses, as well as forestry-oriented production. Women-led farm innovation also harnesses the multifunctional potential within farming from for example practicing green care or agritourism. In this section we highlight a range of different farming systems and examples of women-led innovation within them.

Figure 3: Women-led innovation in farming: A diverse picture



We find examples in dairy farming, such as where in the Netherlands, Agnes de Boer and her mother farmed with 60 cows on 47 hectares. They then transitioned from organic to regenerative farming where they now produce 400,000 kilos of milk annually from 75 cows on grass alone. On this organic, regenerative grassland dairy farm in the Netherlands their cows, milked by a robot, graze day and night on the grass, improving health and milk production. Agnes encourages other farmers to trust in the power of grass and cows. Transitioning to environmentally responsible, regenerative cow farming is feasible, financially profitable, and provides mental tranquillity and scenic beauty, all of which she enjoys.

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Other types of dairy farms include goats, such as where Claudia Smolka runs a dairy goat farm with 45 goats and a small cheese dairy located in Hesse in central Germany. The farm is run together with her husband, and they farm according to Bioland organic farming guidelines representing higher standards than EU organic production requirements. In addition to the goat enterprise there is a small arable farm with various crops and 10 hectares of grassland in the nature reserve. The young animals are reared with their mothers, which means that they drink milk from their mothers until they are old enough to feed themselves. Only the surplus milk goes to the cheese dairy. She not only rears the female offspring but also fattens the male lambs and markets the meat.

[More info](#)



Women-led innovation in beef farming can be illustrated by Farma Hoslovice in Czechia that is focused on the breeding of beef cattle and sale of beef of organic quality operated by Mrs. Terezie Daňková. Located in South Bohemia in the Bohemian Forest region the farm also has agritourism in the form of horse stables and rider training and is involved in goat and sheep breeding. Created from the area of the former agricultural cooperative, since 1994, they have been gradually trying to rebuild it to meet the needs of modern cattle and horse breeding.

[Learn more](#)



The story of women in poultry and egg farming can be highlighted by Margaret Farrelly who began selling free range eggs in the early 1980's. This was initially to supplement income from her husband's farm on the Cavan-Meath border of Ireland. After the arrival of the first 150 hens, Margaret developed a deep affection for them, drew great satisfaction from caring for them and the land. Margaret's Eggs grew into a family company and generations of family have produced eggs on their farm. From an initial 150 hens the flock grew to 160,000, working with several dozen farmers across the region and packaging close to 50 million eggs a year. Margaret has also brought new products to the market, including an innovative product, pasteurised liquid egg products, for cooking and baking. Although retired from her business, she represents a wonderful example of farm diversification.

[More info](#)

Another avenue into farming that FLIARA identified was also women's involvement in the equestrian sector. For example, since January 2010, based in Sweden, Annelie Svensson has offered equestrian experiences at Eriksgården, both for locals and tourists. There is also an agritourism dimension where accommodation is available on the farm, with the opportunity to take carriage driving courses with the farm's horses. Annelies' vision is to get more people to realise that horses can be used for more than what they are used for today. Every animal, including humans, want to feel needed and have work to occupy their time. This vision is the basis for the horse and forestry days that Eriksgården organises and for the carriage driving courses that she offers. Eriksgården is also passionate about sharing knowledge about horse handling and the interaction and communication that takes place between horses and humans.

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Women-led horticulture, crop and arable farming systems that take different farm business models are also evident. Take Angelien Hertgers and Welmoet de Waard who started Tuinderij De Stroom. With 1 hectare of open land cultivation, they sold their products to 75 customers. The site was part of the care farm Philadelphia in Hemmen (Gelderland) as a small enterprise. In 2012, Linde Swart joined Tuinderij de Stroom and they moved to a new location close to Ecofarm Lingehof. Their plot is part of a larger farm focusing on only a few types of crops. Angelien, Welmoet and Linde focus on more specific types of vegetables. Both farms work to help each other in times of need. Volunteers and interns help, resulting in a community, coaching new farmers with volunteers and local owners. The farm sells more than 450 bags of vegetables and fruits. Their story shows how renting a small parcel of land and joining forces for the benefit of all can be the start of a successful farm.

[More info](#)



Taking a different approach to growing crops, Mariëlle Keijzer is owner of Keijzer Agro in Lelystad, in Flevoland in the Netherlands that operates both organic and conventional farming systems. Mariëlle took over her father's farm in her thirties. On her 54-hectare farm, she grows potatoes, seed onions, sugar beet, and winter wheat. Mariëlle and her father also manage a 37-hectare organic farm, cultivating oats, barley, and alfalfa to boost biodiversity. Combining both systems helps overcome obstacles where innovative technologies are merged with traditional practices to create a sustainable farming system. Mariëlle's approach to farming shows forward thinking and supports a balanced approach that integrates the best practices from organic and conventional farming to ensure resilient soil and sustainable production. Facing obstacles like wireworms and crop failures in her experimental organic farming, supported by provincial subsidies, she learns valuable insights for future practices.

[More info](#)

We can already see from the stories of women-led farms that they are diverse and operate on different scales. In the next section, we spotlight women-led farms of different scales to further illustrate the multiplicity of farm business models and types of farming systems.



Organic farming in Italy on 2.5 hectares

As Greta Moser's father announced his retirement, she felt the desire to move back and take over the small family farm located near the city of Trento located in Italy by the Italian Alps. Greta took over her father's farm in 2023 and currently manages the farm with the help of her parents. Greta's farming practice is characterised by a strong focus on environmental sustainability and local supply chains. Greta operates biodynamic and organic farming on this 2.5-hectare farm where production takes a circular agriculture perspective. Producing eggs and a variety of crops including local traditional varieties such as grains, bitter roots and grapes. Overall, Greta's farming practice aims at preserving local farming practices, traditional crops, and rural lifestyles. Future plans include opening a food processing laboratory to produce local products, as well as rural space on the farm to act as a meeting point for local people.

[Learn more](#)

Sheep farming in Finland on 35 hectares

In 2012 Mrs. Anu Turu started as a sheep farmer in Miehkälä, Finland. Before entering farming, she worked in a salaried job for 20 years. Now she runs Sepälän Lammastila with 100 ewes and 35 hectares of farmland. Sheep rearing leads to many products and services emerging, such as meat products, skins, wool, yarn, a farm restaurant, knit garments, agri-education and tourism. Part of Anu Turu's motivations where her frustrations at seeing negative portrayals of animal husbandry in the media. She also wanted to counter the dominant view that only big business can survive and flourish. She has successfully created a transparent, sustainable and small-scale business built around local sheep-based products and services.

[More info](#)



Extensive livestock grazing on 200 hectares in Spain

La Caperuza is led by Laura and Conchi in Bustarviejo, Spain. Their approach prioritises economic sustainability, animal welfare, and environmental stewardship and integrates extensive or grazing livestock farming with artisanal cheese and yoghurt production. Since 2019, they have managed a herd comprising 170 dairy goats and 60 Serrana cows in the Bustarviejo Valley. Their farm spans over 200 hectares of oak and scrubland, part of the Natura 2000 Network, where they practice regenerative grazing management. Enabled by for example embracing circular economy concepts and utilising advanced technologies like GPS-guided herd management, the project achieves a harmonious balance between profitability and ecological stewardship.

[Learn more](#)

Mixed farming, forestry and green care on 765 hectares on Sweden

Elisabeth Eliasson and her husband Albert bought Ramshults Gård in 1987. Initially, they had just five beef cattle while working outside the farm. Over time, they decided to expand their enterprise, acquiring another nearby farm. The two farms include a total of 765 hectares, of which 610 hectares are productive forest land, 58 hectares are arable land, and 50 hectares are pastureland. Presently, Elisabeth cares for 43 cows and 20 sheep, as well as sheepskin sales and collaboration with the local municipality in a green care initiative. The farm's cooperation with Mönsterås municipality includes renting out a portion of the farm, which organises daily activities for individuals with disabilities. Elisabeth emphasises that this collaboration holds value beyond financial terms.

[More info](#)



Mixed farming and diversified activities on 6100 hectares in Czechia

ZD Unčovice is an agricultural cooperative situated in the fertile Upper-Morava lowland. Chairwoman of the board of directors is M.Sc. Milada Měsíková-Rašková. It manages 6,100 hectares of agricultural land. It focuses on cattle breeding and plant production, selling its own products. It also includes a real estate rental service, and a biogas station. It is also the school farm of the High School of Agriculture and Horticulture in Olomouc. The cooperative has 262 members and employs 178 workers (60 women, 118 men). The vision is to pass on the land in good condition to the descendants, thanks to the use of modern technology, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), reducing the use of synthetic agrochemicals, and attention to animal welfare. The management of the company is anchored in the locality and region showing for example how large enterprises can work based on precision agriculture and also positively influence the lives of local communities.

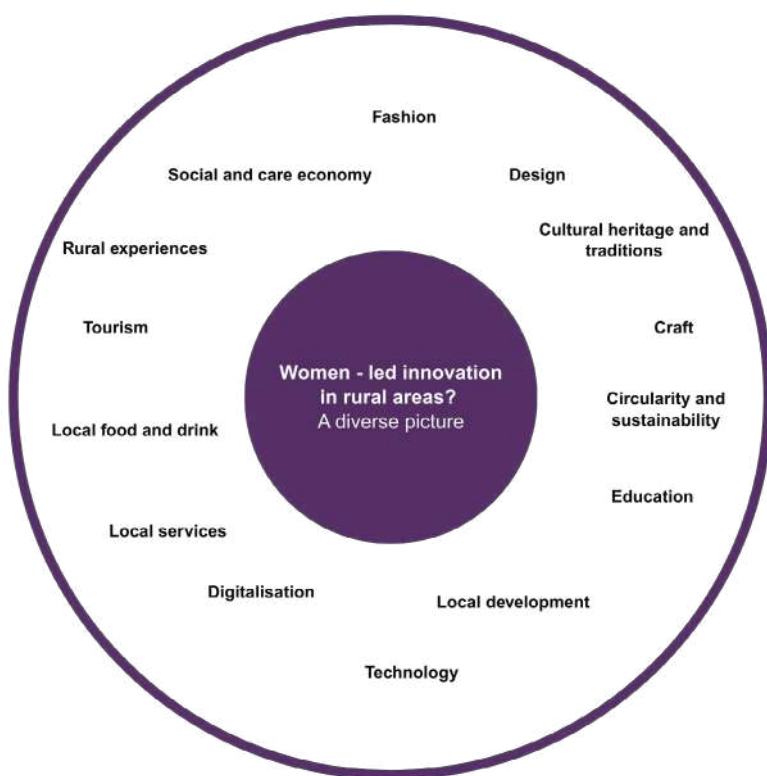
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2.2.2 Women-led innovation diversifying the rural economy

The rural economy can be a place associated with more traditional business and innovation opportunities, such as local services, retail and hospitality. These examples present only one part of the picture. FLIARA evidence suggests women-led innovation is a driver of development of the rural economy, contributing to, diversification and regeneration. Women harness potential in rural areas for innovation and entrepreneurship. Women-led innovation generates embedded organisations in rural areas, that draw on opportunities from local resources such as people's skills, cultural heritage or natural assets. The innovations can also work to address unmet or underserved needs, such as enhancing local services and building a more socially oriented rural economy. Based on the FLIARA evidence in this section we showcase how women-led innovation is contributing to diversifying the rural economy.

Figure 4: Women-led innovation in rural areas: A diverse picture



Women-led innovation driving the local cultural and creative economy:

Innovations that build on and are driven by harnessing culture, creativity and heritage help to build on the potential of the rural creative economy in areas such as fashion, crafts and design. They show how creative innovation has a strong place in the rural economy and women play a strong role in driving this space. For example:

Horisaki Design and Handel produce and sell artisanal hats worldwide. Karin Horisaki and her husband, Makoto, own and run the company. Karin started a small business in Stockholm in 2008, focusing on fashionable, premium-quality hats. Since 2013, Horisaki Design and Handel have operated from its now rural farm location in Småland, Sweden. Inspired by the surroundings and the cultural heritage of Småland, Karin produces two collections per year, which she traditionally exhibits during the fashion weeks in Paris. Horisaki's stylish hats blend innovation with a commitment to preserving the time-honoured tradition of hat-making. They operate a web shop as well as a small local shop, offering a diverse range of products produced by other craftspeople in their network. The owners have made a deliberate choice not to scale production in order to lead more sustainable and personally fulfilling lives and ensure connection with the craft's artistic aspects.

[More info](#)



Springt Design, founded by Evelien Kamphuis in 2021 and based in the Netherlands showcases a commitment to environmentally friendly interior products by using natural, biodegradable, or recyclable materials. Growing up in a potato-cultivating region and working as an independent journalist specialising in agriculture, Evelien was inspired to create sustainable alternatives to plastic interiors. She developed the TOVVEL lampshade, made from potato starch - a by-product of the potato chip industry. Starting from scratch, she attended numerous startup workshops, tested prototypes, applied for and received a LEADER subsidy, and has been actively involved in Innovatiehub Oost-Groningen. Through rigorous experimentation with raw materials and prototypes, Evelien moved from concept to production, establishing herself as a multi-talented entrepreneur in biodegradable products.

[More info](#)



Women-led innovation driving the social and care economy:

Women-led innovation can be value-driven and have a strong place-based driver such as addressing a social issue. Women-led innovation builds on the potential of addressing social issues and building innovations to respond to these needs. For example:

Sofia Rasini, her two sisters and their mother, Marina Clerici, are the managers of the non-profit association Campo Base based in rural Italy. Campo Base organises summer camps to support children and young adults living with serious illnesses and coping with psychosocial challenges. In 2003, after the death of her husband, Marina Clerici moved back to a small rural village close to Riva del Garda, by the Italian Alps, where she inherited an ancient medieval castle, Castel Campo. Marina opened an organic farm but in 2016, her three daughters joined forces to found the association. Sofia recently moved next to the castle with her family, while the two sisters live in other cities and join her only for the association's activities. Collaborations are a key enabler; the association collaborates with hospitals and associations, both in Italy and abroad. The association is supported mostly by private foundations and participation is free.

[More info](#)



Residencia Campo Romanos represents a pioneering initiative in Romanos, Aragon, Spain, offering a residential development tailored for the elderly. It provides living spaces for seniors, fostering a sense of belonging and comfort akin to home. With a strong emphasis on eco-friendly practices and lifestyle amenities such as recreational areas and fitness centres, the residence aims to create an idyllic community where residents can lead fulfilling lives. In a region grappling with an ageing population and serious depopulation issues, this project plays a vital role in revitalising the community. It attracts new residents and diversifies the local economy beyond agriculture. Marta Reinales Gómez is the visionary behind Residencia Campo Romanos. Her ability to attract funding, leverage networking opportunities, and prioritise the well-being of elderly residents highlights the multifaceted impact of this project on both the local community and the broader region.

[More info](#)

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Women-led innovation driving the tourism and experience economy:

Rural places and resources can be harnessed to provide activities and experiences for local communities and tourist visitors alike. Innovations can bring different services together, such as creating distinct experiences and tours around a specific farm landscape or food product. They can bring different worlds together such as farms providing a space for education or recreation. For example:



Harnessing the intangible heritage of the remote Gornji Grad and the Upper Savinja Valley, Slovenia and blending this with love of their home region, herbalism, and tourism, Amanda Kladnik and Maja Žerovnik developed Babave. Driven by enthusiasm, a love for where they live and an ambitious vision to develop local resources for the most discerning tourists, they began their entrepreneurial journey in 2018. LEADER support enabled them to set up and gradually expand their business that blends developing tourism and preserving cultural heritage. A herb farm and garden inspire their products, workshops and the wider experiences they offer that include learning about cultural and natural heritage. Babave also enriches the local area, such as providing a meeting place for local discussion evenings and an artist residency with foreign artists in Gornji Grad. Their efforts have raised the profile of Gornji Grad as a tourist destination.

[More info](#)

In 2006, Mrs. Anne-Leena Pellikka bought a village school, set up a small stable and started to provide riding lessons in her home municipality Keitele, Finland. From here, gradual growth continued, acquiring the family farm and transforming it into a horse farm. As well as this, since 2019 she has organised rock festivals in the manège. In the summer season there are about 500 regular riding customers per week, and this is expected to grow. In 2023 there were 700 visitors in the Manège Rock. Growth of the event has never been an objective, but happened organically. New jobs as well as positive direct and indirect impacts on the local economy have been significant. To enable this business, contacts are extremely important. A large network is needed to manage extensive and diverse business in several locations and challenging remote business environment.

[More info](#)



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Women-led innovation driving the local food and drink culture:

Food production is at the heart of the rural economy. There are many examples featured in this guide where women add value to a farm's primary production to create local and artisan foods. Beyond the boundaries of the farm itself, innovative food businesses are driven by women-led innovation. Just a pinch of those explored in the FLIARA project are for example:



In Spain, María Rosas Alcántara developed Setacor a production model that integrates mushrooms and extra virgin olive oil. The integrated production of mushrooms and oil strengthens the environment through the use of circular and ecological farming practices. During olive harvesting, she piles up olive tree leaves with cereals to form substrates for mushroom growth, minimising environmental impact by avoiding air conditioning. Products include sauces or pâtés made with mushrooms from environmentally friendly, circular cultivation. A curiosity to explore mushroom cultivation was a starting driver. Using social networks and consumer groups has enabled expanding sales to end consumers. Collaboration is important, such as with the University of Seville to produce animal feed. María Rosas Alcántara's approach ensures sustainability and autonomy for its business model. María's innovation also includes cultivating new varieties of mushrooms.

[More info](#)

Master confectioner Nanetta Ruf runs KondiTOUREi, Germany's first mobile confectionery and bakery in the Wetterau region of Hesse. The idea is modelled on mobile cheese dairies and butcher shops. Nanetta was motivated by the search for an alternative to the night work of traditional bakers and confectioners. KondiTOUREi offers contract processing of farm produce from organic farms within a radius of around 150 kilometres from her home. She visits the farms, stays on the farm for about a week with her lorry and creates a stock of products for the farmers and direct marketers, such as cakes in jars, tartlets, eggnog, jams and spices, which they in turn sell in their farm shops. Her services have created the opportunity for them to offer a wider range of products for direct marketing without the need for extensive investment in the necessary resources.

[Learn more](#)



Women-led innovation driving rurally based digitalisation and technology:

The FLIARA case study research shows how digitalisation and technology provide an important opportunity for women innovators. Digitalisation and technology can provide specific benefits to the innovative enterprise or in some cases be a driver underpinning the innovation at its core. While these types of innovations are less common among FLIARA's case study research, they do however represent an important part of the wider picture and future opportunities. For example, the following examples illustrate this trend:

Based in Galway, Ireland, Aoife Noone has over 20 years of experience in information security and compliance. Noone Cyber Services uses highly skilled expertise and knowledge to efficiently resolve issues and achieve significant operational cost savings in the process. In January 2023, Aoife also set up 'THINK SMART', a new cyber mindset program for educational facilities, community organisations as well as national and international business organisations. 'THINK SMART' is built around a program of workshops and talks. For educational organisations it educates and empowers students, parents, and teachers when it comes to the use of social media and smart devices. By integrating cyber security expertise with high-performance mindset skills, this program equips participants with lifelong tools to foster more positive attitudes and behaviours online.

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Led by María José Serrano Arnau, located in Alcaudete, Spain Olivares is a technological innovation project aimed at combating water stress in olive groves based on the combination of new devices and other technologies. A core driver is to find a solution for the decreasing availability of water. Another motivation is the sharing of knowledge with other farmers, the members of the Alacudere cooperative, as well as implementing different techniques developed by the farmers who are members of the SCA Perpetuo Socorro de Alcaudete. María José is a lawyer who decided to leave her job to cultivate the land she inherited from her father. Her main aspiration was to improve the average environment and work the land, also spreading awareness about the worrying effects of climate change.

[More info](#)

Women led innovation supporting local services:

Women-led innovation also shows a pattern of driving the enhancement or maintenance of important local services for the local community. Women can be the drivers of a range of organisations and innovations that support the local community. For example, the following examples illustrate this trend:



Laura Albu's passion for women's rights and community development led her to establish the Community Safety and Mediation Centre Foundation (CMSC) in 2000, operating in rural communities in various counties in north-east Romania. CMSC works primarily with and for women and children in rural communities, on three main topics: rural communities' development, support for victims of domestic violence, and transnational cooperation. CMSC is also connected to a wide network of other organisations, the Romanian Women's Lobby, the Network of NGOs against Violence on Women and the Federation of NGOs on Social Services. Some more specific work includes supporting more women to run for Local Councils. CMSC is also involved in influencing public policy and legal changes in Romania. Through their transnational cooperation with the Republic of Moldova, they aim to expand this approach to Moldavian civil society organisations and Local Action Groups.

[More info](#)

Veronica Barrett is the Director of Services at Roscommon Home Services Home Care (RHS). Since 1996, this non-profit organisation has been offering compassionate and professional home care services to families in the Midlands, West, and Northwest of Ireland. When Veronica joined RHS it had only 12 registered carers. During her 28 years leading RHS, through her dedication and business acumen, RHS now provides services to hundreds of clients and has over 300 employees. From the outset, Veronica focused on building the co-operative through securing contracts that would provide a stable financial income. The co-op's not-for-profit ethos was a significant factor in securing a contract with government agencies and in gaining support and trust within the community. The aim of RHS Home Care is to provide quality-driven care that enables clients to keep their independence and dignity while staying in their own homes.



[More info](#)



2.3 FUTURE INSPIRATION FOR INNOVATION

It is already clear from this guide that women-led innovation contributes to building a stronger, more sustainable, diversified rural and farm economy. In this section we illustrate how some of the FLIARA future visions for sustainability are being addressed by current women-led innovators in rural areas and farming. We have selected some of the visions that illustrate the different dimensions of sustainability (environmental, social, economic and cultural) that have underpinned the FLIARA project. This section also aims to highlight specific spill-over impacts of women-led innovation for the wider rural economy, community, environment and culture. It also illustrates some further drivers and motivations of women-led innovation.

The examples presented here are also intended to illustrate novel ideas, models and approaches that could have relevance and learning for other contexts. One idea explored in FLIARA was the concept of scaling and how innovations could not just 'scale up' but also 'scale out' where innovations are adapted in new contexts. For the future visions to become more than vision and be part of our future realities, learning from existing innovation can also hold ideas for practice. The examples presented here are also put together with this aim in mind. They are organised in relation to the four sustainability dimensions, but they also cut across them. FLIARA's findings also indicate that women-led innovations can address multiple dimensions of sustainability at the same time.



FLIARA Vision Cards

Subset featured in this guide



Environmental Sustainability

Developing innovations that support environmental sustainability emerged as a clear driver influencing women-led innovation based on the FLIARA evidence. The preservation and responsible use of ecosystems and natural resources is at the core of the environmental dimension of sustainability (Farrell et. al. 2023b). In the section below we highlight a few examples of models and approaches that are clear drivers of environmental sustainability but also represent novel ways of doing things that could inspire other innovators in developing their innovations.



Vision card: Sustainable farming models have become mainstream

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: A cooperative movement in regenerative farming in the Netherlands: Founded in 2013, the Herenboeren movement has established 23 grassroots farms across the country, feeding more than 9,000 people. The movement aims to expand to 50 farms by 2030. In August 2025, the national association of local Herenboerderijen took over the role of Herenboeren Nederland, the national foundation supporting the local farms. Each Herenboerderij is a cooperative of 150 to 300 shareholders, with 15 to 20-hectare farms and 1-3 part-time professional farmers, sharing producing vegetables, fruit, eggs and optional meat throughout the year. Regenerative agriculture is practiced and the aim is for zero inputs. The entire network of local cooperatives works together to improve knowledge, legislation, and policies for sustainable agriculture, partnering with 'Caring Farmers', 'Groenboerenplan', 'Aardpeer', and the innovation hub 'Plaats De Kleine Aarde'. There are currently 21 farms feeding over 9,000 people across the country, with hundreds more in the pipeline.

[Learn more](#)

Vision card: Sustainable lifestyles and practices have been adopted

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: A network of re-use centres in Slovenia: Marinka Vovk is a socially responsible entrepreneur, innovator, and founder of the first reuse centre and social enterprise in Slovenia. Centri Ponovne Uporabe opened in 2009 in the rural municipality of Rogaška Slatina. In 2014, the network of reuse centres began to expand, opening six more centres. After a few years of support, most of the reuse centres were gradually handed over to local actors for independent management. Today, they operate four reuse centres – three in rural municipalities and one in Ljubljana. Each centre has its own specialisation such as repair of electronics and upholstered furniture. There is cooperation and exchange of goods and products between the centres. Half of the income comes from the sale of products and the other half from various projects.

[More info](#)



Vision card: Nature conservation is promoted to address sustainability problems

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: Farming for conservation on public land in Germany: Biology graduate Astrid Fölling runs a nature conservation farm with her husband in south-west Germany. The farm covers 80 hectares and is managed with 30 – 40 donkeys in four herds. Astrid does not own the land herself but is commissioned by the state of Rhineland-Palatinate to manage the land in a nature conservation-friendly manner. Astrid keeps registered 'German Donkeys' of various sizes. Some of the donkeys come from France and belong to the 'Provence Donkey' breed. The transfer of this method of extensive grassland utilisation from France to Germany was carried out together with a few other nature friendly conservation initiatives and represents pioneering work.

[More info](#)

Economic sustainability

Women-led innovation is a clear driver of rural economic development. Socially and environmentally conscious long-term growth is a key component of the economic dimension of sustainability. For economic sustainability, the welfare of future generations must not be compromised in economic development, and a focus should be placed on improving societal well-being (Farrell et al., 2023b). Women-led innovations can also illustrate ideas that change the nature of the economy by bringing together principles such as localising aspects of the economy, bringing ecological thinking into the built environment and supporting future generations to become drivers of innovation and enterprise. In the section below we highlight examples of innovative models and approaches that are clear drivers of these types of economic sustainability.



Vision card: Local development has been organised in new ways

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: Youth business incubator in Czechia: A business incubator is being created at the Polytechnic Secondary School of Technology in Kyjov. The main goal is to retain high school-educated youth in the region through the development of the local business environment utilising start-ups, a coworking centre, the involvement of companies from the region and the Chamber of Commerce. The founder is Mgr. Hana Bednaříková, councillor of the city of Kyjov, a member of important city commissions and an entrepreneur. The school supports the involvement of companies from the region in teaching. Keeping educated people in the region is a key issue for the development of rural areas.

[Learn more](#)

Vision card: Local food and short food chains have become mainstream

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: A local food economy with a social orientation in Czechia: Founded in 2012, Na soutoku brings together local citizens and people with disabilities who are engaged in biodynamic agriculture, crafts and artistic activities. The farm operates as a system of Community-Supported Agriculture. The farm supplies about 350 member families in three regions. Its aims include the promotion and practice of bio-dynamic agriculture, care for disabled people, development of handicrafts and artwork. The business is run in an eco-friendly and sustainable way, prioritising cooperation rather than competition. Žaneta Lenhartová came to České Kopisty with her husband and son in 2009. She takes care of the bees, runs the Camphill candle-making workshop and is responsible for the daily work of roommates with special needs.

[More info](#)



Vision card: Attractive housing possibilities are made available

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: Knowledge centre for eco-building, energy-efficiently, self-sufficiency in Sweden: The Knowledge Center Ecotopia Österlen opened its doors in 2012. Situated on seven hectares, Ecotopia serves as an inspiration for eco-building, energy-efficiently, self-sufficiently. The planning for Ecotopia began by Karin Malmgren in 2007 and the organisation has consistently employed a holistic perspective guided by her principles of permaculture and her interest for environmental issues. Today Karin is retired from working at Ecotopia Österlen and instead is involved on a voluntary basis. Ecotopia comprises several buildings made from various combinations of ecological building materials, along with associated structures, energy calculations, recycling systems, a combined solar-solid fuel heating system, solar collectors and cell installations. Ecotopia also serves as a bridge between old and new knowledge.

[More info](#)

Cultural sustainability

Less emphasis can be placed on the cultural dimension of sustainability in sustainability discourse. However, for sustainable development FLIARA has pointed to the significance of cultural expressions, customs, languages, arts and its importance in a community's identity and well-being (Farrell et. al. 2023b). Women-led innovations directly impact cultural sustainability and touch on a number of the FLIARA visions that are important for the future to address sustainability problems. Similar to previous sections, again we highlight just a few examples of innovative models and approaches that are clear drivers of cultural sustainability, while also representing novel ways of doing things that could inspire other innovators.



Vision card: Rural image has been renewed

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: Social media as a lever to change the image of farming in Ireland: Miriam and Rachel Hastings have been assisting on their family farm since their childhood. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they witnessed their parents and other farmers continue with their work despite other professions ceasing to operate. To raise awareness of the foundational need for farming to sustain society and to spotlight the positives of farming as a career, the Hastings sisters established their Instagram account in 2020. Despite their full-time teaching commitments, the two sisters aim to create awareness of farming life, impart knowledge and inspire others. 'Keeping up with the Hastings' showcases the diverse aspects of farming life. As influencers in the farming community, they share their experiences and insights on agricultural life, such as providing insight into daily farm operations, tips on sustainable farming practices and showcasing new innovations.

[Learn more](#)



Vision card: Communality and involvement of people have been organised in novel ways

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: A multifunctional food, tourism and cultural rural hub in Sweden: Meetingpoint Häradsbäck started as a rural grocery store and since 2018 has developed into a café, restaurant and rural centre for cultural events. The different components of the organisation feed into each other in an innovative way since the company is owned by several local non-profit organisations. The café hosts a branch of the municipal library, and the store provides groceries and functions as a pharmacy and post office. Food delivery services and living facilities for the elderly are also offered by the organisation. For tourists, campervans can stay overnight, and the store sells camping gas, which attracts some travellers to stay in the village. Mette Adolfson has been vital to the success of the organisation. In addition to Mette, the local community along with dedicated volunteers have made the meeting point a reality

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Vision card: Reform of the educational curricula has provided people with new competences

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: Wool as a vehicle for sustainability education in Ireland: Wool as a craft and textile material becomes a vehicle for education on sustainability in the educational company Wool in School. Established by fibre artist Lorna McCormack, part of the company's goals are to increase awareness and use of this sustainable, biodegradable, and hypoallergenic product. Wool in School runs interactive workshops through its online shop and a range of products for schools and families are available. Lorna is embedded in the wool and sustainability business community. The company takes a novel, interactive approach to sustainability education. Fast fashion is a big challenge for sustainability and increasing knowledge and use of materials such as wool provide an important part of more environmentally conscious clothes consumption. Cross generational learning is also a focus helping link older and younger generations, preserving and passing on knowledge through large scale art projects and intergenerational learning.

[Learn more](#)



Vision card: Heritage has been preserved

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: Turning furniture heritage into a cultural destination in Sweden: Virserum was a hub for Swedish furniture production until the 1970s. When the industry declined, the area suffered, and properties fell into disuse. A local artist, Henrik Teleman, envisioned that the property could be restored as an art gallery for non-traditional art audiences. His dream became reality when the gallery opened in 1998. In 2004, a 1600 m2 exhibition hall was constructed to showcase art exhibitions including wood art, textile art, and addressing topics such as household labour, sustainable architecture, consumption, and social sustainability. Currently, Julia Wiel Fredén is acting Operations Manager. The gallery is owned by a non-profit organisation and is funded by public funds and private foundations. The gallery is a unique cultural destination and functions as a meeting place in a rural area in Småland.

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Social sustainability

To achieve the social dimension of sustainability, diverse, equal, and thriving communities must be built where for example human rights and social fairness is advanced (Farrell et al., 2023b). FLIARA evidence shows how women-led innovations are important drivers of the social dimension of sustainability. Finally, we highlight examples of innovative models and approaches that are clear drivers of social sustainability, while also representing novel ways of doing things that could inspire future women-led innovations.



Vision card: Concerted action has been organised successfully

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: Working together for women's empowerment in Romania: Born and raised in the commune of Saschiz, Florentina Călugăr became the manager of the Local Action Group Dealurile Târnavei. In 2015, to meet one of the selection criteria for the Local Development Strategy of the LAG, she established the Saschiz Women's Neighborhood Association. The association was born out of a need to formalise the already strong informal networks among women in Saschiz. Traditionally, women played significant but often unrecognised roles in the community, organising social gatherings and supporting local traditions. The association aims to empower women economically and socially, providing them with the resources and support needed to develop sustainable small businesses and engage more actively in community life. The association focuses on various sustainable initiatives, from promoting local crafts and gastronomy to organising community events and educational programmes, while also developing tourism.

[Learn more](#)

Vision card: Novel products, services and business models have been developed

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: A parent run cooperative kindergarten in Finland: During the recession of the 1990s, the city decided to close Pupula kindergarten in Karkkila, Finland. Parents decided to set up a cooperative to safeguard the kindergarten services. Mrs. Saila Jarila has been Managing Director of the cooperative since 2009. Parents are members of the cooperative once their kids are in kindergarten. The board consists of 5–7 parents of children currently in the kindergarten. The board is chosen annually, but many parents continue for many years. The cooperative model brings advantages. Parents decide many things concerning the care of their children, including recruitment of employees and additional activities. The cooperative provides an opportunity to have a small, intimate and safe place for the children.



[Learn more](#)

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Vision card: Human welfare has been promoted in new ways

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: Catalysing farm safety with children in Ireland: AgriKids was created in 2015 with the principle of actively engaging, educating, and empowering children to become ambassadors for farm safety. Founded by Alma Jordan, AgriKids is a farm safety educational platform for children and teachers. Alma recognised the immense potential of children as catalysts for change. The strategy of engaging children as the point of contact for educating and raising awareness on farm safety necessarily draws in other key people into the discussions, for example, parents, guardians and experts, thus the learning outcome reaches a wider audience. AgriKids has carried out various initiatives nationwide to promote and raise awareness of farm safety, health, and well-being. This includes the AgriKids website, where there is also a dedicated space for the AgriKids School's Farm Safe Hub. This provides links and resources to two tailor-made programmes both of which align to specific aspects of the school curriculum.

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Vision card: Local services have been reorganised and preserved

Example of women-led innovation already addressing this vision: Social enterprise providing integrated services for people with disabilities in Slovenia: Zavod Uvid fills an important gap in the provision of public services. Marija Zupanec is committed to developing activities to enable people with various forms of physical and/or mental disabilities to enjoy a good quality of life. In 2018 she started to build and develop programmes and services. In 2023 she obtained social enterprise status. The holistic approach includes advice centres for older people and people with disabilities and a personal assistance network. One pioneering part of the work is gradually and comprehensively tackling the issue of cycling for people with disabilities on the Beaver Centre's cycle paths. As advocates for people with disabilities, they sensitise society as a whole to the fact that there are groups of people in the community who would like to cycle but cannot because they do not have suitable bicycles. In co-operation with other actors in the local area, they will therefore gradually try to develop the full range of activities towards a bicycle product for businesses of people with disabilities or as a tourism product.



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2.4 FLIARA AMBASSADORS

The FLIARA Innovation Ambassadors from across the ten FLIARA case study countries have been at the heart of the project. Through our CoP Network events each Ambassador shared insights on their pathway to success and obstacles they had to overcome to establish their innovations. In this section, we draw on each Ambassador's Fact Sheet produced as part of our case study research (see FLIARA 2025a), as well as their interviews recorded at the FLIARA CoP Network events. We do this to outline just some of the drivers, obstacles and enablers on their innovation journey. Some of the overlapping patterns are summarised in Figure 5 below.

Drivers

- ✓ **A vision for change:** Contribute to and capitalise on e.g. the value of nature and environmental sustainability, address new trends, problems, cultural shifts or preserve traditions
- ✓ **Personal aspirations and build the desired livelihood:** Such as change career direction, make real the dream of rural living, build a farm-based livelihood
- ✓ **New trends and needs:** Tapping into new market trends, community needs and service gaps

Obstacles

- ✓ **Acceptance and building new ideas and approaches:** Convincing others of the potential of the innovation, tapping into new markets, traditional perceptions and norms
- ✓ **Knowledge and skills:** Such as learning new skills, knowledge and techniques and harness the value of traditions and culture
- ✓ **Access to finance and navigating regulations:** Gaining adequate finance to support business development, continuity of funding supports, navigating complex laws and requirements

Enablers

- ✓ **A novel approach to innovation:** Combining different kinds of knowledge, such as nature's processes and scientific techniques, farming and social care, applying digital solutions
- ✓ **An innovator mindset and skillset:** Vision, determination, problem-solving, influencing skills, passion and positivity
- ✓ **Networking and partnerships:** Developing synergies with other businesses, partners and building a wider support network
- ✓ **Gradual development:** Develop gradually over time to allow time to gain resources, learn lessons and adapt
- ✓ **Gaining recognition:** Acceptance of the novel approach and ideas, formally through awards or informally in the community

Figure 5: Some patterns emerging from the Ambassador innovation pathways



Iva Zadražilová

An agricultural scientist with a love of farming, Dr. Iva Zadražilová runs the vibrant organic family farm Kyprův mlýn Knínice including agritourism in the rolling countryside of the Czech Republic.

For Iva Zadražilová farming in a natural way has been a driver. This organic farm raises Suffolk lambs, cattle, and horses while also producing honey, grains, and medicinal herbs. Dr. Zadražilová 's father got land in restitution and step by step she persuaded her father that farming in a natural way was possible. Iva Zadražilová has also been motivated to develop a farm that is more than a place of production. Dr. Zadražilová was driven to develop a farm that provided a place for people to connect with nature and ecological farming. This organic farm also has an agritourism

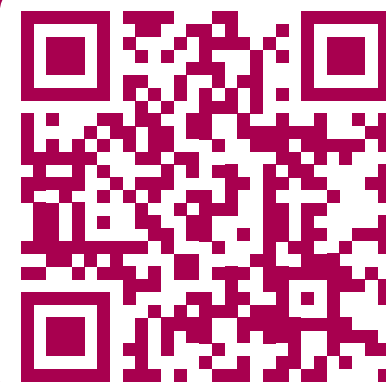
business, running tourist accommodation and a boarding house. One obstacle experienced is local understanding about doing things differently. The local area only had conventional farms when Iva started farming organically. Local understanding and faith in the real potential of organic farming was low. However, this has since changed, and neighbouring farms have also now converted to organic farming.

One thing that has enabled the farm is combining respect for nature, science and innovation. This modern farm combines farming ecologically with the use of scientific knowledge and innovation. Dr. Zadražilová is a graduate of Mendel University in Brno, majoring in general agriculture and applied landscape ecology. Since 2011, she is also the director of the branch of the

German organic certification company ABCERT AG and this role demands continuous education and keeping up to date with agricultural legislation. Another enabler has been the determination and vision of Dr. Zadražilová. She was determined to prove that organic farming could not only work but thrive. The agritourism aspect of the farm was launched in 2017. Future plans include developing renewable energy through restoring the former mill and transform it into as a small hydroelectric power station.

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Alžbeta Nagyová

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Situated in the Ostrava-Karviná coal mine basin Alžbeta Nagyová is Chief Agronomist at the Bezdínek farm that operates 11 hectares of greenhouses where the aim is to create a favourable food environment for a healthy and sustainable diet.

For Bezdínek Ltd one of the drivers is for environmentally friendly and economically viable large-scale food production. Bezdínek Ltd. grows tomatoes, cucumbers and other vegetables, as well as producing additional products including dried tomatoes and flower honey, widely used in the Chřiby Mountains region. For example, the tomatoes are planted on an organic substrate made of crushed coconut husks, which are composted after the season. About 15 litres of water are used for 1 kg of tomatoes compared to hundreds of litres in field production. Rainwater is used for watering. The farm is also motivated to promote local food and education. Bezdínek Ltd. is not just a food production environment, but also has local, healthy food and environment education aspects. There is a demonstration greenhouse open to visitors. The company participates in food festivals, TED talks and the campaign of the Vegetable Union of Bohemia and Moravia to support the consumption of local vegetables. One obstacle faced has been implementing zero-pesticide cultivation. This new approach brought different challenges each year, such as plant health issues and rising energy costs. Adapting, building experience and knowledge was essential to its success.

The problem-solving mindset of Dr. Nagyová has enabled Bezdínek Ltd's development. The science-based mindset of solving problems step by step has been crucial to successfully setting up the greenhouses, according to Dr. Nagyová. A graduate of Comenius University in Bratislava, she earned her Ph.D. in microbiology and virology before beginning her career at the Slovak

Academy of Sciences, where she specialised in plant viruses. Working with key partners is also an important enabler. The process of successfully implementing zero-pesticide cultivation also involved working with specialised experts in biological protection from France and Spain. Both Dr. Nagyová and her husband are employees of the Bezdínek farm. In 2017 when the Bezdínek company established its large-capacity greenhouses, both were involved from the start and the assistance of her husband was essential.

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CEO and founder of Naturest Ltd., Rita Porkka's nature service company offers environmental education and nature-based wellbeing services in the forest environment of Northern Ostrobothnia.

One motivation for Rita was to harness existing expertise to build a business. After working for 20 years in various rural development projects weaving connections between communities, landscapes, and livelihoods, Rita started to wish to do something else with her life and put her accumulated expertise into new use. This led to the establishment of Naturest in 2020 with two other women. Rita is also driven by utilising nature as a tool for well-being and sustainable development. Rita turned her lifelong love of nature into a force for education, well-being, and sustainable development. For Rita, rural nature offers space and freedom that feeds creative thinking. The company is directed by the Visit Finland

Sustainable Travel and Green Activities labels. Social responsibility is also a driver, such as through internships, also for immigrants. Rita has also arranged free events for example for Ukrainian refugee families and children with different disabilities. Recently, Rita's passion has focused on regenerative tourism and the development of accessible services.

An obstacle that has faced Naturest Ltd is responding and adapting in the face of unexpected shocks. Naturest began by offering immersive, hands-on learning experiences for schoolchildren and then expanding to international educational travel groups. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Naturest had to rethink its services looking to opportunities closer to home. Naturest adapted and expanded its offering that now includes forest schools and creative workshops, meetings for companies in nature, as well as rehabilitative nature care sessions for individuals and small groups.

Since 2022, Naturest has been running the Nature Cafe Loppula at Sanginjoki nature conservation area, a space where visitors can connect with nature. Networks are an important enabler. Working too independently is risky for small business. A network of partners is important to supporting small rural businesses such as Naturest. Working closely with other local small companies and entrepreneurs is part of how running this business operates. This provides a support network and strengthens the businesses for mutual benefit. Re-thinking innovation has also enabled Naturest Ltd. A novel insight on what innovation is sits at the heart of Naturest. Innovation does not have to be about technology or a totally new service but novel ideas around how communities engage with their natural surroundings are core to the innovation embedded in Naturest.

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Rita Porkka



Sonja Jokiranta

Founder of Luovuuden Lakeus, Sonja Jokiranta has created a unique farm-based social enterprise in rural Finland, where animals, nature and creativity are powerful tools for healing, grounding and renewal.

A key driver for Sonja was fulfilling a lifelong dream: to live in the countryside and build a meaningful, human-centred business. In 2015, she made that dream a reality by purchasing a small farm and moving to the Finnish countryside. Her vision was never simply to live on a farm – it was to build a pioneering Green Care enterprise with a strong social mission. Over the years, Sonja has developed two interconnected branches within Luovuuden Lakeus. The Satumaa (Fairylane) branch is dedicated to experiential wellbeing, creativity, music, nature connection and multisensory experiences. Internationally, Satumaa can be described as Care Farm Alchemy, capturing the transformation that occurs when human presence, animals, nature and creative expression interact in ways that support emotional regulation and personal restoration. It also provides expert services and consulting grounded in the concept of the Architecture of Humanity, supporting organisations in strengthening humane leadership, emotional intelligence and innovation capacity. The Sarastus (Dawnlight) branch provides formal social and

therapeutic services. Sarastus integrates experiential, embodied, arts-based and animal-assisted methods into professional practice. Services include animal-assisted therapeutic work, family- and couple-oriented psycho-therapeutic approaches, and various public-sector commissioned social care services.

One of the central obstacles Sonja has faced is the limited understanding and institutional support for rural Green Care and women-led enterprises. Innovative rural wellbeing businesses often fall outside traditional agricultural support structures, making financial and structural backing difficult to access. Sonja has actively worked to increase awareness among key public and private actors across the rural and wellbeing sectors. As a forerunner in this field, she is now widely recognised; FIDA has named her Benefactor of the Year for her contribution.

What has enabled Sonja's work is her ability to combine her professional expertise with rural life and farming. With a background in dance, music and social services — and a deep understanding of therapeutic, creative and experiential methods — she has created a place where nature, animals and human connection form an integrated landscape of care. Her small farm is home to horses, sheep, dogs, rabbits and even a tortoise, all contributing to the experiential and therapeutic environment. The development of Luovuuden Lakeus has been gradual and organic. When Sonja first moved to the farm in 2015, she continued teaching dance and cared only for a few horses. By 2017, sheep joined the pastures, and the farm slowly began evolving into more than a personal haven. Between 2021 and 2022, she officially opened her doors to the public sector, launching Satumaa and Sarastus, establishing Luovuuden Lakeus as an innovative rural Green Care enterprise.



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Anja Frey

What began as a cow-fed calf rearing concept on Anja Frey's farm evolved into a regional marketing initiative where Anja is now the Value Chain Manager.

Driving this initiative was an interest in ethical and sustainable calf rearing. More than twenty years ago, Anja Frey and her husband introduced cow-fed calf rearing on their Demeter-certified dairy farm. In this system, calves stay with the cows for three months and drink from the udder. Some calves remain on the farm after the cow fed rearing period and become dairy cows themselves, the other calves go to slaughter. The concept has been adopted by neighbouring farmers. The meat of these calves is sold under a premium label. It has become a regional marketing initiative, together with the Geifertshofen Village Dairy, the Hohenlohe Bruderkalb Initiative, and the Schwäbisch Hall Producers' Association.

One obstacle was tapping into a new market and maintaining economic viability. The logistical processes involved in creating a market from scratch is challenging. Partners in processing and retail need to be persuaded and willing to take risks. Customers must value the added effort and price premium. Farmers face higher costs of cow-

fed rearing and the complexity of marketing niche products. Economic viability is a major challenge for everyone involved in the value chain. What has enabled this initiative are the networking, organising and influencing skills of women. Much of the hands-on organising, negotiating, and building of the initiative was carried out by women. They designed the label, held talks with processors and retailers, and became visible role models for sustainable change. Anja Frey engaged in the alignment of forces of the different organisations and pushed forward for the development of the joint label.

Another enabler has been gradual growth of an idea embedded in the farming community. Anja applied this system and adjusted the management steadily during her own learning-by-doing period. Now as the Value Chain Manager, she advises the farms on all issues related to cow-fed calf rearing, organises training events, marketing and informs customers.

Learn more



Linda Kelly

Farming alongside her husband and parents, Linda Kelly defined an innovative place for herself on the family farm through her vision for developing a product range anchored around the potential held in the sweet lupin legume.

A driver for Linda was a vision for a more resilient, health-conscious, and sustainable food system. The Kelly farm is run according to the Bioland standard. It contributes to biodiversity and nature conservation. Farm nutrient cycles have been closed. They keep beef cattle, cultivate around 350 hectares of grassland and arable land with 16 different crops and produce renewable energy. As far as possible, all byproducts of the sweet lupin enterprise are utilised on the farm. She was also driven to anchor a place on the farm for herself. Linda's sweet lupin enterprise has anchored her role on the farm and provided a place for her entrepreneurial spirit and innovative ideas to flourish. Linda processes sweet lupins into dry products such as lupin coffee, seasoning, flour, meal and flakes. Sweet lupins are also used to make spirits and cosmetic products from lupin oil.

Acceptance of a novel product was an obstacle. Developing a novel product range can be met with scepticism and doubt, which Linda faced. However,

her vision, determination and family support helped her turn this obstacle into a motivating challenge to overcome. Gaining recognition and visibility for innovation has been one enabler. Unconventional ideas can take time to be accepted and celebrated for their value and innovation, but this happened for Linda when she was named Entrepreneur of the Year by the German Rural Women's Association in 2018 and received the prestigious CERES Award in 2019. For Linda, the accolades are less about prestige and more about visibility as a woman in farming with innovative vision. What has also enabled Linda's innovation is changing market demands and dietary habits. Even though Linda's lupin products were first met with scepticism, her success has proven how farms can tap into wider trends such as declining meat consumption and increased demand for plant proteins. The product taps into this wider trend and uses multiple sales channels including their farm shop, online sales and resellers across the region.

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Blátnaid Gallagher

An organic wool and lamb producer, Blátnaid runs several enterprises at Murray Meadows farm. But at the centre is an initiative that works to champion and preserve Ireland's native wool, the Galway Wool Co-op.

One driver for Blátnaid is to promote local wool and revive a tradition that intertwines sustainability and heritage. Blátnaid became increasingly aware of the lack of appreciation for native Irish wool and the declining population of the Galway purebred sheep. The species has less than 1500 breeding females left in the world. This was a key driver to promote Galway Wool more widely as a sustainable and locally grown bio-fibre as well as revive its value and provide fair compensation to farmers. Another driver were Blátnaid's family roots and personal aspirations. Despite growing up in Galway city, Blátnaid always felt a pull towards the countryside. The family kept ties with rural Ireland leaving Blátnaid connected to her roots and developing a love for the land. Blátnaid inherited the farm in 2016 and now has a flock of pure bred registered native Irish Galway sheep.

A broad challenging obstacle identified by Blátnaid is breaking through the traditional perceptions of women in agriculture. She identifies that women

have a strong ability to organise, manage and innovate. To overcome this obstacle, it is important women support each other and share experiences to assist transformation of the agricultural landscape and a prosperous future for the next generations.

What has enabled this innovation includes Blátnaid's professional experience, personal capacities and networks. Blátnaid's experience in sales and product management has equipped her with key skills. The Galway Wool Co-op works to restore consistent routes to market for native Irish Galway wool. A strong network of support is also key. The collective action embedded in the Galway Wool Co-op is also an enabler. It is a collective of 70 pedigree registered Galway Sheep flocks across Ireland, encompassing a range of sizes from five to 80 sheep. The co-operative's strategic focus is on establishing unique market opportunities for Galway Wool both domestically and internationally. The co-op also provides a space to exchange knowledge and best practices of what can be created with wool as well as education and peer support for wool growers who are new or existing owners of Galway Sheep.



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Ursula Kelly

A family involved in agribusiness since 1985, Ursula Kelly is Managing Director of Cormac Tagging, supplier of cattle, sheep, pig and goat identification products.

One driver underpinning Cormac Tagging is Ursula Kelly as the next generation in this rural business. Ursula is the second generation at the helm of this family business and has led the business to a new level enabling significant growth. Growing up on a sheep farm in the west of Ireland instilled a strong work ethic and a passion for agribusiness in Ursula Kelly and this laid the foundation for what would become a deep dedication to the field. Another core driver was the market opportunity for Cormac Tagging products and services. Ursula saw that Cormac Tagging had capacity and potential to expand the animal identification tags offered from just the sheep market to also the cattle market. At this time only one supplier was approved to supply farmers with cattle tags by the Irish Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine.

Ursula experienced the common obstacle of gaining finance on her business journey. Working in a traditionally male-dominated industry, Ursula has faced obstacles in accessing finance and gaining support

at various levels. Determination and strategic networking have been key to overcoming this. This issue of generational change was also a challenge. The more social and emotional challenge of changing the business direction, bringing new ideas and expansion as generational change occurred is also something Ursula notes as part of her journey.

Embracing digitalisation has been an enabler. Ursula's has embraced digitalisation in business for example by developing an ecommerce platform and digitalising the businesses in house processes. Partnerships, such as with Censortec and Alfco, also build on digital solutions for farmers combining animal identification and monitoring solutions in the product offering. Networks are an important enabler. Other entrepreneurs in rural business will have experienced similar challenges and can offer sound advice and guidance. Ursula sees the importance of networking with the community of people who face similar challenges in business and across farming.

[Learn more](#)

Sarah Khoudja

Leaving behind a demanding career in Brussels to pursue a slower, more purposeful life, Sarah Khoudja established CuCilento, a workshop where discarded agricultural and maritime materials are given a second life in a tailoring upcycling laboratory.

One driver for Sarah Khoudja is to protect the environment, create a social impact and employment. CuCilento collects olive harvest nets, boat sails, coffee sacks, and agricultural bin bags, transforming them into durable shopping bags, fashionable accessories, and zero-waste lifestyle solutions. The innovation creates something new from something old through upcycling. CuCilento is about environmental sustainability but also creating social impact in a region where many women still lack work opportunities. Another driver is spreading the culture of upcycling. Through CuCilento Sarah organises sewing workshops for children and adults to spread the culture of upcycling. This is spreading the culture of upcycling and recycling in a region where these concepts are still unpopular. An obstacle experienced was access to funding and navigating regulations. Sarah invested finance from her own savings to develop the enterprise. Innovation involves risk

and Sarah was aware of this gamble. Navigating Italy's complex legal and administrative system proved another uphill battle.

Enablers supporting Sarah Khoudja included a support programme for women entrepreneurs. Sarah participated in the Empowering Women in Agri-food programme, co-financed by the EU. The programme provides training to support women entrepreneurs to develop their business idea. Collaboration and teamwork is also an important enabler. Support has come from many directions. Sarah describes CuCilento as a team effort. She works alongside her husband, who runs his own business, and relies on the dedication of local women tailors. Sarah has also been promoter of the Circe women's collective and its transformation into a non-profit association.

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Sofia De Matteis manages Avamposto Agricolo Autonomo with her partner, an ethological donkey farm that also promotes outdoor education in Calabria, Italy.

A driver for Sofia De Matteis is to build an ethological farming project on abandoned land. Sofia and her partner moved to Calabria in 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic. They bought abandoned land and began to restore it after not being used for over 50 years. The farm project is based on the principle of learning from the territory and from its inhabitants, revaluing

the rich cultural heritage. Also driving Avamposto Agricolo Autonomo is land as a heritage and educational setting. They cultivate traditional crops such as wild artichokes and have reintroduced donkeys and other animals to live freely in a large land plot. They also organise outdoor education activities for tourists as well as for local children and marginalised people, such as migrants living in the area.

One obstacle was to challenge the development model and vision for rural areas. The approach of Sofia De Matteis reminds us that slowness,

rootedness, and listening are radical. When Sofia returned to the region she saw potential. Her approach shows that the people left in and who return to rural villages are crucial to the future. Her vision is to reclaim the South not as a place of abandonment, but as a frontier of alternative futures. Sofia has also been a promoter of the association We're South, a network of local operators and farmers celebrating the slowness and uniqueness of rural villages in the region.

Funding to help expand and diversify enabled Avamposto Agricolo Autonomo's development. Funding received through

a national programme has enabled Sofia to work towards opening a kindergarten for local children. The project is in its final stages and will focus on the principles of living in harmony with the local environment and with animals. Another enabler was to listen and respond to the needs and traditions of the region. The Avamposto Agricolo Autonomo farm is harnessing the value of heritage and tradition. The reintroduction of donkeys for example was met with emotion by the elders in the community. They brought back a familiar sound long gone from the village building on symbolic and ancestral traditions.



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Sofia De Matteis



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Mieke Elzenga

LiberTerra is an ecovillage founded by Mieke Elzenga and a group of environmentally conscious citizens. The LiberTerra Knowledge Centre is now run by Mieke and showcases how abandoned agricultural spaces can be transformed into thriving centres for learning, living, and environmental stewardship.

Driving LiberTerra was a growing crisis in the Dutch countryside, with many farmers leaving the land. With fertile land and farmhouses empty, Mieke saw an opportunity and envisioned a future where these neglected spaces could be re-purposed to address some of society's most pressing challenges: housing shortages, the need for sustainable living, and the desire for community-orientated education. Another driver was to support more sustainable living through social innovation. LiberTerra, an eco-village of 10 relocatable tiny houses, promotes biobased construction and sustainable living. Built from natural and upcycled materials, many houses are off-grid and designed for easy relocation. A permaculture garden with rainwater harvesting encourages self-sufficient food production. Also behind LiberTerra is a vision that transformative potential lies in every community. Developing LiberTerra's ecovillage has resulted in

huge learning. This is the idea behind LiberTerra Knowledge Centre that it can take this knowledge to help other eco-villages to develop.

Navigating land use regulations proved an obstacle. Navigating the complex web of regulations surrounding land use has been a major challenge. When land is categorised for specific uses (e.g. agricultural, residential, or industrial) it difficult to re-purpose it for mixed or alternative uses. Key to overcoming this obstacle was to work within the system and collaborate with others as a way to create new possibilities. Building networks and working together collaboratively has enabled LiberTerra. Mieke's innovative approach to rural development is deeply collaborative. She emphasises the importance of building strong relationships with local authorities, entrepreneurs, and civil leaders. Blending the expertise and goals of various stakeholders, is a key strength.



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Learn more



Annette Harberink

The Warmonderhof Foundation supports cultivating both the land and future generations of sustainable farmers and Annette Harberink is its Director.

Annette Harberink is driven by a vision for more sustainable farming systems. To support more sustainable farming there is a need to change mindsets and build skills in methods such as biodynamic farming. There is also a need for more women and young people leading these types of farms. To support this vision, the foundation provides hands-on training and student accommodation within 85 hectares of farmland. Annette Harberink is also driven to pioneer new ideas for more holistic change. Pioneering new ideas and in-

novation can be challenging, however it fuels Annette's motivation. Annette Harberink's work aims to ensure that biodynamic agriculture survives, grows and evolves.

It has been an obstacle to enter farming the atypical way. Annette does not come from a farming background but always knew she wanted to farm. Without a family farm to inherit, she built her path into farming through a different route and had to overcome obstacles to learn, gain access to land and build a biodynamic farm over twelve years. The approach of education supporting transformation has been an enabler. For the next generation education and skills are key to ensuring biodynamic agriculture can thrive. The work of

the foundation involves coordinating closely with Aeres MBO Dronten Warmonderhof, an accredited educational institution offering diplomas in biodynamic farming. Forming coalitions with like-minded others is also an important enabler. Networks and working with others that share similar vision can help make visions real. For example, in 2019, she co-initiated Caring Farmers, a growing coalition promoting circular agriculture. The network advocates for systems that restore rather than extract, drawing on Community Supported Agriculture, humane practices, and collaborative leadership.



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[Learn more](#)

Patricia Marina Toma

A photographer and documentary filmmaker, Patricia Marina Toma founded MarinArt. Cultural, Educational, and Arts Centre, working closely with her community to preserve and build cultural heritage and social cohesion.

A motivation driving Patricia Marina Toma is art as a vehicle for education, learning and collaboration. Being involved in art and culture projects impacts how the children perceive themselves and the world, teaching them to value their own creativity, learn about their emotions and how they collaborate with others. Patricia's innovations have brought educational activities to children locally and she is motivated by access to education through art. Another driver fuelling Patricia Marina Toma's innovation is to give visibility to traditions and tell the community's story. Patricia's work has included pioneering a local cultural festival as a participative event for the community which would tell their story. Her photography storytelling projects focusing on the rural elderly have also not only filled a void in Romanian society by enriching it culturally, but

also socially by giving visibility to the elderly population.

Resources to support community based artistic and cultural activities is a challenging obstacle. Accessing external support remains difficult, but Patricia Marina Toma has successfully realised community cultural projects, including festivals and exhibitions. Early in life, the local context resulted in Patricia having limited access to services and resources to enable the nurturing of her artistic talent and passions. She gained formal training at university but sees the important value of bringing chances for youth to engage in arts and culture projects from an early age.

Partnerships have been an important enabler. Post-pandemic, she partnered with an NGO securing national funding for art-based education projects benefitting children and women in Marin and surrounding areas. Artists and trainers from across Romania convened in Marin to lead workshops in storytelling, illustration, theatre, photography, documentary filmmaking, and textiles. Local cultural heritage

has been an enabling resource. Patricia's work builds on the rich local cultural heritage and traditions. For example, the festival has included diverse cultural activities: the reenactment of a local wedding ritual in traditional costumes, tastings of local gastronomy, exhibitions and educational workshops with children.

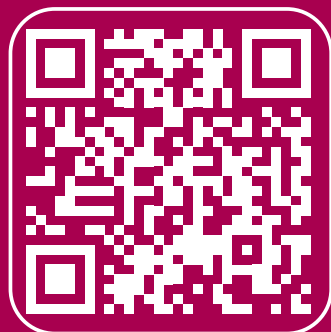


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Anca Veronica Marcu



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A local leader driving change in her home village of Cojocna, Romania, Anca Veronica Marcu has served as vice mayor and was elected as first woman mayor. She has initiated a range of projects that have contributed to revitalising her community.

A driver for Anca Veronica Marcu is to positively influence local development. Anca Veronica Marcu's work is driving concrete lasting positive change in Cojocna. Her vision identified the potential in local resources as well as unmet local needs. She led the revitalization of the Cojocna Baths turning it into a profitable enterprise and revitalising a key local asset, as well as environmental initiatives like introducing the village's first recycling program and tree planting campaigns. Shifting social and cultural attitudes towards women in leadership has also driven Anca Veronica Marcu. She has challenged stereotypes. Her leadership has inspired other women to pursue active roles in public life and seek leadership positions.

Gendered perceptions of who belongs in public positions has been an obstacle for Anca Veronica Marcu. She met resistance and a strong mentality around how a woman could manage the responsibilities of public adminis-

tration. As the first woman mayor of Cojocna, she has reshaped the way local leadership is understood in her own community and Romania's wider rural landscape.

Professional experience at home and abroad has enabled Anca Veronica Marcu's work. She got her first experience of public service in her role as a teacher in Cojocna. In her early twenties, she moved to Spain, working as a social educator and becoming active in the union movement. This gave Anca Veronica Marcu understanding of community, solidarity and the power of organised action. When she returned home a decade later, she was determined to put her experience to work. Active engagement with the community is also an enabler. Despite resistance, Anca Veronica Marcu actively engaged in the community, discussing issues and potential solutions with residents. She listened closely to the concerns of each ethnic group in her diverse community. Her authenticity and determination paid off, breaking barriers and getting elected.

[Learn more](#)



Watch the video



Petra Matos

Park Istra, co-founded by Petra Matos, is a vibrant hub of solidarity, learning, and global cooperation in rural Slovenia. The initiative addresses local needs through volunteer work, connecting people from around the world in a shared mission to create positive change.

Driven by a deep belief in volunteering as a force for personal growth and community development, Petra envisions a world where people support one another and act for the common good. Through Park Istra, she promotes the idea of being the change you want to see, nurturing solidarity in a time when many societies face growing isolation. Park Istra not only strengthens volunteering and community engagement but also contributes to green job creation in rural areas and inspires young people to return to the countryside to help, learn, and grow.

Like many innovative initiatives, Park Istra faced challenges in its early years—particularly the struggle to secure continuous funding and to convince others of the value of a new idea. The steady support of the European Solidarity Corps has since become crucial to sustaining its work. Inspired by her volunteer experience on a reforestation project in India, Petra, together with her husband Dr. Janez Matos, founded Park Istra in 2013. Through perseverance and collaboration, they built understanding and trust in their vision.

Today, Park Istra is a trusted partner to more than 50 organisations and has established itself as a cornerstone of Slovenia's civic landscape, demonstrating that volunteering can truly transform both people and places.

[Learn more](#)

Saša Kržič

Pioneering the new business idea of growing micro vegetables in Slovenia, Saša Kržič has developed two well-known and established brands Mikrozelenje Šebenik and Bloomy.

Driving Saša Kržič is taking a new business path to build a rewarding livelihood. Saša studied economics and had taken a conventional career path. However, during her maternity leave, she began a path towards something more aligned with her values and lifestyle. She was dissatisfied with her previous job. Its rhythm and meaning were not satisfying and did not suit her lifestyle. In 2014, Saša embarked on a completely new business path, and she built a business with her partner Boštjan.

Building knowledge, finding the right partners and financial support have been obstacles. As pioneers in microgreens there was no real knowledge, support and even demand. Saša

embarked on intensive research and experimentation in the cultivation of microgreens. Other difficulties were a lack of the right partners and financial support. Built with determination and over time, the business gradually succeeded.

Being a pioneer in steering a growing interest in microgreens has been an enabling strength. What was an obstacle became an enabler. Saša is leading a movement toward sustainable, local food production, also driving new culinary trends. Microgreens have gained visibility and have been included in the strategies and tenders of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food and in the protocols of the National Institute of Public Health. The business also placed emphasis on education and empowerment, running online courses, as well as working with schools and kindergartens.

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Isabel Sánchez Tejado



Founder of Escuela de Turismo Generativo, Isabel Sánchez Tejado has spearheaded an online training school that provides training in sustainable management models for rural tourist destinations.

Spreading a model for more sustainable rural tourism is a core driver of Escuela de Turismo Generativo. The business provides training in a new management model for rural tourist destinations aiming to boost demand for tourist services, developing a less seasonal tourism model, while safeguarding and enhancing natural resources. Training is also customised for specific destinations.

Strengthening a message of positive rural futures underpins motivations for Isabel's work. Her podcast Mundo Rural en Positivo or Rural World in a Positive Light is co-hosted with a colleague based in France's Limousin region, Raket Sanes. Inspiring individuals are interviewed each week demonstrating that rural living is both viable and desirable. One obstacle has been building local trust and understanding of the value of sustainable tourism. Isabel takes a locally rooted approach to convince local stakeholders and build trust and community through personal interaction and empathy. Depopulation can also add to this challenge when fewer residents and those that remain can be deeply attached to traditional ways.

Demand for training in sustainable tourism practices was key enabler leading Isabel Sánchez Tejado to establish Escuela de Turismo Generativo. In 2011, Isabel revitalised a local entrepreneurs' association and formed a working group to develop sustainable tourism practices that honour traditions, gastronomy, and landscape heritage in Gredos, Spain. Word spread of the success of this initiative and Isabel received requests from other regions.

Natalia Díaz

Founder of Ecoalpisa in 2017, producer of reusable beeswax food wraps and in 2020, La Abejera, a unique space for eco-agrotourism and environmental education, Natalia Díaz's innovations embed her passion for nature and sustainability.

A value-based driver for Natalia Díaz is care of her home territory by taking care of bees. Natalia works with ecological apiculture that respects bees to keep the soil alive. Building knowledge and skills of others on biodiversity and sustainability issues is also a motivation. She teaches both children and countless adults about bees, biodiversity, and the dangers of plastic pollution. La Abejera initiation courses in apiculture as well as internships for students are offered from the University of La Laguna and the Institute of Occupational Training. Building a small rural, island project in a global, unpredictable system has been a challenging obstacle, such as

developing a novel local product that must compete with imported products and more widely navigating the demands of administration and bureaucracy. Island businesses can also face specific challenges and support systems often are not flexible to provide the right supports when needed.

Natalia Díaz's own capacities, her passion and persistence have been an important enabler. She believes strongly in her work and innovation as both a personal and professional mission. The innovations show how a different way of doing things and multifunctional agriculture has a great potential. Collaboration with other local and non-local partners is an important enabler of Ecoalpisa. This sustainable business works at the local level but also collaborates with universities and other European entities on biodiversity conservation projects.

[Learn more](#)



Watch the video



Watch the video



Alexandra Larsson

Founded by Alexandra Larsson in 2014, the driving school Rosa Kortet offers modern, innovative driver's license education.

Alexandra Larsson was initially driven to modernise a tired model. Rosa Kortet started by employing only women driving instructors. Driving instructors tend to be male and Alexandra identified a need for a new approach, also working with modern driving instruction pedagogy.

One obstacle faced was perceptions by others. When Alexandra started her business she heard negative perceptions relating to women's capacity to run a business and how long the business would last. But now more than 10 years old, Rosa Kortet is proving how such negative perceptions are wrong. Driving improvements is a pleasant challenge. Alexandra Larsson challenge's herself to always drive improvements. She holds a goal to continually evolve as

a woman leader, to improve the company's services and be a strong leader of the Rosa Kortet team to ensure they are also empowered to grow. Building networks but also taking a break from the business bubble are important routes to achieving these improvements.

Approaching things differently has been an enabler. While Rosa Kortet started by employing only women driving instructors they have now moved beyond this approach. Still, the lesson was that many driving students wanted a fresh approach and that is what Rosa Kortet offers. Embracing new techniques has also been an enabler. Rosa Kortet has strongly embraced innovation available in the driving sector, being owner of one of Sweden's first driving simulators and using modern pedagogy and psychology as part of its driving instruction approach.

[Learn more](#)



Watch the video



Malin Axelsson

One of the pioneers behind Ödevata Gård & Gårdshotell, Malin Axelsson has created a rural tourist destination with sustainability at its core. An initial driver was to live closer to nature: In 2005, Malin Axelsson and her husband Magnus bought a neglected farm and dilapidated property. They held a vision to transform it into a distinctive destination including modern small-scale agriculture. Ödevata Gårdshotell now includes hotel rooms, lodges, cabins, and camping alongside an aquaponic agricultural cultivation system, permaculture vegetable production and biochar production.

Another key motivation was to build a place supporting sustainability as a way of life. The motivation to live closer to nature transformed into a mission to inspire sustainability-led transformation. Motivated to create more than a hotel, guests that stay at Ödevata Gårdshotell experience an exemplary model of sustainable practices and can leave inspired to replicate them.

One obstacle could be described as finding all the pieces of the puzzle. Malin

Axelsson started with an awareness that you do not need to have all the answers from the start and worked to find and develop all the necessary pieces to build Ödevata Gårdshotell. For example, when Malin discovered permaculture, it put together a large piece of the puzzle for how they would work and gave a framework to design their vegetable production but also wider lifestyle.

Malin Axelsson's innovation and initiative is enabled by a strong support network. Working in equal partnership with her husband Magus has been an important part of the Ödevata Gårdshotell story. Malin's wider outlook is to surround yourself with people that support you and this will create a mutually beneficial support network.

Sustainability is an enabling asset for the Ödevata Gårdshotell. From aiming to be climate-positive, to the biochar production that is a key part of Ödevata's circular systems, the deep and comprehensive focus on sustainability is a strong part of the strength of Ödevata Gårdshotell.

[Learn more](#)

3. INNOVATION LESSONS: FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

3.1 GOOD PRACTICE FROM THE GROUND UP: WOMEN-LED INNOVATION IN ACTION

The FLIARA case studies have brought to light ways that women successfully navigate the world of innovation and entrepreneurship in rural and farming contexts. In this section we have identified a set of practices that enable women-leading rural and farm innovations. These are intended to provide lessons from the ground up that can assist current and future women-led innovation in these contexts.

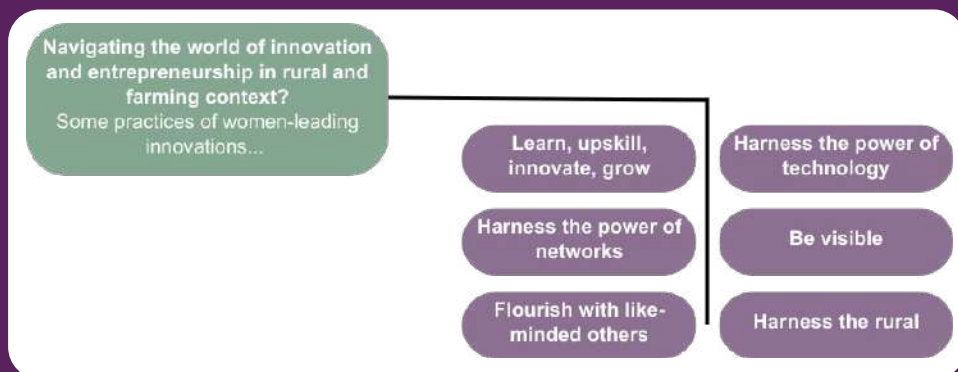


Figure 7: Some practices of women leading innovations in rural areas and farming

The Practice Abstracts developed for the FLIARA project also offer practical guidance and highlight women's vital contributions to rural sustainability. We draw on a range of these in this section, to explore them click below.

Practice Abstracts

3.1.1 HARNESS THE POWER OF NETWORKS

The value of networks and networking to women-led innovation is clear from both the FLIARA case study and future foresight research. Networks can serve different purposes for women such as assisting knowledge sharing, connecting with collaborators, building reputation as well as providing a source of peer support and motivation. FLIARA has outlined some tips for practice below that aim to assist building an effective network.

Research networking opportunities

As a first step, knowing what networks are available to women leading innovations in rural and farming contexts can be useful. This should help innovators make an informed choice about what networking activities to take part in. Specific organisations, wider business or sector-specific networks or even personal and family networks could open important connections. Networking requires a time investment so knowing what is out there and selecting the networking activities that appear most beneficial should help support a more strategic approach to networking.

Adopt a networking strategy

Depending on the stage of involvement in innovation, networking needs may differ. Women starting out on their innovation journey or those that have moved afresh to build their innovation in a rural area may lack networks and particularly need to focus on building and utilising them. Women can become part of women-only targeted networks if they feel they are valuable, but there are also benefits to wider and diverse networks at different scales. Different kinds of networks bring different kinds of benefits, for example building a local community network can support local engagement versus connecting with another innovator in the same or a similar field can support peer to peer learning.

Still want to dig deeper?

To explore further see Practice Abstract 3 'Networking: A key facilitator for rural and farm women-led innovation' (Sivini et. al., 2025, p.11) and Practice Abstract 8 'Connecting Women: A driver for agricultural innovation' (Weir et. al., 2025, p.19).

3.1.2 FLOURISH WITH LIKE-MINDED OTHERS

Connections developed through networks can have a different nature. For example, connecting with wide and varied networks can provide exposure to new ideas helping to ensure external ideas influence innovation practice. Connecting with like-minded others on a more ongoing level, and with specific goals in mind, can also be an enabler of women-led innovation.

Collaborations and partnerships

Women leading innovations describe the benefits of cooperating with others, such as innovators in a similar field to work on collective marketing, or public bodies that share some similar goals where specific projects or services can be developed together. Rarely any of the innovators in FLIARA went on their innovation journey all alone. They explored formal and informal collaborations and partnerships.

Be a role model

Women leading innovations in rural and farm contexts can also be pioneers of their innovation in that context. They may incorporate knowledge exchange and spread novel approaches directly into their innovation practice. They can aim to inspire for example certain sustainable practices, such as more sustainable lifestyle practices or farming methods.

Still want to dig deeper?

To explore further see Practice Abstract 8 'Building confidence and self-esteem in rural women innovators' and Practice Abstract 10 'Inspiring change: scaling your innovation by imitation' (Sivini et. al., 2025, p.16 and p.18).

Find role models

Other women can act as role models and provide broad inspiration, motivation or even practical tips for action. Role models might be identified from networks or could be someone there is more direct collaboration with. They could also be more distant others. In the age of digital media, rural and farm women can also gain inspiration and motivation from role models they identify with through digital networks and social media platforms.

Know your value

Women leading innovations in rural and farming contexts may not see themselves as innovators or entrepreneurs. These kinds of labels can be something women do not immediately identify with. In some of the FLIARA case study contexts, women even felt the 'imposter syndrome'. A strong support network of like-minded others can help manage this issue, build and maintain confidence.

3.1.3 LEARN, UPSKILL, INNOVATE, GROW

Women leading innovations in farming and rural areas are skilled individuals with strong expertise and capacities in their fields of innovation. However, in an ever-changing world, and as innovation throws new challenges and innovators take another step on their journey, additional skills and knowledge can be an important enabler.

Different stages, different skills

Different stages of the innovation journey taken by women in rural areas and farming can demand different skills and knowledge. At the start of the journey, skills in starting and day to day running of an enterprise can be critical, while later on understanding routes to diversify and develop a business can become important. Soft skills can also be important at any stage, such as personal resilience and leadership skills. Skills and knowledge can also be gained formally and informally and finding the right balance is key to life-long learning.

Everyday learning

There are many strategies to continue learning and upskilling. Formal training courses often demand a time and cost investment. Women leading innovations in farming and rural areas can themselves seek out the skills they are missing, rather than take a business course or enrol in a business development scheme. Innovators can take a proactive and self-learning approach to overcome pressing skills gaps. This might involve tapping into networks and learning from peers, learn by doing or connecting with a mentor.

The importance of formal training

All this said, sometimes joining a structured formal training programme can be a game changer, providing missing pieces of the puzzle for innovation, but also providing time out to reflect and connect with new peers. More formal training can also take more innovative learning approaches. A network-based peer to peer approach to learning can be a valuable approach to building entrepreneurial skills, as well as practice-based learning.

Still want to dig deeper?

To explore further see Practice Abstract 12 'Training for Women Innovating in Farming and Rural Areas' (Weir et. al., 2025, p.24).

3.1.4 HARNESS THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY

One strength of women leading rural and farm innovations is how they apply relevant digital and technological solutions in developing and supporting their innovation. The benefits of harnessing the power of technology and digitalisation can include for example improving efficiencies, saving time and opening access to new customers and markets. Harnessing technology can mean tapping into the power of newer trends such as AI, but also there can be both high-tech and low-tech applications of technology. Rural broadband can be a challenge when using tools that rely on good internet connectivity and ensuring it is enhanced in all rural communities is also key.

The power of the web

Online sales and e-commerce can help to connect directly with consumers as well as reach broader markets. Digital marketing, such as using social media and producing content such as podcasts or videos, can also share the wider story of innovation. The web can also be a tool to gain and share knowledge and information. Online training, such as through on demand online courses or wider web-based courses can connect innovators to tailored knowledge and build new skills.

Keeping pace with technology

Building a more technological and digital outlook and actively seeking out information can help innovators to stay apace with relevant digital and technological solutions. To stay apace with technology in your field can mean availing of training or also just keep-

ing an ear to the ground such as through following trends highlighted in the media and being discussed in your networks. This can also include an awareness around risks that need to be managed such as related to cyber security and managing data.

Still want to dig deeper?

To explore further see Practice Abstract 4 'Web use by rural innovators' (Sivini et. al., 2025, p.12) and Practice Abstract 5 'Unlocking the power of digital tools' (Weir et. al., 2025, p.15).

3.1.5 BE VISIBLE

One objective of the FLIARA project has been to increase the visibility of women leading innovations in agriculture and rural areas showcasing their role in sustainable development and innovation in farming and the rural economy. This has involved research to understand needs and opportunities better, as well as direct communications efforts through the Campaign of Visibility and CoP Network. The activities of women leading innovations themselves can see them working on being visible in a range of spaces.

Harness the diversity of visibility opportunities Showcase wider innovation impacts

Marketing activities are central to gaining visibility, but complementary activities such as gaining recognition by applying for awards or media engagement such as through local and national media can also improve the visibility. Women-led innovation can be based around novel ideas and harnessing the diversity of visibility opportunities can provide both recognition for innovative efforts as well as more widely contributing to shifting more traditional mindsets.

The FLIARA case studies have also illustrated how women leading innovations in rural and farming contexts can also pursue wider goals, such as influencing policy change, local development or driving forward a message on the importance of sustainability. Working on these issues can go in tandem with their innovation, while also can be driven by wider personal and professional experiences.

Be visible on different levels

Being visible in the market is key, but women leading innovations can also work to be more visible and connect in their own local community. The FLIARA CoP Network aimed to assist innovators not just connect and communicate with a range of policy stakeholders, but also increase women-led innovation's visibility to policymakers and increase their understanding of the value of women-led rural and farm innovation.

Still want to dig deeper?

To explore further see Practice Abstract 14 'Market Leadership: Investing in Rural Women's Commercial Growth' and Practice Abstract 15 'Amplifying Voices: Continuous Visibility for Rural Women Innovators' (Weir et. al., 2025, p.27 and p.28).

3.1.6 HARNESS THE RURAL

Women-led innovation can tap into the value of social, cultural, environmental assets that are embedded in rural areas and farms. A motivation for innovation can be harnessing and preserving underutilised resources in the rural area or farm. Innovations that are based in farming for example can involve farm diversification and adding new functions to the farm or rural innovations can harness cultural traditions to develop new services, for example. Building an innovation based on the local rural conditions is a strategy that FLIARA identified among some innovators and some traits underpinning their activities included:

Respond to local needs

Innovations that build on local needs can respond to motivations as diverse as local housing shortages to preserving local heritage that is being lost. Women-leading rural and farm innovations that serve local needs are often built on strong partnerships and networks.

Build on local resources

Rural areas and farms are rich in different kinds of capital, including natural and cultural capital. Women-leading innovations have built businesses that include impacts such as conserving and restoring the environment, providing environmental education functions or harnessing nature to provide care services. Innovations harnessing cultural capital can centre around preserving local heritage, culture and customs that also generate a range of valuable services such as related to education and tourism.

Realise a lifestyle change

Women leading rural and farm innovation can start on this pathway because of a wish for a more nature-connected life for themselves and their families or to take a change in their career direction. Deep interests can become the basis for an innovation driven by passion and vision.

Still want to dig deeper?

To explore further see Practice Abstract 1 'Why women innovate in rural Sweden and Finland' and 'Women-led Innovation in Multi-functional Farming' (Sivini et. al., 2025, p.9 and p.13).



3.2 GOOD PRACTICE FOR POLICY: SUPPORTING WOMEN-LED INNOVATION

How can policy strengthen the conditions for women-led rural and farm innovation and entrepreneurship? In this section we provide an overview of some of the important issues emerging from the FLIARA project. We discuss some current policy practices as well as ideas for new policies that can support overcoming obstacles and catalysing motivations of existing and future women innovators on their innovation pathway.



Figure 8: Policy support needs for women-led rural and farm innovation

The Policy Briefs developed for the FLIARA project also provide detailed insights on policy challenges and solutions. We draw on a range of these in this section, to explore them all see FLIARA Policy Briefs. All of the FLIARA Policy Briefs can also be found in the report D5.1 Policy Booklet and Policy Briefs (see Kang et. al., 2025).

More info

3.2.1 SUPPORTING ACCESS TO FINANCE

Access to finance is a key part of the critical enabling conditions for women-led innovations to start up and build a sustainable business model.

Women-led innovations can be under-funded, such as women innovators working without pay to develop their innovation, stifling their development or use personal finances in absence of other feasible finance supports. Public grants and finance supports are crucially important and FLIARA research shows that improving access to finance can be achieved through more diverse and better targeted measures. Women leading innovations in rural and farming contexts do tap into existing sources of financial support and can make use of a wide range of sources of public finance. However, the need for more targeted finance supports towards the more specific structures, needs and opportunities of rural and farm innovative and women-led business emerged.

✔ **Directly support rural and farm-based women-led start-ups:** Targeted support programmes towards women in rural areas and farming, or specific groups of women such as unemployed rural women, to start-up innovations provide important wider support and often include an access to finance component.

✔ In Germany, Baden-Württemberg's long running Innovative Measure for Women in Rural Areas programme includes the **provision of grants for start-up expenses of microenterprises** from €2,000 up to €160,000. To explore further see Germany's Policy Brief No. 2 'Empowering Rural Women through Tailored Measures'.

✔ **A proposal for an integrated voucher-based support scheme** offering start-up funding, entrepreneurship training, and personalised mentoring is identified as important in Slovenia. A good practice national programme (2015-2018) to promote women's entrepreneurship is also identified, primarily aimed towards unemployed women with higher education and a viable business idea, included grant support of €3,000-€5,000. To explore further see Slovenia's Policy Brief No. 1 'Start-up Finance, Training and Mentoring Vouchers for Rural Women'.

✔ **Support women in particular rural contexts to tap into novel areas of opportunity:** In Italy, the Innovative Mountain Women's Enterprise Scheme provides grants for women-led business projects with high technological and innovative content in mountain municipalities. Also in Italy, the 'More Enterprise

- Youth and Women Entrepreneurship in Agriculture' provides interest free finance for business expansion and improving competitiveness to women (and young people) intending to take over a farm or who have done so in the previous two years. To explore further see Italy's Policy Brief No. 2 'Funding and advisory services for women innovators in rural areas'.

✓ **Provide quick and easy access to microcredit:** In Spain, part of the Women's Business Support Program (PAEM) is providing microcredit of up to €30,000 without requiring third-party guarantees. To explore further see Spain's Policy Brief No.1 'Financial gaps and opportunities for rural women-led innovation projects'.

✓ **Wider grant schemes can also be designed to favour women:** In Ireland the CAP On-Farm Capital Investment Scheme supports increased farm efficiency and competitiveness by providing financial support to farmers. Grants are provided to cover 40% of costs however female and young farmers can claim 60% of the costs (up to a maximum investment ceiling). To explore further see Ireland's Policy Brief No.1 'Improve access to finance to better support women-led rural and farm innovation'.



More broadly, the FLIARA case studies and wider policy assessment point to how measures can take a different approach. Rather than just providing grants or loans, support can be provided for key business costs or reward certain types of practices (e.g. that support wider social or environmental goals) through for example tax reliefs.

✓ **Support wage costs:** Measures that support reduced wage costs for hiring employees in a start-up or micro/small rural innovative businesses can also support the business model economically. As part of our initial benchmarking report (Murtagh et al. 2024b) a policy needs assessment of the FLIARA case studies found evidence from the German case studies that pointed to an example where one innovator benefited from a federal employment scheme. This incentivised the hiring and retraining of long-term unemployed people through wage support.

✓ **Reward practices supporting sustainability:** As part of our initial benchmarking report (Murtagh et al., 2024b) one of the key emerging needs identified was to strengthen rural and farm economy renewal and sustainability with women-led innovation as a lever. It was also suggested in this report that there is a need for improved supports such as targeting social, cultural, environmental and digital rural and farm innovation. This idea is also echoed more widely in Finland's Policy Brief No. 3 'Special targeted support for atypical rural SMEs'.

Still want to dig deeper?

The FLIARA policy booklet discusses these issues more deeply in the section 'Infrastructure for the network for financial security' (Kang et. al., 2025).

3.2.2 SUPPORTING NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

FLIARA evidence identifies the central importance of networks as part of the enabling environment for women-led innovation. This makes policies that support and facilitate networking important.

Women leading innovations can engage with and benefit from being part of many kinds of networks. To have an availability of diverse networks we also need an innovation system that supports networks. It is important that spaces for networking are not a gap in the rural innovation system. Our policy assessment (Murtagh et al., 2024a) identified the presence of women's networks and business networks, but those specific to rural and farm women were less common. Two examples identified were:

✓ Local Action Groups in Ireland organise a **Women's Rural Entrepreneurial Network** targeting self-employed women, start-up or established women entrepreneurs in county Cork and Limerick.

✓ The **National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men** in Slovenia includes an action to strengthen the role of women in agriculture. This provides policy justification to support the activities of the Association of Farming Women of Slovenia. However, this organisation is also challenged by its voluntary nature. This shows how networks can emerge as part of different policy domains, but also from civil society.

Availability of diverse networks is important. Networks should not be understood in a one-dimensional way as a place to connect innovators, but they can serve specific purposes. These can for example be networks on different scales, such as from the local to European level, specific professional networks in women's field of innovation or targeted women's networks. To explore further see Romania's Policy Brief No. 4 'Improving networking support and social spaces for rural women' and Germany's Policy Brief No. 1 'Connecting Women: A Driver for Agricultural Innovation'. Different kinds of networks can include:

✓ **Multi-stakeholder networks:** The FLIARA Community of Practice (CoP) is a European platform designed to connect women innovators in farming and rural areas with policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders. The CoP model provided a space for connection, influence and policy dialogue. To explore further see Practice Abstract 7 'FLIARA Community of Practice: Bridging Practice and Policy for Shared Learning and Impact' (Weir et. al., 2025, p.18).

✓ **Combining in-person and digital networking platforms:** Organisations such as women's groups and farming organisations can be the drivers of spaces for networking such as hosting events and training. Beyond these in-person connections, online platforms connected to specific networks can also provide a way to further harness the value of networking. To explore further see Czechia's Policy Brief No.2 'Create a platform for sharing experiences and examples of good practices'.

✓ **Commercialisation and collaboration networks:** Commercialisation and branding networks can also harness collective power to directly build economic business opportunities. To explore further see Spain's Policy Brief No.3 'Strengthening the Commercialisation of Women-Led Rural Products and Services through Support Networks' and Finland's Policy Brief No. 4 'Co-creation platforms for rural women'.

Still want to dig deeper?

The FLIARA policy booklet discusses these issues more deeply in the section 'Policies to get a fine learning network' (Kang et al., 2025). In our policy assessment report see the section 'Networking supports and programmes' (Murtagh et. al. 2024a, p.38).



3.2.3 SUPPORTING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The need for specialist skills, staying aligned with new knowledge and changing enterprise needs create the need for supporting knowledge and skills as part of a strong enabling environment for women-led innovation.

Women involved in rural and farm innovation can sometimes enter innovation, as part of a career transition and without formal training. Innovation can develop in an organic way, rather than for example following a business plan. Training in the practicalities of starting, running and developing a business can be important. Development of soft skills is also important, such as building confidence and leadership skills to help deal with self-esteem issues, including the imposter syndrome. In relation to farm innovation, training in alternative agricultural approaches, such as specialist organic, biodynamic, regenerative and permaculture skills can be useful. Barriers, such as time, costs and proximity to training, can also challenge access to upskilling opportunities and knowledge. Targeted skills and training supports can play an important role to address these issues, for example:

- ✓ **The Empowering Women in Agri-Food Programme** run by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology and co-funded by European Union provides training on how to manage a farm-related business. It supports early-stage women-led business develop their entrepreneurial path. In Ireland the ACORNS (Accelerating the Creation of Rural Nascent Start-ups) programme is a peer-led support network programme that connects early-stage rural female entrepreneurs with 'lead entrepreneurs' to learn together, grow a business and accelerate its establishment and development. To find further discussion of these and other examples see Ireland's Policy Brief No.2 'Improve skills training opportunities targeting women-led rural and farm innovation'.

- ✓ To address a range of needs, one Italian policy brief proposes the establishment of **Learning Centres for Rural and Farming Entrepreneurship** that offer training tailored to women's needs. To find further discussion see Italy's Policy Brief No. 1 'Training for Women Innovating in Farming and Rural Areas'.

A more gender sensitive approach can also ensure existing systems meet the specific needs of women.

- ✓ FLARA has specifically explored this in relation to the **agricultural knowledge innovation system (AKIS)**. To find further discussion of these and other examples see Ireland's Policy Brief No. 5 'Building a Gender Inclusive AKIS in Ireland; Italy's Policy Brief No. 5 'Reframing and Expanding AKIS in Italy to Reach Women Innovators' and Sweden's Policy Brief No. 10 'Diversifying AKIS in Sweden'.

- ✓ More specifically, FLIARA also has pointed to the need to **better serve the needs of women in farming in the farm advisory system**. Explore this further in Slovenia's Policy Brief No. 2 'Empowering Rural Women Through Targeted Advisory Services' and Italy's Policy Brief No.2 'Funding and Advisory Services for Women Innovators in Rural Areas'.

FLIARA evidence points to the importance of a range of knowledge and skills areas, but also how specific training supports can be important, in areas such as:

- ✓ **Digital skills:** Training can support the adoption and use of specific new digital and technological tools. Digital tools can also support wider business improvements such as use of digital marketing, sales, accounting and customer relationship management. Digitalisation is a fast-changing space and can also present new challenges for an innovator to manage. For example, the EU funded Digital Entrepreneurship for Women (DEW) project provides an online training package targeting women. To explore further see Ireland's Policy Brief No. 4 'Innovating from the Ground Up: Digital Policy Pathways to Support Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas'.

- ✓ **Stakeholder engagement skills:** Women-leading innovations can have strong competencies in stakeholder engagement. To support other women to developing this capacity, training in how to engage, advocate and persuade can provide support. To explore further see Germany's Policy Brief No.3 'Learning how to Engage with Stakeholders'.

Still want to dig deeper?

The FLIARA policy booklet discusses these issues more deeply in the sections 'Policies to get a fine learning network' and 'An advisory network infrastructure' (Kang et. al., 2025). In our policy assessment report see the section 'Education, training and networks' (Murtagh et. al. 2024a, p.34-37).

3.2.4 SUPPORTING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Business supports on their own cannot respond to the obstacles and assist with enablers on the innovation pathway. Policies and measures supporting work-life balance are also important to consider as an enabler on the pathway of women-led rural and farm innovation.

Rural and farm women-led innovation does not occur in isolation from daily life where commitments, such as childcare, elderly care and wider family and domestic duties, must be balanced with the pursuit of innovation. Family, friends and wider community networks can be a source of support, but for women without these networks their innovation capacity can face obstacles and may not be realised. For women with young children, lack of access to childcare and after-school care can be a barrier. For women planning a family, access to paid maternity leave when self-employed becomes an issue. For women with wider caring responsibilities, care supports and respite become important. Policies and measures supporting work-life balance impact innovation capacity and are important to consider as an enabler supporting women-led innovation. For example:

✓ **Maternity leave payments for self-employed women** is an issue highlighted in some countries, such as Germany and Italy. In Italy for example only 5 months leave is covered by the financial supports. In Germany, there is no current statutory leave for self-employed women and campaigning is ongoing on the issue. For self-employment women in the Netherlands, maternity benefits are based on the hours worked and in Sweden they are based on a comparable industry standard income. To explore further see Germany's Policy Brief No. 4 'Maternity Leave Reform: Reconciling Parenthood and Rural Innovations'.

✓ **A publicly funded Farm Relief system** in Finland supports farmers by providing substitute workers and covering their costs to allow farmers to take time off for reasons such as holidays, illness, parental leave and pregnancy leave. To explore further see Sweden's Policy Brief No. 5 'Implementing a Farmer Relief Service'.

✓ **The Swedish parental leave system** provides a paid parental leave of 480 days through a universal, state administered scheme. The scheme allows for sharing of leave days between parents, as well as transfer of days to people other than parents, such as a grandparent, if one parent is absent. Days can be taken in blocks or over longer periods of time. There is also paid leave of 60 days available to care for a sick child. To explore further see Sweden's Policy Brief No. 1 'Providing Adequate Parental Leave'.

✓ **The pre-school and after-school childcare system** in Sweden is also a leading example in the European context. For all children over age 1, municipalities must offer full-time pre-school care. After school activities must also be provided. Costs are also low. Most municipalities also provide services for night or shift workers. To explore further see Sweden's Policy Brief No.2 'Providing Adequate Childcare and After School Activities'.

Still want to dig deeper?

The FLIARA policy booklet discusses these issues more deeply in the sections 'Infrastructure for the Social Network' and 'Infrastructure for the network that enables a healthy work-life balance' (Kang et. al., 2025). In our policy assessment report see the section 'Pay, pension, work-life and family' (Murtagh et. al. 2024a, p.42-48).



3.2.5 SUPPORTING VISIBILITY AND MINDSET CHANGES

Traditional gender norms and stereotypes influence how women see rural and farm innovation, as well as how they perceive themselves and how others see them. Measures can work to address these issues and tackle improving the visibility and recognition of existing women-led innovation.

While change is happening, traditional gender roles and norms are still persistent issues impacting rural and farm women-led innovation. As part of our initial benchmarking report (Murtagh et al., 2024b) a policy need assessment of the FLIARA case studies found that in some countries there are still persistent traditional gender roles associating women with motherhood and domesticity. Gaining recognition and credibility was also an issue in some contexts with women sometimes feeling they had to work harder to prove themselves as innovators. Maintaining and building confidence can also be challenging for women innovators in the face of these issues. FLIARA can also point to ways towards working to address these issues and tackle improving the visibility and recognition of existing women-led innovation. For example:

✓ **Existing women-led farm innovation can be better leveraged to change perceptions** of women-led rural and farm innovation. The FLIARA Visibility Campaign had this idea underpinning it, through a targeted communications campaign working to give increased visibility to women leading innovations. To explore further see European Policy Brief No.1 'Spotlighting Rural Women in Sustainable Innovation' as well as Italy's Policy Brief No. 6 'Spotlighting Women in Sustainable Rural Innovation' and Finland's Policy Brief No. 5 'Visibility platforms supporting rural entrepreneurship and renewing rural image'.

There were also a range of new policy ideas emerging from our initial benchmarking report, such as:

✓ **Building capacities through the education system:** This could include targeting secondary or third level education sectors promoting opportunities for women in farming and success stories to encourage women in farming careers. More widely implementing wider gender equality education as part of the education curriculum was also discussed in policy briefs. To explore further see Czechia's Policy Brief No.1 'Include more gender education in school curricula' and the Netherlands Policy Brief No. 2 'Promoting Positive Images of Rural Farming Women and Rural Women Entrepreneurs Across All Education Curricula'.

✓ **Gain visibility through the media:** Media attention provides visibility and can also help to counter stereotypes and change the narrative. Policy measures that support collaborations among the creative sector and women-leading innovations could more directly increase visibility through the media.

✓ **Provide formal recognition through awards:** Programmes that give awards and recognition also emerged as important. One example emerging in our FLIARA policy assessment (Murtagh et al., 2024a) was how in Slovenia, the Association of Rural Women of Slovenia awards the Female Farmer/Rural Woman of the Year.

Still want to dig deeper?

The FLIARA policy booklet discusses these issues more deeply in the section 'Learning Network' (Kang et. al., 2025).



3.2.6 SUPPORTING EMPOWERMENT AND REPRESENTATION

Rural and farm women's greater involvement in decision-making spaces is important to improve decision-making and enhance gender equality. Policies and measures influencing gender equality in these spaces are important to consider as part of the enabling environment for women-led rural and farm innovation.

Women in rural and farm innovation provide an important voice to influence policies and decision making. Women remain underrepresented in politics in Europe at both local and national levels. Underrepresentation in farming also has a knock-on effect on women's involvement in the influencing and decision-making spaces of farming, such as stakeholder organisations and leadership positions. Support can also be called for to build capacities to change traditional gender norms and support women to become involved in decision making spaces. This can target areas such as politics, stakeholder organisations, policy-making spaces as well as leadership roles. For example, some policies and supports identified in FLIARA were:

- ✔ **Gender quotas** for electoral lists can be a measure taken to support gender balance in politics. Quotas are also seen as only one part of the solution, and this approach is also debated.

- ✔ Traditional gender norms can inhibit women's recognition and impact. **Improving the visibility of women in politics** can also provide recognition for women's achievements and role models for others. One example from Germany shows women are supported in local politics and outstanding achievements by being recognised through the Helene Weber College and its Helene Weber Award. The winners have also formed a self-organised network.

- ✔ **The See Her Elected Programme** in Ireland supports rural women engage in local democracy through the provision of training, mentoring and networking.

- ✔ To find further discussion of these and other examples see Ireland's Policy Brief No. 8 'Strengthening the Voice of Rural and Farm Women in Decision-Making Spaces'.

Strengthening networks among women farmers and rural entrepreneurs is also important to provide spaces where women's voice can come together and find a place in policy discussions. More formal spaces within policymaking can also assist rural and farm women's influence in the policy process. Some examples are:

- ✔ Identified as part of our FLIARA policy assessment (Murtagh et al., 2024a) the **Association of Farming Women** of Slovenia was founded in 1995 to raise awareness of women's rights. It is active in 35 associations with 3,000 members. The activities of the association also include educational workshops, seminars, social events and the competition for Female Farmer of the Year.

- ✔ As part of the FLIARA policy assessment it was also identified how the Irish government facilitated a **National Dialogue on Women in Agriculture**. This has generated a Women in Agriculture Action Plan and the Women in Agriculture Working Group guides its implementation. In Slovenia, the **Rural Women's Council** is an advisory body within the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food that provides input on key decisions relating to women in rural areas.

Still want to dig deeper?

A number of FLIARA policy briefs explore these issues such as Romania's Policy Brief No. 2 'Building gender-sensitive capacity for rural development governance' and the Netherlands Policy Brief No.5 'Addressing Underrepresentation of Rural Women and Rural Entrepreneurship in the Emancipation National Policy'. In our policy assessment report see the section 'Empowerment' (Murtagh et. al. 2024a, p.39-42).

3.2.7 SUPPORTING INTEGRATED AND INNOVATIVE POLICIES FOR RURAL SUSTAINABILITY

Women-led innovation can be driven by a motivation to contribute to rural and farm sustainability. Finally in this section, we look at some more integrated, locally-led approaches to how policy can strengthen rural and farm renewal with women-led innovation as a lever.

As part of our initial benchmarking report (Murtagh et al., 2024b) a policy need assessment of the FLIARA case studies signalled that women have an important role in renewal of the rural and farm economy. For example, rural and farm innovators are often embedded and active in their communities. Women-led rural and farm innovation can help address local needs and harness under-exploited opportunities. Policies that tap into and support the multifunctional role of farming appear important, as well as those which more broadly support social, environmental, cultural and technological innovation. Below is a selection of more cross-cutting policy suggestions that aim to address complex, interconnected issues, as well as support more sustainable rural development patterns:

✓ **Provide integrated innovation support services:** Innovation incubators for start-up and early-stage women-led innovation could act as innovation catalysts. More broadly, integrated entrepreneurial support hubs for rural and farm women could support women overcome the range of obstacles they face as well as identify opportunities they seek to harness. For example, in Ireland Longford Women's Link is an award-winning model, a social enterprise that integrates gender-based violence and rural innovation supports to address complex barriers faced by women. It also provides a childcare service. Longford Women's Link connects services across agencies, ensuring women are not left behind in rural development efforts. To explore further see Ireland's Policy Brief No. 3 'Women's Empowerment as a Driver of Rural and Agricultural Innovation'.

✓ **Locally-led policies and solutions:** Innovative policy supports can sometimes be those that emerge from harnessing local strengths and servicing local needs and opportunities. For example, providing access to public land or shared innovation spaces to develop and test a rural and farm innovation can be provided by key local development players such as local authorities. To explore further see Italy's Policy Brief No.3 'Local Support to Women Innovators'.

✓ **Support return to rural areas:** As part of FLIARA's initial benchmarking report (Murtagh et al. 2024b) policy needs assessment one new idea discussed

emerging from the Irish context was a 'return to farming' innovation grant to support women that have left rural areas to return and develop a business idea. In the rural context also as part of this assessment, Romania identified a new policy idea where national-level scholarship programmes could specifically target rural women and there are re-entry programmes for women to return and apply their skills in rural contexts, including grants for start-ups or innovative projects upon their return. Policies to support women's return migration, while also addressing reintegration barriers and enabling sustainable innovation are important. To explore further see Romania's Policy Brief No. 3 'Supporting Women's Return to Rural Areas and Promoting Female Entrepreneurship'.

✓ **Re-thinking the innovation support system ethos:** An innovation support system with a wider ethos and valuing more than economic growth appears as an important consideration to better support women-led rural and farm innovation. For example, this could include rewarding a triple bottom line approach and accounting for social, environmental and economic performance, as well as slower, more incremental growth patterns. To explore further see Sweden's Policy Brief No. 6 'Simplifying the Swedish Innovation Support System'; No.8 'Reforming the Knowledge Support System to Foster Innovation in Rural Areas' and Finland's Policy Brief No. 3 'Special targeted support for atypical rural SMEs'.

✓ **Harness shorter supply chains:** Extending the focus in policy beyond the farm gate and better harnessing opportunities for shortening food supply chains between farmer and consumer, as well as developing more direct connections between them appear important to support women-led innovation. To explore further see the Netherlands' Policy Brief No. 3 'Supporting Direct-to-Consumer and Short Supply Chain Farming' and No. 1 'Promoting a Diversity of Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural Practices'.

Still want to dig deeper?

The FLIARA policy booklet discusses these issues more deeply across its sections (Kang et al., 2025). The FLIARA futures research also details key measures identified to promote women's contribution to the sustainability innovations in farm and rural domains (see Kuhmonen and Tembo, 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

Drawing on key aspects of the FLIARA project activities, this guide has showcased stories of women-led innovation in rural and farming contexts, including key lessons for innovators, policymakers and those involved in supporting rural innovation and development. It has illustrated what women-led innovation in rural areas and farming looks like and how the stories represent a diverse, dynamic, future-focused narrative. It also synthesised broad learnings around key lessons that emerge from the practice of women-led innovation.

Finally, here we provide a few concluding reflections based on the core lessons driving, underpinning and emerging from this guide:

- ✓ Women-led innovation is evident in rural areas and farming. There are many pathways into innovation, farming systems and sectors of the rural economy where women-led innovation is evident.
- ✓ The evidence presented provides a new narrative relating to rural enterprise, farming and innovation. This narrative shows how women are strongly active in this space.
- ✓ The evidence presented also shows that the dominant picture of who can innovate and where this can happen needs to be updated. The realities of what rural and farm women are doing shows a different picture.
- ✓ Traditional thinking and stereotypes influence what possibilities women themselves, as well as wider rural and farming communities identify and build on.
- ✓ Policy can play a decisive role in supporting the innovations that women in rural areas and farming are already generating.
- ✓ Empowering and enabling more women to innovate and existing innovators to expand the impact of their innovations is crucial for future improved sustainability and gender equality.



Moira Hart. Wexford Lavender Farm, Ireland.

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