Digging Deeper: Female Identity in Sustainable Agriculture

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Background
From 2012 to 2017, there was a 27% increase in female producers on farms, 36% of all producers in the U.S. are female.

The highest concentration of female farmers are aggregated in the west and northeast U.S.

White men currently dominate the field of sustainable ag.

We need to increase the visibility of women in agriculture.

Research Question

What barriers do women face in sustainable agriculture?

Internship & Methods

I worked as a farm intern at Clark Fork Organics, an organic, diversified vegetable farm in Missoula, Montana.

I conducted a series of recorded interviews with female farmers in western Washington. I asked questions regarding barriers and opportunities women face in sustainable ag.

Findings

Functional Barrier:
- affects the functionality of the farm (e.g. childcare)

Societal Barrier:
- preconceptions or systemic policy that favors men

Physical Barrier:
- systems and work designed for an average male physique

“People in male bodies often have more mass and more muscle...I can’t just muscle something the way that somebody who has another 50 lbs of muscle.” - Arwen Norman, SkyRoot Farm

Significance

We need legislation that supports mothers in agriculture.

We need legislation that supports female farmers in leasing or purchasing land.

We need to increase transparency between the farmer and their customer to raise the visibility of women in agriculture.

We must create pathways through high school programs, mentorships, and/or apprenticeships that allow female farmers to access sustainable ag without higher education.

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