



The Gender Gap in Generational Renewal

Policy Brief Ireland

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Tackling the gender gap is part of the wider generational renewal challenge in Irish farming to ensure its future sustainability.

Executive Summary

The gender gap represents a key aspect of the broader challenge of generational renewal in Irish farming, which is essential for ensuring the sector's long-term sustainability. Promoting women-led farm innovation and attracting more young women into farming holds significant untapped potential to enhance farm viability, support generational renewal, and strengthen the overall sustainability of rural communities. The Action Plan arising from the National Dialogue on Women in Agriculture includes a number of specific and welcome actions targeted towards young women. FLIARA evidence also points to the complexity of the issues and the need for further policy action.

The Challenge

- 🏠 Official statistics show that an ageing farming population is an issue across male and female genders. However, within this trend, significant gender differences emerge. In 2022, only 1.8% (of the overall 13.2%) of female farm holders in Ireland were under 45 compared with just 13.8% (of the overall 86.8%) all male farm holders (CSO, 2024a).
- 🏠 A range of barriers impact all women, including young women, who attempt to establish a sustainable farm-based livelihood. These include access to finance, skills, mentoring and achieving work-life balance. Improvements in supports are needed to improve not only generational renewal but also the farming profession's gender balance.
- 🏠 In 2023, less than half of Ireland's farms had a succession plan (46.5%). For those that did, just 16.1% named a woman as the identified successor (CSO, 2024b).
- 🏠 Complex issues surround farm succession and inheritance. They range from personal level considerations such as farming as a career choice to wider issues such as access to land

as well as the attractiveness and viability of a farm livelihood. Barriers appear even stronger in the case of female succession.

Policy Solutions

Policy actions to support greater levels of female succession and farming careers:

- 💡 The Action Plan arising from the National Dialogue on Women in Agriculture includes an action to: Promote and normalise female succession, including the consideration of any changes required to policy, taxation, legislation and DAFM schemes (DAFM, 2024). This is a welcome and needed action.
- 💡 The Action Plan also includes an action to: Increase promotion of agriculture as a viable career for women and young girls in primary and post-primary schools, to be progressed through with Agri Aware and the Department of Education (DAFM, 2024).
- 💡 This is also a welcome and needed action. Consideration of gender-based fee supports would also act as an incentive to the uptake of agriculture in further and higher education. For example, a Gender Based Bursary Fund is in place for apprenticeships (Generation Apprenticeship, 2025). A similar scheme could support young women study agriculture-related courses in further and higher education settings.

Tackle traditional gender stereotypes and norms at a number of levels:

- 💡 The Action Plan arising from the National Dialogue on Women in Agriculture includes an action to: Implement the use of more inclusive language and imagery in communications to farmers and about farming (DAFM, 2024).
- 💡 This is a welcome and needed action. FLIARA farm case study evidence however points to a range of areas of action such as within the education system, the 'grassroots' level targeting the family itself, as well as wider society to change the image of farming.
- 💡 There is a potentially a greater role for the media in helping to change gender stereotypes and norms related to farming. A stimulus fund promoting creative and agricultural sector cooperation on film and broadcasting projects via a body such as Screen Ireland or the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland would support the media's greater role.

Develop a farm business programme or farm business incubator for young female farmers:

- 💡 This could provide a more holistic and dedicated support programme, such as a start-up and early-stage women-led innovation incubator.
- 💡 Such a programme could provide a range of supports from finance to mentoring, as well as link young women to wider available supports.

Address farm work-life challenges to ensure farming offers a viable livelihood across different life-stages:

- 💡 This could include government support for farm relief, but also having a focus on young women farmers requirements, such as to take time off for parental leave or broader care-giving responsibilities (see Best Practices).

Better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of how existing farm supports and wider supports assisting rural enterprise address the needs of young innovative women farmers:

- 💡 Better monitoring of the rate of uptake of national and EU farming supports by young women would provide evidence to understand the need for more targeted measures and to tailor policy responses.
- 💡 Existing grant supports such as through LEADER and Local Enterprise Offices provide important support for women-leading farm innovations, but potentially there is a need to



understand if young women are accessing this support sufficiently and availing of the full suite of supports.

Supporting Evidence & Best Practices

The FLIARA case study evidence from Ireland points to how potential female successors involved in their family farm can lack more formal status as landowners which leaves them in a precarious position, such as if they have businesses attached to the farm or more broadly qualifying for assistance via public supports. This can create uncertainty and impact further investment and development of their farm innovation.

Evidence from Ireland's FLIARA farm case study evidence highlights the need to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and norms around farming, particularly as these strongly influence whether young women consider farming a career choice. The evidence also identified that change is happening, signalling some progress which is encouraging, and a timely opportunity to accelerate further transformation.

The phrase: 'If you see it, you believe it and you can become it' has become an unofficial mantra of the FLIARA project. The value of media in changing gender stereotypes and norms related to farming emerged in FLIARA case study evidence. For example, one woman described, "You see programmes like Ear to the Ground and Nationwide and if they can focus maybe more on young farmers, or younger girls, breeding sheep or breeding cattle, things like that help obviously. The more it's seen and the more it's publicised, it's breaking down kind of stereotypical barriers" (Interviewee 20, cited in Farrell et al. 2024a, p.19).

The need for both soft (e.g. mentoring) and hard (e.g. finance) supports targeting young women is also seen in Ireland's FLIARA farm case study evidence. Women-leading farm innovations can invest personal life savings and take out personal loans. Many young women may not have this capacity. Financial pressures are most particularly seen in early stages of women-led farm innovation. Networks appeared key to accessing information and peer support for women-leading farm innovations, which could take time and extra effort for young women to develop.

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Farm relief in Finland: The publicly funded [Farm Relief system](#) in Finland supports farmers providing substitute workers or self-arranged substitutes and allows for parental leave and pregnancy leave. It covers the costs of these workers, also for holidays and illness periods. For more information see Sweden Policy Brief: Implementing a Farmer Relief Service (found in Kang et al. eds. 2025, see Further Reading).

Spain's CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027: In Spain, under the Complementary Income Support for Young Farmers there is a 15% higher direct payment rate available to young women who own or co-own farms. In 14 of Spain's Managing Authorities the intervention supporting the establishment of young farmers includes gender balance in the selection criteria. More broadly, gender balance is also included in a range of other interventions in certain Managing Authorities (EU CAP Network, 2025). For more information see Policy Brief: Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan and Gender Equality (found in Kang et al. eds. 2025, see Further Reading).

Conclusion & Call to Action

Ireland's FLIARA farm case study evidence highlights how even with strong farm business supports work-life issues such as caring commitments also need to be considered. Business supports alone fail to address the key barriers experienced by some women. Increasing the visibility of innovative women in farming to work towards changing gender stereotypes and norms is also important to help ensure young women do not overlook farming as a livelihood option and consider it as a career choice.

Call to action

-  Increasing the attractiveness and realistic potential of farming as a career option for young women needs to look beyond farm business supports alone. For example, there is call for tackling traditional gender stereotypes and norms in a number of ways such as a greater role for the media in helping to change traditional gender stereotypes and norms related to farming. It is also important to address farm work-life challenges to ensure farming offers a viable livelihood.
-  A holistic and dedicated support programme for young women farmers, such as a farm business training programme and innovation incubator, could provide strong and targeted supports. Evaluation of any such programme would also be crucial to learn lessons to tailor its delivery.

Further Reading

FLIARA Policy Briefs

Find the following Policy Briefs published in D5.1 Policy Booklet and Policy Briefs (Kang et al. eds., 2025):

- Ireland: Balancing women-led innovation, rural and farm family-life: The need for improved policy supports
- Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan and Gender Equality
- Sweden: Implementing a Farmer Relief Service

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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

Email: info@fliara.eu

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Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

www.fliara.eu



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