

The Role of Austrian Farm Women in On-Farm Activities



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Februar 2004

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Layout: Roland Neissl

ISBN: 3-85311-066-5

Introduction

From September to December 2002 I have fulfilled an internship at the Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen (BABF) in Vienna. This publication is the result of this practice and my work there.

For me it was interesting and informative to spend a part of my study in a foreign country. I have chosen to do my practice in Austria, because I wanted to stay in Europe and to improve the German language. It is also the case I know Germany better than Austria. People from my home university gave me some contact addresses and after communicating with Theresia Oedl-Wieser from BABF the decision for the internship at Vienna was taken.

My motivation to fulfil this internship was to get more insight in sociology as a profession in practice. Until now my study was primarily theoretic and it was time for me to experience the ‘rural sociology world’ in reality. I had to find out whether this world is the place I want to find my future profession in.

I am interested in the countryside in general. That has probably to do with the fact I was raised at the Dutch countryside. In this time of insecurity for the agricultural sector, terms as rural development and pluriactivity are getting more common. The agrarian production stays important but at an increasing pace farms are forced to search for a surplus value. One possibility is the starting of on-farm activities. Examples of the latter are cheese making, agro-tourism, direct marketing of own (processed) agrarian products, etc. I have chosen this subject because I was very curious how this wide-spread activity in Austria looks like. In the Netherlands so-called on-farm activities aren’t very common yet. Things are changing though and the process of diversification at Dutch farms is still developing, in contrast to Austria which has a long tradition of such on-farm activities besides farming.

In addition, I had read that in Austria there are mainly women who start such activities. From the literature it also became clear that there is still a traditional and in some cases a patriarchal way of living to be found at the countryside. For these reasons I have chosen to combine the subjects ‘on-farm activities’ and ‘gender aspects’ into my main subject: The Role of Austrian Farm Women in On-Farm Activities.

The purpose of the research work was to get more insight into the reasons why Austrian farm women are setting up an on-farm activity and what kind of social problems they have experienced while setting up such an activity. Therefore it was necessary to examine the reactions of the family and the wider social environment and to find out what kind of changes took place inside the household once such initiatives have been started.

My general research questions were the following:

1. Why are farm women engaging in an on-farm activity?
2. What were the reactions of the family and the social environment to the (new) on-farm activity?
3. Which were the changes for farm women because of the on-farm activity?

My findings are summarised in this report, which consists of a theoretical and an empirical part.

For me this was a very interesting time and study work, and I do hope I may give you as a reader a short glimpse of the life of Austrian ‘active’ farm women.

1. Theoretical Part

In this part I'll try to give a general overview of the situation of farm women in Austria. It should be noted many changes have taken place in agrarian society over the last decades. Because of the continuation of these movements it is difficult to describe a 'general' Austrian countryside, but nevertheless I have tried to treat some general tendencies.

I didn't only pay attention to the position of farm women. A lot of other issues will be raised as well. Such a broad and general theoretical framework is important in order to get a clear and more complete analysis of the situation of the Austrian countryside.

I do want to make clear to be aware of the many different patterns of life of Austrian farm women. Every person has different personal characteristics and capacities and all individuals are influenced by their social and economic environment. Moreover Austria disposes of many different regions. They do not only differ in the geographical sense (Austria is not lying totally in the mountains!), but also in social, economic, cultural and political terms. Due to the limited time and the complexity of these processes I could not add a regional analysis to my study.

1.1 Agricultural structural changes

During the last decades European agriculture has undergone enormous structural changes. After the middle of the twentieth century a shift can be observed from the combination of a market orientated agriculture with subsistence farming towards a predominantly production and market oriented agriculture which had as the main aim the maximising of the agricultural output. This development was strongly supported by processes of rationalisation, intensification and mechanisation. This orientation of farming caused to a large extent rising surpluses in agricultural production. As a consequence the output prices for agricultural products decreased permanently (Dax 1998, p.147). Another changing factor, stimulated by the developments explained above, is the reduction of the agricultural labour force. More and more farm people were driven to search profession outside the rural sector. In Austria off-farm employment increased particularly since the 1960's. Two factors that stimulated this process were the expanding industrial sector and the mechanisation of agriculture. These two conditions made it possible for farmers to find attractive jobs outside the farm.

Besides these structural changes, from the eighties onwards social processes like the pollution of the environment and the growing consciousness of the importance of healthy food by consumers also started to play a role. Especially small family farms in Europe, like those prevalent in Austria, had to find alternatives to adjust to these social and structural changes in order to keep their farms economically viable and to improve their household income. One of the alternatives is the conversion to organic farming. Other alternatives are off-farm employment or the starting of an extra activity on the farm but besides farming.

The option of selling the farm or quit farming completely is often not considered. Most farmers have strong emotional ties with their holdings and often the farm has been in the hands of the family for many generations. That is why there is such a high, nostalgic value attached to the maintenance and continuation of the family farm in Austria. Besides that, the selling of a farm is often not accepted by the social environment (E5).

In short, the European agricultural sector had and still has to differentiate and specialize its production in order to ensure sufficient income for its farm businesses.

1.2 Changes in agricultural policies

Agricultural policies had, of course, to adjust to these changes as well. In Europe the current policy framework is less production oriented and less focused on full time farming than it was in the past, thereby contributing to encourage agricultural diversification (Dax 1998, p.145).

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU was taken over by Austria with the accession to the EU in 1995. This policy had already been reformed in 1992 and has introduced as its major aim the removal of the surpluses of the agricultural products such as milk, grain and beef. Since then the concern shifted towards rural development measures and rural development was established as the second pillar of CAP (Agenda 2000). The EU-memberstates can decide within their national programmes the contents and strategies for rural development measures, though in reality a totally independent national agricultural policy doesn't exist anymore. As a consequence the Austrian accession to the EU (and the adoption of the CAP) resulted in a decline of about 9% of its farm businesses.

1.3 Changes in the concept of farming

As a consequence of these multiple changes in the agricultural world, the idea of farming as a free and independent profession started to change as well. On the one hand, farmers still have a certain kind of freedom to decide how to manage their farms. However, on the other hand, this independent entrepreneurship is increasingly limited by a complex system of different markets and regulations on regional, national as well as on international level (E4). In this context the accession of Austria to the EU played a major role. For many family farms the conditions for their decisionmaking has become unclear because of the lack of overview of existing agricultural regulations on different levels (Kittel et al 1991, p.229).

1.4 Increasing influences between urban and rural world

Along with this changing perception of the profession of farming, other important transformations have an impact on community life of farmers. It seems that the stereotype assumption of a 'traditional farm world' in contrast to a 'modern, non-farm world' doesn't exist anymore. The exchange and interrelation between rural and urban areas are increasing (E4). In this context it has to be recalled that there are not only farmers living in rural areas. This can already be taken as an indication for the mix between the two so-called „separate worlds“. Examples of increasing contacts between the rural and urban scene are: farm people working outside agriculture, urban people having holidays on farms, rural children being educated in towns, and many others. It is obvious that the two 'worlds' cannot be seen as separated and different from each other. At an increasing rate they are mutually influenced by each other (E2). As already referred to one reason for this process of globalisation is the growing mobility of people.

In this way farmers come into contact with totally other ways of thinking and living. These new impressions can give family farms a renewed reflection on their own ways of working and living (see 1.12).

1.5 Situation in Austria

Austria comprises for the greater part marginal rural areas, especially mountainous areas: about 70% of the total Austrian surface (Hovorka 2002, p.5). According to the standards of the OECD, 91% of the population is living in rural communities and about 78% in rural regions (Dax 1996). In all regions agriculture is not anymore the dominant sector of the rural economy.

Austria's agriculture is characterised by relatively small farm sizes, 44% of the farms have less than 10 hectares. For many of these farm units there are no possibilities for enlargement or intensification because of the weak economic and local unfavourable natural situations. An indication of the latter is that about 2/3 of the total surface of Austria belongs to the Alps according to EU definitions (Hovorka 1998, p.19). About 52% of the farm units are situated in mountainous areas, and 70% in less-favoured areas. Austria has one of the highest percentages (57%) of agricultural surface lying in mountainous areas all over the EU (BMLFUW 2001, p. 63ff).

As a consequence of these unfavourable conditions for farming many family farms are forced to search for alternative activities. These various economic activities in addition to farming, and carried out by one or more household members, are subsumed under the term pluriactivity (Dax and Oedl-Wieser 1993, p.3).

1.6 Pluriactivity

Only since the 1980's an increased awareness developed that the improvement of the conditions for farmers can not be achieved by protection and price support alone (Brun and Fuller 1991, p.10). Gradually, pluriactivity came to be seen as one of the possible contributors to the surviving of the family farms in Austria. There are three different types of pluriactivities (parts of them also known as para-agricultural activities) to be distinguished: on-farm activities, off-farm employment and employment on other farms (Brun and Fuller 1991, p.54). This study focuses on the first type.

In general, pluriactivity can be seen as a survival strategy for family farms while it stabilizes the household income. The main reason for family farms to start with one of the different types of pluriactivity is the need for an extra income. However one should be aware that the motives to start a new business are not just linked to the poor economic situation on farm units, but include also many other motives as well.

Pluriactivity is a common feature of the present European (and worldwide) farm households. It is suggested that around 58% of all European farmers are involved in a certain kind of pluriactivity (Bryden 1995, p.22). In Austria in 2001 about 60% of its farm households were involved in pluriactivity, comprising a share of 37% full-time farmers (BMLFUW 2001, p. 63ff). Here especially the on-farm activities are very common and address many different activities, in comparison to the rest of Europe. This has to do with the fact that the greater part of farm units are small scaled and the dominant organisation of farm units is the family farm.

1.7 Pluriactivity no new phenomenon

It must be made clear that pluriactivity is no actually new phenomenon, neither in Austria or elsewhere. Until the Second World War most farmers and in many regions even afterwards did have diversified farm activities (Dax 1998, p.146) and were mainly self sufficient. They grew and processed their own food and often performed other local non-agricultural activities as well. It was mainly the women who played a leading role in those activities (Kittel et al 1991, p.142). Examples of those activities are: baking and selling of own bread, selling own fruits, vegetables, eggs and meat on the local market; processing and selling of own dairy products and so on. From the seventies onwards these processes of direct marketing and the offering of other services and products to consumers on farm units has been rediscovered. It is seen as one of the many alternatives to ensure the surviving of the small family farm.

1.8 Conditions for on-farm activities

Before taking up activities it should be considered whether it is actually possible to start an on-farm activity. First of all, on-farm activities are only interesting for those farms which can afford to make changes, to take certain risks and to establish activities which have a future as well (E5). Often these are the middle and small sized

farms. Although large farms are less driven towards other income alternatives some of these farms also engage in new on-farm activities.

Secondly, the question arises whether everything necessary for the initiative is available or present within the farm unit or its close surrounding. It has to be thought of investment capability, working hours, technical knowledge, extension services, marketing possibilities, credit, risk management, and so on. It is important to be aware of the possible changes at all levels inside and outside the family farm. This means private and personal changes have to be taken into account.

Besides that, a good communication sphere within the family is necessary to avoid conflicts, misunderstandings and disappointments. Changes can bring up conflicts which only can be solved if people address and talk about them (Loibl 1997, p.181). Unfortunately this talking between the different household members is often lacking (E2).

Another condition is the own wish and goal of the family farm to develop something new. Because when there is no real interest or pleasure in the new activity, it isn't likely the new activity will survive (E1).

And of course there should also be the demand and interest of the consumers for a certain service or product. In this way the on-farm activity doesn't only have an income and production function for the family farm, but also a function for society; it should reflect and adjust the wishes and demands of the greater public in order to succeed.

1.9 Types of on-farm activities

On-farm activities can take many different forms; the possibilities are manifold (Loibl 1997, p.173). In Austria the biggest part of all on-farm activities can be put in the categories tourism and direct marketing (E1). The former includes the offering of holidays on the farm. Examples of the latter category are the processing and marketing of own agricultural products; cheese, meat, wine, bread, wool, flowers, and so on. Other examples of very different activities are services like education for school children on the farm, catering, care for elderly people, offering of different courses, etc.

As noted before on-farm activities can be very different from one another. Although some can be classified in the same category, they still might differ in size, degree of professionalism, number of participants, period of time between idea and actual start of activity, strategies, target group, degree of cooperation with other initiatives, investment, and stage of development process.

1.10 Female sensitivity for changes

It is often the case that there are relatively more women who are sensitive for diversification needs and possibilities of the farm than men (Kittel et al 1991, p.206). Women seem to have a wider view to the outside world and a stronger sense for social developments and changes while men seem to focus more tightly on the activities at the farm and its production (E1). For the latter economic rationality plays a major role while for women the contacts with different people become more important leading to the wish to do something else besides their daily tasks in the household and on the farm (E3). Both feel strongly committed to the survival of the family farm, but they have different ways of ensuring this.

1.11 Feminisation of the Austrian countryside

Another factor that might play a role for this sensitivity of farm women for changes, is the tendency of an increasing feminisation of the Austrian agriculture and countryside. This implies that the number of female workers in

agriculture is in absolute terms rising, the agricultural work for the latter is increasing and that women don't have a lot of possibilities stepping out of the agricultural sector in these regions (Dax et al. 1995, p.112).

In many cases the agricultural production of the farm alone is not enough to ensure a sufficient income for the family. In Austria it was traditionally the men who were off-farm employed and that is why a high percentage of women manages the farm in comparison to the rest of Europe (Dax and Oedl-Wieser 1993, p.102). An EU-wide study shows the portion of female farm managers in Austria (29%) is the highest in the EU (EU-Commission 2002, p.5). The farms managed by women are mostly small or middle sized farms. One can see these processes linked to the existing traditional relations between men and women and the supposed roles of the two. But this also has to do with the fact that the labour market in rural areas often offers hardly any, and if, then unattractive jobs for (farm) women (Oedl-Wieser 1997, p.4).

With men going off to work (and often commuting on a weekly basis), the farm women being left on the farms stay often isolated. This social isolation might also incite, in specific cases and situations, for farm women to do something else. They might have a growing interest and desire in creating an own professional domain, because farming is still perceived as a male world and the contribution of farm women to the farm is often taken for granted (Gasson and Errington 1993, p.145).

1.12 Experiences from the outside world

In general we can conclude that people who actually start with on-farm activities are the ones who have lived and worked outside the agricultural sector part of their life. Usually they are relatively young and well-educated (Dax et al. 1995, p.154). Because of these life experiences they are more encouraged to act and see things differently from people who have never left the countryside. The latter tend to stick to the traditional pattern of life. They have adopted and live almost the same lives as the former farm generations (E3).

People with experiences from the outside world bring new ideas into the family farm which on the one hand can lead to conflicts with the (traditional) thinking of the family, but on the other hand this can also bring new impulses to the farm, such as the development of on-farm activities.

One way how these 'modern' people become engaged in farming is through marriage with a farm man or woman. For example, many present young farm women have no rural background (E2).

1.13 Motivation for on-farm activities

As noted before, the reasons to start an on-farm activity can be manifold. In general, the insufficient financial situation of the family farm plays an important role. Farmers seem to prefer diversification of the farm unit against giving it up completely. This can be linked to the emotional value attached to the farm (E5). To maintain the farm, extra income alternatives have to be found. Besides the economic aspect, social and personal motives are significant as well; the desire of people to create an own independent job, a satisfying hobby activity (Bock 1996, p.47) or a more idealistic objective, namely to work in an environmentally friendly way (e.g. organic farming) (Loibl 1998, p.14).

For each farm household an other set of motivations might play a role. And within the family the members might see things differently from one another and might act in various ways as well. This own way of thinking is influenced by the individual character and personal situation, but also by the social environment.

One should be aware that the motivation to start an on-farm activity and the decision making process around this are both influenced by different stimulating and obstructing factors from the personal character and from the environment as well. Stimulating factors can be the support of other family members, the engagement and persistency of persons involved, availability of adequate support measures, enthusiasm of participants and a lot

more. At the same time one can think of several impediments as well: lack of time, non-acceptance of the environment, uncertainty of the persons involved, conflicts within the family farm, too much work-load, no financial possibility to make the appropriate investments, and so on.

As already mentioned, the general motives for the farm women are the wish to develop something ‘own’ and to earn own money, to come into contact with people from outside the farm and to engage in activites which give them pleasure and satisfaction (E1).

1.14 Patriarchal way of thinking

A patriarchal way of thinking and living still partly determines rural social life (Oedl-Wieser 1997, p.3). This implies a social structure in which women are subordinated to men through a range of social practices and institutions (Whatmore 1991, p.42). To put it more simply, in society there still exist several forms of inequality between men and women. For example, farm women are often not or hardly present in political life in comparison to their husbands. This dominant representation of men in public life can also be seen in the representation of farms. It are mainly the men who are the official and public face of the family farm (O’Hara 1998, p.2). Often they own the farm property and officially the farm belongs to them. Besides, the work and income of the male farmer is often regarded as important and not put into question by other farm household members.

Also in the more private spheres this distinction of lifestyles and roles of farm men and women might also exist. It are mainly the women who are kept in control by this social mechanism. Farm men are still used to have more power and control within the family farm than farm women (E4). The general role of women (at least in the past) was to accept the social limits and power relations within the family (Kittel et al 1991, p.218). In short the farm women should obey to the wishes and needs of the family farm. This often means taking care of the household, children and some supplementary farm work. As some of these patterns are still relevant in the Austrian countryside, it can be hard for farm women to carry through changes and to make their own opinions and wishes clear and understood by men and rural society.

Nevertheless, changes in the social relations at the countryside can be recognised. People are becoming increasingly aware of this inequality and take notice of the need for changes. However, this is a slow and long lasting process, because the relations between the genders cannot be changed in one day. They are deeply rooted in society. There is still too much fear leading the traditional roles of men and women within agrarian society today.

1.15 Austrian family farm

The predominantly form of farms in Austria is the family farm (Dax et al. 1995, p.53). There are varying definitions of the term ‘family farm’. This study uses the following one: the family farm is a production unit in agriculture which uses mainly family labour, which is generally acquired and disposed of through family and kinship ties and sells (a portion of) its products in the market (O’Hara 1995, p.90).

In the past it used to be the case that all family members had their main activity at the farm. This isn’t the case any more. A great part of the present family members, especially the young people, are getting a non-agricultural education and have an off-farm job (E3). Thus a great part of the off-farm labour is carried out by other family members than the farm couple (Dax 1998, p.150). As a consequence the latter are mainly the ones who are not only responsible for the farm work but also for the activities of the on-farm initiative.

Still we can combine all the different activities of the family members to constitute the farm household. The opportunity for family members to work together at the farm can cause satisfaction as well as conflicts (Gasson

and Errington 1993, p.179) (see part ‘Conflicts within the family farm’). It depends on the dynamics and organisations in the farm household how one is dealing with each other (E3).

It should be noted in this context that especially women’s work is essential for the survival of the family farm. Mainly the farm woman is the person who performs a lot of tasks, also the more invisible but necessary activities to keep the family farm running. In short, although the official and public face of the farm is the farm man, the farm woman is often the driving force behind the family and farm (O’Hara 1994, p.51).

Generally there is an assumption that work and private sphere within the family farm form a unit. For many farm households however this is a wrong assumption. Family members don’t always have the same interests and opinions because of personal characteristics and different interpretations. Another important factor in this context is that family relations are complicated by the fact that spheres of production and consumption cannot be separated as clearly as for other households. To put it differently, the household and the farm are dependent of each other.

1.16 Division of labour inside the family farm

Looking at the different tasks men and women perform on the family farm, is one way to get an insight to gender relations inside the household (O’Hara 1994, p.54). Division of labour between men and women is reinforced by ideologies and cultural traditions (O’Hara 1998, p.3) which have played and sometimes still play a large role in the Austrian countryside. Women enter farming mostly through marriage. This implies a fixed route of entry and position within the family-in-law. The family often still has stereo-typed expectations; they expect certain tasks of the farm woman without rethinking this. Often there is no possibility for farm women’s own choices with regard to the labour spheres and household domains. That is why the household labour of women is often not defined as work, but as part of the role of women’s gender identity (Whatmore 1991, p.103).

Women have different roles within the farm unit; mother, wife, farm labourer. To all these roles belong specific prescribed labour domains. That is why farm women have several jobs at once. Their main responsibility often lies in the reproductive sphere; taking care of the housework and children, administrative work (Dax et al. 1995, p.100). Besides that they may also be partly involved in the farm work (productive sphere) and in general they have a very important role in on-farm activities. Because of this major participation in on-farm activities women are particularly hit by the extra work from this activity (E5).

All tasks together often form a hard work and burdensome life for Austrian farm women; in principal the work pressure and time for farm women in Austria are higher than for farm men (E1). Fortunately it is the case farm women are increasingly able (and allowed) to ask for help from other family members. This can be seen as a break-through of the patriarchal relations within rural society (E3). In the past women couldn’t do this because it was seen as a loss of image and women were afraid to be called lazy (E1).

The work of women in the family farm is often not realised and underestimated while especially reproductive work such as cooking and cleaning occurs within the household and is therefore not seen as ‘real’ (Gasson and Errington 1993, 175) and ‘productive’ work. The different tasks are seen as self-evident female work (E1). It seems as if Austrian farm women have always taken care of household, children and farm when necessary and the family often strongly holds to these traditional roles; carrying through changes seems to require an almost impossible effort (Kittel et al 1991, p.205). For example, it is therefore still quite common that men are hardly involved in the reproductive sphere.

Because of the existing inequality between the genders in the division of labour, women often experience social resistance while realising own professional ambitions. They also undergo special obstructions because of the

combination with other tasks in farm and family (Bock 1998, p.10). This results in a situation where there is not much time and flexibility left to start on-farm activities.

1.17 Conflicts within the family farm

Just like in all other families, farm families have their own problems from time to time. But for the latter there exist more conflict potential because of the difficulty to separate work from private sphere. A major conflict potential is the often complicated relations between the older and younger generations within the farm unit. It is still often the case that in Austria many generations are living under the same roof (E2) although the trend goes to more separate households (Dax et al. 1993, p.48), because of the wish for more privacy and less social control within the farm.

In general, the older generation tends to stick to the traditional way of life (E4). Therefore they are afraid to take risks and are often sceptical about new organisation (E1). In contrast young people appear more innovative and want to live a different life from their parents and parents-in-law.

One of the most common conflicts is the well-known conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. With the marriage into the family of her husband she enters a family where specific rules and traditions dominate, but which she is not familiar with. She is the one to adapt to the new life styles and roles. Often the mother-in-law is exerting too much influence on the way her daughter-in-law is working and living (E3).

There are other reasons as well for conflicts within the family farm (see E2). For example, women try to break out of the traditional and patriarchal way of living, identity crisis of farmers, conflicts between innovating and more conventional people, economic insecurity of farming, unequal division of labour between men and women, conflicts with the wider social environment, too high work-burden, consideration of farm pioneers as outsiders, etc. Because of the patriarchal relations and the multiple labour tasks farm women often have to deal with hard and complex situations and therefore are often involved in conflicts.

How it is dealt with conflicts is very important because it implies the way conflicts are solved or not. Many problems within the family remain unexpressed, because certain issues are still placed in rural society under a taboo (E3). Often conflicts are not solved; because farmers have no experience how to deal with conflicts (Kittel et al 1991, p.118). Besides this, the strong wish for a good performing family farm can also be of importance; it is mainly the farm women who chose to remain silent about the problems in the family in order to preserve the peace and unity in the farm unit (Kittel et al 1991, p.204). Unaddressed and unresolved conflicts within the family may eventually lead to different forms of stress, mental illness or even family breakdown (E2).

It seems for farm people especially difficult to ask for professional help from a social worker. This largely depends on the idea that a family farm is independent and can solve all problems within the family (see E2). Sometimes there is also a feeling of shame which is based on the concept that the existence of conflicts are seen as a failure for the unity of the family farm (E1). But gradually there is an increasing openness to talk about conflicts and problems within the family (E2). Yet these problems are not communicated to the outside world. In the end it seems important that problems are spoken out, because family members depend on each other and one can only start an on-farm activity when others agree and support your plans (Kittel et al 1991, p.217).

1.18 Position of women in family farm

The position of farm women within the family has improved a lot in comparison to the past. Nowadays for example, they are more engaged in the decision making process of the family farm and involved in the financial situation of the farm (E1). Also women are increasingly earning their own money and thus become financially more independent.

The position of farm women in the family is certainly influenced by the on-farm activity. It is difficult to assess whether their position is improved through the new activity or as a result of so many other aspects concerning the personal characters of woman, family and household organisation. It is also linked to the degree of success of the activity and what role the women played in its development and continuation. It should be noted the position or status within the family farm is often closely linked to the payment of the activity. When farm women are earning part of the total family income themselves, they generally become more appreciated than if they don't make any contribution in terms of money (E2).

In general, with the start of an on-farm activity farm women get the chance to build a more self-conscious identity as farm woman. Because of the high involvement in the activity they might feel greater self esteem and become more conscious of their own power and influence within the family (E5). But on the other side they have to cope with a higher work-burden (Goldberg 1997, p.33). In short, it seems very hard to define the different factors which influence the position of farm women.

Gradually, changes can be noticed in the social relationship between men and women in the Austrian countryside. In this process the generation shift cannot be neglected. One of the driving forces for changes in farm women's roles might result from new structures in rural community and the increasing interaction between young farm women with new ideas and progressive ways of working and living (Symes 1991 in Bock 1998, p.15). But in general farm women have to struggle a lot to gain more status and appreciation in order to improve their position within the family (E2).

1.19 Farm women as active agents

In the last decades many social changes within agrarian society have taken place. One of these changes, the process of individualisation, has strengthened the choices of farm women to make decisions regarding their own way of living (Oedl-Wieser 1997, p.287). Besides this, the influence from newcomers to the countryside is of major importance (see 1.12). This implies more contacts between urban and rural areas. Farm women might become more aware of their subordinated position when they see and experience situations in which this is not as clearly the case. In many aspects it seems still true that rural society tends to maintain traditional ways of thinking and living much longer than in urban areas (E2).

Most farm women are aware of the inequality between the genders, but this doesn't imply that they perceive themselves as subordinated. They might believe in the significance of their contribution to the family farm. Besides that, every woman finds an own way of dealing with the existing situation and relations (Whatmore et al. 1994, p.58).

An explicitly gendered organisation within the family farm doesn't automatically mean farm women are the social victims of the household without power or few internal influence. They can also be perceived as active agents in shaping the world around them (O'Hara 1998 p.153) and as women who have a strong sense of identity. Albeit it must be stressed that changes require a painful process within an environment with strong patriarchal relations. Women can make own choices, but these choices are often limited by the available resources and social restrictions. Of course, the individual character also plays a significant role. Lack of self-confidence, for example, can be one of the personal characteristics of farm women which makes them feel insecure in their daily life. Therefore their own way to become active and the ways in which they are supported and encouraged should not be neglected in the process of empowering of women.

Austrian farm women are at an increasing degree searching for independent living spheres, an improvement of their own social contacts and the recognition for their work inside the farm unit. Especially the younger women articulated the wish for an independent work domain to achieve an autonomous sphere of life (Oedl-Wieser 1993, p.13). New activities primarily performed by farm women could be a source of this empowerment.

2. Empirical Research

As already explored in the theoretical part, it is still often the case that Austrian farm women have to deal with a disadvantaged position within the family farm and within agrarian society in general. In the following analysis a closer look on the situation of three Austrian farm women who have developed an on-farm activity in cooperation with their family will be provided. This is a very important part of my work, because through these examples it can be seen how women themselves experience their lives in the family farm and how they have gone through the whole process of developing the new on-farm activity. In short, it enables to get a glimpse of the real life of farm women in Austria.

The views and opinions of agricultural experts from the BABF and from two experts outside the institute have been used throughout my study and are referenced in the Appendix. Summaries of the interviews with these experts have been transcribed and are referred to whenever appropriated. However, the full texts of expert interviews have not been included in this publication. Before analysing the farm women's interviews several contextual aspects related to the interviews will be treated.

2.1 Interviews

2.1.1 Interview method

I made use of a qualitative method of interviewing, semi-formal interviewing to be precise, because for the purpose of the study the respondents should have enough freedom to talk about their living situation and to give their own points of view on certain subjects. At the same time it was possible for me to introduce the same issues to all respondents.

First of all I started to think on which questions I really would like to get an answer. Besides my personal interest, the research questions and the literature I had already read, the information from different interviews with agricultural experts were the basis for the interview issues and the formulation of the interview questions. At the beginning I had some difficulties with the translation of theoretical concepts into usable operational instruments. My aim was to ask questions which would be easy and clear to be understood by all respondents. After the formulation of the questions, I discussed them several times with colleagues. They provided useful comments on the reformulation of the questions and on the grammatically correct use of the German language (note: the interviews took place in German).

Secondly, I had to prepare the whole process of interviewing. I got respective information from qualitative research handbooks and could speak with a colleague about experiences with carrying out qualitative interviews. My interview concept included items like how to introduce myself to the women, how to ensure that their information would be treated confidentially, important observations I should be aware of during the interview, and other similar aspects. This concept was very useful and clarifying for me.

2.1.2 Method of Finding Respondents

The criteria for the respondents were the following: it should concern family farms on which an on-farm activity takes place which is closely linked to the agrarian production itself and on which the farm women are the main actors of the activity.

With my colleagues we agreed to have two interviews to be taken in Oberösterreich where there were links to appropriate farm families available and a good possibility to meet farm women involved. One of the farm woman there was active in an on-farm activity and we asked her if she was willing to talk to me and whether she knew another 'active' woman in her neighbourhood with whom I could have a second interview. This is probably not the best way to come into contact with respondents. But one should realize it is difficult to come into

contact with the right people when you don't have contacts in the Austrian countryside. And besides that, a bigger problem was the difficulty to reach the farms. Normally spoken you need a car and I didn't have one.

The intention was to do another two interviews in another region of Austria. But because of the time factor (I had three weeks to finish everything off), we agreed it was the best to have only one. One of the selection criteria was, that it should be possible to reach the farm woman by public transport, so I could travel on my own. Finally a colleague arranged an interview for me with a farm woman in Kleinhöflein in Burgenland, which could be very well reached by bus. It was by coincidence that this again was an organic farm, just like the other two.

2.1.3 Research Areas

The first two interviews took place in the neighbourhood of the city Rohrbach in the northwest of the region Mühlviertel in the province of Upper Austria. The Mühlviertel is one of the less-favoured and economically weakest economic regions of Austria mainly due to the absence of large regional urban centres. This leads to a high commuting intensity between the rural areas and the nearest city Linz (Regionalbericht 2000, p.179). In the region around Rohrbach in 1991 still 19.8% of the labour force were employed in the agricultural sector. This is a very high percentage compared to the average of 6.2% for all Austria. The farm size in Rohrbach is around the average of Austria with 9.2 hectares (Regionalbericht West Österreich 1996, p.4ff). The Mühlviertel is one of the regions of Austria where organic farming started to boom in the 1990's and very early got a specific importance (Waldert 1992, p.68).

The third interview took place in Kleinhöflein, a little village in the north of Burgenland and in the close neighbourhood of the city Eisenstadt. North Burgenland is in reach of Vienna and on the border to Hungary and Slovakia. The degree of mobility between the rural areas and the urban centres is relatively high. It is one of the regions where the information technology is booming in recent years (Regionalbericht 2000, p.33). Nevertheless, the agricultural sector, mainly wine production and arable farming, is still significant as well. In the region around Eisenstadt in 1991 about 8.4% (absolute) of the labour force were employed in the agricultural sector (Regionalbericht Ost Österreich 1996, p.4). With 5.7 hectares per farm the size of the farms is relatively small when compared with the average of 12.5 hectares for all Austria (Regionalbericht Ost Österreich 1996, p.6). Organic farming is not as widespread in this region as in the Mühlviertel but increasing over recent years.

2.1.4 Profiles of Respondents

Tabelle 1: Farm woman I

Personal Information	
Age	43 years.
Children	Three children; 10, 6 and 3 years.
Farm Residents	Husband, children and mother-in-law. The latter lives in a separate household.
Education	Agrarian education, hospital nurse.
Job History	She was nurse in a hospital for about ten years.
Agrarian Background	Yes, she was raised on a farm.
Married into Farm of Husband	Yes.
Farm Business Information	
Farm Business	Mixed organic farm business: dairy farm, grain cultivation.
On-farm activities	Processing and direct marketing of organic noodles, direct marketing of organic beef.
Other activities	Selling of organic grain, selling of organic milk.
Hectares	In total 22 hectares (20 own property and 2 rented); of which forest (2), grain cultivation (7), pasture (13).
Farm Manager	Husband.
Farm Owner	Husband and herself.

Tabelle 2: Farm woman II:

Personal Information	
Age	43 years.
Children	Three children; 14, 12 and 7 years.
Farm Residents	Husband, children, mother-in-law, great-aunt. The latter two live in a separate household.
Education	Two years training for home care assistance.
Job History	Home care assistant for eleven years.
Agrarian Background	Yes, she was raised on a farm.
Married into Farm of Husband	Yes.
Farm Business Information	
Farm Business	Organic farm business: grain cultivation.
On-farm activity	Baking and direct marketing of organic bread.
Other activities	Sawmill, mill, keeping cows for own use (meat).
Hectares	In total 8 hectares organic grain (5.5 own property and 2.5 rented).
Farm Manager	herself.
Farm Owner	herself.

Tabelle 3: Farm woman III:

Personal Information	
Age	48 years.
Children	Five children; between 29 and 8 years.
Farm Residents	Husband, three children (two of them are only there in the weekends), mother-in-law. The latter lives in a separate household.
Education	Three years in economic professional education.
Job History	She worked in a bank office for a couple of years.
Agrarian Background	No, but her parents did own a retail shop where they sold wine from the farmers in the neighbourhood.
Married into Farm of Husband	Yes.
Farm Business Information	
Farm Business	Mixed organic farm business: pigs, vineyard, agriculture.
On-farm activity	Processing and direct marketing of organic pork and sausages.
Other activities	Processing and direct marketing of organic wine, selling of organic grain, maize, sunflowers.
Hectares	In total 76 hectares of which; vineyard (6), agriculture (70) (grain, maize, sunflowers).
Farm Manager	Husband.
Farm Owner	Husband and herself.

2.1.5 Personal Findings

(first respondent = I, second respondent = II, third respondent = III)

During the **first interview** (14. 11. 2002) there was a good and open atmosphere. That was probably because I spend the night at the farm. Before the interview I helped her with packing noodles, so I had the chance to experience one of her labour tasks. During this activity we talked a lot. So when I did the interview, I already knew a lot about her farm and living situation and about the kind of person she was: open, friendly, direct to the point.

The only disadvantage for me and maybe also for her, was the use of the recorder. When I turned the recorder on, I immediately noticed there was a more formal atmosphere. She tried to talk very clear and understandable German for me, which was good for me of course, but which also had the disadvantage she wasn't using her own daily words. I think this is a pity, since she might have used other words with slightly different meanings, than she actually meant to say.

I found it remarkable how her husband and she worked together. They were both aware of the different domains in the household and farm and the different roles that have to be performed, and they tried to make the best of it. For example, this brought about that now and then they are changing roles; she is working in the stables and he is taking care of the children. After their marriage they tried to teach each other their respective tasks. I think they form a very good team, professionally as well as privately.

For example, she cooked dinner while her husband cleared everything away afterwards and made some coffee. It probably is still the case that she is more involved in the housework but at least they are both aware of this and try to change this a bit now and then.

She is an extremely straightforward woman, who follows her own instinct and who knows what she wants. From the interview remarks I'm sure the person she is today, is partly formed by her life experiences outside agriculture since she worked for a while in a hospital as nurse and she also used to travel a lot.

A major value for her is the quality of life. At the farm they try to produce and process many own products themselves; own vegetables and fruits, meat, sausage, bacon, noodles, and so on. I was amazed to see people who live still so close to nature and whose attitude is to treat nature with such a great respect.

We had the interview in the kitchen and a few times we were disturbed; a few telephone calls and her little daughter was in need for help. For me this wasn't really disturbing because I know I can't expect an interview without interruptions, because of the busy family life.

During the **second interview** (14. 11. 2002) I wasn't so aware of the presence of the recorder anymore, which was good, I think. I also knew better how to ask the questions and how to react to the answers.

This time there were more people around while I talked to the farm women, but that was also because of the situation. The first farm woman (I) had phoned her sister-in-law only that morning, because she had forgotten to look for another interviewee for me. So my second respondent didn't have a good idea what I was going to ask her. In the beginning we talked alone in the kitchen. A few times the telephone rang and her husband came in once. I think I didn't explain very well that I would actually like to talk to her alone, because the husband started answering my questions as well! But I could not interfere in that situation and stop the husband from answering. Fortunately the interview was almost finished and it wasn't like he dominated the conversation. They tried to answer the questions together, which was not the intention for my research of course, but which reveals something about the way they are dealing with each other and about the respect they have for each other. In the end I tried to see the positive side of this interview situation.

The farm woman pointed out explicitly that she is aware of the presumed role of farm women; taking care of the household and children. Although she is aware of the 'negative' position, she also thinks this is justified and to a certain degree the appropriate role of the lady of the house. Men are often doing heavy physical work and shouldn't be burdened too much. But on the other hand, she also thought it is the role of women to pay attention to this supposed role-pattern and to make the partner aware of it.

I also think she accepts these traditional roles between men and women, because she holds the opinion everybody should perform those tasks in which he/she can work the fastest and the best. And simply women are esteemed to be better in the housework. They have a better overview of what is necessary in the household than men.

At the same time I had the impression her husband and she are working together a lot as well, in certain domains. There are also many different tasks to perform, because of the multiplicity of the businesses. I think they both liked this way of 'working together'; they have the possibility to spend some time together and to communicate, while at the same time some work is done as well.

I was surprised by her intensive interest in a lot of things. She likes to try out different things in her life. When they were rebuilding the house for example, she also helped with the construction and building.

She also has a clear opinion on many issues and was not afraid to share these with me. She also knows what she likes and what she doesn't like. But she admitted, sometimes it is hard for her not to cross the emotional and physical limits of her abilities. Through the years she learned to recognize these limits better.

After the two interviews I had an informal chat with both farm women respondents together. Both women take their role as mother very serious and they both think it is important to spend much time with their children; both stressed the importance of the role as mother. They also made clear that the role of the father is often taken over by the grandmother, who in both cases still lives within the farm unit, but in a separated household. It seems the old generation finds it inappropriate and uncommon when their sons or sons-in-law are helping out in the household or are taking care for the children. The first farm woman recalled that her mother-in-law once told her son, who was helping in the kitchen: 'Go along, make yourself useful, I'll handle this'. This also depicts

how the old generation of farm women views housework: it is no valuable work, and does not give real status. Women should be responsible for it and men should perform the ‘real’ work. The respondents told me that farm women (in the past) tended to spoil their sons in this way. As a consequence many male farmers have never learned how to perform certain tasks in the household or aren’t even aware of the possibility to help out in the household.

For both the most important thing was to make money out of the new business, but at the same time they should still be able to enjoy life and to live in a conscious and healthy way. These last values have turned to be seen as more important than money.

This is why both women know were to draw their boundaries. The first farm woman for example has the possibility to enlarge her activity with the processing of organic noodles, because the demand of customers is rising. But she doesn’t want to spend more time on her business than she already does. Now she managed to combine the work very well with her other tasks in the household and on the farm, and she wouldn’t like to change this situation.

The **third interview** (3. 12. 2002) took place in the kitchen of the farm woman. The situation was different in comparison with the other two interviews, because there I had been introduced by a person I knew and who knew the respondent as well. Now the woman didn’t really know what to expect. From the beginning she was very friendly, which was kind of relief. We had some coffee and biscuits first and had a little talk about my research study. At the start of the interview she was a bit reserved in answering. But later on this disappeared and she started to answer in a more open and self conscious way.

When she talked about her mother-in-law, who is living inside the farm unit as well, though in a separate household we touched a very interesting topic. It seems they help each other a lot when needed. The only thing her mother-in-law doesn’t do any more is the work in the wine production and processing; that is now too heavy for her. The other way around, the farm woman helped her for example, with the organising of the celebration of her 75th birthday. It was too much stress for the old woman, to do this on her own.

Although the relations between the two are good, the woman expressed she is very glad that they live in separate households. In this way there are no irritations on how one should live and work. The advantage is, help and support is always nearby. The woman mentioned that it is still often the case that many family farms don’t have separate households. According to her, such a situation where different generations live together in one house (and household) often leads to heavy conflicts.

The way I realised the task organisation in the household was that there was a strict division of labour between her and her husband. The latter mainly works in the countryside and is a lot on the road to sell their wine. This is in contrast to his wife, who is more involved in the household, the processing of the products and the direct selling from the farm. In short: the woman seems to work inside the farm unit and her husband more outside.

In the end it was unclear for me how the decisions were taken inside the family. But I did get the impression the main decisions within the farm unit are taken together. She expressed over and over again it takes the approval of both the partners to start a new activity and to manage such a busy and varied farm.

After the interview she showed me her farm and she did this with proud and pleasure.

2.1.6 Analyses of Interviews

Following the introduction to the interview situation and main issues dealt with, the next section will provide the analyses of interviews, structured by the topics most relevant to the execution of the on-farm activities. I

have tried to include quotations so as to indicate with the respondents words (albeit translated from German) the kind of arguments used for the issues discussed.

The on-farm activity

Before a family farm actually starts a new activity in addition to farming, a whole process of thinking, negotiating and decision-taking has to take place. Usually the process starts with the **wish** or necessity **to change** something on the farm. It can be either one person within the family¹ who isn't content with the current situation, or the whole family is of the opinion something needs to be changed. Thus the **idea to start something new going beyond the standard agrarian production, and the motivation to start such an activity can differ greatly from one person (and family) to another.**

As noted, **a whole decision making process** has to be undergone before something new can actually be achieved. Many things have to be negotiated inside the family farm, not only the technical and financial aspects of the activity, but also the potential personal changes required, like the division of labour within the family.

Thus the idea alone is not enough; one has to implement the idea and turn it into reality. Hereby a certain **strategy** should already be in mind and of course this depends on the way the pluriactivity will be developed from the start. It is the question whether the activity can be carried out professionally or not. When there are just vague ideas and plans how everything should go, the activity isn't likely to succeed. This includes also to decide which **persons** are actually going to **participate** in the **new activity**.

Starting a new business means new unknown processes and changes. Therefore it might be the case there is a particular need for **professional support** and **information in this period**. It depends on the willingness of the family and on the available offer of such services to which extent these services are used.

In all the interviews of the farm women this first phase of the development of the pluriactivity was a particular important issue of the interview.

Wish to change

The main wish or need to change something on the farm of the respondents was indeed the economic necessity. The structural agrarian changes after the EU accession of Austria played an important role. In general the agricultural output prices declined, while at the same time the competition increased. The main reaction of small farms in Austria was to start something new and carry out changes on the use made of farm assets, or to search directly for off-farm employment as already explained in the 'theoretical part'. The respondents have chosen the former option and searched for a way to reevaluate their agrarian production through increased involvement in activities beyond farming but carried out on-farm.

Especially the two women from the Mühlviertel were forced to search for another extra income source in order to stabilise the family income.

„There was the fear that we can not live from agriculture, and I said that we have to think about an alternative where we can gain some additional income.“ (I)

Interestingly by this quotation at the same time says something about the personal wish for changes. Farm woman I, for example, expressed that it is important for her to have an own working domain within the farm unit in which she can make herself useful and earn part of the total family income. In this sense the individual wish to change something is strongly linked to the own motives to start something new.

1. With the term family I'll refer in this report to the family members who are living inside the farm unit.

For farm woman III another personal reason to change something in the former situation of the farm unit played a role. She and her husband have always kept some pigs for the household's own use. At a moment she was fed up with eating sausages the whole time, because there was more than enough meat for their family.

„I couldn't see anymore these sausages (Blunzen) in winter time. I don't want never again to eat them. And therefore I have given them to some friends.“ (III)

For this family the financial benefit of the new activity formed a part of the wish to change as well, but as far as became clear from the interview, this was of less importance than for the other respondents.

Motivation

It is not surprising that the main reason to start an on-farm activity is the financial necessity. Many family farms, just like the respondents, are in need of an extra income to stabilise the declining incomes from agrarian production since the 1980's. For the respondents the option to search for an off-farm employment did not provide an attractive prospect.

In general it is the case that the motivation is expressed primarily by the farm woman. But according to women I and II their own motivation and the motivations of their husbands were the same.

„With respect to motivation we are the same. We believed that we have enough potential to make some efficient business.“ (I)

Compared to the other two women, farm woman III had the feeling the motivation for the processing and selling of organic pork mainly came from her side. This might be linked to the fact that she was the one who was the most unsatisfied with the former situation.

Personal interest to start something new played a very important role for the farm women. It was their conviction that when one is not really interested, it is hard to spend enough time and energy on the new activity. According to the respondents, it is of major importance that all family members who are closely involved or affected by the activity (in these cases this was the husband) support the decision completely. This complex process cannot be managed on its own without the active support by the other family members.

„Together you have to look after it, that the business is running.“ (II)

„It is necessary that both agree to start the new business. If my husband would have said he does not want to join it, then we could not have done it.“ (III)

It also seemed to be an advantage when characteristics like persistence to try something new, desire to build up something 'own', need and pleasure to get in contact with people, and so on, are present. This attitude underlines the strong wish and desire to put energy in the activity and to make it work.

It is necessary to like to have contact with the consumers. Otherwise you shouldn't start the business“ (III)

It was stressed particularly by the respondents from the Mühlviertel that it is very important there is an own strong wish to develop something new within the farm. They were of the opinion it should be 'your own thing' and you have to believe in it. Because when you don't have confidence in your plans and activities, other people, and customers for example, won't have it either.

„If you are not convinced of your idea or of it is not your own idea, than you have no respect (...) and it becomes difficult to be approved positively.“ (I)

But one should not overlook, personal motives are influenced by the possibilities a family farm has in the regional context, i.e. particularly the social and economic environment. One of the women (II) for example, told they actually didn't have much choice in choosing a special kind of on-farm activity. They grow organic grain and there appeared two possibilities to them: sell the grain to an organic bakery or baking bread themselves. Because there was no baker in the near surrounding, only the latter possibility was left.

Idea to start something new

It was remarkable to note that the idea was often not very clear in the beginning. In general it was also difficult to say from whom the idea actually came. This might be due to the complexity of such a long decision process. At the same time it was obvious for the farm women that they have realised some chances and possibilities in the new activity; they had specific visions of how certain things should go. Often the question whether the new activity was easily to combine with other tasks in the household and the farm played a major role.

„And then we came accross the idea to produce noodles. I said to myself that this was an activity which could be at least calculated and even measured in terms of time and costs.“ (I)

According to farm woman III, the idea suddenly seemed to be there, differently to the situation of the other respondents. As explained she was fed up with processing and eating pork all the time. A neighbour wondered whether it wasn't a solution to sell part of the pork to other people. After that she (III) presented the idea to her husband and after some considerations she started to develop the activity.

In most cases the farm women were the ones who had to be the most convincing and persuading towards the rest of the family. This is mainly based in the fact that they had the strong believe and motivation that it was necessary to start something new. The importance of reflecting the own interest and wish for something new, was strongly expressed by all interviewees, as already explained above. The respondents think especially farm women have to make their own decisions and follow their own aspirations in order to contest the traditional (patriarchal) relationship between men and women.

I think it is particularly important for women to become clear what do I want to do. It is often expected that farm women are acting in a traditonal way and keep traditions. This is thinking in fixed gender roles and not what women really want to do.(I)

You have to plan und think carefully from the beginning, is this the right way how I am dealing with it. (...) And with this, I had to come through. (...) What's important and an immediate need, but cannot be paid for, it is always the woman who has to care for it.“ (II)

Decision making process

Preparation for most activities took a long time before they could actually start. This has to do with multiple factors relevant to make the decision. It is important those decisions are taken seriously. The most important aspects are to consider if it is actually possible (financial aspects) to start such an activity and if it is really what the family wishes and can support as its strategy (see 'theoretical part').

Unexpectedly, in the Mühlviertel both women formed a good team with their husbands. The major decisions associated with the activity were discussed and taken together. The daily decisions are generally taken by the person who is responsible for that domain in which the question arises.

„The economic decision on the farm unit and future activity are taken by both of us together (...). Smaller decisions derive from the working fields you are involved in.“ (I)

From the interview with the woman from Burgenland it became obvious, that she and her husband have decided the most radical innovations at the farm together. Again less important and daily decisions are taken according to daily work involvement.

„In the most cases we have decided together. But in some agendas I am not so competent and there I can not give advise to him (my husband)“. (III)

But woman II made it clear, she really had to make her husband aware of the fact she also had an equal say in the decision making process within the family farm. During the discussions on the new activity she had to make her expectations clear, as is shown in the next quotation.

„Often it was necessary to convince my husband about my views and expectations because he often didn't realize them.“ (II)

It can be seen from this quotation, not all men are used (maybe unconscious) to take the opinions and wishes of their wives into account; sometimes the women have to make them aware they also have a say. This actually can be seen as the usual situation for most Austrian family farms. But it is a huge improvement, when at least the consciousness is there that women are aware of their own power and influence.

One of the decisions that have to be taken is which family members are going to transform the idea into reality and which persons eventually will participate in the activity (see part ‘participants’). As far as could be analysed from the interviews, these two groups were the same persons, i.e. primarily the farm women. But it should be noted, that they get a lot of help and support from their husbands.

Strategy

It seems most on-farm activities start step by step, rather than right away at a professional scale; a clear and distinct strategy is often missing. This was also the case for the respondents. The advantage of this might be the flexibility to try things out without running high financial risks. The new business is not too big for people to stop with it and it is still big enough to make some money. Things are kept open in order not to exclude anything from the beginning. A lot of creativity is used to discover the whole process of developing an own business. It can be seen as a process of trial and error, just like the next quotation underlines:

And then we have started (to process noodles). Half a year we just made experiences and worked for our own or gave the products as a present to friends, before we dared to go to the market and sell our products.“ (I)

In the case of the three respondents, they started offering their family and friends the processed products and in this way the clientele increased by mouth advertising. They just went ahead with the activity and looked how things were going.

„And it started really on a very small scale. And then more and more people came and wanted to buy organic pork. And then we increased the production step by step.“ (III)

When it seems to be a success, the activity can always widen. Or it might be the case other activities will be taken up, supplementing the first one. In one family (I) already many new ideas occurred to engage in other related activities. In the future they want to start with the processing of own apple juice. Together with some other farmers from the neighbourhood they want to buy a fruit press, so that they can work together in cooperation.

It was interesting to see all farms were very mixed enterprises. Two (I, III) had different agricultural activities and the other (II) had non-agricultural businesses besides the agricultural production. The next quotation indicates that the strength of the family farm can lie in the existence of different small businesses inside the farm unit, which are not necessarily linked to agriculture:

„We want to have three pillars on the farm: A small one in agriculture, then the timber mill (which is what my husband works in) and the saw mill.“ (II)

In the case of farm woman III, she and her family had the strong wish to run a typical farm of Burgenland. This implies a very varying farm business in which the existence of the on-farm activity also plays a significant role.

What I and also my husband really like very much is the big diversity of a farm. We don't want only wine production and crop production, we want a farm which was typical in the Burgenland in former times.“ (III)

Participants

It is mainly the farm women who are the human strengths behind the pluriactivity. Of course it eventually depends on the kind of activity which persons are participating. But for the respondents in general it can be said women are the ones who take care of the main tasks of the on-farm activity and who are held responsible for the running of it. They arrange the contacts with the clients and make sure everything goes the way it should go.

One of the interviewed women (I) has employed an external worker for half a day in the week. But this again was part of one of the several projects she and her husband are involved in. The lady who is helping them is involved in a program for mentally handicapped people. The main aim of the program is the social integration of the patients into society. For the family (I) it is only possible to hire the lady because they don't have to pay her very much. In the end the main effect is to offer an interesting working place which is more important from the social aspect and exceeds by far the economic reasoning.

Women II works together with her husband on the family farm and they aren't in need for external labour, this in contrast to farm woman III, who is making use of seasonal labourers. The latter are mainly needed in the vineyards. There is one friend who has good knowledge of the processing of sausages and he helps woman III on a regular basis.

The husband of farm woman I isn't helping directly in the on-farm activity.

„My husband doesn't help me processing the noodles, this makes him nervous.“ (I)

However, he takes care of the fields where the organic grain grows, which is used for the processing of the noodles. And he also looks after the cows that are meant for the slaughtering. His wife takes care of the processing of the noodles and the meat processing and the marketing of it.

In the case of farm woman II her husband helps with the baking of the bread. He has some knowledge on the quality of grain and normally he is the one who roles out the dough, because of the heavy work.

Woman III performs most of the tasks of the on-farm activity herself. Her husband is involved in the foddering of the pigs and with other physical work, like the transport of the pigs to the butcher. One of their daughters (28 years) is also helping out, when she is at home.

To summarize, all respondents performed the tasks of the new activity to a large extent, partly with help from their family, the husband in most cases.

Professional support and extension services

All initiatives had in some way to do with professional services. For instance, they had contact with a financial consultant or with an agency for EU-support programmes. Because there was a kind of boom between 1990 and 1997 of stepping into new on-farm activities in the countryside, there was a wide range of offer, also from the side of the government, of agricultural extension services and possibilities for credits for such initiatives.

Besides that, respondents I and II had good contacts with other people in the neighbourhood who were involved in similar or other activities. These contacts were seen as very valuable and as a kind of support as well, though not professional. The women explained they have learned from each other and had the possibility to talk to each other about problems and risks.

For farm woman III, this support and contact with colleagues with similar activities wasn't there. This probably has to do with the fact that her farm is the only one in the area which is involved in organic farming and in direct marketing of meat. In the end it was clear for all families that they themselves are the ones who have to try and search the best way of working for their family farm.

Changes after the start of the activity

After the start of the on-farm activity it is probable that many things have to be changed and look quite different for the farm woman and her family than before. One of the most evident changes will take place in the **division of labour between the family members**. The new activity will certainly require extra work and the question arises how this extra work will be divided between the different family members and based on what criteria these decisions are taken.

First of all, it is a good thing to have a closer look at the **daily tasks and labour domains** of the farm women. Besides this it should also be noted what work other family members perform inside the farm, on-farm activity and household. After that, it can be sorted out in what way the new activity has changed the kind and amount of work of the farm women. To get a better idea of the own view of the respondents on the labour division inside the family, attention is paid on the degree of **satisfaction** and **enjoyment** the women receive from their **work**, what they actually perceive as main profession and whether the women think the **division of labour** inside the family farm is **equally divided** or not.

Except the changes in the division of labour, changes might also be recognizable in the personal lives of the farm women. There can also be changes in the way other family members or the wide social environment are **valuing** the farm woman; they might appreciate her work more or less than before the start of the activity.

Another factor that probably will change is the financial situation of the family farm.

Daily tasks and labour domains

The traditional way of the division of labour between family members can't be neglected in this report. Certain tasks are still perceived as a typical female sphere, others as a typical male thing. It is usually the case farm women are responsible for a lot of tasks within the household and the farm. So it wasn't surprising this was also the case for the respondents.

The only problem is that many of these tasks are still not perceived as real work. They need to be done because they belong to the basis and existence of the family farm but at the same time they are seen as self-evident and are not valued in money (see 'theoretical part'). Most of these tasks belong to the reproductive domain. That implies working in the household, taking care of the children, cooking meals, etc.

In these cases it was indeed mainly the women who took care of the reproductive work, as already noted above. However, a temporary shift in roles can be noticed between husband and wife. At least it was like this for the women in the Mühlviertel.

„I said I want to learn everything which is necessary for the daily work with cattle and for the work on the farm in general. My husband was instructed by me how to clean the house und how to do the household.“ (I)

One gets the impression the division of labour between husband and wife is equally divided and the partners work and cooperate together a lot. But although the women I and II asserted this, it still seems to be the women, together with other female family members, who remain responsible for the household and the children. For example, the mothers-in-law of all respondents were helping out in the household and with the children. In this way the role of the farm man as father is often perceived as less important, especially by the older generation. The men are held responsible for the ‘real’ work, i.e. the farm work. One of the respondents (I) told me for example that her mother-in-law finds it inappropriate when her son is helping out in the household. It cannot be neglected both husbands in the Mühlviertel help their wives with the housework, but often only when necessary. This is in contrast to the situation of woman III; her husband doesn’t help at all. But that might be because he is mostly on the road to sell their wines.

Most farm women don’t like the housework and don’t want to be restricted to it. Nevertheless, at the same time they perceive and accept it as part of their roles as mother and wife. They hold the opinion that everybody should perform those tasks in which he/she is the fastest. For women this still is the household work, because many farm men never learned how to work in the household. The next quotation reveals how dissatisfied farm woman I is with housework.

„For example with cleaning. What can you see after two days? Nothing anymore! The work in the household has to be done but it has no appreciation.“ (III)

It was interesting to find out that the women are the ones who are concerned with the processing and selling of the agrarian products; they perform the handwork.

„I have to admit, I can’t operate the tractor. Therefore my husband is doing this work (...). But I can handle meat and sausages, this is where I am good at.“ (III)

The men on the other hand perform the machine work; in all cases they take care of the organic production and arable farming. It is probably not a coincidence this was the same in the old days.

It can be summarized that the traditional division of labour still plays an important role in the Austrian countryside, even in more modern and progressive family farms. But there is also more and more awareness of the presumed self-evidence of division of labour between men and women and of the possibility of the changes and adaptations of roles between farm men and women.

Division of labour

It is not obvious to interviewees to describe and explain in which way the division of labour inside the family farm is organised. Often this has to do with the self-evidence and expectations one has towards the roles of other family members. Indeed this was the way woman III felt it. She explained the division of tasks between her and her husband were self-evident.

„The division of labour was rather in this way that everybody is doing that work in which he/she is good (...).“ (III)

Surprisingly, for the other respondents this self-evidence was less clear. The farm women argued they had actually talked with their husbands about the division of tasks before the start of the on-farm activity. This implies an awareness on both sides of the different domains and responsibilities in the farm unit. But again, it should be worked out explicitly who is responsible for which tasks; otherwise the farm woman is the one who will have to perform the small and undervalued tasks in the family farm.

„It must be made clear, who is responsible for which task or working sphere. Because otherwise, especially as woman, you are ending up in everything and without appreciation of the others.“ (II)

As noted above, although this awareness of the division of labour can be decided upon, there remains the general pattern of female responsibility in the household. One farm woman (II) had the feeling her husband is already doing enough hard work at the farm and that is why she doesn't want to bother him with more work.

„I often think my husband has to do all that heavy work. Because of this situation I didn't want to burden him additional work. But on the other side the partner will feel not or less responsible for the work of the other.“ (II)

From this, it becomes clear that farm women perform many different tasks within the farm unit, when compared to the farm men who are mainly (only) responsible for the farm. Again the time argument is relevant as well. That means time is often lacking inside a family farm to help each other in all domains and to actively change labour roles. Everybody is expected to be busy with those tasks in which he/she is the fastest instead. This implies also some assumption about the physical difference between men and women. Men in general are faster in lifting heavy things. These physical differences also should be taken into account in the process of labour division.

Changes in labour situation

The main finding from the interviews was that the tasks of the farm women before taking up the activity were pretty much the same than after the start of the activity. The major thing what changed was the extra work from the activity and the increasing degree of the organisation to arrange all the different tasks. In order to utilize the factor time in a flexible and efficient way, it must be decided which tasks are more important and necessary than others. Farm woman I for instance, told me she leaves the less important tasks inside the household, in order to have enough time left for more important activities such as the on-farm activity.

„In families which have no pluriactivity, the farm women can keep the household perfect all morning long (...). But I don't have the time to do this.“ (I)

Time efficiency in general is a very important subject for the respondents. One woman (I) for example stated that some work of the new activity is performed at the same time while she is taking care of her children. Thus indeed the work-burden is getting higher in comparison with the situation before the activity, but women try to make the best of it, by combining different tasks together. They have to, otherwise there isn't enough time left for the new activity.

„Of course there is more work to do now, but this additional work occurs at the same time as taking care for the children. So it can be combined.“ (I)

Woman II tries to keep to a certain time schedule in which she also tries to adjust the work of the activity with the child care, just like woman I. It also depends on the life cycle of the family farm, how much time flexibility is available. When the children are older and going to school (like in the situation of farm woman II) they also have their own friends and meetings and so on. In this way there is more to organise for them as when they were small.

„There is more organisational work to do, also with the children. When they were smaller (...) they were staying with me during my work. But now, the children have their own schedule with the school and for their leisure time. So I think, my head is full of things.“ (II).

After the start of the on-farm activity, woman II and her husband had the opportunity to work together more intensively than before. She expressed she really values this time and thinks they have a better communication with each other about the family and the farm than before.

For the woman from Burgenland the work time has risen because of the new activity. Her main problem is that she needs a whole week to process the organic meat into sausages and pork. In this week other tasks, within the household and vineyard for example, have to wait. She didn't expect the on-farm activity would take up so much time.

„The direct marketing of our pork and sausages is really very much work, I experienced. I didn't think before starting this activity that it will be so much work.“ (III)

It is important to have some space to divide the available time between the different domains and tasks. In this aspect it still plays a crucial role that in these cases the farm women can rely on their husbands and mothers-in-laws for help when necessary.

Satisfaction and enjoyment of the work

It was remarkable that all respondents were actually quite happy with their daily work. At least they told they were. At the same time it was clear they also have their bad moments and things don't always run smoothly and without complications.

„I really enjoy my work very much. Just when getting up in the morning it is very hard for me, I don't feel fine in the morning, it is somehow against my natural rhythm, but I have to get up ...“ (II)

For woman III it was hard to combine all the different tasks within the farm unit. She felt that this was one of the disadvantages of her work.

„Often the diversity (of tasks) was a problem for me, the pigs, the wine and crop production. Because it is very much work. (...) Then I think, I can't concentrate on all three tasks.“ (III)

Perception of main profession

This was not the same for the different farm women. Two (I and III) perceived their profession primarily as farm women but the third (II) felt more inclined with the new activity and saw it as her main profession. It is difficult to give an explanation for these differences, because it concerns the personal opinions of the respondents. It might be linked to the kind of farm one is living on. For example, woman (II) who associates her job more closely with the pluriactivity lives on a farm engaging just in organic grain cultivation. There is not so much farm work around as on the mixed organic farms of farm women I and III. It must be noted that the latter explain all the various tasks they perform, add up to their personally perceived profession. So for woman I at one moment she is the noodles farm woman and at another moment she feels as meat farm woman.

„Sometimes I say to myself I am the noodle-farm women, and then the meat-farm women. (...) One day is different from another. This diversity is the essence of my profesion.“ (I)

Equality of the division of labour

In all cases it seems the farm women were the ones with the most increased work-burden after the start of the on-farm activity because women were the most involved in the new activity in comparison with other family members. Besides that, they still are responsible for the same (amount of) tasks in the household and farm as before the activity. It is hard to conclude quantitatively from these three cases if they are also the ones with the

highest work-burden inside the family farm, because the tasks of the other family members aren't specified and questioned in the same manner as for the farm women.

One of the respondents (I) thought the division of labour within the family was equally and this is also the woman who carries out most of the tasks together with her husband. She and her husband regularly substitute each other in specific work fields in order to give each other some space and freedom when needed. This flexibility is only reached by good communication and understanding of the work tasks of each other.

„Sometimes we are changing our tasks, so that I am relieved for some time from child care. (...) And I really have the chance to say, now you take the children because I have to make an other work.“ (I)

Farm woman III also thought the division of labour in her family is equally divided although she is the one who is responsible for the whole household. But at the same time she and her husband share some labour tasks as well.

„We have arranged that my husband is feeding the pigs in the morning and I am feeding them in the evening.“ (III)

All small tasks together make the work-burden of the farm women. It is mainly the women who are the strengths behind the running of the family farm. They have to watch what tasks need to be done first and which are of less importance. This is emphasized by woman II, who had some doubts whether the division of labour in her family was equally divided.

„I have the feeling, that I am responsible for the family. (...) I was always the person who was caring and looking if somebody needs something or something has to be done. (...) I question it, why is it always me to be the person caring for everybody?“ (II)

On the other hand the respondents are aware of this work-burden and they know they are the ones who can change something about it, by asking others for help, for example. They have to be conscious of their own power and influence in running their own lives.

„But it lies also in the hands of the women to communicate this work-burden to the other family members. I didn't see it this way at the beginning.“ (II)

Personal changes after the start of the new activity

The new activity has an impact on the whole life of the farm household. Because in these cases it were mainly the farm women who are the most involved in the new activities, it is interesting to investigate whether they themselves think something has changed in their own personal lives, their way of thinking and behaviour.

It is interesting that farm women I and II on the one side became more aware of their own possibilities and own influence on their lives and on the other side they have realised that it is important to limit the amount of work, which is different to many other Austrian farm women (see 'theoretical part').

Farm woman's (I) view of agriculture has changed since she and her husband turned to organic agriculture. After this transition she has learned more about healthy food and other quality aspects of life. At that moment she also started to value the nature and the profession of farmer more. Besides that it became clear for her that the only person who has the strongest influence on her life, is she herself. It is important for her to take her own place within the family farm. Because when she doesn't, she thinks she will be carried away with the traditional pattern within family farms.

„(...) When I would not take space on the farm, the system would be the same as in former times. That means my husband is with his mother and the mother is saying what to do. And I didn't want that anymore.“ (I)

Farm woman (II) argued she is more aware of her own limits than before the activity. She knows when to say no and when to reduce her amount of work, but this was a long learning process. At the beginning of the on-farm activity for example, she got up very early to start with the baking of the bread. Soon she found out this was too early and too much for her. She decided to start one hour later and bring the bread later to the shops where they sell her bread.

„At the beginning I had only 4 to 5 hours of sleeping und that was much too short for me. This situation was too much for me. (...) Than I said to the shopkeepers, I want to bring the bread an hour later otherwise I can't do it.“ (II)

So the main change in the personal lives was that the farm women became aware of their own abilities and they learned how to recognize their own limits. Whether this is the same for woman III, cannot be said from the interview. For her the main personal positive change was the increase in personal contacts and small talks with people from the neighbourhood, but also with foreigners, who started to buy her meat products.

Appreciation

Farm women involved in on-farm activities might be treated and valued differently than farm women without such activities, whose work often remains unknown and unappreciated. Farm woman I gained much recognition from her family from the beginning. Sisters and brothers of both sides aren't involved in agriculture and they were very proud that she had the power and persistence to start something totally new. At first she received some critical comments from the side of her mother-in-law. But when the activity started to succeed, the latter became proud of her daughter-in-law and since that moment they respect each others lives and work.

In the beginning farm woman II didn't realise herself that she had developed an own professional activity. Because of the curious and positive reactions from friends of her children, she started to notice that it was actually quite uncommon what she had achieved. Especially the people from the neighbourhood who weren't involved in farming found her activity very interesting. First her children were a bit sceptic about the new activity, because of the increasing amount of time and work it would cost their mother. But later her children became proud of her bread and her success as well.

„The children were a little bit afraid that the work would increase too much. But now I think they are proud of our bread and our success.“ (II)

According to farm woman III she receives more appreciation for her products than before. Her customers value her products highly and return to the farm over and over again to buy the delicious sausages.

„But when we started with the sausages I received very much appreciation and praise. The costumers would say again and again, we hope the sausages will be as good as last time.“ (III)

Although she reported that it is mainly the products which are appreciated, she got the impression that it is also she herself, as a working farm woman, who receives high recognition as well.

Changing financial position

All respondents felt that the need for an extra income was the main motive for the new activity. Therefore it should be examined in what way this extra income influences the financial position of the family.

For the farm women I and II the income from the new activity is about half of the total income of the family. It is hard to say whether the activity actually increased the income of the family, because the normal agricultural output prices started to decline the last couple of years and the income from the pluriactivity keeps the income more or less stable in this way. In the farm of woman II for example, the work in the saw mill (and also the income of course) is declining. The new activity ensures the same income as before the work of the saw mill was declining.

For farm woman III the economic necessity for a change at the farm played a minor role. The on-farm activity doesn't bring as much money as for the other two women. She expressed her feeling that she is now making her own money. She doesn't have to feel guilty anymore, when buying own clothes or other things for herself.

„The income from the direct marketing is rather a small amount. But I can for instance buy something for me alone without feeling guilty anymore. That's what I can do now, but didn't dare before.“ (III)

No clear answer can be given on the question whether the extra income from the activity actually improved the own financial situation of the farm women. In fact all three respondents had a shared cash with the whole family and could not separate the use of income for family members.

The activities' impact

The reactions of the social environment on a new on-farm activity can have a major influence on starting and developing such a process. It can be very difficult for the persons involved when there are many negative reactions or, even worse, when there are conflicts because of the activity. At the same time it might be encouraging to receive positive and supporting comments. In the following section reactions of the family on the activity are presented separately from the reactions of the wider social environment such as neighbours, friends and other farmers. It is also examined whether something has changed in the **relations and ways of communication** within the family farm. In short, this part deals with the kind of reactions and the potential problems farm women have to face from other family members and the people around them.

Reactions of the family

In all cases the activity was actually an initiative of both partners, although the farm women might have been the ones with the strongest will and decisive wish to start the on-farm activity. Therefore it is difficult to speak of the reaction of the husband on the initiative; eventually, the decisions on the activity are mainly taken together. It is self-evident the husband and wife not always have agreed with each other, but it couldn't be noticed from the interviews whether serious problems between the two had occurred because of the on-farm activity.

In the case of all respondents negative reactions came from the parents-in-law, who had some difficulties with the renewing of the farm unit and household activities. For the farm women these sceptical reactions weren't an obstruction to the start and later the further development of the activity.

Farm woman I argued that her mother-in-law first of all couldn't understand her decision to quit her job as nurse and to start a profession in agriculture. Moreover, she didn't have much confidence in the new product (noodles production). And at last, this on-farm activity was not very common in the region at that time yet.

„My mother-in-law was scared, that I left my job in the hospital and planned to start working in the farm. And she didn't believe in our new product.“ (I)

Thus the mother-in-law had many doubts. Farm woman I and her husband partly ignored her comments and partly tried to convince her that the on-farm activity would have a future. They made clear to her that it was them two who were responsible for the farm and its developments.

„I think, we have ignored her resentments, no not ignored. We have told her, if we are taking over the farm, we'd like to cope also with the agricultural management and we listend to her opinion, but we did it in the way we thought it is the best.“ (I)

When the activity started to expand and turned to be successful the mother-in-law totally changed her mind. The changing views in public opinion and the media played a central role for her new assessment and brought her to believe also that organic food is good and healthy.

„At first she learned from the media, that it is quite reasonable what we are producing here, and then she informed herself.“ (I)

Later she also noticed there was demand for organic noodles and meat (the second on-farm activity) and she became very proud of her family and the new products. It is difficult to judge how her children reacted, because they are relatively young.

For farm woman II it was only the father-in-law who reacted sceptical towards the new activity (he passed away a few years ago). Because of the new activity, the baking of organic bread, the old farm had to be rebuilt and the old man had difficulties with that, because it was his old home and particularly belonged to him. And he had some fear how his son and daughter-in-law could make the necessary investments for the activity. In comparison to the father-in-law, the mother-in-law never made negative comments on the new activity.

„But they never hinder us or made troubles.“ (II)

In the end the doubts and scepticism of the father-in-law weren't a real obstruction for the development of the activity. As already noted before, the children of woman II reacted rather sceptical, because they didn't know what changes to expect.

For the farm woman from Burgenland it was again the mother-in-law who feared most how everything would develop.

„My mother-in-law was always rather a sceptical person. (...). She was afraid of new developments. (...) But she was helping us afterwards.“ (III)

But this sceptical behaviour faded away and now the mother-in-law is even helping out now and then. The children of farm woman III were rather indifferent. They found it fine, as long as they didn't have to help with the processing of sausages. Only one daughter is very involved in the activity and enjoys this work.

Changes family relations communication

It is difficult to relate the changes in the relations within the family to the start and development of the new activity. In many cases it is also possible that changes would have taken place anyway.

Farm woman I explained she doesn't experience obstructions from her mother-in-law. Instead, they have a good relationship with each other. According to her (I), this is because of the mutual respect they have for each others achievements.

„There is no ressentiment from the side of the mother-in-law. Sie is appreciating our work, and we are appreciating her work.“ (I)

The old woman now has accepted the new on-farm activities and she highly appreciates the work of her daughter-in-law in these activities. Also the farm woman I has a lot of respect for the hard working life of her mother-and-law. When the latter and her husband didn't work so hard, there wouldn't be enough money and space for farm woman I and her husband to expand the farm with an on-farm activity. The new activity isn't directly the reason for this mutual respect between the different generations within the family farm. Yet it is of importance to know how the family members are dealing with each other in order to learn something on the potential influence of such a decisive change on the existing relations within the family farm.

Woman II also couldn't respond to the issue exactly. She just noted that she and her husband always had worked together a lot and that after they sold the milk quota and started with the baking of bread, they have a regular waking time schedule in which they are together. During these moments they have the possibility to communicate with each other and this might have slightly improved internal communication after the start of the on-farm activity.

Farm woman III didn't think something major has changed in the relations between the family members. Nevertheless it seems likely that her husband spends less time with her than before, because of the multiple activities that have to be performed. This could imply the necessity of good communication between the two in order to adjust and distribute their tasks and amount of time between each other.

Reactions of the social environment

The reactions of the environment were very varying. Colleagues of woman I for example, couldn't understand her decision of becoming a farm woman and starting an on-farm activity.

„The colleagues of my former profession very surprised that I am going to give up the job in the hospital. And it took me a long time to say that my profession now is to be a farm woman and that this was accepted by the others.“ (I)

Other people in the neighbourhood also wondered whether the processing of noodles would be a good income alternative. They had some doubts and the expectations weren't very high. According to farm woman I the profession of farm woman doesn't have an appealing reputation and often it is not seen as a „real“ profession. Many people comforted her, saying that at least once she was a nurse; they tried to talk it right. Over and over again she had to convince people she does have a profession like all other people and that the new activity is succeeding. In the end, when many people noticed the on-farm activity was a success indeed and when they saw what work the farm woman had to perform to achieve, she became highly appreciated and partly admired. From the other (mainly conventional) farmers she is always getting critical questions on how she is managing all the work and so on. According to her it is of major importance one shouldn't bother what other people keep saying and instead you have to believe in and be convinced of your way of working and acting.

„And you should not be dependent and listen too much to your husband, your parents-in-law and especially not other men what they think how a farm woman should be.“ (I)

So especially in the beginning there were lots of doubts and people didn't understand it. But after a while they started to understand the situation and accepted the work of the woman and appreciated her.

Woman II also stressed that especially in the beginning people wondered whether she and her family were able to make the necessary investments for the new activity. Other were sceptical if the baking of organic bread had a good perspective for the future. But according to her, in general the reactions were mainly positive in the end.

For farm woman III the people who came to buy the organic sausages were very positive and enthusiastic. They were glad there is a place for them where they can buy organic products direct from the farm. But she expressed that these costumers were mainly not from a farm themselves. The other conventional farmers in the neighbourhood reacted, however, very negatively. This reaction might be caused by the isolated situation as single organic farm in the nearby region. Besides that, most farms only keep vineyards, while woman III and her husband also have a considerable part of arable organic farming and keep organic pigs. Woman III deeply regrets these critical comments and she would like to see a different, more positive reaction by conventional farmers, too.

„The conventional farmers don't believe in organic production and they don't want to try it. (...) They are very suspicious. I often ask myself, why don't they try it out, if they think it is not working.“ (III)

It summary, the main negative reactions for all women came from other farmers in the neighbourhood. Other people in their direct environment reacted firstly sceptical (just some of them being positive from the beginning), but soon they became enthusiastic and appreciated the work and the products of the farm women.

3. General Findings and Conclusions

The main aim of this study was to examine the role of Austrian farm women in the so-called on-farm activities. In the introduction I have formulated some general research questions in relation to this subject which will be addressed in this concluding part.

3.1 Answers to the Research Questions

3.1.1 Reasons for taking up on-farm activities

I like to start with the part '**why**' starting an on-farm activity (research question 1).

First of all, it should be noted that the farm women who were interviewed didn't start the on-farm activity alone, but in cooperation with their family. The main reason for the starting and developing of an on-farm activity was the economical necessity, as expected. At least two of the family farms expressed their pressing need for an extra income alternative, in order to survive and stabilise the total family income. Besides that, the personal interest of the farm women seem to play a significant role. These personal views weren't the same for the interviewed farm women. One of them had the desire to develop an own working domain, while another was fed up with the former situation in the family farm and wanted to change something about this.

For me it was very surprising to discover that the motivation for the on-farm activity was about the same for two of the farm women and equally their husbands. Both partners saw the necessity of the on-farm activity and agreed on the start and development of it. I had expected that the main impulse would have been given by the farm women. This was still the case for the third respondent. She had the feeling the motivation came mainly from her side. The differences between the farm women might be linked to the different financial situations.

All respondents strongly underlined the importance of the support and cooperation inside the family towards the new activity. It became clear from the interviews that similar changes can only be carried through when both partners fully support the activity. Farm women are convinced that it is nearly impossible to set up something just on your own in a farm household; the help and the support of the family must not be missed.

However it was expressed that the new activity should be something of your own; you have to feel good in it and it should be your own interest. It has to be realized that setting up something new implies personal input of time and energy and you must be willing to invest this. Otherwise you should not even start such a thing, because it just won't work, according to the women.

Moreover by listening and following the own intentions the traditional patriarchal relations in the Austrian countryside can be contested. When one doesn't make own decisions and stand up for one's rights, a certain role pattern is traditionally taken over, in which farm women are expected to act and perform in a subordinated way.

At the same time the idea to start something new wasn't very clear in the beginning. The farm women did have some ideas how things should go, but in all cases a distinct strategy was missing. The new activities were started in a rather unprofessional way and later on have developed step by step. The clientele for example, has to be increased from friends, neighbours and family by mouth advertisement. In this manner certain flexibility is build into the developing process and major financial risks are reduced.

Two of the farm women were not clear in attributing from whom the idea for the new on-farm activity actually came. The other woman pointed out that the idea just seemed to be there suddenly and developed with the comments from a neighbour. Although the farm women were not the only ones who came up with the idea and motivation to start a new activity, I got the impression it was mainly them who were the most convincing and persuading towards the rest of the family. This strong persistence reveals something about the strong wish and

feeling of the necessity of such an activity. It can be concluded that women seem to be more sensitive and enduring towards changes in the family farm than men.

It was also the case that women were the most involved in implementing the idea into reality. They were the persons who were the main actors in the activity, besides the help from the family. In two cases part-time and seasonal labourers were present as well.

With the background of the traditional relationships in the Austrian countryside, it appeared rather unexpected to notice that all women formed a good and solid team with their partners. You would not expect such a cooperation in which the major decisions of the family farm are taken together. However, the smaller and less important decisions aren't. These are mainly taken by the person who is responsible for that certain labour domain in which the decision should be taken. Although one farm woman and her husband work together in an equal and respectable way, she sometimes has to make him aware of her own wishes and expectations. It seems not all men find it obvious to take the opinions of their wives into account. It seems that this is less the case than expected.

The experience to see such mixed family farms was really new for me. I noticed that the farm women are very content with the variation of tasks. It can be seen also as a strategy to exclude certain risks. On the other hand it seems this multiplicity of the farm involves a lot of work, organisational tasks and social adaptation, especially for the farm women.

3.1.2 Reactions to new activity

The second part concerns the **reactions of the family and wider social environment** to the initiative (research question 2).

It is most difficult to assess the reactions of the husbands, because in all cases the activity was set up by both partners. From the interviews it couldn't be concluded whether serious problems occurred between husband and wife due to the on-farm activity.

The children of the farm women reacted in very different ways. Some children were too young to give reactions on the new activity. Others reacted quite sceptical, because they feared their mother would have more work than she already had. This might imply they were afraid to get less attention from her. The last group of children reacted rather indifferent. As long as they didn't have to help, they agreed with the activity; it probably plays a role they were older (mostly adults) than the children of the other women. In total there was only one daughter (out of five children from one family) who became very enthusiastic and who helps out in the on-farm activity.

The negative reactions mainly from the side of the parents-in-law were not new for me. In all family farms it was the case the mothers of the husbands lived with the family unit, though in a separate household. In general the mothers-in-law (in one case it was the father-in-law) reacted rather sceptical to the new activity. They had some fears and doubts how everything would go, because they were unfamiliar with such 'new' activities on farms. Besides that, one of them didn't have confidence in the new product. One has to stress here that in all three cases the new processed products from the on-farm activities weren't common in those regions. This might explain the fear and insecurity of the mothers-in-law.

The father-in-law was mainly concerned how his son and daughter-in-law would finance the new activity. For him it was also very hard to see the rebuilding of 'his' old stable into a room for the new on-farm activity. It is interesting to find out the mothers-in-law were more 'emotionally' concerned, while the father-in-law had more 'technical' doubts, respectively financial concerns.

Just one of the three mothers-in-law didn't have any negative comments at all.

In all families the farm women and their husbands had to try hard to convince the parents-in-law of the importance and necessity of the new activity and they finally would persuade them everything would be fine in the end. These long discussions were the main part to deal with those sceptical comments.

But these rather negative reactions weren't an obstruction to the start and development of the activities. At the end, when the parents-in-law saw and experienced the development and the successes of their families, they changed their mind, and supported their children and children-in-law in all possible ways. This was quite incredible for me because I had expected more serious and lasting problems and conflicts between the two generations.

The reactions of the wider social environment were varying. In general it can be said the customers of the women were the ones who were the most enthusiastic and thankful for the fresh organic products. The other people around the women (relatives, neighbours, friends) reacted more surprised and didn't have very high expectations of the new activities. But in the end, when they saw the activity developing, they started to react in a more positive way. One of the women had given up her former job as hospital nurse to become a farm woman, and this decision wasn't understood by the environment at all. It seems when you have a 'real' profession, it isn't common and understood that you give it up in order to become a farm woman. In this way it can be realised that the profession of farm woman is not everywhere considered and accepted as a real job.

All three family farms were organic farms and got help and support by their colleague organic farmer. They also had the possibility to learn from each other. But the conventional farmers were highly critical and treated them sceptically and as outsiders. Especially in regions where organic farming isn't widespread this lack of understanding for organic farming strategies is very common.

3.1.3 Changes for farm woman

In this last part the **changes for the farm woman within the family farm** is treated (research question 3).

The labour situations of the women showed as the major change the increasing amount of work, especially for farm women, because of the extra work of the activity. After the start of the activity the farm women were still held responsible for the housework, although more involvement from the husband's side could be noticed in two cases. In the other case the husband isn't involved in the housework at all.

The organisation of tasks and time arguments started to play an increased role in the lives of the women. Because of the additional tasks more different activities have to be organised in the family farm.

In general the interviewed women did not like the work in the household, but at the same time two of them still perceive and accept this as the role of mother and wife. In the case of the other woman it was remarkable to notice a temporary change of roles between her and her husband. They try to exchange roles every now and then in order to give each other some freedom and also to sense a varied activity. For another woman this exchange of roles wasn't really present, but her husband did help her out in the household when necessary and they worked together in different domains. The last woman had strictly separated labour domains in the farm household. She and her husband are only involved in one activity together.

The deliberation on the division of labour should be very clear, otherwise it would be the women who are (remain) responsible for all the small, nasty tasks in the family. It was good to see at least two women were aware of this fact. Only one of the women who was interviewed had the idea the division of labour inside the family wasn't equal. She still felt responsible for a lot of things in the household and at the farm. The other two had the idea this division was equal. It should be noted one of them is used to change the work tasks with her husband from time to time. The other has strictly separate labour domains, and therefore doesn't have the idea she has to carry a greater work burden than her husband. She also doesn't think it is wrong or strange her husband isn't helping in the household.

In the end I noticed the respondents were mainly responsible for the ‘handwork’ inside the farm unit, while the husbands were principally concerned with the ‘machine work’. Because this is often the case in Austrian family farms, it was not surprising to my view.

It was interesting to find out that two of farm women actually see their main profession as farm women, while the other sees her main job more in connection with the new activity. This different assessment is directly linked to the farm where one is living in. The former two live on a very mixed farm, while the other woman lives on a farm where they only grow grain as agricultural business; the rest of the activities are non-agricultural.

The personal changes in the lives of the farm women weren’t the same for all of them. It was surprising though, at least two of them had the feeling they became more aware of their possibilities and boundaries within the family farm than before the activity. For the other the major personal change in her life were the increasing contacts with people from outside the farm, something she really enjoys.

After the development of the new activity the farm women received high recognition for their work and products. One can not say whether the appreciation from the side of the family did improve over time or not. But in general the parents-in-law, for example, became proud and supportive towards the farm woman and her activity in the end.

The financial position of the farm women seem to have improved, but no real assessment can be drawn as all respondents had a shared cash with their husbands. One woman did have the feeling she is making her own money now and she doesn’t have to feel guilty anymore when buying things for herself. Surprisingly, only one woman expressed this feeling while I had expected all women would feel like this and put more importance on this issue.

It was reported that the relationship between the women and their family didn’t change. However, from the interviews I got the impression that the communication between the women and their husbands had even improved. At least two farm women have a fixed schedule and regular periods where they have the possibility to work (and talk) together with their husbands which is much more than before the start of the activity.

In short the traditional division of labour between men and women can still be noticed after the development of the on-farm activity. But at the same time there is a growing awareness of the presumed self-evidence of this role pattern.

3.2 Personal Experiences

My personal experiences form this study include a better and completely different view of the Austrian countryside, before I had before. In the Netherlands, Austria still has an image as a country which only exists of mountains, winter holidays, „Anton aus Tirol“ and purple Milka cows. It seems the mountains really do exist, but there is a lot more than that.

For example, I was amazed by the relative small farm sizes in Austria and the high value attached to the family farm. Furthermore, from the three interviews I had with farm women, I was very impressed by their persistence to make a success out of the new activities. It was clear they have to work very hard and have a great work burden to carry out in order to achieve such a thing. But I was glad to see they weren’t left alone and got help from the rest of the family. It also seems they have a particularly good and solid relation with their partners.

I was also impressed by the multiplicity of the farms I have visited. In the Netherlands most farms have specialised in one direction, but here I saw a variation of mixed farms. This was fundamentally new for me, as well as the close involvement of farmers to nature; that was really an eye-opener for me.

To conclude, I have seen and experienced a lot of new things. It wasn't only the research work which I learned from my stay. I also experienced what it is like to live in another culture with new and sometimes strange habits, and to speak another language, which wasn't German at all, I noticed. The Austrian language is quite different from my German which I was taught in high school. Besides that, I have witnessed what it is like to work at an institute and to have colleagues. I must say my time at the BABF Institute was a very positive experience. In general there was a very good and friendly atmosphere and I didn't have the feeling I was treated as an outsider. I was also very pleased with the support and help of my supervisor Theresia; it was informative and good to get some feedback so now and then. But I also got help when necessary from other employees at the BABF. I could come ask my questions to all of them. This hospitality of the whole institute has certainly played a major role in making my Vienna period a very wonderful and interesting time for me.

Appendix: Expert Interviews

- ◆ E1 Expert Extern 1 (9. 10. 2002)
- ◆ E2 Expert Extern 2 (15. 10. 2002)
- ◆ E3 Expert Intern 1 (1. 10. 2002)
- ◆ E4 Expert Intern 2 (10. 10. 2002)
- ◆ E5 Expert Intern 3 (31. 10. 2002)

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