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Farm Women and the Empowerment Potential in Value-Added Agriculture

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Abstract:

While the number of women in the U.S. is growing, less clear is whether increasing participation in agriculture translates into empowerment opportunities. Are invisibility and disempowerment lingering expressions of farm women's experience? Using qualitative data drawn from 32 interviews with Michigan value-added farmers, we examine the extent to which women have been able to experience empowerment, and the ways in which value-added agriculture specifically fosters an empowering context. We adopt a conceptualization of empowerment from the development scholarship in order to establish a baseline for scrutiny, viewing empowerment as a multi-dimensional process constituting the 'power to' realize one's goals, the opportunity to exercise 'power with' others, and the ability to find and nurture 'power within' the self. Our findings indicate that value-added agriculture provides a unique context for women's empowerment. At the same time, the extent to which value added-agriculture constitutes a venue for women's empowerment is complex, multifaceted, and requires constant negotiation. It can be organized and performed in such a way as to subvert the empowerment process by confining women to specific social locations that may reify oppressive structures.

Introduction

Recent census data reveal a growing representation of women in agriculture. In 2012, U.S. women farmers reached 969,672 or 30 percent of the farming population, an increase of 14 percent over the past decade (2002-2013) (Census of Agriculture 2012; 2002). Some journalists have summarized this trend as "breaking the 'grass ceiling'" (Doering 2013) whereby invisible barriers have been removed and opportunities to production agriculture are no longer denied to women. In this paper, we redirect an analytical lens on farm women to test extant theoretical understandings of gender relations in agriculture, as well as to gauge the extent to which the, so-called, "breaking of the 'grass' ceiling'" is indeed an accurate portrayal of women's experience or merely enthusiastic reporter rhetoric.

The now classical feminist literature on gender relations in agriculture in the Global North in general, and in the United States in particular, has focused on the family farm unit (Preibisch and Grez 2010) and hinges on a fundamental conclusion that women have made significant contributions to family farm economic and social well-being through their on and off-farm contributions (Brandth 1995; Fink 1992; Leckie 1996; Neth 1995; Pearson 1979; Rosenfeld 1985; Sachs 1983), yet their efforts frequently go unrecognized or diminished. This results in the disempowerment of women by deflating their social status, curtailing their access to material resources, denigrating their identities (Gasson 1980; Jellison 1993; Little 2002), as well as portraying "a very biased view of agricultural history" (Alston 2003). Sachs and Alston (2010:278) argue that "undoing existing gender arrangements in agriculture requires the reshuffling of power relations and the reframing of discourses surrounding gender." The demographic up-tick among American farm women presents an opportunity to reinvigorate this

conversation and explore the extent to which invisibility and disempowerment are lingering expressions of farm women's experience in late capitalism.

A recent body of research posits that this new generation of women farmers are more likely to be found on operations which add value to agriculture (Bock 2004; McNally 2001; Trauger 2004). For example, 40 percent of community-supported agriculture farms are operated by women (Jarosz 2011) and women are more likely to engage in farm tourism (Brandth and Haugen 2011; Garcia-Ramon, Canoves, and Valdovinos 1995) – both variants of value-added agriculture. In this paper, our goal is to examine the context of participation in value-added agriculture to ask how women farmers experience opportunities for and impediments to empowerment. More specifically, this study examines the forces that empower women to engage in farming generally, and value-added agriculture specifically. We also consider the ways in which value-added agriculture creates the context for nurturing women's empowerment.

Why focus on value-added agriculture? First, much of the work of value-added agriculture is performed in a public setting, creating distinctive opportunities for visibility. Many women are taking their farm on the road via face-to-face sales at farmer's markets, community-supported agriculture, or becoming farm spokespersons via agritourism. Secondly, there appears to be a lack of scholarship on the explicit intersection of value-added agriculture and gender. Research on the topic has more overtly taken up the question of women's empowerment vis-á-vis either conventional or sustainable farming systems, but few have explored value-added agriculture. Existing studies have found that women's participation in farm decision-making has led to empowerment, yet, as noted above, much of the literature contends that such participation has occurred less in conventional than in sustainable farming systems (DeLind and Ferguson 1999; Hassanein 1999; Leipins 1998; Meares 1997; Wells 1998). Like agritourism (Brandth and

Haugen 2011), many practices associated with value-added agriculture accentuate skills often performed within traditional notions of gendered-work (cooking, cleaning, caring) suggesting the need for investigation of the empowerment potential in value-added agriculture.

Relatedly, not only is value-added agriculture explicitly missing from the empowerment debate, but the use of conventional/sustainable binaries can mask heterogeneity within the typical farm operation, eclipsing the spaces where women often work. The structure of much of U.S. agriculture is such that conventional or sustainable farming systems are not always analytically discrete. Attributes typically assigned to conventional farms, such as large scale farms that continuously grow single crops over many seasons and produce a high-yielding uniform commodity with the use of pesticides and fertilizers and that rely upon technological innovation and large capital investments, may be found in farms that practice value-added agriculture. Yet, value-added agriculture is typically treated as an instance of sustainable farming, in part because of its ability to stimulate economic diversity on the farm, create employment opportunities, and revitalize rural development – all functions frequently aligned with sustainable agriculture. Examples of this hybrid model can be seen in fruit and small vegetable producers, such as apple or blueberry growers who produce by 'conventional' methods, yet process and market according to 'value-added' practices by processing apples into cider or pies, or marketing direct to the consumer.

Such variations are supported by previous scholarship which has found that simplistic binaries do not map strictly onto perceived production practices and, in doing so, masks complexity in understanding agricultural change and attendant management approaches (Fairweather et al. 2009; Lockie and Halpin 2005; Rosin and Campbell 2008). For example, Hall and Mogyorody (2007:295) found that organic agriculture did not create any unique conditions for gender

empowerment in Ontario, rather "most organic farms exhibited a fairly conventional gendered division of labor and power." For these reasons, neither conventional nor sustainable farming systems are discrete, thus we focus on the much narrower system of value-added agriculture which can serve as a more accurate benchmark to explore empowerment.

In examining the extent to which women have been able to create a space for empowerment free from the constraints of social structures, such as patriarchy, heterosexism and agrarian ideology, we look to the development literature to conceptualize empowerment as a multi-dimensional process constituting the "power to" improve one's conditions, the opportunity to exercise "power with" others, and the ability to find and nurture "power within" the self (Charlier 2006; Oxaal and Baden 1997). Drawing upon interview data with 32 Michigan farm women engaged in value-added agriculture, we examine the extent to which they express these various forms of power.

This study allows us to add to the literature on gender and value-added agriculture in general, and value-added agriculture as a vehicle for women's empowerment, in particular. This work also contributes to the conceptualization of empowerment—a concept which when applied to rural women, has disproportionately focused on the experiences of women in the Global South. By turning our geographic lens on American women, we are able to augment our understanding of this process and systematically distinguish the experience of farm women's empowerment by place.

Conceptualizing Empowerment

Feminist scholars have made formidable inroads in understanding the intersection between gender and power relations in agriculture. Within the field of sociology of agrifood

systems, the debates about the role of women in agriculture and their power/powerlessness are often framed in terms of conventional or sustainable/alternative agriculture farming systems. Early scholarship found conventional farming systems to be organized economically, politically, and socio-culturally exclusively, marginalizing women from land ownership (Jensen 1991) and active roles in production and decision-making (Neth 1995; Rosenfeld 1985; Sachs 1983; Whatmore 1991). Conventional agriculture was undergirded by input systems that, likewise, displaced women by alienating them from technology (Jellison 1993) and knowledge acquisition (Hassanein 1999; Kiernan et al. 2012). The growth in alternative or sustainable agriculture has opened opportunities for women, to not only resist the hegemony of conventional farming systems, but to engage in agriculture via avenues historically denied to them. A growing body of scholarship has credited this sea change with empowering women traditionally excluded from this sector of the economy (DeLind and Ferguson 1999; Trauger 2004; Wells 1998).

A common denominator running through this literature on U.S. farm women and empowerment draws attention to the role of collective action and networks for empowering women in agriculture. For Wells (1998), it was the organizing of Iowa farm women in the Women, Food and Agriculture Network which stimulated opportunities for empowerment via collective action. Delind and Ferguson (1999:198) found that community-supported agriculture likewise, served as a "feminine form of empowerment" as it embodied "both a social and physical space within which relationships of everyday life, practical gender concerns that relate to women's life positions and experiences, can be variously expressed." Trauger (2004:290) sees sustainable agriculture as "new spaces of empowerment and resistance" where women and agriculture work are made visible and valued. This insight leads her to conclude that "perhaps changing the spatial institutions of work may have more to do with liberating women from

oppressive gender relations and simply changing the kind of work they do" (2004:304). We offer this literature as a historical anchor, aware that the present research is distinct from these studies in its focus on value-added agriculture, and, therefore, limits any comparative function.

Empowerment may appear like a simple concept to define, yet, as Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (2002:22) write, "there is a tendency to use the term loosely, without embedding it in a larger conceptual framework." Rowlands (1995) argues that the concept of empowerment has muddled scholarly thinking and practice because understanding of the root concept – power – is disputed. Development scholars tend to view empowerment as both a process and an exercise in agency (Ali 2013; Malhotra and Schuler 2005). Nayaran (2005:4) defines empowerment as "the expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one's life." For Kabeer (2001:41), empowerment is the "expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them." Both definitions stress the importance of agency in charting one's future and they centralize the role of process, highlighting a temporal component, but neither say anything about the forms in which power may be realized.

Others draw upon Foucault (Charlier 2006; Oxaal and Baden 1997; Rowlands 1997; Williams, Seed, and Mwau 1994) to problematize the meaning of empowerment. These feminist development scholars have identified a multi-dimensional concept of power that consists of four distinct types: "power over," "power to," "power with," and "power within."

"Power over" implies relations of domination and/or subordination. This type of power rests upon the control and domination of one group over another whose consent to be dominated may be given freely or extracted illegitimately. Rowlands (1995:101) writes that "a gender analysis shows that 'power over' is wielded predominantly by men over other men, by men over

women, and by dominant social, political, economic, or cultural groups over those who are marginalized." Empowerment necessitates a reconsideration of patriarchy and relations of domination between men and women and it also mandates that we scrutinize other patterns of domination embedded in socio-cultural arrangements, such as racism, colonialism, and heterosexism (Charlier 2006). Only once imbalances embedded in these relations are dismantled, can we initiate a power shift (Kabeer 1999; 2001). Power and empowerment, then, are inextricably intertwined. In this way, "power over" becomes the normative benchmark from which all shifts in power can be assessed.

"Power to" chronicles the onset of change, or the process of empowerment. It includes the ability to access resources, make decisions, exercise authority, and seek solutions. It acknowledges the importance of skills and competencies (human resources) as well as material resources (e.g., financial). Kelly argues that "power to" is "achieved by increasing one's ability to resist and challenge 'power over'" (quoted in Rowlands 1995:102).

Empowerment can also be approached as an individual or collective journey (Charlier 2006; Kabeer 2001; Umut Bespiran 2011). Underlying the notion of solidarity is "power with" which signals the capacity to collectively organize in the pursuit of common goals. The recognition that women can work together to achieve power in the form of collective action, political structures, or other forms of social and economic cooperation alerts us to the fact that there are dimensions beyond the "personal level", such as with "close relationships" in which women cultivate empowerment (Rowlands 1995). An empowered group is one who understands their "right to voice" and is vocal (Dahal 2013); it is a group which has acquired the power to take charge of their lives (Kabeer 2001).

Lastly, empowerment is a process of developing a stronger sense of self. "Power within" refers to the development of self-esteem, including the ability of individuals to see themselves as confident agents of change and to cultivate a presentation of self that mirrors this internal image. Others suggest that "power within" (aka "power inside") also refers to the practice of reflexivity, or a form of consciousness-raising, whereby women develop the ability to identify the sources of their oppression (Afshar 1998; Murthy et al. 2008).

To summarize, the notion of empowerment requires the ability to cultivate power, exercise control over one's life, and the ability to make and implement choices (Charlier 2006; Kabeer 2001; Sen 2000). In short, this ability is related to the acquisition to three of the four types of power: "power to," "power with," and "power within" (Charlier 2006; Oxaal and Baden 1997; Rowlands 1995; Williams et al. 1994). For development scholars, empowerment is transformative; women become agents of their own transformation. Empowerment is not an end-state, however, but a dynamic, on-going process. Moreover, empowerment cannot be created by others, it is inherently a personal process, yet conditions for empowerment can be constructed. For Oxaal and Baden (1997), it is the context in which actions are undertaken which facilitate this process. For this, we are especially intrigued to explore the context of value-added agriculture as a vehicle for empowerment.

After a brief discussion of the gendered transformations in U.S. agriculture and our research methods, we address the ways in which Michigan women articulate their experience of empowerment via "power to," "power with," and "power within" value-added agriculture systems as well as document lingering struggles to break free of the domination and subordination that typify "power over."

Gendered Transformations in U.S. Agriculture

Both the U.S. farm women and development scholarship views women's subordination to men as grounded, in part, in material and historical conditions (Charlier 2006; Fink 1992; Kabeer 1999; 2001; Sachs 1983). American farm women's lack of power has historically been accomplished by both legal and socio-cultural means and can be traced to the contours of a system of family farming as a household livelihood strategy. In the U.S. context, family farms have been defined first and foremost based on their dependence on the heterosexual couple as the primary unit of production (Allen and Sachs 2007; Fink 1992; Sachs 1983).

The post-World War II era ushered in an industrial mode of production "designed to increase productivity by substituting capital in the form of machinery, chemicals, and other purchased inputs and management inputs for labor and land" (Lyson 2004:18). Women were pushed out of the fields and either into the home or off the farm. Some found in off-farm employment the opportunity to make significant contributions to the household/farm unit. Others found a changing political and economic climate in the 1990s that gradually valorized localism, livelihood simplicity and sustainability, providing a new market opportunity to their 'unique' skills and subjectivities (DeLind and Ferguson 1999; Trauger 2001). Movement actors created markets where the production of smaller scale, lower-input, value-added agriculture and other non-market related goods, such as landscape and cultural amenities were highly sought after. As a result, many aspects of gendered farm work - once under-valued - have begun to take on increased importance, such as on-farm processing, direct sales, and farm tourism.

The work involved in value-added agriculture is often in keeping with socially constructed gendered skills, knowledge, and subjectivities, including women's reproductive work. For instance, hosting visitors on the farm is suggested by Brandth and Haugen (2010) to

afford women the opportunity to use skills in the areas of caretaking, service, cooking, and education. Cánoves et al. (2004) contend that although gendered skills undergird the nature of such work, it may, nonetheless, allow women to move from a position of societal invisibility to assume roles that hold promise for personal empowerment. Michigan is an excellent case in which to study farm women's empowerment given the economic importance of value-added agriculture which emerged from the state's agriculture and tourism sectors.

The food and agriculture sector is central to the economic portfolio of Michigan. It generates $91.4 billion in economic activity annually and employs 923,000 people or 22 percent of the laborforce (Knudson and Peterson 2012). Surrounded by four of the five Great Lakes, much of the state enjoys a unique micro-climate that is acutely suited to the production of fruits and vegetables which are highly amenable to adding value at the farmgate. Secondly, this unique geographical location has also enabled Michiganders to develop a vibrant tourism economy to capitalize on markets created by travelers visiting the state for lakeside holidays. As a result, value-added agriculture was established in Michigan long before many other areas of the U.S. (Krauss 1999). Che, Veeck, and Veeck (2005:225) argue that "Michigan farmers are utilizing agritourism as a value-added way to capitalize on their comparative advantages, their diverse agricultural products, and their locations near large, urban, tourist-generating areas."

Value-added agriculture is generally referred to as the process of differentiating the raw agriculture product or commodity. Economic and social value may be 'added' to raw agricultural commodities by either capturing or creating a novel value (Boland 2009). When value is said to be 'captured', the raw product is transformed into a marketable product or service desired by consumers, such as on-farm processing of fruit into pies, jams and jellies or marketing one's products straight to the consumer. Creating value is performed when a product is differentiated

from other similar products in the marketplace based on desired attributes. For example, value can be created with brand identification, such as the use of organic labeling, or other certification programs. In either case, producers receive price premiums for melding raw commodities with socially desirable attributes. This system also selectively draws on a new set of skills often distinct from raw commodity production as products are transformed, processed, or marketed.

Research Methods

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were used to obtain data for this study. Interview data were collected with the intention that they would provide a window into the meanings women give to agriculture work. Our goal was to investigate how Michigan women constructed meaning of their work and experienced empowerment generally, and within the boundaries of value-added agriculture systems. We began by selecting potential respondents by their presence in the state media outlets, roles they held in agricultural organizations, and on advice from Extension Educators. We then used a snowball sample to identify other potential candidates. In total, we conducted 32 interviews at either the respondent's home, farm, or coffee shop. The interviews ranged in length from one to three hours, were tape-recorded and, later, primarily transcribed. Interviews consisted of approximately 40 open and closed-ended questions covering subjects such as farm history, farm and business organization and interaction, motivations, gender dynamics, future visions, and personal demographic data. A semi-structured interview design allowed us to pay systematic attention to similarities and differences across various types of value-added enterprises. We have given each respondent a pseudonym in an effort to shield her identity.

A general inductive approach to data analysis was used. The authors systematically read and coded each transcript which resulted in the emergence of significant textual themes. The

identified themes were analyzed based on their congruence with concepts from the empowerment literature.

Data were collected in 2013 from women ranging in ages between 25 to 78 years. Most had been actively engaged in farming for over 30 years, but years farming ranged from as little as two years to 65 years. The farms with which these women are associated range in size from one to 540 acres. Efforts were made to strategically include women from various parts of the state. The women were located in fifteen different counties, however all were from Michigan's Lower Peninsula.

They are united in their practice of value-added agriculture which, in Michigan, typically includes an array of entrepreneurial activities as discussed above. In our study, women added value to agriculture by processing fruits into cider, jams, pies and other edibles, processing lamb, cheese-making, selling directly on the farm, at local farm markets, or through community–supported agriculture networks, practicing agritourism, or via organic production methods.

There are limitations to these data that should be noted. The farm women who participated in this study were initially identified by either their personal visibility as an agribusiness entrepreneur or the visibility of their farm operation. They, in turn, led us to other respondents who may possess similar traits. This suggests that our dataset may include a disproportionate number of highly visible farm women. Moreover, the initial interviewees were also identified by their connections to Co-operative Extension and for this reason these women may constitute a distinctive group. As Scott as noted (1996), their affiliation with Extension may imply a more conventional approach to agriculture production or a more entrepreneurial ethos to agribusiness than those non-affiliated. Lastly, given the small sample size it is not possible to determine if these findings represent all women farm operators. In these following sections, we

offer these data to ignite further scrutiny of how women experience empowerment and the role of value-added agriculture in facilitating it.

Findings

In this research, women articulated a number of social and economic forces that served to empower them to farm and to engage in value-added agriculture. This section provides evidence of how women cultivate "power to", "power with", and "power within" to farm generally, and to engage in value-added agriculture, specifically. We have organized this section by each of the three forms of power and we conclude each section discussing the extent to which empowerment is thwarted in the value-added agriculture context.

"Power To" Farm

Here we primarily take up two questions: what are the forces that facilitate women's power to farm; and, how does value-added agriculture, more specifically, provide a context in which farm women can effectively pursue this farming style? We define power to farm as constitutive of individual decision-making authority and control, as well as the ability to access resources and skills to operate one's farm. We begin by showing that women demonstrate the power to farm by making an individual commitment to the occupation. They access resources such as land, as well as cultivate farming knowledge and skills, via familial socialization and experiences gained during previous occupations. It was not uncommon to hear women detail the challenges they encountered in cultivating the power to farm.

Choosing Farming. A majority of the women came to farming independent of their husband's occupation or interest. They chose to farm. Most (53 percent) of the women farmed alone either as a result of being unmarried or having a husband employed full-time off the farm.

When there was a spouse present, he may have ‘helped’ from time to time during intensive periods, but had very few on-going farm responsibilities. In only 27 percent of the cases did the respondents indicate that the male was the primary farm operator and only six percent farmed jointly.

Following their passion to farm, for many, was an old dream, and for others a more recent ambition, but in each case, women highlighted *their* role in the decision to farm. When we asked the women to reflect on their motivations for farming, they frequently emphasized three issues: farming was a personal aspiration; they had dreamed of farming for many years; and, they were the primary decision-makers and in control of their operations.

> As a nurse I had the chance to see so many illnesses caused by lifestyle choices and I began to see diet as so important to health. Gradually, I started raising herbs as a hobby and for gift-giving, but eventually I chose to leave my nursing job for full-time farming, but I always wanted my business to be a community effort, to bring people in and to teach… My husband has always been supportive, but this was my dream (Rita).

> I had worked as a medical professional for many years and I wanted a change. I dreamed of being a cheesemaker and having a creamery on a small farm and raising sheep. My husband would like to help when he retires, but, for now, he still works (Rhonda).

> I’m the boss around here. I always have been and always will be. I was farming this land and running the farm stand before we got married. My husband always worked off the farm as a tool and die maker, but he helps on the weekend (Grace).

These women view themselves as the primary or sole decision-maker in either the production end of the operation or some other area of the farm, such as processing (e.g., running the cider house, farm market, restaurant). The quotes above suggest that the women were able to make the career choice to farm, as well as exercise authority in the daily management of their farm operation. However, they told us this ability was facilitated by the acquisition of specific skills and resources made possible by familial ties and previous careers.

Accessing resources and skills. For many, the power to farm was facilitated by accessing resources and skills critical to the practice of agriculture, in general, and value-added agriculture more specifically. Not surprisingly, women stressed the importance of land and capital access as vital. Land and capital have always been barriers to entry into farming and these resources are particularly difficult to access for beginning and minority populations. The power to farm was enabled by families who helped them access resources. Among primary farm operators (76 percent), forty-one percent inherited or purchased farmland from the family of *her* ancestry.

Beyond land, women credited family ties for passing on a passion for farming, as well as skills, knowledge, and entrepreneurial opportunities that launched their farm careers. Women described being socialized into the role of farmer, in the same way as male farm operators have historically reported, but contrary to their male counterparts, many attributed significant influence to their mother—who uniquely prepared them to practice value-added agriculture.

Grace is a good example of those women motivated by family heritage. At 78 years old, she tells us she has been farming since the age of two to emphasize the work she was expected to do with her parents. She traces her farm business lineage back to her teenage years when, at the suggestion of her mother, she turned her equine hobby into an entrepreneurial activity. At age 15, Grace began organizing hayrides and horse riding events for profit, and when she married at age

19, she followed her mother's advice once again and established a roadside fruit and vegetable market. Later, she began adding value to the produce by processing jams and jellies which she sold at her roadside stand. Grace tells us, "I could not have done it if it weren't for my parents. Using the farm to make money was my mother's idea, and they helped us buy the farm when they retired."

Melissa also has a farming heritage; she grew up working alongside her mother in a seasonal farm stand located on a busy highway near Lake Michigan. "We kids were expected to work along with her, so a few years after we got married mom decided to retire and she asked me if I wanted to take it over." Today, Melissa produces cherries which she and her staff transform into value-added products and sell at the same market she inherited from her mother. Her husband helps from time to time, but, like Grace's spouse, he has an unrelated off-farm career.

In a similar way, Maxine also inherited a farm market from her mother whom she describes as value-added agriculture "pioneer".

> Dad grew the cherries and mom baked pies. She would load the trunk of the '68 GMC, drive over to Hwy 57, set up card tables and saw horses to sell cherries, pies, and jams for two and a half weeks, then reopen a few weeks later for peach season, and then again for apples. I guess I learned a lot from her, because we had to help all summer.

This matriarchal influence appears rare in the sociological literature on farm succession. Daily farming activity is typically the site of youth socialization into farming (Brandth and Overein 2013), with most emphasis being placed on knowledge transfer and passing down the farm from father to son (Peter et al. 2005). Our research suggests that mothers may be neglected actors in farm succession, as they play a significant role in socializing their daughters, not only to farm, but to pursue value-added agriculture, specifically. Haugen and Brandth (1994) found that

farm women often downplay relations with mothers and accentuate relations with fathers to align themselves with masculinist traits perceived necessary for validation in agriculture. Conversely, the women in this study accentuated the role of their mothers by recounting stories of mothers who taught them culinary, marketing, and organizational skills necessary to transform raw products into value-added consumables, which, in turn, prepared them socially and economically to respond to the post-productionist turn in agriculture. This suggests that farm women, as mothers, can be empowering agents preparing their daughters through socialization, to obtain the aspiration, skills, and knowledge to become farm operators in adulthood, and to become value-added entrepreneurs, in particular.

Other women reported turning to farming as a second, or "encore", career. The power to farm for these women was cultivated through previous careers that provided both valuable capital and skills. A number of women noted that the power to farm was constrained by lack of capital and years spent saving money in other careers was necessary to eventually be able to farm, or to turn to farming full time. "I put in my time as a nurse for 28 years, waiting for the day we could start our own farm. We had to save a lot of money," says Carolyn.

In addition to capital, women also attributed the power to farm to their previous careers which provided the context in which they developed the human capital valuable to their farming career. Women described skills such as bookkeeping, marketing, advertising, photography, nursing, and teaching that they routinely put to use in their farm operation. For instance, Leigh says she uses her former "school teacher skills everyday day. "From managing our two employees, to teaching bread-baking classes, to leading tours of the mill, I'm always teaching." While these skills are not necessarily unique to value-added agriculture, they are more critical for operations that demand a farm-public interface. Value-added agriculture creates the context for

the utilization of skills and knowledge more likely to be part of women's social-cultural tool-kit, cultivated within the domestic sphere or within female-dominated occupations. In this way, it makes room for skills and knowledge deemed feminine, but does not disrupt the traditional gendered division of labor prevalent in rural communities.

Cultivating "power to". The power to farm was due to women's access to land, familial resources, and human resources developed in previous careers. This reinforces findings by Pilgeram and Amos (2015) who underscore the importance of social location and life course as determinants of farming opportunities. A number of respondents acknowledged the importance of their husband's income. Among those who were married, 39 percent have husbands who contribute to the fiscal health of farm from their off-farm income. Veronica says her "husband provides good financial support which helps me run *my* business, but I still cannot get an income from it after three years." Not only do some women not have full control over the resources required to sustain value-added agriculture, but this condition facilitates a relationship of co-dependency of women on men.

Moreover, as previously stated, value-added agriculture accentuates skills typically affiliated with women's caretaking. In this way, value-added agriculture trades disproportionately on traditional gender roles which, in such cases, are presented to the public for commodification. Incorporating traditional gender roles into value-added agriculture may leverage economic opportunity, but it also functions to constrain women's ability to deviate from conventional gender expectations. In this way, it continues the extension of women's assignment to the domestic sphere. It may also reaffirm a gender system in which traditional views of femininity are valued. Coding such work as feminine, may be responsible for the lower revenue that the respondents reported, and for their persistent reliance on male incomes to sustain their

operations. In this regard, their involvement in value-added agriculture may not foster the desired social change needed to sustain the power to farm.

These interviews suggest that women find the power to farm in their exercise of agency to choose farming, as well as in their ability to access land. Yet, they cultivate the power to farm value-added agriculture specifically, in the farming knowledge and skills gained via familial socialization and experiences achieved during previous occupations. However, reliance on gendered skills and knowledge typically found in value-added agriculture operations, along with co-dependence on male incomes, may create only tenuous empowerment opportunities. These conditions do not provide women the opportunity to act in their own interests, but may stimulate erratic and unintended disruptions to the empowerment process. The following analysis delves deeper by exploring the ways in which value-added agriculture enables women to construct power with others.

"Power With" Others

"Power with" signals the importance of empowerment as a collective journey bringing together individuals who share complementary interests (Charlier 2006; Kabeer 2001; Umut Bespiran 2011). Previous research suggests that farm women create power in their relations with other women, through agricultural organizations or networks (Annes and Wright 2015; Hassanein 1999; Trauger 2001; Wells 1998) which can be a source of shared interests, as well as solidarity. Likewise, women in this study reported that they were motivated to farm, in part, out of a desire to connect with others, making the farm/public aspect of much of value-added agriculture an attractive choice. However, the connection they accentuated was less likely the desire to connect with other like-minded farmers, but a desire to establish ties with those outside

of agriculture. Therefore, in this section, we explore how women use value-added agriculture to create "power with" customers or farm guests. The solidarity farm women cultivate within value-added agriculture is expressed in two ways: through the development of personal connections, as well as a desire to educate consumers about agriculture.

Connecting with consumers. Many women were motivated to pursue value-added agriculture as a way of embedding themselves and their farms in a broader social network. Charlotte centralizes the importance of community when she says, "It was important to us to build a farm that was open to the public so we could share our land with other people." Leslie describes her work on her mint farm as "planting dreams, cultivating friendships and harvesting goodness." Grace too punctuates her need for community when she says, "I am not interested in raising corn and soybeans like these farmers around here. I am a people person, I need to talk to people." In each of these cases, the role of community embeddedness rises to the foreground, where the farm is regarded as more than an economic vehicle, but a civic instrument to serve social interests as well.

Although the desire for community ties was a reoccurring theme, the ways in which some enacted it complicates interpretation. We visited Jackie's farm on a bright spring day and she met us at our car looking ever the picture of the early 1900s farm fashion. Her silver hair tied into a sleek bun and her ankle length cotton print dress and coordinating apron were part of her costume meant to enhance her performance aimed at transporting us to a different way of life. She begins immediately to welcome us to her "life on the farm", telling us her goal is to give her u-pick customers a chance to "experience a life they are not exposed to" and to develop a relationship with farmers. "They want a story," she tells us, and her historical costume helps her spin this narrative.

> They want to feel connected and I do too. We are not in the business to entertain … we are here to educate and connect with city dwellers and to help them experience a little slice of rural life.

Jackie's language reinforces her desire for community and to educate which is important to both her sense of self and desire to establish a common agricultural consciousness with her customers. Yet, she pursues this solidarity in costume which objectifies herself and her farm operation. By 'dressing the part', this woman has positioned herself as a physical object to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of appearance, rather than on any competence-based measures. She becomes a prop and her farm a stage for what may be interpreted as a choreographed performance.

Dorothy echoes a desire for connection. On her well-manicured turn-of-the-century 32 acre farm she combines a farm tour with retail sales of pottery created in her barn-turned art gallery/studio. Her motivation is to share her up-bringing and

> to get people to think about where their food comes from and support local economies … I tell people this is a Hollywood farm; that it's not real, but I am trying to reconstruct the fairytale image in my head of rural life from my childhood. *Charlotte's Webb* was my favorite book as a child and I am trying to resurrect those images.

Dorothy also wants tourists to develop a deeper understanding of agriculture and rural life and she uses popular myths to do so. Like Jackie, she presents a fictional representation of rurality that trades on nostalgia and, in doing so, underscores imagery over realism. While images of rural space can be informative in understanding the worldviews of women, when constructed for the purpose of 'educating' others less familiar with rural people and places, they can confound

and stimulate tension (Yarwood 2005). In this way, power with others is difficult to discern. It may be only an approximation, disguising fragile or artificial bonds.

Educating consumers. Ninety percent of the women reported feeling very strongly about educating consumers about the challenges facing modern agriculture and farm families. "It's a passion of mine, teaching people," Ava said. "I use the time together to talk about wider issues in the Michigan economy, the opposition between big farms and small ones, and the importance of communities working together."

Dorothy described two types of guests who visit her agritourism operation: those who are "a totally naïve group;" and others who are "very knowledgeable, but are freaked out and trying to find answers…Both groups need educating, it is just a different kind." Katherine adds a gendered distinction to the education role when she says, "It's all about educating, the guys get frustrated with customer questions, but this is a real chance to educate them." Similarly, Patricia believes

> people have a very idealistic view of rural life. They are very disconnected from their food; they get their information on-line and it is not accurate. They need more education…Education is primarily what we do.

Perhaps Leigh's is the most ambitious goal.

> We wanted to save the world. We thought by increasing the supply of organic food and educating people we might help accomplish that. People who come here are looking for a personal connection with their food and I need a personal connection with them. Our tours, cooking classes, dinners, festivals help me connect too.

Developing social relations with consumers satisfied needs for community among the respondents, but it was also viewed as a form of public service to their community. Repeatedly,

respondents described consumers as deficient in essential agrifood knowledge and feeling obligated to fill this gap. Tammy called it a "civic responsibility." "I think I have a duty to educate them."

These collective ties established with consumers differ from the solidarity development scholars envision when discussing women in the Global South collectively, nonetheless they demonstrate the ability of Michigan farm women to exercise "power with" others within the value-added-agriculture context. In this way, value-added agriculture provides women with the opportunity to overcome isolation, establish social ties, demonstrate their specialized knowledge, and provide a vital civic function. The extent to which these ties are reciprocated and that learning takes place, however, is unknown.

Cultivating "power with". The importance of sharing the culture of farm life and connecting with others was not only a significant draw to value-added-agriculture, but was deemed a core element for many which they saw as contributing to their own personal empowerment, as well as to broader social welfare. Cultivating "power with" others was found to fill an important need among farm women, but, at the same time, such connections were not innocuous. The manner in which some farm women went about disseminating farm information may distance themselves from any empowerment potential. Reliance upon cultural imaginary, costumes, or fictional narratives to initiate this connection - giving consumers the story they want to hear - may backfire. Portraying farming in ways that caricature agriculture perpetuates stereotypes that eclipse the dynamism of the modern agrifood system, rife with tension and struggle. Peddling in imagery is unlikely to lead to a meaningful connection with others for the storytellers, nor can it produce a profound understanding of agriculture and rural life for consumers. Symbols and narratives rooted in idealized or romantic imagery, rather than accurate

and complex portrayals of contemporary challenges farmers face or the tensions inherent in rural life, can only tear at the fabric of trust and undo any prospective community building inroads.

"Power Within" the Self

In this section, we discuss how value-added agriculture may activate "power within." Specifically, we ask how women develop a stronger sense of self and to what extent their involvement in value-added agriculture fosters the practice of reflexivity and raises consciousness regarding structures of oppression. We show that as value-added producers, many women reported experiencing a transformation in their identities; increasingly seeing themselves as farmers and adopting this language as a professional identifier. But, while many associated positive socio-psychological benefits to the practice of value-added agriculture, others struggled in this regard.

Socio-psychological benefits. A majority of women stressed the socio-psychological benefits of value-added agriculture, especially in the context of their interactions with others. Time and time again, we heard it was "enjoyable", "rewarding" or "personally fulfilling." "I find it fun and I think it is important work and I am good at it. It gives me a lot of pride to share my knowledge and to have others take our life here seriously," Angela says. Others described the educational component of their work as "a fascinating process" that was "personally uplifting" and "life changing when you see people make connections." "It makes me feel good to educate people and know I helped them develop as a person," says Carolyn.

From this perspective, value-added agriculture provides women the opportunity to challenge traditional representations of farm women, allowing them to appear as competent professionals. Positive socio-psychological benefits raise the question as to whether women are

drawn to value-added agriculture precisely because it prizes their culturally-prescribed gendered skills and creates the context for them to use these talents in ways other farming systems do not. Such conclusions are supported by motivation theories which posit that individuals are more likely to be attracted to activities in which they perceive themselves as being highly skilled or competent (Harter 1978; Nicholls 1984).

Many women went beyond describing their work as satisfying to attach meta-physical attributes to it. Claims that they found their farm work to be "sacred" or "spiritually invigorating" were common. Rita's religious values are closely woven into her one-woman farm operation. As a former nurse, she describes her work as "food evangelism", helping her customers find good health and spirituality through her farm. She is convinced that "God wants me to be here, to do this work. I see this as a ministry of care as I connect with others." She shares her theory that many women are entering value-added agriculture as an existential exercise – "to find quiet time, to recharge themselves."

Crafting the farmer identity. Almost eight in ten of the women self-identified as farmers. These findings support research showing a growing inclination among women to identify as farmers (Braiser et al. 2014). This group reported making most of the decisions concerning the farm, conducting most, if not all the labor, being responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the operation, conducting financial management tasks, and exploring new business outlets.

Also in keeping with previous research (Barberchek et al. 2009), in spite of this tendency to identify as a farmer, many respondents continued to struggle with the social acceptability of such an identity. As one woman put it, "women don't get much respect in farming. I used to sell wholesale and the clients wouldn't want to talk to me. They were always looking for Brad [husband]." Leslie agrees, saying she also feels "like a farmer, but others see me as a caretaker."

Women recounted efforts to manage a frontstage persona that is at odds with their personal identity to facilitate smooth social relations with clients. Tammy, for instance, avoids publicly identifying as a farmer even though this is how she sees herself and her role on the farm.

> I think people in this area would think I was mocking farmers if I called myself a farmer publically. I feel I am, but they don't see me that way. They are always looking to talk to my son. He's the 'real' farmer.

On the other hand, Betty Jo says others perceive her as a 'real' farmer, but she is less comfortable with this identity. As a result, she has developed tactics for managing an impression of herself as a competent farmer that meets local social expectations.

> I go back and forth on that issue. I guess I don't really feel like a real farmer because I don't have a garden, I don't know how to can [preserve]…sometimes I feel like a fake. Customers expect me to have certain knowledge I do not have. Often they ask how to can something, how much product to buy to make something, and I don't know. I was embarrassed to say 'I don't know' so I made a cheat sheet that shows how much fruit you need to make a pie or jams or whatever.

These findings suggest there remains considerable public speculation regarding women's ability to farm. For many, the role of farmer continues to be perceived to be in contrast to role expectations for women. It also reinforces the notion that women's agency is constrained by the organizational form prescribed. Nieva and Gutek (1981:132) argue that when women enter male-dominated fields they are unlikely to be able to significantly alter work roles, as "social structures heavily shape the options and tools available to them."

The ability to think reflexively about sources of oppression is evident by women who are cognizant of customer's efforts to categorize organic from non-organic farmers. Katherine stated

that she was "starting to notice younger people being more snobbish to us since we don't do organic. They think they know better how to raise apples than we who have been doing it for years." Betty Jo shared a similar experience.

> More and more people are asking about organic and they can be a bit judgmental. I am against organic in Michigan because it rains here. It is not a smart way to farm…We can't feed the world that way. Wet trees create fungus and you have to spray to control fungus. Some are snotty about it. It is like a religion for them. They are not going to hear your side of the story…We do IPM but for some people that's not enough. People really don't want worms, but they want a perfect world and perfect fruit, but they can't have both.

In each of these cases, we can see how women construct a sense of self in alignment with the social context in which they must navigate that is imbued with its own set of assumptions about what does or does not constitute a farmer. These women appear to experience cognitive dissonance and must negotiate both social expectations and practices produced by outsiders and their own preferred self-image. That our sense of self is constructed in part from social experience with others is not surprising from the perspective of classical socio-psychological theory (Mead 1934). What farm women think of themselves is significantly shaped by "the looking glass" of consumers, agritourists and others with whom they interact. However, this ability to take the role of the other demonstrates their ability for reflexivity as women see themselves as both subject and object.

Cultivating "power within". Given that value-added agriculture often rewards skills disproportionately held by women and provides a venue to showcase them, it can enhance feelings of competence and self-esteem. At the same time, some of the women reported being denied the recognition of farmer, and others who were granted it felt undeserving, needing "cheat

sheets" to fulfill local expectations. This reinforces Saugères (2002) argument that farm women are often perceived as "incomplete farmers," lacking both physical, psychological, and social attributes necessary for farming.

Findings about who farm women are and how they are allowed to portray themselves continue to be negotiated under value-added agriculture as it can fail to provide the supportive environment for the empowerment of women. This suggests that given the context, the ability of value-added agriculture to nurture "power within" the self, as well as challenge it, is uneven. The persistence of this socio-psychological struggle demonstrates the lingering forces of "power over" as groups, such as customers and guests, influence how women perceive themselves.

Discussion

While the empowerment of women is evident in all three forms of power presented in this paper, it does not go unchallenged. In this section, we discuss insights from these findings and their prospects for aiding the future empowerment of rural women.

Like much of the literature on sustainable agriculture (Sumner and Llewelyn 2011; Trauger 2004), we found that value-added agriculture also provides a context in which women are more likely to be represented, but in the case of Michigan, this relationship is not new. Women's empowerment in Michigan agriculture started long before the relatively recent rise of alternative agriculture. Michigan farm women pioneered value-added agriculture in their efforts to expand the economic activity of the household, rooted in the heterosexual partnership. Yet, the rise in alternative food systems and the localism movement have accentuated these contributions and punctuated women's visibility. In addition to laying the foundation for a value-added

agriculture, they socialized future generations of women into this work, opening opportunities for sustained participation.

We found these women to have autonomy in the decision-making process, and considerable control over their farms. Their access to farmland, knowledge and skills via familial ties and socialization and first careers has provided greater control over their fates to experience the power to farm. Their cultivation of power with others allows them to satisfy needs for social relations and community and the growing embrace of a farmer identity also speaks to critical socio-psychological aspects of the empowerment process to be found in value-added agriculture.

Women appear to be more responsible for the infrastructure and services that allow others to consume the rural through the purchase of place-based products and experiential activities which all draw on their gendered skills and knowledge. This surely is a signal that the value for women's knowledge is rising and, thus, the empowerment potential in value-added agriculture. The incorporation of a care ethic in organic production systems as well as the valorization of natural and cultural amenities is, likewise, considered by some to have uniquely positioned women to capitalize on these new markets (Jarosz 2011).

However, increased visibility and activation of traditional gendered roles may be indicators of a more troublesome nature. Could women's visibility in value-added agriculture signal their persistent invisibility? We see significant inroads to empowerment which we have summarized above, that, while necessary, remain insufficient markers of empowerment.

One feature notable in women's struggle to gain "power to", "power with", and "power within" is the unevenness of the empowerment process. This requires interrogation of the ways in which their visibility and participation is structured. More information is needed on how structural arrangements condition opportunities in value-added agriculture. For example,

continued reliance upon male incomes, years spent saving money in first careers, as well as family inheritances, capitalizing on culturally expected gender roles, molding ones identity to fit conventional norms are cultural signposts that empowerment does not proceed unabated. This suggests that value-added agriculture may not provide the individual with the empowerment potential we assume.

Findings also make clear that not all visibility is beneficial. Rendering visible and performing traditional gender roles may also constitute an essentialist interpretation of women's work, denying women expression of their own subjectivities. We discovered women's ability to be seen as a subject obscured in multiple ways. For example, when outsiders reserve the identity of farmer for males, women are denied agency. At the same token, when women 'fake' a farmer identity and construct a disingenuous persona that is intended to 'dress the part', or possesses knowledge one does not legitimately hold in order to align oneself with normative expectations, they subvert their own empowerment potential. Such struggles, and especially the tendency by some to acquiesce to the expectations of others, suggests that our respondents were stymied in their ability to cultivate "power within." The manufacture of expectant identities becomes just another marketing tool that trades on stereotypes and rose-colored ruralities. Both are forms of "othering" which distance rural populations from the non-rural, and in doing so, women become objects or representations of the rural, rather than subjects. Instead of becoming empowering, in certain circumstances, value-added agriculture may become disciplinary and coercive by pushing women to adopt, and to be confined to, a gender and a rural identity that is externally prescribed. In both extolling rural imaginary and denying their own sense of self, farm women privilege the discourse of the non-farm [urban] population to depict rural lives. Such objectification can only lead to the reproduction of "power over," rather than the realization of any actual empowerment.

When any mode of agriculture practiced in this way prevents women from fully challenging cultural misrepresentations of women which portray them as incomplete farmers, they are once again rendered culturally and socially invisible. By perpetrating such imagery and partial realities, many of our research participants are unable to identify the true source of their oppression, limiting their ability to cultivate "power within." These findings suggest that while women are increasingly engaged in value-added agriculture and assuming structural positions of authority and decision-making, ideological and political forces outside of agriculture have not kept pace, and when presented with challenges to their roles, women often acquiesce to social norms.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to apply the concept of empowerment to farm women in the Global North. Mainly elaborated in the context of the developing world, we extended the conceptualization of empowerment to probe the experience of farm women in North America. Exploring the question of whether Michigan women find in value-added agriculture an avenue for empowerment, we found uneven evidence for developing "power to," "power with," and "power within." While inroads have been made, the extent to which value added-agriculture constitutes a venue for farm women's empowerment is complex, multifaceted, and requires constant negotiation. Women's engagement in value-added agriculture creates a space for decision-making and control, but it also can be organized in such a way as to impede the empowerment process by confining women to specific social locations that may reify existing oppressive normative structures.

Many debates within the empowerment literature focus attention on 'how much' empowerment is attained as a result of some intervention or social transformation. We are left to

conclude that the accolades often bestowed upon value-added agriculture as both a vehicle for sustainable rural development generally, and for women's empowerment more specifically, may be overstated. This question clearly requires more empirical research and may be expected to differ by region and the presence of competing economic opportunities. This study suggests that of equal importance is the investigation of different kinds of involvement and their effects. By exploring the kinds of involvement to which women have access or create, we are able to discover how agriculture systems affirm or challenge empowerment opportunities. A fuller understanding of how value-added agriculture both contributes to and impedes farm women's empowerment awaits more scrutiny. Given the growing demand for value-added agriculture and the rising number of women taking their place in agriculture, the question of gender empowerment is critical to the social sustainability of the food system.

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