

Innovation and Multi Functionality of Female Agriculture in the Short Food Supply Chain. Four Campania Region Case Studies

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Abstract. This article aims at analyzing the features and the dynamics of female agriculture entrepreneurship in terms of Sustainability Empowerment, in the field of the short food supply chain of fruit and vegetables products. Drawing on the data of the last Agriculture Census (2010) in the specific territorial context of Campania Region, the article analyses the impacts of female management in terms of innovation and multi functionality. In particular, it focuses on experience of direct sale Campania farms in which women's role is crucial: using a survey in the form of open questionnaire, the article tries to answer to the following questions: does it exist a positive correlation between a farm managed by a woman and her innovative incentive in it? Can women concretely promote the innovation and multi functionality of farms in Campania Region?

Keywords: Short food supply chain, agriculture, multi functionality, innovation, well-being sustainability, female entrepreneurship

1 Introduction

This article has the dual aim of contributing to the analysis of female agriculture entrepreneurship in the specific field of the short food supply chain of fruit and vegetables products, and of showing the impacts of female management in terms of innovation and multi functionality. The territory of reference is Campania Region and the perspective is the Sustainability Empowerment, that is the capacity to found the society on the right to sustainability, in which well-being and sustainability are the key strategic objectives¹. The phenomenon of female agriculture entrepreneurship is not well known yet: in fact, there is a still lacking scientific literature about farms managed by women and their conditions of life and work: since this lack has influenced the effectiveness of interventions in their favour, this phenomenon has to

¹ Simone Cesaretti Foundation, URL www.fondazioneimonecesaretti.it .

be more studied and analyzed. Until now, it has not been possible to define the importance of the female agriculture entrepreneurship in rural areas, because of structural matters: the available census data, even if produce important socio-economic information, are likely to underestimate or overestimate the extent of the phenomenon: for example, it is not possible to indicate more than one person as a conductor or manager of the farm, and this makes difficult to highlight the cases in which the decision making role is actually played by women (Zumpano 2013)².

This work is articulated in three sections. In the first section, we analyse the bond between agriculture and social sustainability, which has led to the development of the short food supply chain as a new opportunity for the marketing of farm products. The second section analyses the features of women's role in the short food supply chain, as a social innovation, and the third section introduces four case studies of farms managed by women in Campania Region. Concluding remarks follow.

2 Agriculture and Social Sustainability

The crisis of the previous agricultural and economic development model made necessary to reformulate the pattern of social economic priorities (ReteLeader 2007)³ and to create some alternatives to this system (Commissione Internazionale per Futuro dell'Alimentazione e dell'Agricoltura 2003)⁴. This has led to a more and more strong link between agriculture and sustainability: our first aim is the analysis of this link, by keeping the multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of well-being sustainability in relation with the "food sector" theme (Cesaretti 2014)⁵. In fact, in recent years the anthropocentric approach to the environment has been replaced by the ethical one, more focused on the importance of the territory, the quality of products and the careful consumption, according to the Bruntland Report's Sustainable Development definition of 1987: "*man has increased his awareness about his ability to control and manage the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and respecting the environment in its complexity*". This has led to a reflection about the need to change the forms of production and consumption phases of the agricultural products, by shortening physical and economic but also social and cultural distances

² Zumpano, C. (2013), La dimensione femminile dell'impiego agricolo italiano: percorsi differenziati, in *Il capitale umano in agricoltura. Supplemento Agrisole*, 17 May 2013.

³ ReteLeader (2007b), *Donne e sviluppo rurale*, Biemmegraf, Roma

⁴ Commissione Internazionale per Futuro dell'Alimentazione e dell'Agricoltura (2003), *Manifesto sul futuro del cibo, ARSIA-Regione Toscana*. Available at: www.arsia.toscana.it/petizione/documents/cibo/cibo_it.pdf [Accessed: 21 February 2015].

⁵ "*The sustainability is a status or process characteristic which can be kept, at a certain level, in space and time*". Cesaretti, G.P. (2014), Thinking Sustainability, Global Approach and Sectoral Approach. "Environmental issue – Food for sustainability and not just food". *Rivista di studi sulla sostenibilità*, 1/2013. Franco Angeli, Milano.

between consumers and producers (Brunori et al. 2012)⁶. In this context, we can find the experience of the short food supply chain, which was born as a reaction to the crisis of intensive agricultural models. Its success derives, on the demand side, from the growing distrust of consumers, out for fresh, safe and high quality products; on the supply side, from the will to reduce competition by focusing on the uniqueness of the products of the territory of reference and the desire to establish a trust-based relation with clients (Ascione et al. 2014)⁷. Therefore, the short food supply chain, creating a direct relationship between producer and consumer (Belligiano and De Rubertis 2012)⁸, is one of the rural development and agriculture multi-functionality components and thus, by encouraging the economic growth in the reference area through social connections at local level, it could be actually considered as a social innovation (Brunori 2007)⁹.

3 Women's Role in the Short Food Supply Chain

The special focus on certain items, such as food issues, the reconciliation between production and natural processes and the humanization of the logics of profit see the woman as a privileged interlocutor. At this regard, we can observe that female management sensitivity in food issues can contribute to the food quality and represent a guarantee for the consumer: in fact, women have a greater interest on the environment, biodiversity, food quality, thanks to an innate sensitivity that makes them more suitable for modernizing the production system. Moreover, they are more devoted to all multifunctional activities: the multi-functionality is the main female element especially in the less competitive agriculture: so, this may be a relevant factor not only to revitalize these business types, but also to offer new opportunities to female management. In fact, women have a propensity for innovation and they succeed to quickly adapt they offer according to the changes and to the market and territory demand (Guidi 2009)¹⁰. Recent studies have shown that Campania agriculture is characterized by an ever greater presence of women both in direction

⁶ Brunori, G., Rossi, A. and Guidi, F. (2012), On the new social relations around the beyond food. Analysing consumers' role and action in Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale (Solidarity Purchasing Groups). *Sociologia Ruralis*, 52, 1: 1-30.

⁷ Ascione, E., Tarangioli, S. and Zanetti, B. (2014), *Nuova imprenditoria per l'agricoltura italiana. Caratteri, dinamiche e strutture aziendali*, INEA.

⁸ Belligiano, A. and De Rubertis, S. (2012), Le filiere corte agroalimentari nei processi di sviluppo locale. *Intermid*. Available at: <http://siba-ese.unile.it> [Accessed: 12 February 2015].

⁹ Brunori, G. (2007), Local food and alternative food networks: a communication perspective. *Anthropology of Food*, vol. S2, *Intermid*. Available at: <http://aof.revues.org/index430.html> [Accessed: 21 January 2015].

¹⁰ Guidi, F. (2009), *Filiera corta: percorsi di innovazione tecnici, organizzativi e sociali nella gestione strategica delle nicchie. Esperienze in Toscana e in Provenza*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Bologna University.

and management of farms (INEA 2013)¹¹. The results of the last Campania Agriculture Census (2010) showed that over than 37% of farms are managed by women (more than 7% compared with national data) and the rising sector is the fruit and vegetables one, because one-tenth of Italian female farms in this sector is from Campania¹².

The purpose of the research will be to understand if and how women's role could be decisive also for innovation of the Campania short food supply chain, producing some best practices that can allow the female entrepreneurship to pursue its own competitiveness and to contribute at the same time to the global well being sustainability, even as a potential occupational tool.

4 Method

Considering the complex and highly dynamic reality of collective forms of direct sales, the methodology adopted for this research was aimed to capture qualitative features, in order to better understand the specific characters of these realities. The research focused on some Campania direct sale experiences realizing the short food supply chain, in which women play the main role. Since the time to conduct the survey has been short, we have chosen only four case studies, analyzed through the open and semi-structured interview, in order to identify the elements confirming the positive correlation between female farm management and its tendency to innovation and multi functionality, driving the agriculture system towards the environmental, social and economic sustainability. The four case studies on which we have chosen to focus are: the agritourist cooperative *La Ginestra*; the natural farm *Madrenatura*; the agritourist farm *Le Tore* and the natural farm *La Masseria della Contessa*. The direct interviews, even if very informal, have been realized with a semi-structured questionnaire, based on a checklist of essential topics for the analysis. This allowed anyway a wide freedom of interaction, letting the interviewees talking freely about the proposed topics. All interviews were recorded, to allow a further deep analysis of the several aspects identified and investigated.

The interview is structured into two parts: the first describes farm's structural characteristics (such as the birth year, the legal status, the type of management, the right of ownership, the kind of production chain and of short food supply chain and the others activities connected to the main one); the second part describes farm manager's aspects, (in terms both of age, educational qualification and level of ICT, and of values that women try to spread to marketed products and to the activities realized).

¹¹ INEA (2013), *L'agricoltura nella Campania in cifre – 2012*, Imago editrice.

¹² ISTAT (2010), *6th Campania Agriculture Census*; ISTAT (2011), *15th Population and buildings General Census*.

5 Results and Discussion

5.1 La Ginestra¹³

The Agritourist Cooperative *La Ginestra* is situated in Santa Maria del Castello, in the splendid setting of the Sorrento coast, on the Gulf of Naples. The farm, which covers an area of about 8 hectares, cultivated mainly at fruit and vegetables production, was founded in 1997 as a partnership between 7 women: we have interviewed one of these, Carmen Ciampa, 33 years old, with a Bachelor's Degree in Languages. Carmen clearly says that the choice of not leaving the family farm which she helped to create and innovate herself, goes beyond an utilitarian purpose, since it lies in the strong emotional bond with her farm, despite many economic, bureaucratic and even cultural difficulties incurred. Over twenty years of activity, this link has strengthened, together with the will to escape from the traditional patterns of food production and consumption, towards the promotion of a healthy nutrition and a sustainable environment. That is why *La Ginestra* produces sustainability and generates income in the territory, through several innovative types of products sale: first, it is mainly used the direct selling in the farm, for example of the honey, the farm's flagship, or other products harvested directly from the partners' parents. Then it is practiced the so-called 'pick you own' method, which allows the clients to choose and directly grasp the desired products, and even to personally cook them, giving an added value to the product marketed. Another innovative type of direct sale is the so-called 'box schemes' method: twice weekly some boxes, consisting of a certain prearranged amount of fruit and vegetables in season, are delivered in Naples, in a predetermined point of collection. The composition of the box varies from week to week depending on products availability and thus it is very flexible, because it can be planned by telephone¹⁴. The farm innovative and multifunctional drive is evident also regarding to the other connected activities that the farm realizes: not only the agritourist and restaurant services, but also the educational farm, that can be a communication tool with children and families, spreading the importance of agriculture and the knowledge of the land of reference. Carmen is teacher at a local school, and succeeds to combine its two business activities, proposing to her students some educational guided tours at her farm, with the aim of allowing young people to rediscover the bond between man and nature, and to make know her job. Another related activity is the realization of guided tours around the farm: in fact, having signed a contract with a Dutch agency, the farm hosts many foreigners loving trekking and hiking through the several routes along the Lattari Mountains.

¹³ The case studies *La Ginestra* and *Madrenatura* have been realized for the research conducted together with Roberto Palomba ("Female agriculture in the short food supply chain. A new path toward the Sustainability Empowerment"), presented at Florence SWIF – "Sustainable of well-being International Forum, Food for sustainability and not just food", set in Florence from 4th to 6th June 2015.

¹⁴ The several activities realized, such as the educational farm or guided tours are also available online: *La Ginestra's* website is <http://www.laginestra.org/>

5.2 Madrenatura¹⁵

The natural farm *Madrenatura*, covering an area of 1.5 hectares in Poggiomarino, between Naples and the Sarno river valley, an area as fertile as attacked, was founded in 2009 by Marialuisa Squitieri, 36 years old, with a Bachelor's degree in Medieval History. She describes herself as a 'resistant farmer', because its organic agriculture endures intensive mass productions, prefers quality over quantity, and does not use GMOs or chemicals. In fact, she cultivates natural and untreated products, through a biological not certificated method to preserve the typical products. Indeed, *Madrenatura* was born from the intent to directly propose local products to consumers, without intermediaries, and from the desire to get away from the devalued logics of the market, in which the intermediaries speculate on the farmers work. The key element to achieve this goal is exactly the short food supply chain, that is realized with direct sales, which *Madrenatura* practices through *box schemes*, whose beneficiaries are mainly SPGs (solidarity purchasing groups) and families, and through the participation in the '*farmer's market*', ideal place for the meeting of aware consumers whose lifestyle is the research for food quality. From the need to create a fixed meeting point in the city with consumers was born the project "*The Garden in the City*", a store in the heart of Naples, which is not a simple fruit and vegetable shop, but it is a solidarity place aimed to save the typical cultivations of the Vesuvius and Sarno area. Her mission is to help to increase consumers' awareness about the need to change their purchasing and food consumption patterns, by favoring the periodicity¹⁶. Women's main characteristic, that we have found here, is the ability to be multitasking in the farm: in fact, besides taking care of bureaucracy and fiscal management, Marialuisa organizes sowings and harvests, controlling fields organization, manages the shop and arranges orders and sales, also following the orders of the buying groups. Moreover, an added value of the farm emerged from the interview is the strong network of relationships that Marialuisa has managed to create over time, not only with customers but also with small local producers by helping them in the sale of their products. This proves the virtuous circle that, basing on the principles of fairness, ethics and sustainability, favors farms, particularly female ones, that are most suitable to establish and enhance the development of these networks, not only economically convenient but also made of satisfying human relations.

¹⁵ See note above.

¹⁶ It is possible to buy products also through *Madrenatura's* website: <http://www.madrenaturabio.it>

5.3 Le Tore

The agritourist farm *Le Tore* is located in Massa Lubrense, in the heart of the Sorrento peninsula, between the Gulfs of Naples and Positano. The farm, which covers an area of about 14 hectares, was founded in the early 80s by the parents of the current owner: Vittoria Brancaccio, 57 years old, with a Bachelor's Degree in Agronomy, that has been working in the farm since she was little. The interview immediately shows the female innovative mark: in fact, even if in the early years of activity there were not yet the protected designation of origin in that area and the national law on the agritourism, Vittoria in 1982 already had applied to make an agritourist farm and it is thanks to her pressure on municipal administration that Massa Lubrense has become "oil city"; moreover, *Le Tore* is the first Campania farm to join in 1994 the system of organic certification. One of the feature of the farm is the diversified products sale: first, the direct sale, both in the farm for the agritourism clients, and in an external store in Naples; then, the sale by subscription, through the shipment in the world of high quality products. The farm, therefore, is well renown at national and international level, thanks mainly to the production and sale of oil, its flagship, and for the chance to go trekking: for this, *Le Tore* is often quoted in several international magazines, such as *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*, and in many foreign travel guides, such as *Lonely Planet*, *Guide Routard*, *GO*, and in the important Dutch magazine *Seasons*¹⁷. The farm also realizes the "educational farms" for all types of users interested in visiting the farm, tasting and sensory analysis of oil and wine: this activity enhances the products sale. The interview highlights two elements: the multi functionality of a farm managed by a woman, more versatile and adaptable: "(...) *this is why women can make a little bit of everything, for their ability to be multi-tasking and multi-functional*". In fact, Vittoria, which coordinated for six years the agritourist sector of the Confederation of Italian farmers, manages the farm - both the agricultural features and bureaucratic and fiscal ones - she is in charge of food service, she chooses the kind of production, and she organises the staff. The second element is the strong female tendency to innovation and modernity: women, which are able to learn more easily and more quickly, also thanks to the curiosity showing in any activities that they carry on: "(...) *beyond the generalisations, I can say that women are a step ahead on men. On average, the skills being equal, the capable man consider himself unchangeable, while the capable woman proves to be more curious and innovative, and she always is ready to the change and improvement*".

5.4 Masseria La Contessa

The natural farm *La Masseria della Contessa*, covering an area of over 3 hectares, is located in the Caudina Valley, in the heart of Campania plain and was founded in 2012 by Giulia Antonuccio, 30 years old with a Bachelor's Degree in Agronom, which manages it with her husband. Giulia represents the real woman entrepreneur:

¹⁷ *Le Tore's* website, available in Italian, English, French and German, is <http://www.agriturismosorrentoletore.com>

her idea to cultivate beans from South America - which she analyzed during university and post-graduate research - was due to the fact that the cultivation of these legumes, by providing nitrogen to the soil, is “healthy and not exploitative”. This confirms the female vocation towards agriculture closer to food security and the environment-friendly, because the South American beans variety can create biodiversity in this specific farming. Therefore, the *Masseria* innovates in the field of legumes cultivation, testing, for the first time in Italy, the so called “heirloom bean”, which well reacted to the challenge, adapting to climatic agronomic conditions. This allowed to cease importing seeds from South America, and to invest in direct cultivation, by continuing to innovate, also experimenting some intersections in different species of beans, thus creating new varieties¹⁸. Another unique element of the *Masseria*’s product is the packaging: in fact, Giulia chose quadrangular glass jars, with a basic label, because a product well packaged gives an idea of not commercial and recalls the fact that it is carefully by traditional methods hand-cultivated, trying to combine tradition and innovation; moreover, this choice confirm the tendency towards sustainability, because the jar is reusable. Beside the innovation feature, this case study also shows the multifunctional aspect of farms managed by women: Giulia works almost alone in the farm, helped only by her husband, a photographer who has chosen to follow his wife’s passion and innovative ideas. An important female characteristic, that Giulia recognizes to herself, and that the interview has confirmed, in addition to the multi-functionality, is the strong tendency to be fanciful, that fosters innovation in agricultural production: “*Women often have insights that men have not, because they tend to throw themselves headlong into work, without that typically female stroke of genius, which turns into a more innovative work*”. Thus, to be a woman entrepreneur means to have more and better ideas, that can create interest among consumers: in fact, women are likely to be more empathic with both clients and producers; for example, the *Masseria* organizes the annual event of the sowing of beans: Giulia invites friends and acquaintances who, while having fun in a convivial atmosphere, are planting together for three days, even sharing lunch and dinner, bringing thus farming to its original function, the sociability.

6 Concluding Remarks

The recognition of the multifunctional role of agricultural activity has led to the overcoming of its only productive dimension and to the promotion of its ability to produce services for the community, realizing activities related to the territory and the environment. In fact, agriculture performs nowadays various and diversified functions: economic, environmental, social, cultural, educational, recreational. In this context, the agricultural policy is becoming also a land policy, because the agricultural sector can promote the economic and social development of a country

¹⁸ It is possible to discover and buy the different varieties of legumes on the *Masseria*’s website <http://www.masseriadellacontessa.com> and at facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/lamasseriadellacontessa?fref=ts> .

more and more interested to environmental issues and to the research of healthy and high quality products (Sanlorenzo 2011)¹⁹. Particularly, the agriculture food sector has a strong multi functional character: in some areas, it maintains its productive and commercial character, but in other ones it takes on a complementary role, for the generation of income and the economy of the territory, also having a social value connected to the enhancement of the cultural and landscape characteristics of the area in which it is conducted. An important contribution to the multi-functionality of agriculture is certainly provided by the work of women (Unioncamere 2010)²⁰: in fact, they tend to orientate farms to diversification, particularly with the agritourism, food processing and provision of certain services to the population such as recreational activities, educational farms, disabled hospitality and assistance, etc (NoiDonne 2013)²¹. This research has therefore confirmed that female entrepreneurship tends to be innovative and multi-functional, increasing the productive offer and having positive effects also on generational change and the permanence of young people in rural areas (Sabbatini 2006)²². Here, women could support the local economy through strategic alternative pathways, improving living conditions of rural and agricultural contexts (Guidi 2008)²³. In particular, in the short food supply chain, the female contribution is particularly important, since women are more able to integrate the community and build social ties, sense of trust and reciprocity:(Giaré and Giuca 2012)²⁴. Thus, the typical female features, such as the high care and precision in carrying out the duties, the kind and polite behaviour in relating not only with the customers, but with all the stakeholders of the farm, can promote the implementation of direct sale of agricultural products (Giampaolo 2006)²⁵. Thus, the final consideration is that we still need a greater attention on the part of European policy makers to these issues, to facilitate the female agriculture entrepreneurship, as well as the rural development and environmental protection (Andreopoulou et al. 2014)²⁶. Moreover, it is necessary to reduce conflicts between the different roles played by woman as entrepreneur, wife, mother and housewife, helping her to reconcile the different functions with adequate services even in rural

¹⁹ Sanlorenzo, G. (2011), Il ruolo della donna nell'agricoltura contemporanea, multifunzionale e innovativa in *Agriregionieuropa*, n.26

²⁰ Unioncamere (2010), *Impresa in genere. 2° Rapporto nazionale sull'imprenditoria femminile*. Roma

²¹ NoiDonne (2013), *L'agricoltura delle donne. Una nuova idea di crescita. Intervista ad Alessandra Tazza*. Available at: www.noidonne.org [Accessed: 03 March 2015].

²² Sabbatini, M. (2006), Intervento di apertura in ISTAT and ONILFA, *Donne della terra: i loro "numeri" per e nell'agricoltura. Atti del convegno – Roma, 13 gennaio 2006*, p. 14-16.

²³ Guidi, F. (2008), Rassegna delle esperienze di filiera corta, in Rossi, A., Guidi, F. and Innocenti, S. (eds.), *Guida per l'attivazione di forme collettive di vendita diretta. Esperienze, approcci e strumenti*, ARSIA.

²⁴ Giaré, F. and Giuca, S. (2012), *Agricoltori e filiera corta. Profili giuridici e dinamiche socio-economiche*, INEA.

²⁵ Giampaolo, S. (2006), *Imprenditoria femminile: le principali caratteristiche strutturali delle aziende agricole condotte al femminile*, ISTAT.

²⁶ Andreopoulou, Z., Misso, R. and Cesaretti, G.P. (2014), Using the internet to Support green business. For rural development and environmental protection. *Journal of environmental protection and ecology*, Vol. 15, p. 723-732, ISSN: 1311-5065

areas (health, education, transport), by realizing effective mainstreaming policies. The enhancement of the role of women is very important both in a microeconomic perspective, linked to the structure and performance in time of farms, and in a macroeconomic approach, in reference to the rural dimension and to the complex of agricultural activities, in order to ensure the principle of Equal Opportunities between men and women, which is one of the EU fundamental rights.

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Moreover, this research has completed and mainly analyzed – with additional case studies - the results described in the research conducted by Marika Zirham and Roberto Palomba “Female agriculture in the short food supply chain. A new path toward the Sustainability Empowerment” (in press), presented at Florence SWIF - Sustainable of well-being International Forum, *Food for sustainability and not just food*, set in Florence from 4th to 6th June 2015.

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