

SIMA-SIMAGENA 2013: MAKE WAY FOR WOMEN

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Now more than ever, SIMA aims to be a platform for contacts and interaction for the entire sector. Through special events, conferences and workshops, visitors will discover and deepen their knowledge of all major fields of the world of agriculture. In this context, women, who are increasingly numerous and well represented in agricultural professions, will be honoured during the 75th annual SIMA-SIMAGENA exhibition, through a wide range of workshops and conferences.

Women and their role in agriculture

The agricultural world is a significant source of employment for women. In Europe, farms are family firms, often operated by a couple. In this sector, women are often involved in temporary, occasional and seasonal work as well as diversification activities. Yet women have always played a major role in the global agricultural landscape.

Today, in countries suffering from malnutrition, over 80% of food grown is produced by women. In Europe, 37% of participants in the agricultural sector are women and 25% of all farms are run by women farmers. And this trend is on the increase. World Rural Women's Day, celebrated annually on 15 October (the day before World Food Day) is also evidence of this observation. Since 1996, it has been receiving support at all levels, from grassroots women's movements in the most marginalized areas of developing countries to well established national organizations in industrialized countries. This day was even adopted by the United Nations as an annual celebration day in its own right in 2008. Karen Serres, who chairs FNSEA's Women Farmers Committee, points out with a forward-looking outlook that "NFSEA has asked for, and obtained for 2013, the introduction of a system of representation on the upcoming chambers of agriculture lists to reflect the real distribution of female and male farmers. Together, we will work towards an agriculture that recognizes and promotes female farmers as key partners in food production. This is a noble challenge that will be taken up by men and women in both the North and the South, so we can feed tomorrow's children."

Today's exceptional women farmers

The agricultural world is indeed experiencing major changes in terms of feminization, but not only in quantitative terms. There are admittedly many more women working in agriculture today than was the case 50 years ago (25% of farms are currently managed by women as opposed to 8% in 1970), but their profile has changed considerably. Even though 80% of women become farmers by marriage or kinship, increasing

numbers of women take up farming as a personal career goal after having been gainfully employed in another sector. With the benefit of these professional experiences, women farmers tend to be more creative than men as regards business practices, by developing sales through short distribution channels or via organic production methods.

Better educated, they do not hesitate to get involved and assume responsibilities, even though the example of the Gironde young farmers chapter (Jeunes Agriculteurs de Gironde) with six women among its eight members remains marginal.

Even so, women still experience problems setting up as farmers. The central government has therefore put in place specific support measures to assist and encourage them, such as a guarantee fund for business creation, acquisition and development targeted at women (FGIF) or Departmental Prizes for Women in Agriculture. Practical guides especially for women have also been created to help them enter and pursue careers in agriculture.

(Sources: www.fnsea.fr and Analyse, no. 38 of the Centre d'études et de prospectives)

Key figures

- 119,730 women farm operators
- 202,984 female spouses of farm operators, including 20.4% women farm employees
- Women head up one-quarter of farms or agricultural businesses

This proportion has remained stable since 1999.

These women often succeed their husbands, which explains their higher average age (51 compared with 46 for men).

39% of women farm operators are at least 55 years of age.

41% of new farms started in 2010 were headed up by women.

Since farms are often inherited from a spouse, women often get started later than men (29% of women begin operating their farms before age 40, compared with 77% for men).

- Smaller average area and lower revenues per person

The main business sector is dairy farming, which accounts for 18% of all women-run farms, followed by grain and industrial crops (15%) and non-specialized crops and livestock (13%).

The average usable agricultural area of farms managed by women is 38 ha (compared with 52 ha for men).

In 2010, the total gross tax and social security base these women were subject to amounted to €1.15 billion,

or 20% of the total base.

69% of women farm operators are taxed on their actual revenue (compared with 76% of the men).

- Farms with at least one female head of operations are most often (52%) organized as companies.

(MSA figures as of 1st January 2010)

Thanks to their efforts, commitment, hard work and particularly their willingness to assume responsibilities, now more than ever, women farmers are helping to enhance the image of agriculture and rural life and to raise awareness of societal issues affecting agriculture. The growing numbers of women in agriculture and their changing role on farms provides a new perspective on the agriculture of tomorrow. Learn more at SIMA by participating in workshops on "Women in Agriculture" or enquire at the kiosk in Hall 3.

Source: Internationale Messen in Frankreich Gmb