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# Changes in Agriculture and Rural Areas and the Direction of Gender-Sensitive Policy

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Korean Women's Development Institute

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and the Direction of Gender-Sensitive  
Policy**

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# Changes in Agriculture and Rural Areas and the Direction of Gender-Sensitive Policy

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## I . Study Outline

### □ Motivation and Background of Study

Amid growing interest in gender equality throughout the broader society, farming communities have also seen a heightened awareness regarding the importance of gender equality. However, the reality in such communities still leaves much to be desired, and large gaps between urban and rural areas remain.

The issue of gender inequality could act as a burden on the parties and could become a source of conflict with the parties about the gender inequality. The issue may also be tied to the direction of macro-level developments in agricultural / rural areas. Over the course of the development of such communities, the gender inequality issue may persist, intensify, or become transformed. Also, the gender separation of roles between male and female farmers, as well as gender gaps in authority, autonomy, and status could be highly likely to become critical

factors in the reproduction of such areas. In this regard, it is particularly worth noting that the upward trend in female agricultural labor has recently been reversed. Amid the overall decrease in agricultural labor, the decrease was even more marked among women (particularly prime-aged women), thus indicating an intensifying crisis for rural reproduction.

Gender equality in agricultural and rural areas is also an important agenda at the international level. A female-centric approach was attempted during the 70s, which saw some limited success in addressing the difficulties actually faced by women in rural areas. However, it soon became apparent that this approach was inadequate for addressing the actual issue of gender inequality. Thus, a gender-based approach that takes account of gender gaps and gender inequality between both men and women has been attempted since the late 80s.

Compared to such overseas movements, the research that has been ongoing within Korea regarding female farmers has pointed out a few gender inequality-related issues meriting attention – such as the legal status of female farmers and their position / authority within farm households. However, such studies have mainly been focused on the female-centric approach, and were thus unable to properly investigate important gender gaps in authority, status, and burden across areas such as agricultural labor, family life, villages and local communities, and rural / agricultural policy.

The female-centric approach is also evident in policies for female farmers, which constitutes the core of policies related to gender equality in rural and agricultural communities, with the gender-based approach having a limited presence in policy agendas. Furthermore, previous measures that had been introduced at a limited capacity were found to

be lacking in efficacy. Meanwhile, broader policies aimed at strengthening gender equality across society at large have failed to even address issues such as gender equality in rural / agricultural areas and inter-regional / inter-industrial gaps in equality.

Given such circumstances, in this study we have aimed to gauge the current situation regarding gender issues within rural / agricultural areas, so as to identify the instances of inequality experienced by female farmers, thus drawing up concrete gender equality agendas that must be addressed at the policy level. Furthermore, by making projections about the direction gender equality issues might take amid rural / agricultural development, we have attempted to approach policy agendas in a forward-looking manner. We have also looked at farmers' perceptions regarding the realities of rural inequality, participatory movements for strengthening gender equality, and hindrances to such movements to explore the possibility of gender-equal agriculture and gender-equal rural communities. Based on the findings, we have proposed policy directions and developed relevant measures for addressing gender inequality and strengthening gender equality in rural and agricultural communities.

#### □ Contents of Study

- The Current Gender Equality Situation in Rural / Agricultural Areas
  - Gender composition of persons engaged in agriculture, by year
  - Gender gaps among farmers: work hours, share of domestic labor, welfare levels, gender role perceptions
  - Farmers' gender situation, relative to that among the non-agricultural population

- 
- Changes in Rural / Agricultural Areas and the Direction of Development Regarding Gender Issues
    - Rural / agricultural areas' direction of development, and the state of key policies
    - Possible ways gender issues may develop: broadening of new opportunities vs. widening gender gaps in burden, authority, and opportunities
  - Gender Inequalities Experienced by Female Farmers, and Demands for Change
    - Gender gaps in burden, authority, and opportunities in the realms of farm management, labor, family life, village life, and producers' groups
    - The effects of experienced inequality
    - Demand for gender equality, attempts at change, and obstacles
    - Linkages to policy
    - The nature of recently observed changes, and their relation to gender gaps
  - Gender-Aware Policy Directions for Strengthening Gender Equality in Rural / Agricultural Areas
    - State of current policies: policies for female farmers, policies for gender equality
    - Gender-aware policy directions for rural / agricultural areas
    - Policy approach regarding gaps in gender equality across regions and industries

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□ Research Methodology

○ Literature Review and Data Analysis

- Foreign literature regarding agricultural development and gender equality
- Korean literature and policy briefs regarding female farmers and gender equality in rural areas

○ Analysis of Statistical Raw Data

- Statistics on farm households: AFFS (Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery Survey, 2002, 2019)
- General statistics with information on the gender of persons engaged in agriculture: KTUS (Korean Time Use Survey 2019), Social Survey(2019, 2020)

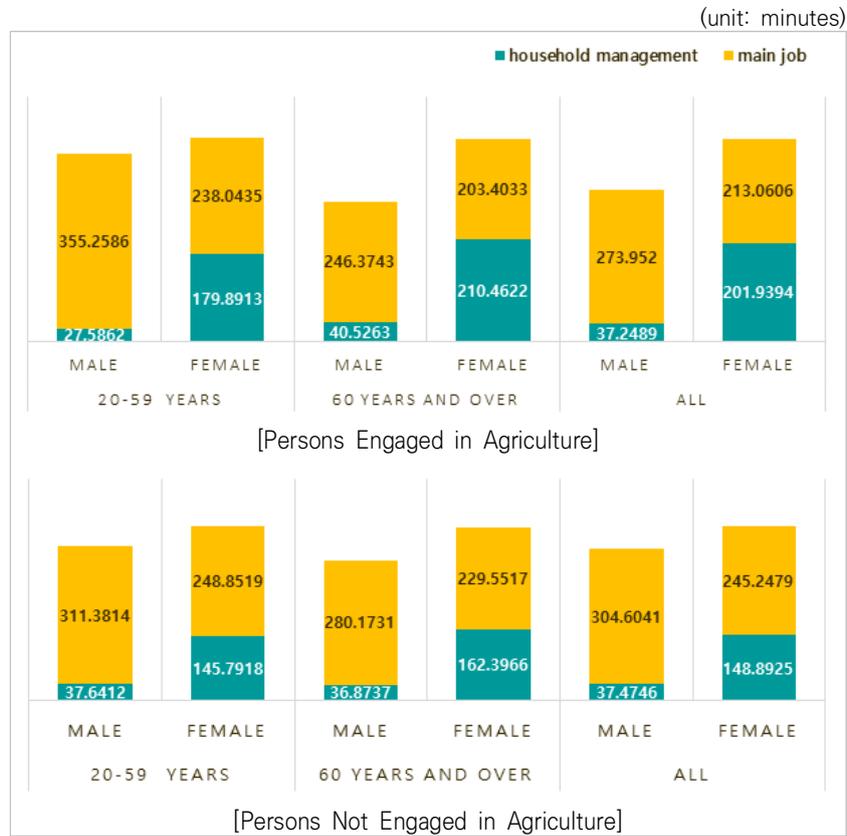
○ Interviews with Female Farmers

- Interviewees: 20 Female farmers interested in gender inequality issues within the realms of agricultural production, family life, local community, etc.
- Key topics: experiences of gender inequality in agricultural production, family life, local community, etc. and demand for change, Post-Covid state of agriculture, changes in agricultural areas and policy needs

## II . The Current Gender Equality Situation in Rural / Agricultural Areas

### □ Gender Gap in Work Hours, and the Double Burden Borne by Female Farmers

Within the structure of farm households, where both agricultural labor and domestic tasks must be handled by members of the household, the division of labor is a key indicator of the separation of gender roles and gaps in the burdens borne by each gender. As such, in this study we have conducted interviews with female farmers while also analyzing the KTUS raw data. From both, we found that female farmers face a significant double burden, and that this burden represents the key difference in everyday life relative to male farmers.



Note: Figures pertain to married & employed persons.

Source: Statistics Korea(2019). Re-analysis of raw data from the 2019 Korean Time Use Survey.

[Figure 1] Hours of Labor (household management and main job), by Gender and Engagement in Agriculture

As shown in the above figure, female farmers spent a daily average of 6 hours and 55 minutes<sup>1)</sup> on household tasks and agricultural labor (household management and main job) – or about 1 hour and 44 minutes more than their male counterparts (5 hours 11 minutes). Even compared to populations not engaged in agriculture, this gender gap in work hours

1) Conversion from the minute-based numbers in the figures to hour-based numbers

was markedly larger. In particular, female farmers in the 60+ age group spent very long hours on household management, with a very long gap vis-à-vis their male counterparts. While the gender gap in work hours among farmers in the 59 or under age group was smaller compared to that of the 60+ age group, female farmers in this age group still worked 35 minutes more compared to their male counterparts.

The female farmers we interviewed also stressed the extreme difficulty due to this double burden. In particular, they felt that the gender inequality issue was most apparent in how the everyday lives of husbands and wives differed after the working day was done and the couple returned home.

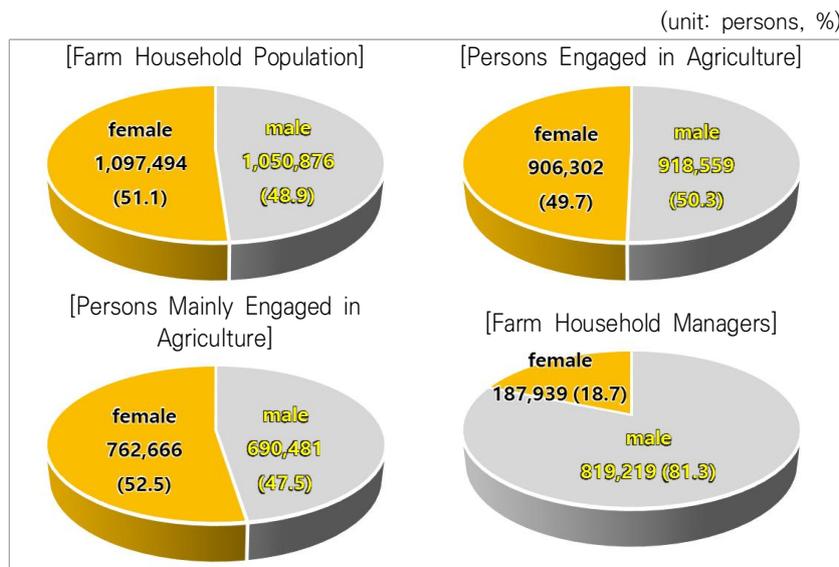
#### □ Gender Gaps in Status as Producer

The separation of gender roles remained entrenched not only in the realms of domestic / care labor, but also in agricultural work. Agricultural tasks ‘suited’ for either male or female largely depend on whether a machine needs to be operated and the posture that must be sustained while performing a task. Access to, and the ability to operate, farming equipment have combined with dominant perceptions regarding bodily build and propensity differences by gender, thus leading to men being in charge of operating farm equipment while women being mostly consigned to lengthy tasks that must be performed while sustaining uncomfortable posture. Under such a scheme of role separation, female farmers are often regarded as being auxiliary to the men operating the key equipment, and the tasks handled by women may be regarded as ‘trivial’ by comparison.

While some female farmers participate in equipment training and attempt to operate farming equipment, such efforts have done little to

change the separation of gender roles regarding equipment. These gender gaps in productivity and value of labor that arise from access to equipment are unlikely to be bridged in the future.

Gender gaps become even more pronounced in matters of proprietorship – i.e., one’s status as the representative of a farm household. While women account for more than half (52.5%) of persons mainly engaged in agriculture, they only account for 18.7% of farm household managers. This indicates how difficult it is for female farmers to become farm household managers.



Source: Statistics Korea (2019). Re-analysis of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery Survey 2019 raw data.

[Figure 2] Populations Engaged in Agriculture, by Gender (2019)

As farmers, women encounter various obstacles that would not affect men, on matters critical to agricultural production such as the leasing and ownership of farmland. Female farmers entering agriculture by themselves

(without the aid of a husband) often face overt discrimination from farmland owners while attempting to obtain a lease. As such discrimination is solely attributable to gender, women face obstacles during the earliest steps on their way to becoming farm household managers.

While women who farm as part of a married couple may appear to be relatively better off in that they have better access to the means of production (via their husbands), men typically hold ownership over farmland and other key means of production. In particular, in farming enterprises established by the husband's side of the family, all handles of authority pertaining to farm management – e.g. farmland ownership, coop membership, etc. – are typically inherited along the patrilineal line. While female farmers are occasionally conferred ownership over some land that is obtained through the course of farming as a married couple, such decisions are usually a part of a family strategy to meet eligibility requirements and are unlikely to involve the strengthening of women's autonomous authority. This is strikingly apparent in the fact that among households where both men and women were mainly engaged in agriculture, 97.2% of the farm household managers were male and only 2.8% were female.

One's status as registered manager (as a representative of a registered farm business) is particularly important in that it moves beyond customary practices among farm households, thus conferring official recognition and forming the basis unit by which various forms of support are determined. Women account for 28.3% of all registered farm managers. While this percentage is somewhat higher compared to that based on farm household managers, it is apparent that males remain dominant among registered managers as well. In contrast, women account for 87.8% of 'joint managers'. However, this appellation is

merely given to spouses of registered managers who wish to hold a title and may hardly be considered an official status, in that it confers no actual authority and is not taken into consideration in matters of policy. Due to such limitations, female farmers are scarcely interested in becoming joint managers. Also, the number of joint managers is far smaller than the number of registered farm businesses managers or the number of persons engaged in agriculture.

〈Table 1〉 Percentage of Women, by Registered Status

(unit: %)

Year	% Among Persons Engaged in Agriculture	% Among Registered Managers	% Among Joint Managers
2015	47.4	24.9	(enacted in 2016)
2016	47.0	25.7	90.1
2017	46.2	26.4	91.4
2018	46.0	27.0	90.3
2019	45.8	27.6	89.4
2020.10.	45.7	28.3	87.8

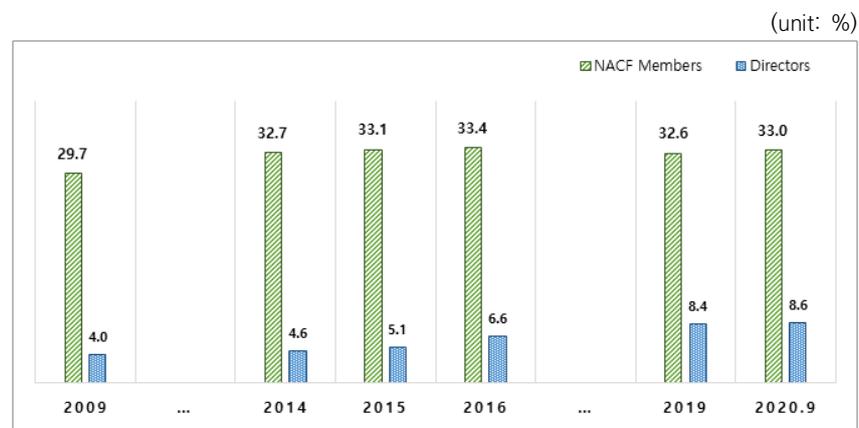
Source: author's calculations based on the following data:

- 2015~2019) Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs, National Agricultural Products Quality Management Service. 2020.3. 'Status of Agricultural Population, based on Farm Business Registration Records' p.49.
- 2020.10.) Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs, 2021. '2021 Policy Brief on Women Engaged in Agriculture' p.83.

Eschewing the joint manager scheme, female farmers seeking official recognition of their authority sometimes register a farm business that is separate from that held by their husband. However, only a few portion of female farmers have access to the credentials and registration requirements in their own (rather than husband's) name. Even after women succeed in getting their registration request processed, most other

institutional features pertaining to farm management assume male managership, thus undermining the actual efficacy of becoming a registered manager.

Other than registered managership, one's official status and authority as an agricultural producer is also tied to membership with producer groups such as the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF) and various other coops. Although female membership in the NACF has risen steadily since 1995 the enactment of open membership, they still account for only about 1/3 of all members. This is because, due to significant membership fees, many do not feel the need to join separate memberships in addition to that of their husbands. Meanwhile, female membership is even lower among other coops where open memberships are unavailable.



Source: author's calculations based on the following data:

- 2009, 2014) Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (2015.12.31.). '4th ('16-'20) Basic Plan for Fostering Female Farmers' p.4.
- 2015, 2016, 2019) Lim, S.Y. et al. (2020a). 'Proposals for the 5th ('21-'25) Basic Plan for Fostering Female Farmers' p.78.
- 2020.9.) Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (2021). '2021 Policy Brief on Women Engaged in Agriculture' p.19.

[Figure 3] Percentage of Women among NACF Members / Directors

Given the prevailing baseline assumption among producer's groups regarding male managership which regards women mainly as the 'manager's spouse', it is exceedingly uncommon for a woman to gain membership as a business manager. Despite this, some female farmers – in particular younger single women who run their own farms – seek membership in view of the importance of producer's groups for agricultural management. However, they run the risk of becoming marginalized among other members who do not regard them as 'full' membership.

#### □ The Gender Inequality Situation in Rural and Agricultural Villages

In rural communities, the village is a space where the private and public spheres intersect. It provides a backdrop to the everyday lives of its residents, exerts significant influence on individual attitudes and family life. It also performs multidimensional functions such as acting as a channel within which certain relational frames are formalized, or through which public institutions are introduced and propagated. In view of this, in this study we are particularly interested in the fact that female farmers have expressed grave concern regarding gender inequality at the village level.

Separation of gender roles and gaps in status at the village level are closely tied with the existence of so-called 'women's associations'. The female farmers we interviewed pointed out that among the various activities women's associations are tasked with, the most prominent is the preparation of food during village festivals or other functions. As such, women were keenly aware of the fact that women's associations

perpetuate and normalize the gender role of women within the confines of domestic labor / caregiving at the village level.

The characteristics of women's associations becomes even more apparent when compared to similar organizations for male villagers. Unlike men's groups which are usually determined via the participant's lifecycles (e.g., youth associations, senior associations, etc.), the identity of groups for women were tied to the assumption of being a married wife – thus unrelated to changes in lifecycle or status. While male villagers are given the floor in village meetings as representatives of their households, thus participating in decision making or officiating village ceremonies, women are put aside and tasked with preparing food as part of their women's association duties.

Given that such practices were long regarded as being 'natural', even women who are the head of their household face difficulties in participating in village meetings in an official capacity. Older female farmers, who officially became the head of their household upon the death of their husbands, are still tasked with food preparation as part of the women's association, and any say they have in official meetings is relatively muted compared to that of men.

The village chief and the head of the women's association may be regarded as representatives of a village's men and women. While the former is a formal office as part of an administrative structure, elected and salaried as per village ordinances, the latter's official status is ambiguous at best, while performing roles that are auxiliary to those of the village chief.

### III. Differences in Interest and Hopes Regarding Gender Equality: Possibility of Schisms / Conflict among Villagers

Throughout all aspects of rural / agricultural life – such as everyday life in farm households, official institutions regarding producer status, producer groups' activities, and other village matters – the separation of gender roles and the gender gaps in status and authority remain firmly and overtly in place. Whether this represents a situation that must be remedied has been a subject of significant disagreement, and perceptions / awareness regarding gender inequality as a problematic issue tend to draw a line that divides villagers.

Surveys that offer some partial insight into farmers' views regarding gender (in)equality, such as the Survey on Rural Welfare Conditions (2017) and the KTUS (2019), indicate that large gaps in equality awareness exist depending on gender and age. Female farmers (compared to male farmers) of younger age were more likely to perceive separation of gender roles and gender inequality as problematic issues that needed to be resolved.

Our interviews with female farmers show that there have been efforts to raise the issue of inequality and calls for change at the family / village / organization level, usually driven by female farmers who were relatively keenly aware of gender inequality issues – such as younger female farmers or those who had recently taken up farming. Despite such efforts, there was a clear tendency among men to be uninterested or unresponsive regarding such efforts, as well as treating the issue as a trivial matter. Given that rural communities have yet to even begin properly discussing gender issues despite efforts to raise awareness, there

are concerns that the gender inequality issue may lead to conflict at the family, village, or organization level (as per the debate regarding local governments' farmers' allowances).

Furthermore, large generational gaps remain in sensitivity regarding gender inequality and the perceived need to realize equality, thus occasionally further exacerbating inter-generational differences. Middle-aged or older female farmers, who have internalized the traditional norms despite the great burdens they had to bear due to their gender, find it difficult to sympathize with the bold needs raised by younger women, and have little interest in participating in a cause that is likely to be lost. Given the lack of interest among not only males but also older females in their issue-raising and calls for change, younger female farmers or women who have recently taken up farming sometimes become discouraged from putting down roots in rural / agricultural communities. The only option left for women who face difficulties finding common ground with other villagers is to distance themselves from the village's inequality and to concentrate their efforts on other groups who share their commitment to gender equality.

#### **IV. Changes in Rural / Agricultural Areas and Gender (In)equality**

The issue of gender inequality in rural / agricultural areas stems from their historical path of development. As such, these areas will certainly undergo changes in the future amid various foreseeable changes including the strengthening of the public nature of agriculture, efforts for rural reproduction focusing on social economy, the spread of

digital-based agriculture, the activation of agricultural policy by local governments, lack of personnel, and climate change.

Such changes may provide female farmers with the opportunity to gain visibility in previously unacknowledged activities, and to have their value be officially recognized as well. In particular, changes such as social economy, promotion of food culture, and the spread of online distribution are likely to be conducive to broadening the scope of activity among female farmers. In turn, this may lead to positive developments in gender equality, such as more flexibility in gender roles and a bridging of the gap in socioeconomic status.

That said, there remain ample possibility for changes in rural / agricultural areas to take place amid even worsening gender inequality, such that already-entrenched separations in gender roles become further solidified and gender gaps in productivity / socioeconomic status / authority. Factors such as the spread of eco-friendly agriculture and the growing lack of manpower are likely to further exacerbate labor burdens – such burdens may fall disproportionately on female farmers. The female farmers interviewed in this study have pointed out that, even amid emergencies such as the extreme aging of rural populations and the foreign manpower crisis due to the pandemic, there have been no visible changes to entrenched gender roles. Thus, increases in labor burden were mostly borne by women, who have been given labor-intensive tasks. Therefore, concerns regarding the increased labor burden among female farmers have already been realized.

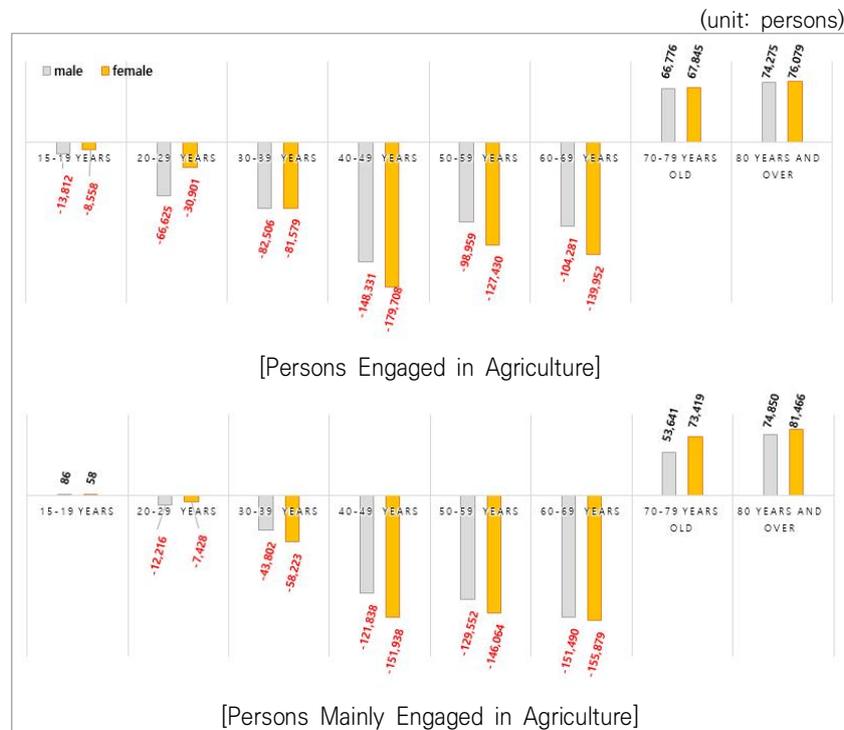
Meanwhile, advancements in digital tech-based agriculture such as drones / smart farms may translated into even wider gender gaps in skills and capital, as has previously been the case with farming equipment. In particular, participation in producers' groups is crucial in order to gain

access to the information and capital necessary to adapt to changes in rural / agricultural areas. Women not only face difficulties in participating in such producers' groups, but are also confined to marginal roles even after they do join as members. Such factors will act as major obstacles for women hoping to access new opportunities.

## V. Gender Inequality and Rural / Agricultural Reproduction

Amid the large ongoing gender gaps in work hours, income levels, retirement preparations, health, and quality of life in general, it is difficult for female farmers to keep a positive outlook about agriculture. What's more, with the expected changes to rural / agricultural areas running the risk of further exacerbating gaps and further intensifying the burden placed on women, prospects become even dimmer. Female farmers who have been pushed to the limit may attempt to alleviate labor burdens by adjusting the types of crops, reducing the area of fields worked, or finding non-agricultural work as a prior step to leaving agriculture altogether.

Given the wide gender gaps in all aspects of rural / agricultural life, there may be gender differences in outlooks about agriculture, and women may face greater obstacles in continuing farming. This may not be unrelated to the recently observed decrease in female farmers among the prime aged population which far outpaces that of their male counterparts.



Source: Statistics Korea (2002, 2019). Re-analysis of raw data from the AFFS data, by year.  
**[Figure 4] Changes in the Number of Persons (Mainly) Engaged in Agriculture, by Sex and Age Group (2002-2019)**

In particular, female farmers who are highly aware of gender equality issues may become discouraged from settling down in rural / agricultural areas due to the serious extent of inequality and limited prospects for change. Ultimately, unless real prospects emerge for changes to the entrenched gender inequality of rural areas, female farmers who find themselves at their limits will only continue to leave agriculture entirely. Furthermore, given the relative unwillingness of women to move to rural / agricultural areas, as evidenced by the low share of women among those recently taking up farming (40.1%) or those recently making the move to rural areas (46.9%) (Statistics Korea, Survey on Migration to

Farming / Rural Areas 2020), a new group of female farmers is very unlikely to emerge in the future.

## VI. Demands for Gender Equality, Exploration of Practical Initiatives

Despite the grave extent of gender inequality in rural / agricultural areas, limited awareness within rural communities means that matters are unlikely to improve simply with the passing of time. That said, various efforts are being made by female farmers with awareness of gender equality issues, thus leading to growing prospects for potential change.

At the individual level, some women try to reason with their husbands for a more equal share of domestic / care work, while talking to acquaintances about reforming unequal everyday customs. While the pace of change is still slow and equal practices are far from becoming commonplace, hints of change in people's behavior offer glimpses of hope.

Furthermore, given the accumulation of experience gained through women's participation in the public sphere, it is becoming increasingly likely that villagers' views regarding the role and status of women may change. The village is a particularly crucial venue for gender-equal practices. Some have directly objected to the role and scope of activity that 'women's associations' had previously been confined to, while various efforts have been made to introduce gender-equal customs regarding the division of tasks during village festivals / functions. It is also worth looking into how efforts made in certain villages to reform public governance by transforming traditional village norms to

‘gender-equal village ordinances’ propagate to other regions. Furthermore, expectations remain quite high for gender equality education as is being pursued by the government.

Based on the experience of past movements, the most critical factor for gender equality improvement is the broad participation of villagers. Foreign cases indicate that a female-centric approach – such as leaving existing structures in place and training women to better adapt to such structures, or providing support to domestic tasks performed by women – brought limited success. The fact that such an approach was followed by a gender-based approach since the late 80’s, which emphasized joint participation by both men and women, holds major implications for Korea. It is time to start properly exploring an approach based on participation and cooperation among both women and men to shed light on and address the gender gaps in status / authority / burden across various realms including but not limited to the family, village, and producers’ groups.

## VII. Current Status of Policy

Of the various factors affecting the strengthening of gender equality in the rural / agricultural sector, relevant policies present ‘realizing gender equality’ as a vision for rural communities. Policies oversee the selection of tasks that must be implemented for said vision, as well as playing a crucial role in advancing measures being implemented on the ground and providing the necessary resources. While gender equality in rural / agricultural areas may be tied to various policy areas, current policies mainly deal with female farmers in rural / agricultural contexts.

Gender equality policies that aim for equality across society in general (encompassing rural / agricultural communities) may also be of relevance.

### □ Policies for Fostering Women in Agriculture

The Basic Plan for Fostering Female Farmers, which forms the bedrock of relevant policies in Korea, has been targeting both ‘male and female farmers’ ever since the 2nd wave (2006). In the 4th and 5th waves, gender equality was included among the Basic Plan’s central objectives. Despite this, owing to its very nature as a basic plan geared toward women, the actually targeted population remains ‘female farmers’.

The specific measures of the Basic Plan up to the 5th wave may largely be divided into those owing to the female-centric approach and those along the gender-based approach. The former include training for female farmers, startup support geared toward female farmers, support for alleviating the burden associated with so-called ‘women’s work’ such as domestic / childcare / care work, and measures for improving the health and welfare of female farmers; while the latter focus on the gender gaps in status / authority at the family / local community levels. Looking at the budgets allotted to each component of the 5th Basic Plan, only 2.9% of the total budget was allotted for ‘Realizing Gender-Equal Rural / Agricultural Communities’, where most of the gender-based measures were concentrated. In contrast, 89% of the total budget was put aside for ‘Access to Welfare / Culture Services & Improvement of Health / Safety’. Thus, in terms of budget allocation, policies for female farmers were mainly concentrated around measures for improving women’s welfare and measures addressing ‘practical gender needs’ (Moser 1989: 1803-1804,

1993: 40-41) – or needs associated with roles traditionally regarded as women’s, such as maternity / caregiving / food preparation, etc.

Outside of Korea, the basic direction of gender equality in relation to agricultural development saw a transition from the female-centric approach, whose limitations were becoming apparent by the late 70s, to a gender-based approach since the late 80s. In this study, we also found that it would be crucial to move beyond female-centric measures to promote participation and cooperation among all genders in order to effect improvements in the gender equality situation of rural / agricultural communities. In this regard, it may be necessary to critically reconsider the fact that the central pillar of domestic policies – i.e., policies for female farmers – still mainly consist of measures along the female-centric approach, wherein measures are geared toward aiding women perform the tasks given to them under separation of gender roles, as well as measures for strengthening women’s welfare. While it may be true that such measures play a positive part in alleviating the labor burden of female farmers and contribute to bettering their quality of life, the female-centric approach has crucial limitations when it comes to changing the fundamental determinants of gender inequality and bridging the gender gaps in status / authority / burden at the family / local community / policy levels.

While female-centric approaches account for the majority of current policies for female farmers, this does not mean that the gender-based approach that focuses on gaps in status / authority has been disregarded. Measures typical to the gender-based approach, such as participation in committees and coops had been in place since the earliest iterations of policies for female farmers. However, compared to measures along the female-centric approach, measures along the gender-based approach

remain limited in terms of agenda and policy sustainability.

The 4th Basic Plan, which was drawn up and enacted concurrently with the revision of the Basic Law for Women's Development into the Framework Act on Gender Equality (July of 2015), included 'actual gender equality' among its objectives and included 'realizing gender-equal rural / agricultural communities' among its core tasks. Thus, on the surface level, gender equality values may be seen to have gained some prominence. However, in terms of actual specific agenda or measures, no new policies were developed aside from reforms to the 'joint manager' system. In fact, some measures along the gender-based approach were actually rolled back compared to previous iterations.

In this regard, it is worth directing our attention to the November 30th 2021 revision of the Support for Female Farmers and Fishers Act, stating 'expanding gender equality in rural / agricultural areas' (Article 1: Goals) as an official policy goal while also stipulating the need for 'strengthening gender equality' (Article 3: Duties of the State and Local Governments). As the Act goes into effect in 2022, we may be able to see actual enactment of measures such as 'expanding education / training and fostering the personnel needed for such efforts, so as to bridge gender gaps in rural / agricultural / fishery areas' (Article 10: Improving the Status of Female Farmers and Fishers).

Among the measures relevant to policy for female farmers, participation in coops and gender equality training were instances where significant gender agendas were conveyed to farmers in general with relative consistency. Although the latter had been included as part of the 2nd Basic Plan, implementation was perfunctory in the past. Then, since the 5th Basic Plan, there began efforts to train 'gender equality instructors for rural areas'. Beginning with the 21 such instructors who

were fostered as of 2020, plans are in place for ongoing training of such personnel. There is a need to develop implementation frameworks and contents in order to systematize future training and to ensure the efficacy of said training.

Participation in the NACF – the most prominent producers’ coop organization – ties into one’s rights as an agricultural producer and one’s voice regarding decision making in local communities. Thus, this has always been a component of policies geared toward female farmers. With the enactment of open memberships in 1995 and the introduction of female directors in 2015, female membership in the NACF has grown steadily among both members and directors. However, given women’s status as agricultural producers, their participation in the NACF still remains quite limited.

Additionally, with regards to one’s status and authority as a farmer, the registered farm manager system introduced in 2008 is worth looking into. The ‘joint managership’ system was introduced in 2016, recognizing the female spouses of farm managers as joint managers, while in 2018 the manager’s assent requirement was abolished, thus providing some room for recognition for female farmers. However, given the institutional validity of ‘joint managership’ and the prohibition of concurrent work (which runs contrary to the realities faced by female farmers), joint managership has seen little activation.

Given the familial structure of farming, where agricultural management is handled mainly by family members, ‘familial agreements on joint management’ – which deals with the allocation of roles and authority across family members with regards to agricultural management and family life – may prove to be a significant measure for improving gender equality at the farm household level. However, despite the

implementation of familial agreements since 2004, awareness and participation among female farmers remains very low. Nationwide, only 431 farm households have entered into such familial agreements. As such, this measure is unlikely to yield substantial outcomes.

### □ Gender Equality Policies

Although gender equality policies represent the second major axis along which the gender inequality issue of rural / agricultural areas is expected to be addressed via policy, previous gender equality policies paid virtually no attention to rural / agricultural communities. Despite the importance of gender gaps in rural / agricultural areas and the gaps in equality across regions and industries, they had not been considered as part of the policy agenda.

Within the current 2nd Basic Plan for Gender Equality Policy (2018~2022), agriculture-related measures are only included in terms of female labor policies, such as fostering more jobs across various fields, or strengthening the support infrastructure for women whose careers have been interrupted. Specific measures are also encompassed in the already-mentioned policies for female farmers, with few measures specifically geared along gender equality policies.

Core vehicles of gender equality policy – such as gender impact assessments and women-friendly city initiatives – may also represent channels of outreach for rural / agricultural communities. Of the 78 specific gender impact assessments conducted from 2012 to 2020, only 3 dealt with rural / agricultural policies. Of these, 2 dealt with farmer-related policies. Additionally, a specific gender impact assessment conducted in 2013 with regards to village community development dealt

with farming villages.

Women-friendly city initiatives as per the Framework Act on Gender Equality (Article 39, as of November 3rd, 2021 in the Korea Law Information Center), where local policy and development are induced to proceed with equal participation by all genders while strengthening the capacities of women and ensuring care and security, may also approach rural environments that differ from urban settings. In fact, there have been calls on the ground for ‘rural-specific’ women-friendly cities. Nevertheless, little has been done in this regard beyond the relaxation of requirements for local governments at the gun(district) level.

## VIII. Policy Suggestions

In order to address the unequal realities in rural / agricultural areas and to improve the chances of realizing gender equality, it is most urgent to stimulate broad-based interest and participation across all spheres of rural communities. Outside of Korea, the shift away from female-centric approaches to a gender-based one focusing on gender gaps in roles / authority / opportunity / activity has been under way as early as the late 80s. Beyond measures for providing immediate aid to women – such as income generation programs or technical training to improve women’s productivity – there have been explorations into implementable practices that could resolve gender inequality and realize gender equality throughout society in general through equal participation by all genders.

As such, there is a need to critically reconsider the tendency toward the typical female-centric approach within conventional policies for female farmers or within gender equality policies (e.g., specialized

training for female farmers, support for care labor performed by female farmers, etc.). While the enactment of such measures did contribute to building competencies among female farmers and somewhat alleviating the burdens borne by female farmers within an unequal reality, these measures alone are not likely to resolve the entrenched state of gender inequality in rural / agricultural areas or lead to the realization of gender-equal rural communities. Despite the policies that have been enacted, the separation of gender roles remains firmly in place across the spheres of agricultural production, family life, and local community life, while the gender gaps in status / authority / burden show little signs of abating. These realities point to the limitations of conventional policies.

In order to address the gender inequality in rural / agricultural areas and thus overcome the rural reproduction crisis, relevant policies should regard inequality issues as core tasks, while making substantiated efforts to develop and implement measures for strengthening gender equality.

○ Integrating Gender Equality into Rural / Agricultural Policy Stances

- Including the ‘resolution of gender inequality and strengthening gender equality in rural / agricultural areas’ as a core tenet of the Framework Act on Agriculture and Fisheries, Rural Community, and Food Industry
- Actively pursuing a full revision of the current Support for Female Farmers and Fishers Act to a ‘Fostering Female Farmers and Fishers and Strengthening Rural / Agricultural Gender Equality Act’
- Restructuring the public nature of rural / agricultural areas from a gender-aware perspective

○ Institutional Improvements for Establishing a ‘Joint Couple Management’ Model

- Transitioning from the previous system that distinguishes between the manager and joint manager to a ‘joint couple management’ scheme where the couple jointly exercise management authority and undertake management responsibility
- Full review of institutional / organizational provisions regarding ‘farm managers’ or ‘farm proprietors’ throughout all aspects of agricultural production, including not only the NACF also other coops, producers’ groups, and produce certification systems

○ Exploring Approaches for Strengthening Gender Equality in Rural Areas at the Village, NACF, and Group Levels

- Introducing a unit of policy delivery adequate for rural settings, in view of the fact that they had little access even to such basic gender equality measures such as preventive training against sexual harassment / violence
- Support for volunteer initiatives for gender equality at the village / group level
- Cooperating with female farmer’s groups to develop and propagate, based on on-the-ground outcomes, practical models for gender equality suited to rural / agricultural settings
- Developing gender-aware governance models for local agriculture policy

○ Restructuring Gender Equality Training for Better Efficacy

- Making participation in gender equality training and preventative training against sexual harassment / violence mandatory for village chiefs and directors of the NACF and Korea Federation of Livestock Cooperatives
- Pursuing continual research on current gender inequality situations, gender discrimination case studies, and case studies of realized gender equality
- Re-designing ‘familial agreements on joint management’

○ Establishing a Statistical Database for Keeping Track of Gender Equality in Rural / Agricultural Areas

- Supplementing statistics for keeping track of the gender situation / gender equality levels in rural / agricultural areas
- Supplementing statistics to facilitate comparisons against urban areas / other industries

○ Strengthening Linkages between Policies for Female Farmers and Policies for Gender Equality

- Integrating the goal of ‘bridging gaps in gender equality across regions / industries’ into the gender equality policy agenda
- Establishing inter-ministry cooperation systems for integrating a gender-aware perspective with regards to policies directly influencing changes in rural / agricultural areas
- Linking the implementation apparatuses of policies for female farmers and policies for gender equality

