



# **Empowering Rural Women: Tailored Measures for Entrepreneurship in Farming and Rural Business**

## **Policy Brief**

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# Empowering Rural Women through Tailored Measures

*“Funding programmes targeted specifically at women in rural areas can contribute to their economic empowerment but also have positive social, economic and environmental effects for the area of implementation. Hence, it is crucial for thriving rural areas.”*

## Executive Summary

Women play a key role in the sustainable transition of agriculture and in fostering the development of innovative, resilient rural communities. The FLIARA study shows that limited access to targeted funding and tailored entrepreneurial training remains a major obstacle for women innovators. Customising financial support and skill development programs to meet women’s needs and the specific realities of rural areas can greatly strengthen rural communities. Such support measures are currently an exception across Europe and Germany. This Policy Brief calls on German state-level policymakers to promote gender equality as part of their CAP strategic plans and establish funding programmes fit for women.

## The Challenge and Opportunity

- ⌚ When economic opportunities in rural areas are limited, particularly for women, more women tend to leave these areas.
- ⌚ Women face difficulties balancing care work with income-generating activities near their homes.
- ⌚ FLIARA finds women-led innovation in rural areas contributes to all four dimensions of sustainability. Yet, access to funding is a significant hurdle to rural and agricultural women-led innovation.
- ⌚ Acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge can be demanding yet are essential for these innovations.
- ⌚ Until now only a few EU Member States implement gender equality measures as part of their CAP strategic plans.
- ⌚ Across Europe and Germany rural women-targeted state support measures are scarce.
- ⌚ Support programmes for women-led economic activities in rural areas can meet diverse policy goals e.g., rural development, gender equality, environmental protection and farm diversification.

## Policy Solutions

To best facilitate women-led innovation in rural areas, policy makers of the German federal states may consider following pathways:

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- ⌚ To design funding programs that link training and coaching measures for women with funding for women-led entrepreneurial activities.
- ⌚ To ensure that funded initiatives lead to income generation (e.g., via farm diversification), long-term employment and/or development opportunities for women in rural areas, thereby meeting equal opportunity mandates.<sup>1</sup>
- ⌚ To guarantee measures benefit principally women, investment support may be made contingent on proof of female ownership and a women-led business concept.
- ⌚ To set funding priorities beyond traditional gender roles, which support equitable participation by all in farming and rural entrepreneurship.<sup>2</sup>
- ⌚ To align the measure(s) with rural and agricultural women's associations as well as equal opportunity offices at employment agencies. To tailor the program to the rural specificities of the implementation area, and regional economic, environmental and social needs.

The realisation of the **potential of women's innovative ideas** requires:

- ⌚ Funding criteria that facilitate innovative ideas, because women's social, cultural and environmental initiatives are often overlooked by funding bodies.
- ⌚ Easy access application processes and sufficient staff allocation to support applicants and beneficiaries.

<sup>1</sup> The German constitution mandates the state to promote equality of men and women. Since 2000 Gender Mainstreaming is legally mandated for all federal and state government bodies. Promoting economic equality has become a priority with the 2018 Federal Equality Strategy. This is further reinforced by federal ministries' action plans on equal opportunities on the labour market and women-led businesses, as well as state-level specific programs.

<sup>2</sup> Traditional gender roles continue to shape German agriculture, with stereotypical perceptions portraying men as more apt and inclined to operate machinery and handle physically demanding tasks, while women are more frequently responsible for "social tasks" like direct marketing, farm tourism and other social services. Source: Thünen Institute – Study on German farming women's living conditions <https://www.studie-frauen-landwirtschaft.de/>



- Substantial co-financing options for entrepreneurial activities in case of limited upfront capital.
- Sufficient flexibility because women's entrepreneurial activities often occur in part-time and as a side-line to other activities.
- Accessibility of farm diversification grants to relatives of farm owners, as this benefits women. Leading diversification efforts enables women to generate independent income.

## Supporting Evidence & Best Practices

Results from the **FLIARA project** show that women-led innovations in agriculture and rural areas contribute to the cultural, social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability but are limited by funding and training barriers. [Germany-wide study by the Thünen Institute](#) echoes these findings.

The Federal State of Baden-Württemberg has a long running '**Innovative Measure for Women in Rural Areas**' programme, which has led to farm diversification, sustainable and exemplary businesses and beneficiaries' uptake of LEADER and farm investment supports. The programme has two strands directed at women in rural areas: funding coaching and training measures on the one hand and grants for start-up expenses of microenterprises on the other. Grants start at 2.000 and go up to 160.000 euros to facilitate women's start-up behaviour, that is, the lower risk appetite of some women. The programme is financed by state and regional business support funding, co-funded by the CAP, and is linked to farm diversification policy goals. The Federal State of [Saxony also implements a support program](#) for women-led start-ups in rural areas.

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## Conclusion & Call to Action

Tailored support measures for women-led business and innovation that reflect local contexts and women's specific needs can revitalise rural areas and enhance their attractiveness as places to live and work. Funding priorities that move beyond traditional gender roles in farming can give way to a more equitable distribution of farm activities, and support women-led innovation in particular. Baden-Württemberg's 'Innovative Measures for Women in Rural Areas' have proven effective over time and is well received by the beneficiaries. This Policy Brief encourages policy makers from other States and countries to implement similar funding measures.

## Further Reading

### More on Baden-Württemberg's IMF programme:

FLIARA Innovator Fact Sheet <https://fliara.eu/innovator/innovative-masnahmen-fur-frauen/>

Baden-Württemberg State Press Release on the IMF Program, 21/02/2025 <https://www.baden-wuerttemberg.de/de/service/presse/pressemitteilung/pid/massgeschneiderte-foerderungen-fuer-frauen-im-laendlichen-raum-1>

FLIARA Deliverable 1.3: Assessment of Rural and Farming Policy and Legal Frameworks in relation to Women-led Innovation Germany assessment pp. 83-100 <https://zenodo.org/records/14045163>

FLIARA Deliverable 3.3: Women-led Innovations in Agriculture and Rural Areas, Lessons Learned Report and Fact Sheets on Female Innovations <https://zenodo.org/records/14045390>





Thünen Working Paper 265: Gender Mainstreaming im GAP-Strategieplan Potenzieller Beitrag des GAP-Strategieplans zur Gleichstellung von Frauen und Männern, mit besonderem Fokus auf das Förderangebot der 2. Säule (ELER), March 2025. <https://www.thuenen.de/de/thuenen-institut/infothek/schriftenreihen/thuenen-working-paper>

Davier Zv, Padel S, Edebohls I, Devries U, Nieberg H. Frauen auf landwirtschaftlichen Betrieben in Deutschland - Leben und Arbeit, Herausforderungen und Wünsche: Befragungsergebnisse von über 7.000 Frauen, Thünen-Institut für Betriebswirtschaft. Thünen Working Paper 207, 2023 <https://www.studie-frauen-landwirtschaft.de/ergebnisse-und-veroeffentlichungen/abschlussberichte>

## About FLIARA

The project is on a mission to create a more sustainable future by highlighting the role of women in agriculture and rural areas. FLIARA will boost understanding of the needs and challenges facing women leading innovative environmental and rural development practices in EU farming and rural areas.

## Contact

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# Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

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