



General discussion on rural women

In Sweden women have the same formal rights and opportunities as men to own and run companies. But in reality, men own agricultural companies more often than women. The common picture of a farmer is still a man and the farming industry is often looked upon as an industry in which only men work.

The status on women's entrepreneurship is lower than the status on men's. Women's entrepreneurship is often looked upon as minor businesses. The consequences are often that it is harder for women than men to achieve financing. To handle this, special programs are invented to support women's economy and businesses instead of working on changes that will give women asset to the same financial opportunities as men. By trying to support women with special programs instead of through general financing, women are being problematized instead of regarded as great opportunities for development.

There are laws in Sweden that gives women the same rights as men to inherit from their parents and the right to inherit from their husbands. Daughters inherit as much as sons. Even though this is a fact the transfer of farms from one generation to the next is characterized by men inheriting more often than women and that they more often have been raised as successor on the farm.

Women are often part of an agricultural family company by being married to a farmer. In these cases it is common that only the man is the owner of the company. It is a way of securing that the farm stays in the family in case of a divorce. Even though women work for the family company and have responsibility for it, it is not for sure that they are being paid for their job. They are in a way "invisible entrepreneurs".

Old traditions and attitudes are holding back changes that would give women the same rights and opportunities as men, not only formally, but also in reality.

In Sweden women have the same access to education as men. Nowadays more women than men graduate from Swedish high schools and universities. This is a fact also when it comes to agricultural education. In spite of this more men than women own land and run agricultural companies and more men earn their salary from the family company. Women often participate in the family company, they work a lot and they are involved in many of the different tasks that the everyday life for a farmer contains. But through history

women's work has not always been looked upon as real work and often they have not earned their salary from the family company. Unfortunately farming is not very lucrative and it's hard to survive from the family business only. Many women both work within the family company and at the same time as an employee in another business to provide for the family.

Even today women are to a certain degree the "invisible farmers". It is important that rural women and their work is looked upon as a great potential and not something that you take for granted. A country cannot afford to neglect its potential in human resources. Women, in a larger extend than men, are inventive. Due to the bad profitability they try to find new businesses as a complement to the agricultural family company.

The parental insurance is a system that makes it possible for parents to stay home with their child for about a year when the baby is born. The parental insurance can be split in two halves so that both women and men can take care of their child. In general women use the larger part of the parental insurance and that is the case in the farming industry as well. According to statistics women are responsible for a larger amount of work in the home than men, such as cooking, cleaning, laundering and taking care of children. It's hard for women to achieve a work-life balance when they do a larger part of work in the family and also work in the family business and/or as an employee. Rural women work for a larger amount of hours than other women in Sweden generally do.

The maternity welfare is very good in Sweden which is a key to giving women good opportunities to live a healthy life and being able to work. The health care system is also good in general, but it could be developed to better provide for entrepreneurs in case of illness. Farmers sometimes worry about what will happen to them, the family and the family company if they get ill. A health insurance that takes into consideration the conditions of an entrepreneur would make them feel safer.

Finishing off, The Federation of Swedish Farmers, like to emphasize the importance of research, reports and statistics as a foundation for improvements considering rural women. To contribute to this foundation LRF founded Jämställdhetsakademien (Academy of Equality). This submission on rural women is based upon material that the academy has worked out. It is also of importance that we are aware of attitudes and traditions that exist and influence us all. With knowledge and awareness as a foundation it is possible to improve the conditions for rural women.

Sincerely yours,



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