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Are All Farmers Challenged Equally? Women Farmers' Perceived Standing As Compared to the *Others*

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Abstract

As the social fabric of US agriculture continues to change, it is important to investigate the set of challenges that minority farmers face. Given women's increasing leadership in agriculture and their traditional involvement in rural communities, we took an *othering* lens to position them as the centered voice to evaluate the suite of challenges they perceive to experience as compared to their male counterparts and in relation to other minority farmers. Data collected from 180 women farmers indicated that responsibilities stemming from their family caregiving role and the current agricultural system exert more pressure on women than on men. Yet, family caregiving responsibilities represent a greater burden for women farmers than the current agricultural system, a finding that responding women perceived to be reversed for men. Despite their disadvantaged position in agriculture, participating women perceived they were in better standing than Latin, first generation, transplant, and African American farmers.

Keywords: agritourism, disadvantaged farmers, minority farmers, othering, women farmers

Tous les agriculteurs sont-ils confrontés aux mêmes défis ? Statut perçu des agricultrices par rapport aux *autres*

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Résumé

Alors que le tissu social de l'agriculture américaine continue de changer, il est important d'étudier l'ensemble des défis auxquels sont confrontés les agriculteurs issus de minorités. Compte tenu du leadership croissant des femmes dans l'agriculture et de leur implication traditionnelle dans les communautés rurales, nous avons adopté une autre perspective pour les positionner comme la voix centrale pour évaluer l'ensemble des défis qu'elles perçoivent comme étant confrontées par rapport à leurs homologues masculins et par rapport aux autres agriculteurs minoritaires. Les données recueillies auprès de 180 agricultrices ont indiqué que les responsabilités découlant du rôle de s'occuper de la famille et le système agricole actuel exercent plus de pression sur les femmes que sur les hommes. Pourtant, les responsabilités familiales représentent un fardeau plus lourd pour les agricultrices que le système agricole actuel, une constatation que les femmes interrogées perçoivent comme étant inversée pour les hommes. Malgré leur position désavantagée dans l'agriculture, les femmes participantes ont le sentiment d'être dans une meilleure situation que les agriculteurs latins, de première génération, transplantés et afro-américains.

Mots-clés : agritourisme, agriculteurs défavorisés, agriculteurs minoritaires, autre, agricultrices

1.0 Introduction

The social fabric of the agrarian context in the United States of America (US) is changing in two salient ways. First, primary operators are becoming increasingly diverse, especially in terms of gender and minority ethnic/racial groups (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2014). Secondly, the US has experienced a growing number of farms diversifying their operations over the last three decades (Barbieri et al., 2008; Schmidt et al., 2023). Notably, farmers are offering educational and recreational activities (agritourism) driven by their continued need to increase their revenues, especially through direct sales (Hollas et al., 2021; Schilling et al., 2012; Schmidt et al., 2023), and the public's burgeoning interest in (re)connecting with local food systems and directly purchasing from local producers (Brune et al., 2021; Kline et al., 2016). Such on-farm entrepreneurship is providing historically hidden agricultural actors (e.g., women, minorities) the opportunity to progress out of their hidden place and move toward more agency (Gil Arroyo et al., 2019; Wright & Annes, 2016).

The emerging agrarian actors experience a distinct set of challenges as their dynamics defy the cultural norms of traditional agricultural societies, especially in relation to the still prevailing White-male hegemony (Sachs et al., 2016; Wright & Annes, 2016). This cultural defiance positions new agrarian models as second-class farming (Colton & Bissix, 2005), which ultimately can negatively affect farmer's success (Eccles, 1994; Savage et al., 2022). Women's increased leadership in agriculture alters customary gendered divisions of farm labor, mainly related to domestic chores, notably childcare (Inwood & Stengel, 2020; Wright & Annes, 2016). In addition, women need to navigate physical limitations, such as tools and equipment designed for masculine body types (Andersson & Lundqvist, 2014; Ball, 2014), reduced accumulated assets, particularly land, machinery, and labor (Fisher et al., 2022), as well as the stereotypical masculine image of agriculture that translates to lack of support—and even respect—from institutions, peer farmers, industry representatives, and customers (Sachs et al., 2016). Women and first-generation farmers also must negotiate their lack of business or agricultural networks (Anthopoulou, 2010; Sachs et al., 2016), which are especially critical for their success (Alsos et al., 2014; Savage et al., 2022).

Developing on-farm enterprises adds a new layer of challenges to farmers. In the case of agritourism, farmers struggle to stay abreast of agritourism-related regulations (e.g., liability requirements) because of their volatility over time and multiple enforcing agencies (Colton & Bissix, 2005; Halim, 2016). While on-farm entrepreneurial diversification can reduce farming risks (e.g., production loss due to weather), the process of developing agritourism can add a substantial level of risk during its inception (Colton & Bissix, 2005) because it requires major reallocations of farm resources (Barbieri et al., 2008) and accumulated experience (Hollas et al., 2021). Finally, while the proximity to urban areas is desired to attract customers—albeit not associated with profitability (Hollas et al., 2021)—it can reduce the availability of labor for agritourism operations (Kline & Milburn, 2010), which is already scarce due to the seasonality of work and limited training opportunities (Halim, 2016). Farm operators offering agritourism, especially women, also face challenges as they struggle to be recognized as farmers by their peers (Brandth & Haugen, 2010).

The changing social fabric of the US agrarian context calls for a deeper examination of the challenges the emerging actors (women, minorities, agritourism providers) face. We adopted a poststructural feminist approach—*othering*—that allowed us to position women in the center of this new agrarian context, given their increasing political empowerment while still trying to break the White-male hegemony (Bock, 2014; Savage et al., 2022). Doing so allowed us to reflect on women farmers' standing in front of their male peers and other disadvantaged farmers. This study addresses the need to increase efforts to understand those farms and farm operators apart from mainstream agricultural production as a way to improve the economic well-being of family farm households and maximize the utility of farm policy. We conducted this study in North Carolina (NC), a southeastern state in the US, which holds agriculture as its top industry. The coexistence of a leading agricultural production, ranking in the top five for several commodities (Farm Flavor, n.d.), with a leading role in local food system development (Creamer & Dunning, 2012; Kline et al., 2016) made NC an ideal setting for this study.

2.0 The Othering in the US Agrarian Context

The US agrarian context, which also holds true in NC, has a traditional structure characterized by the hegemony of White males. Although comparing demographics, especially gender distribution, between the 2017 and previous censuses is difficult because of the variability in the way producers were counted (Pilgeram et al., 2020), the proportions of White and male producers have been consistently high. Specifically concerning the last two censuses in 2017 and 2022, the proportion of all White producers nationwide (95%) and in NC (95%) have remained stable, while the change in the proportion of males in the US (64%) and NC (68%; 67%, respectively) is unnoticeable (USDA: National Agricultural Statistics Service [NASS] 2019; 2014).

Hegemony in the US agricultural context translates to economic farm performance indicators. For example, Fisher et al. (2023) concluded that male operators have, on average, 151% more farm-related income than their female counterparts because of their accumulated land, machinery, and labor assets. Censuses statistics also support the feasibility of agritourism as a farm income avenue as there has been an increase in the average agritourism-related sales per farm in the US (38.5%) and NC (36.1%), adjusted per inflation, between 2012 and 2022 (USDA: NASS 2017; 2022). Yet the proportion of farms offering agritourism is minute (US = 1.5%; NC = 2.3%).

The still predominant hegemony of producers with a given demographic profile (White, male) or enterprise model (not involved in agritourism) in the US agrarian context calls for supporting structural changes that can defy cultural norms. Doing so can eliminate or reduce the additional barriers experienced by those in less privileged positions which ultimately can determine farmer's success (Eccles, 1994; Savage et al., 2022). Chiefly, the motionless scenario of the US agrarian context calls for a deeper understanding of the barriers believed to constrain a more prevalent presence of hidden actors, notably women, agritourism providers, and other minority farmers (e.g., first generation).

2.1 The Silenced Role of Women Farmers

Historically, women have had a vital role in the innovation of global farming, as they are constantly looking for ways to re-purpose existing resources into new sources of income and farm survival (Brandth & Haugen, 2010; Gasson & Winter,

1992; Wright & Annes, 2016). In the US for example, Kirby (1986) largely credits women in the southern states (e.g., NC) with the economic survival of farm families in rural areas during the depression era. Women's creativity for repurposing and maximizing the use of farm resources are key drivers for developing new farm enterprises in the US, notably agritourism, as they are fundamental to program innovative activities for visitors (Johnson et al., 2016; McGehee et al., 2007; Rissing, 2013). Sachs et al. (2016) also noted women's leadership in associations related to sustainable agriculture (e.g., Georgia Organics), agritourism (e.g., North Carolina Agritourism Networking Association), and community-based food systems (e.g., National Farm to School Network, National Young Farmers Coalition).

Despite such a key role in agriculture and rural development throughout history, the importance of women in the agrarian context has remained hidden, usually masked within the gendered—patriarchal—agricultural context (Kirby, 1986; Newsome, 2021; Savage et al., 2022). For example, patriarchal systems tend to favor male-to-male succession, which beyond passing key resources (e.g., land, equipment, networks) also entails upholding customary practices, such as traditional gender roles (e.g., women as caregivers, men in the field). Patriarchal systems tend to be difficult to disrupt because hegemonic masculinity practices are traditionally produced and reproduced (Demetriou, 2001). For example, male-to-male succession enables men to accumulate and control agricultural capitals (hegemonic production), which worsens through further successions (hegemonic reproduction). This hegemony translates into a gender unequal balance of capital, such as in the US, where women farmers have a low capital endowment (Fisher et al., 2022).

Hegemonic systems are also difficult to disrupt because of social norms that punish those seeking to break them. For example, women who resist traditional practices (e.g., having a prominent managerial presence, changing agricultural practices) often results in their exclusion of local networks and their shared resources and knowledge (Carter, 2017; Wang, 2010). Women in agriculture also face subtle structural barriers that negatively affect their chances of success (Savage et al., 2022). For example, farm equipment and tools are designed to suit masculine builds, which overall reinforces the stereotypical masculine image of farms, which keeps women in the 'backstage' (e.g., business assistant) or the private labor (Andersson & Lundqvist, 2014; Ball, 2014).

Notably, women in agriculture are disadvantaged as compared to their male counterparts because of their expected caregiving responsibilities. Women are expected to participate in—and even create—economic opportunities (e.g., farming, entrepreneurship) while fulfilling their domestic roles as mothers, wives, or nurturers (Anthopolou, 2010; Bock, 2004; Brandth, 2002; Inwood & Stengel, 2020). Such caregiving roles are even transcendent beyond their private spheres as women in rural and agricultural endeavors feel personally compelled (Halim et al., 2020) and are expected (Midgley, 2006) to contribute to the development and regeneration of their community. The sense of caregiving responsibility is so strong among women that it even permeates to prioritizing family and community well-being (e.g., providing jobs for family members, giving back to the community) as their main drivers for agricultural and entrepreneurship involvement, thus making farming a secondary activity (Anthopolou, 2010; Bock, 2004; McGehee et al., 2007).

2.2 The Second-Class Farmers: Agritourism Providers

The steady decline of farm profitability, especially among small-scale, low-input agricultural production, that started at the onset of the green revolution, instilled many farmers in the US to start diversifying their operations. Many did so by offering recreation (e.g., U-pick, hiking), hospitality (e.g., on-site dining, festivals), or educational (e.g., workshops, school tours) offerings to the public as a way to improve their economic standing and reap other non-economic benefits (Barbieri et al., 2008; Barbieri, 2013). Yet, agritourism development posits additional challenges to farmers that stem from the private (as providers) and public (from social structures) spheres (Li & Barbieri, 2019). Within the private sphere, farmers venturing into agritourism do not have the adequate business competencies (e.g., customer service) or networks (e.g., suppliers) needed to attract and cater to visitors, which translated into a set of managerial challenges, mainly related to staffing, administrative work, and business growth (Colton & Bissix, 2005; Kline & Milburn, 2010; Savage, 2018). Within the public sphere, farmers in agritourism must overcome a set of structural changes notably related to liability (e.g., lack of, high costs) and insufficient institutional support, especially to reach markets (Colton & Bissix, 2005; Wang et al., 2022). Stemming from the agriculture-tourism marriage, another set of challenges that agritourism providers face relates to balancing the agricultural workload between the agricultural and tourism activities, especially concerning business seasonality that tend to overlap, managing the risks of both enterprises, and coping with all tasks by farmers themselves (Sharpley & Vass, 2016; Savage, 2018).

The women-in-agritourism intersectionality multiplies, rather than adds, the burdens they face. Robust evidence worldwide indicates that women are the key actors in developing, managing, and innovating agritourism offerings (Bock, 2004; Brandth & Haugen, 2010; McGehee et al., 2007; Savage et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2023). Agritourism can encourage and enable women to acquire more prominent roles on the farm, in the family, and in the community (Gil Arroyo et al., 2019; Halim et al., 2020; Wright & Annes, 2016). Yet, women in agritourism are particularly affected by the farm household division of labor, as the nature of agritourism tends to add to their farm household responsibilities (Anthopolou, 2010; Ball, 2014; Bock, 2004; Halim, 2016), which may explain their low profitability (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Hollas et al., 2021). Dealing with the hegemonic gendered ideology of both entrepreneurship and agriculture (Brandth, 2002; Brandth & Haugen, 2011; Savage et al., 2022), women in agritourism are often striving for similar recognition to their male counterparts and seeking respect from other farmers and from the wider community (Driga et al., 2014; Halim et al., 2020). In short, although the public recognition of women as agritourism leaders is improving, there is still resistance to recognize them as change-makers in the agricultural context (Carter, 2017).

As hegemonic masculinity recognizes subordination within the male dominant group (Demetriou, 2001), a major structural challenge stemming from the male-dominated agricultural industry questions the legitimacy of agritourism as a farming activity, causing them to be perceived as second-class farmers (Halim, 2016; Wright & Annes, 2016). Such power imbalance calls for inquiring how subaltern actors (women farmers in this study) perceive the challenges affecting binary opposites (Aitchison, 2001), in this case defined as farms offering agritourism in contrast to those that do not.

2.3 Other Invisible Farmers

Changes in the race/ethnic social fabric and in the urban-rural fluidity are stimulating a more diverse agricultural composition in two major ways. First, racial and ethnic minorities, notably Black and Latin/Hispanic, are another group of invisible actors in the US agrarian context. Although minority farmers have long farmed in the US, structural discrimination (e.g., unequal access to credit, segregation) has contributed to their invisibility, steady decrease in number, and unequal treatment (Taylor, 2018; Waddell, 2019; Wood & Gilbert, 2000). Their disadvantaged standing, as compared to White farmers, makes them more likely to rent/lease land or own less acreage, thus having less farm-related wealth than their White counterparts (Horst & Marion, 2018). Such disparity supports the notion that those in privileged standing, such as White male farmers, are better positioned to reap a series of material advantages, chiefly increased profits (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Demetriou, 2001; Hollas et al., 2021). Disadvantaged standings in patriarchal agrarian societies remain despite farmers' own efforts (e.g., forming associations, cooperatives, and networks) and public stimulus programs (e.g., subsidized loans) as the number of minority farmers and their farmlands are continuing to decline (Grant et al., 2012; Taylor, 2018; Wood & Gilbert, 2000).

Secondly, new entrants to agriculture, that is those not born or married/partnered to a member of an established farming family, are a disruption to hegemonic agricultural systems as they farm on their own terms by undertaking alternative practices and identities to navigate the barriers they encounter (Larmer, 2016; Milone & Ventura, 2019; Newsome, 2021). Most commonly, new entrants to agriculture suffer from a lack of accumulated knowledge and networks (Newsome, 2021), high start-up costs and limited access to land (Ahearn & Newton, 2009), and limited access to capital or formal credit (Milone & Ventura, 2019). Once again, intersectionality plays an aggregated role, which is important to consider, as most beginning farmers in the US tend to be women, non-White or Hispanic (Ahearn & Newton, 2009). For example, even when first-generation farmers may share the duties between spouses and others in the farm family more equally (Ball, 2014), they may instead face dissenting views from their counterparts, community, contractors, or suppliers especially if women (Halim, 2016; Newsome, 2021) or not engaged in alternative (e.g., organic, sustainable) agriculture (Larmer, 2016).

3.0 Study Conceptualization and Design

Considering the increasing presence of women farmers in the changing US agrarian context, we adopted a poststructural feminist standpoint to help unveil their perceptions of the still prevailing White-male hegemony patterns beyond gender-wise comparisons (Savage et al., 2022; Thompson, 2010). More specifically, we adopted the Othering paradigm that enables examining a set of actors in contrast with others through dualisms constructed between the "norms and deviants, centres and margins, cores and peripheries, the powerful and the powerless" (Aitchison, 2000; p. 135). Related to *orientalism*, the mechanism that the British used to define themselves in contrast to those living throughout their imperial territories (Said, 1978), the Othering is a lens to assess binary opposites, which are inherent in the construction of the Other (Aitchinson, 2001). Thus, Othering allows actors to assess where they stand by contrasting themselves with other actors holding different (more or lesser) levels of power (Rose, 1995, as cited by Aitchinson 2001).

With such poststructural feminist epistemology of the Othering, we gauged women farmers' perceptions to determine their standing in relation to other farmers holding different levels of power (e.g., men, first generation) and to assess the binary opposites resulting from the presence/absence of agritourism. Thus, we surveyed women farmers and asked them whether they perceive that: (1) women and men farmers experience similar challenges; (2) farmers with different identities (women, African Americans, Latin, first generation, transplants, White) experience similar disadvantages in their communities; and (3) farmers involved in agritourism experience similar challenges to those in mainstream agriculture. In this inquiry, we positioned women farmers as the key evaluator of the margins, peripheries and powerless (women farmers, minority farmers, agritourism farmers) seeking a recognized space in the new US agrarian context.

3.1 Surveying (About) the Others: Variables and Procedures

We surveyed women farmers using electronic and mailed formats in parallel in 2017. We drew a nonprobability sample of 237 women farmers from a systematic search online and with the support of three local agriculture organizations. We used three scales to construct the power/central dualities of the US agrarian context. Informed by the literature, we first asked participants to rate the extent to which challenges related to family caregiving (six items, e.g., demand of child care [Halim et al., 2020; Inwood & Stengel, 2020; Savage et al. 2022]) and the prevailing agricultural system (eight items, e.g., access to grants [Fisher et al., 2023; Li & Barbieri, 2019]) affect women versus men farmers using four-point unidirectional scales (1 = not at all; 4 = extremely/very much). Using a similar scale, we then queried participants to rate the extent to which a set of *managerial* (e.g., administrative work [Colton & Bissix, 2005; Kline & Milburn, 2010; Savage, 2018]), *structural* (e.g., reaching markets [Colton & Bissix, 2005; Wang et al., 2022]), and *agricultural* (e.g., managing risks [Sharpley & Vass, 2016; Savage, 2018]) factors (three items each) challenge agritourism versus non-agritourism farms. Finally, we queried the extent of disadvantage among six identities of farmers (e.g., Latin, first generation [Inwood & Stengel, 2020; Taylor, 2018; Waddell, 2019]) using four-point unidirectional scales ranging from not at all disadvantaged (1) to extremely disadvantaged (4). We also collected socio-demographic and key farm attributes of participants.

The survey yielded 180 usable responses of women farmers (59.1% response rate) after 13 cases were removed for not fitting the study criteria (e.g., male respondents). We analyzed the data using descriptive statistics, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, and paired *t*-tests ($p < .05$); we applied Bonferroni correction to reduce type-1 error occurred in multiple comparisons. Cronbach's alphas, with a 0.6 acceptable threshold, were computed to test the internal reliability of dimensions of gendered and agritourism challenges (Leech et al., 2005). No significant differences were found between respondents from mailed ($n = 75$) and online ($n = 65$) campaigns on key social and agricultural descriptors, as expected (Dillman et al., 2009). Our preliminary analysis indicated non-response bias when we compared early and late survey respondents (Armstrong & Overton, 1977).

3.2 An Overview of Participating Women Farmers

The typical respondent was 45 years or older ($M = 48.8$) and held at least a 4-year college degree (73.9%; see Table 1). Most (61.3%) reported being a full-time farmer, followed by part-time farming (25.0%) or holding a full-time off-farm job (20.2%).

One-third (34.9%) of the responding women indicated a household income of less than $50,000, while 39.2% reported making at least $75,000.

Table 1. *Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents*

Socio-demographic indicators	**Number**	**Percent**
Age *(n = 152)*		
Less than 35 years old	25	16.5%
35 - 44 years old	33	21.7%
45 - 54 years old	38	25.0%
55 - 64 years old	42	27.6%
65 years old or older	14	9.2%
Mean (in years)		***(48.8)***
Level of education *(n = 165)*		
High school graduate or less	3	1.9%
Some college	22	13.3%
Technical degree (2-year degree)	18	10.9%
Four-year college degree	65	39.4%
Postgraduate studies	57	34.5%
Type of employment (*n* = 168) [a]		
Full-time farming	103	61.3%
Part-time farming	42	25.0%
Full-time off-farm job	34	20.2%
Part-time off-farm job	23	13.7%
Homemaker	23	13.7%
Retired	17	10.1%
Other	6	2.4%
Household income *(n = 158)*		
Less than $25,000	9	5.7%
$25,000 - 34,999	20	12.7%
$35,000 - 49,999	26	16.5%
$50,000 - 74,999	41	25.9%
$75,000 - 149,999	39	24.7%
$150,000 or more	23	14.5%

[a] Adds to more than 100% because participants could check more than one response.

In terms of agricultural profile, most (62.6%) were the farm (co)owner or first-generation farmers (60.7%; see Table 2). Respondents had a diversity of working agricultural facilities in terms of type and extent of production. In terms of size, the averaged farmed acreage in 2016 was 55.8 acres with a relatively large number of respondents farming less than 10 acres (42.0%). Consistent with their low acreage farmed, a relatively large proportion of respondents reported having no full-time employees (37.5%) and making less than $50,000 in gross farm sales (58.5%) in 2016. In terms of production, most were offering at least one form of agritourism activity (63.8%); results also highlighted the diversity of crops and animals that respondents were growing or raising, with the most common being specialty crops (63.8%) and large livestock such as cattle and hogs (47.9%), followed by poultry and small animals (30.7%) and eggs (24.5%).

4.0 Perceived Standing of Women Farmers

Chiefly, our results indicate that women farmers experience a mix of challenges given their caregiving expectations and the current state of agricultural systems, which they perceive exert a greater burden on them in contrast to their male counterparts. Still, participating women stated that other minority farmers in their communities experience an even greater burden. Finally, they consider that farmers engaged in agritourism experience more challenges than their mainstream counterparts. Altogether, this study results confirm the still prevailing White-male hegemony of the US agricultural context challenging new emerging actors (Sachs et al., 2016; Wright & Annes, 2016). In doing so, these results deconstruct the White-male hegemony by identifying how different types of farmers are perceived to be challenged. Addressing the challenges that the emerging—second class, disadvantaged—farmers face is critical to fostering their agricultural and entrepreneurial success (Colton & Bissix, 2005; Savage et al., 2022).

4.1 Women Farmers Perceive They Are Challenged in Various Ways

Responding women perceived they encounter different challenges as farmers, which stem from the expected family caregiving responsibilities (α = 0.875) and the agricultural system they operate in (α = 0.789; see Table 3). Most reported that balancing farm and household tasks (68.8%; M = 3.54), managing off-farm and on-farm work (64.8%; M = 3.45), expectations as a caregiver (59.0%; M = 3.39), lack of cooperation from their spouse/partner (63.8%; M = 3.36), and demand of childcare (54.2%; M = 3.18) were affecting their success very much. These results speak for the patriarchal system in agricultural contexts (Newsome, 2021; Savage et al., 2022) that permeates to private spheres, in which women are expected to fulfill domestic roles as mothers, wives, or nurturers (Anthropolou, 2010; Bock, 2004; Inwood & Stengel, 2020). Conversely, a relatively large proportion of respondents considered that knowledge sharing from parents (20.3%; M = 2.71) and the number of farmers of the same gender (26.9%, M = 2.53) were not impeding their success, which indicates that traditional knowledge transference networks, such as father-to-son and male-to-male (Carter, 2017; Demetriou, 2001; Fisher et al., 2023; Wang, 2010) are relaxing.

Table 2. *Respondents' Agricultural Profile*

Indicators of agricultural profile	**Number**	**Percent**
Respondents' role on farm (*n* = 178) [a]		
Owner or co-owner	154	62.6%
Farm manager or employee	53	29.8%
Other	5	2.8%
Generations on the farm (*n* = 168)		
First generation	102	60.7%
2 generations	12	7.1%
3 generations	21	12.5%
4 generations or more	29	17.3%
Do not know	4	2.4%
Acreage farmed in 2016 (*n* = 162)		
Less than 3 acres	24	14.8%
3 - 9 acres	44	27.2%
10 - 29 acres	42	25.9%
30 - 99 acres	30	18.5%
100 - 249 acres	14	8.7%
250 acres or more	8	4.9%
Mean (in acres)		***(55.8)***
Number of full-time employees (*n* = 160)		
0 (none) employees	60	37.5%
1 – 2 employees	61	38.2%
3 – 5 employees	23	14.4%
6 or more employees	16	10.0%
Mean (in number)		***(3.0)***
Farm gross income in 2016 (*n* = 159)		
Less than $1,000	10	6.3%
$1,000 - 9,999	32	20.1%
$10,000 - 49,999	51	32.1%
$50,000 - 99,999	24	15.1%
$100,000 - 249,999	21	13.2%
$250,000 - 499,999	13	8.2%
500,000 or more	8	5.0%
Main types of agricultural production (*n* = 163) [a]		
Agritourism	117	68.8%
Specialty crops	104	63.8%
Livestock	78	47.9%
Poultry and small animals	50	30.7%

a Adds to more than 100% because participants could check more than one response.

Table 3. *The Extent of Challenges Affecting Women Farmers*

Challenge indicators (*n* = 162)	**Not at all**	**Very little**	**Some**	**Very much**	**Mean** [a]	**Standard deviation**
Family caregiving *(α = 0.875)*					***3.24***	
Balancing farm and household tasks	2.5%	10.0%	18.7%	68.8%	3.54	0.776
Expectations as a caregiver	7.5%	5.6%	27.9%	59.0%	3.39	0.895
Cooperation from spouse/partner	10.0%	7.5%	18.7%	63.8%	3.36	0.994
Demand of childcare	14.0%	7.6%	24.2%	54.2%	3.18	1.073
Falling short on caring for the family	8.2%	13.8%	29.6%	48.4%	3.18	0.960
Falling short on others' expectations	16.6%	19.7%	32.5%	31.2%	2.78	1.064
Agricultural system *(α = 0.789)*					***3.02***	
Managing off-farm and on-farm work	5.0%	9.4%	20.8%	64.8%	3.45	0.862
Physical demand of farm work	2.5%	10.5%	42.6%	44.4%	3.29	0.753
Access to grants	8.6%	19.8%	23.5%	48.1%	3.11	1.009
Ability to inherit farmland	14.2%	10.3%	29.0%	46.5%	3.08	1.066
Availability of farmers' networks	6.8%	19.7%	35.2%	38.3%	3.05	0.924
Lack of respect towards farmers	17.8%	14.0%	31.2%	37.0%	2.87	1.102
Knowledge sharing from parents	20.3%	20.3%	27.4%	32.0%	2.71	1.122
Number of farmers of the same gender	26.9%	23.1%	20.5%	29.5%	2.53	1.177

[a] Measured on a 4-point scale, ranging from "1 = Not at all" to "4 =Very much".

Respondents perceived that women and men farmers experience challenges related to family caregiving and the agricultural system to a different extent (see Table 4). They believe that women are more challenged by their *family caregiving* (M = 3.24) than by the agricultural system *(*M = 3.02), while they perceived men are more challenged by the agricultural system (M = 2.54) than the family caregiving (M = 2.31). Pairwise comparisons indicate that women farmers are perceived to face challenges at a stronger extent than their male counterparts related to family caregiving (M_{female} = 3.24, M_{male} = 2.31, t = 14.952, $p < 0.001$) and the agricultural system (M_{female} = 3.02, M_{male} = 2.54, t = 10.390, $p < 0.001$). Similar statistical differences were found within each type of challenge, except for the extent knowledge is shared from parents, with no statistical difference found (M_{female} = 2.74, M_{male} = 2.57, p = 0.010). The greater burden women perceive from family caregiving than from the agricultural system endorses that society still sees women's farming job as a "second shift" that happens after performing their farm and family chores (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Inwood & Stengel, 2020; McGehee et al., 2007). Furthermore, caregiving responsibilities are even expected to support their community development (Halim et al., 2016; Midgley, 2006).

4.2 Yet, Women Perceive They Are Not the Most Disadvantaged Farmers

Responding women perceived that not all farmers in their communities experience challenges to a similar extent (see Table 5). Over a third perceived that Latino/a (41.1%; M = 2.37), first generation (35.8%), and African American (35.5%) farmers were very or extremely disadvantaged, confirming the still prevalence of structural barriers affecting farmers from minority groups (Taylor, 2018; Waddell, 2019) or new entrants to agriculture (Inwood & Stengel, 2020). After Bonferri correction ($p < 0.008$), Wilcoxon signed-rank tests showed that different types of farmers experience different levels of disadvantages. Latino/a, first generation, African American and transplants (who recently moved into the community) were perceived as the most disadvantaged farmers with no statistical differences among them (rank 1). Women farmers followed (rank 2), being perceived as less disadvantaged than first generation, Latino/a, African American and transplant farmers but more disadvantaged than White (Caucasian) farmers. White (Caucasian) farmers were perceived as the least disadvantaged (rank 3). Respondents placing their women's identity as not as the most disadvantaged farmers may speak for their increased leadership in agriculture and their progress toward a greater voice in society (Halim, 2016; Sachs et al., 2016).

Table 4. *A Comparison of the Extent to Which Challenges are Perceived to Affect the Success of Women and Men Farmers (Paired t-test)*

Types of challenges (n = 148)	**Farmer Gender** [a]		***t*-value**	***df***	***p*-value** [b]
	Women	**Men**			
Family caregiving *(α_{women} = 0.875, α_{men} = 0.786)*					
Balancing farm & household tasks	3.60	2.38	13.186	145	$p < 0.001$
Expectations as a caregiver	3.47	2.07	15.399	147	$p < 0.001$
Cooperation from spouse/partner	3.44	2.73	8.209	147	$p < 0.001$
Demand of childcare	3.31	1.98	14.200	143	$p < 0.001$
Falling short of caring for the family	3.27	2.29	11.482	145	$p < 0.001$
Falling short of others' expectations	2.85	2.34	6.238	143	$p < 0.001$
Composite mean	***3.24***	***2.31***	14.952	149	$p < 0.001$
Agricultural system *(α_{women} = 0.789, α_{men} = 0.772)*					
Managing off-farm & on-farm work	3.52	2.99	6.888	144	$p < 0.001$
Physical demand of farm work	3.31	2.52	10.207	147	$p < 0.001$
Access to grants	3.11	2.82	4.409	147	$p < 0.001$
Ability to inherit farmland	3.11	2.80	4.559	141	$p < 0.001$
Availability of farmers' networks	3.07	2.68	5.600	146	$p < 0.001$
Lack of respect towards farmers	2.91	2.23	7.967	142	$p < 0.001$
Knowledge sharing from parents	2.74	2.57	2.618	140	$p = 0.010$
Number of farmers of the same gender	2.58	1.69	8.098	142	$p < 0.001$
Composite mean	***3.02***	***2.54***	10.390	148	$p < 0.001$

[a] Ordered by female means; measured on a 4-point unidirectional scale ("1 = Not at all" to "4 =Very much".

[b] Critical value (Bonferroni): caregiver role $p < 0.008$ (0.05 / 6); agricultural system $p < 0.006$ (0.05 / 8).

Table 5. *Women's Perceived Disadvantage of Different Farmers in Respondents' Community*

Farmers (n = 160)	**Not at all**	**Moderately**	**Very**	**Extremely**	***Mean*** [a]	***S.D.***	**Wilcoxon Sign Rank** [b]
Latino/a	21.8%	37.1%	23.2%	17.9%	2.37	1.017	1
First generation	15.7%	48.5%	22.0%	13.8%	2.34	0.906	1
African American	23.0%	41.5%	20.4%	15.1%	2.28	0.985	1
Transplants	19.1%	47.8%	25.5%	7.6%	2.22	0.842	1
Women	28.1%	50.6%	16.3%	5.0 %	1.98	0.805	2
Caucasian	65.6%	31.2%	2.6%	0.6%	1.38	0.572	3

a Measured on a 4-point unidirectional scale ("1 = Not at all disadvantaged"; "4 =Extremely disadvantaged").

b Latino/a, first generation, African American, and transplant farmers were the most disadvantaged, with no significant differences among them ($p < 0.008$). Female farmers (rank 2) were significantly less disadvantaged than first generation ($z = 4.950$; $p < 0.001$), Latino/a ($z = 4.642$; $p < 0.001$), African American ($z = 3.799$; $p < 0.001$), and transplant ($z = 3.062$; $p = 0.002$) farmers; but more disadvantaged than Caucasian farmers ($z = -7.752$; $p = 0.001$). Caucasian farmers were the least disadvantaged farmers ($p < 0.008$).

4.3 Women Perceive Agritourism Increases Farmers' Challenges

In their examination of peripheral farmers (those offering agritourism), respondents considered that managerial challenges were the most demanding for agritourism operations ($M = 3.54$), while agricultural and managerial challenges ($M = 3.29$) were most challenging for non-agritourism farms (see Table 6). Individually, the most pressing challenges affecting agritourism operations were managing liability ($M = 3.72$), finding reliable staff ($M = 3.69$), and dealing with business seasonality ($M = 3.66$), recurring challenges stated in the literature (Colton & Bissix, 2005; Halim, 2016; Wang et al., 2022). The strongest perceived challenges for non-agritourism operations were finding reliable staff ($M = 3.53$), reaching markets ($M = 3.45$), and managing risks ($M = 3.41$). Overall, respondents perceived that managerial, structural, and agricultural challenges affect agritourism operations significantly more than non-agritourism ones, with the exception of risk management, where no statistical differences were found. These results may support evidence indicating that agritourism providers tend to receive less institutional support (e.g., access to grants), limiting their chances of success (Halim, 2016).

While the literature has identified some challenges related to agritourism development and success (e.g., Colton & Bissix, 2005; Halim, 2016; Hollas et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022), this study adds to existing knowledge in two main ways. First, despite the many benefits this enterprise produces (Barbieri, 2013), respondents believe that welcoming visitors to the farm adds a set of managerial, structural, and agricultural challenges that farmers need to negotiate (e.g., more time and work commitment) to keep up their agricultural production. In this regard, it is

critical to keep training opportunities to assist farmers in balancing their tourism and agricultural responsibilities. Second, the additional managerial burden of agritourism may further stretch women farmers' challenges and limited resources (Ball, 2014; Savage et al., 2022), even leading to a third shift of labor, taking into consideration women's traditional responsibility in farm management. As such, it is critical to create educational forums and networks to support the success of women in agritourism.

Table 6. *A Comparison of the Extent to Which Challenges are Perceived to Affect the Success of Agritourism and Non-Agritourism Farms (Paired t-test)*

Types of challenges (n = 148)	**Type of operation** [a]		***t*-value**	***df***	***p*-value** [b]
	Agritourism	**Non-agritourism**			
Managerial					
(α_{Agt} = 0.678, α_{non} = 0.669)					
Finding reliable staff	3.69	3.53	3.083	141	$p = 0.002$
Administrative work	3.54	3.25	4.885	139	$p < 0.001$
Controlling business growth	3.44	3.13	5.204	139	$p < 0.001$
Composite mean	***3.54***	***3.29***	6.508	141	$p < 0.001$
Structural					
(α_{Agt} = 0.641, α_{non} = 0.650)					
Managing liability	3.72	3.05	10.149	140	$p < 0.001$
Reaching markets	3.62	3.45	2.496	136	$p = 0.014$
Receiving institutional support	3.09	2.88	2.998	137	$p = 0.003$
Composite mean	***3.49***	***3.12***	7.171	140	$p < 0.001$
Agricultural					
(α_{Agt} = 0.716, α_{non} = 0.712)					
Dealing with business seasonality	3.66	3.33	5.227	139	$p < 0.001$
Managing risks	3.51	3.41	1.547	137	$p = 0.124$
Managing tasks by farmers themselves	3.40	3.23	2.782	139	$p = 0.006$
Composite mean	***3.43***	***3.29***	4.379	149	$p < 0.001$

[a] Organized by agritourism means; measured on a 4-point unidirectional scale ("1 = Not at all"; "4 = Very much").

[b] Critical value after Bonferroni correction: $p = 0.017$ (0.05/3).

5.0 Conclusion

This study examined the challenges that women farmers face in their agricultural endeavors, confirming a still prevalent White-male hegemony in the US. Adopting a poststructural feminist lens gave us the ability to centralize women's perspectives to unfold the hegemonic masculinity, transcending beyond gender power (Demetriou, 2001), of the agrarian context. Beyond investigating women's challenges in agriculture, we documented how they position their identity as women compared to other peripheral farmers (Latino/a, transplants, African American, first generation). We also aired women's perceptions of the challenges agritourism operators encounter compared to their counterparts. Combined, this study's results expand evidence of the greater burden that women and *other* hidden actors still encounter as compared to traditional farmers (White, male, non-entrepreneurial) and reaffirms that still more effort should be placed towards gender equality in agriculture (Ball, 2014; Dentzman et al., 2021; Fisher et al., 2023; Sachs et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2023).

Garnering preliminary evidence of the still perceived disadvantage that historically hidden farmers—women, Latino/a, transplant, African American, first generation—experience calls for deepening the investigation of factors inhibiting their success and how these compounding identities may play into such as both under-investigated topics (Fisher et al., 2023; Sachs et al., 2016). By positioning women at the core of the discussion, this study has laid the foundations for deconstructing the White male hegemony still prevailing in US agriculture. In this regard, our findings indicate that women do not consider their identity the most vulnerable in the agrarian context, suggesting that future studies should consider unfolding the agrarian hierarchy. When doing so, it is advisable to further the identification of the underlying factors maintaining the relegation of historically disadvantaged farmers and document the mechanisms that these farmers may utilize to attain success (Dentzman et al., 2021). Finally, our study counterbalances the positively leaned agritourism literature that predominantly focuses on the benefits produced (Zhang et al., 2009) by identifying a set of managerial, structural, and agricultural challenges that farmers would need to negotiate to keep up their agricultural production.

Study results can also serve to inform intervention measures to increase equity in the US agrarian context. It is of utmost importance to develop policies (e.g., no liability in agritourism farms, childcare tax incentives for women farmers) as well as outreach and support programs (e.g., networking events for first-generation and transplant farmers, community-based elderly care) to support the well-being and business success of disfranchised farmers. In doing so, it is imperative to adopt intersectional approaches that can capture the combined burdens that peripheral farmers with overlapping minority identities (e.g., black women, first entrant Latino/a) experience as such intersectionality tends to multiply, rather than add, the effects of structural barriers (Weldon, 2008). Developing policies to support the success of agritourism endeavors, especially to open opportunities for women, ethnic minorities, and new entrants to agriculture, is also important because of its capacity to empower women and minority groups (Halim et al., 2020; Gil Arroyo et al., 2019). Supporting successful agritourism developments goes even beyond the farmer as they foster multiple socio-cultural (e.g., heritage preservation), environmental (e.g., landscape beautification), and economic (e.g., revitalization of rural economies) benefits in the host communities and even greater society (Barbieri, 2013).

The study results, as well as the aforementioned scholarly and practical insights, should be interpreted within the scope of a few study limitations. Poststructuralism emphasizes relativism as it seeks social criticism in a given context (Aitchinson, 2001), which unfolds two contextual factors—timing and culture—that should be acknowledged. First, this study is encapsulated in a pre-pandemic (COVID-19) period of time. At that time, women's perceived standing may not fully reflect the extent to which their burdens changed, most likely increased (e.g., more home-schooling responsibilities) during the pandemic (Leonardelli et al., 2021), and that may still be lingering. Secondly, this study was conducted in an agrarian culture, that although embedded in patriarchal norms (Savage et al., 2022), is changing due to an increasing neo-localism trend in which food suppliers and consumers are purposively seeking to strengthen local food systems through different initiatives, such as purchasing at farmers' markets and farm to table sales (Kline et al., 2016; Creamer & Dunning, 2012). It is also worth considering that challenges affecting agritourism, especially structural ones, are geopolitically bound as they depend on the extent of local/regional regulations (Wang et al., 2022) and their agricultural resources and agritourism offerings (Hollas et al., 2021).

Moving forward, our study results also elucidate several avenues for future research. Much effort is needed to investigate the factors challenging historically disadvantaged farmers to develop policies and programs to overcome them. Of particular importance is to investigate the constraints on Latin farmers given the large presence of Hispanic farmworkers in the US (Pisani & Guzman, 2016), queer farmers given their increased—yet unnoticed—presence in the 2017 USDA Census (Dentzman et al., 2021), first-generation women farmers as their reduced social network especially challenges their ability to get childcare support (Inwood & Stengel, 2020), and African American farmers given the struggles they face to retain the tenure of their lands (Hinson & Robinson, 2008). Also, there are other hidden actors in the agricultural context that fell beyond the scope of this study that merit further investigation to identify the individual set of challenges they may face. These actors include, but are not limited to, queer farmers, members of indigenous communities with traditional—often unwritten and not fully recognized—land tenure systems, veterans—especially in the US—seeking agriculture as a civilian-life reinsertion avenue, and people with mental or physical disabilities.

Finally, although women farmers are gaining prevalence in agriculture, especially in leadership roles and in entrepreneurial initiatives, the impact of their involvement calls for intersectional approaches to investigate the extent of their challenges when different identities intersect (e.g., black women involved in agritourism, first-generation women farmers). In doing so, qualitative methods of inquiry can serve to elucidate how their different identities interplay with the set of barriers affecting their success. As the former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated on International Women's Day, "The world can never realize 100% of its goals if 50% of people cannot realize their full potential" (United Nations, 2015). Thus, advancing research on the limitations hindering women's success and paying more detailed attention to intersectionality can move them closer to realizing their potential and overall contributing to society's well-being. Ultimately, finding ways to support hidden agricultural actors is critical to disrupt hegemonic practices and improve social and environmental resilience (Newsome, 2021).

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