

WOMEN IN CHARGE OF THE FARM

A ten-year (2000-2010) comparison of the data about female farm holders

Research question

I've decide to investigate the characteristic of female family farm holders in Ireland and the changes between the most two recent Census of Agriculture (COA).

Designing the Question

In Ireland family farms are, and have been for a long time¹, one of the pillars of its economy and society. This specific way of intending the farm possess its own importance² and is predominant in the Irish agricultural landscape, even if it is suffering a crisis in recent years³.

The labour inside the farm it has always been seen as a male activity, and women effort was often overlooked and it has been deemed as invisible (Shortall, 1991; Shortall, 1992; Gibbons, 2012; Byrne, Duvvury, Macken-Walsh, & Watson, 2013). This is changing in the last decades and various studies⁴ have been carried out on the roles⁵ that women assume in the family farm.

After the acknowledgment of their importance, different policies were put in motion by various institutions⁶, particularly in the early 90s. Relevant for the research is the "Advisory Committee on the Role of Women in Agriculture" that submitted their report to the Minister for Agriculture and Rural development (Advisory Committee on the Role of Women in Agriculture, 2000) in the September 2000 (the base year of this research) especially to assess how the situation changed in the decade considered.

The issue of the presence and the recognition of the female work in agriculture is broad and intricate, and a much more complex study is necessary to estimate all the aspect of this phenomena. Therefore this research is focused on the figure of the female holder of the farm primarily for this reasons:

- To evaluate if there has been a change in the role inside the family farm: if women have begun to take on a more significant position and more direct responsibility within the farms, as it is has been observed in other sectors.
- To estimate the economic impact that this role can have upon the dynamic of the farms.⁷

¹ Consequent to the Land Wars, in the late 19th century, and the following Lands Act, the ownership of the land passed from the landlord to the tenants, creating the family managed farm, where the head of the family is also the holder of the estate.

² 2014 was declared the "Family Farm Year" by the UN.

³ This crisis is not the one predicted at the end of the 19th century, where the family farm was supposed to leave the field free to the corporate farming completely, occurrence that didn't happen (Brookfield & Parsons, 2007). Here the term crisis is considered as an "income crisis" of the family farm (Kelly & Shortall, 2002; Byrne, Duvvury, Macken-Walsh, & Watson, 2013).

⁴ Studies on the have been carried out in the fields of sociology, geography, woman studies among others. Recently a number of different report on the situation of the woman in agriculture, cited in this research, where commissioned by different government organism.

⁵ What are colloquially called Farm Wives take on different roles inside the microcosms of the family farm to ensure the smooth progress of its activities. This roles, however, changes with time along the economic and social environment.

⁶ Politics on the role and the presence of women in agriculture are present in the Second Commission of The Status of Women (1993) and in the National Development Plan 2000 – 2006, among others.

⁷ Every year since 2013 the Woman & Agriculture Conference is held. This conferences focus in particular on the business aspects with the participation of various successful women that manage in first person their farms. In the last of this conferences was presented a study conducted in the U.S. that stated that farm managed (or co-managed) by women are deemed more profitable.

The analysis take count of the data retrieved by the most recent Census of Agriculture (COA) available (CSO, 2000; CSO, 2010)⁸

Data and Acknowledgement

The data available on the woman presence in the agriculture is not so simple to recover and is not very detailed. And this is still viewed as a cause of concern⁹ (Dept. of Justice, E., & Gender Equality Unit, 2003; Shortall, The Dearth of Data on Irish Farm Wives: A Critical Review of the Literature, 1991).

Before 1991 the data on farm workers were presented under the heading “Males Engaged in Farm Work”. The 1991 Census of Agriculture was the first to address the issue of the presence of woman in agriculture. It was found that 30% of the total agricultural labour was carried by woman and the female holder were 9.6% (16,453).

Other data on the matter can be found in the CSO Annual Survey of Agriculture and EU Farm Structures Survey (2003, 2005 and 2007)¹⁰ and in the National Farm Survey (NFS)¹¹. But it has been decided not to use this data due different size of the sample and some changes in the methodology (Eurostat, 2005) that make the data not comparable.

The ownership of a farm is almost exclusively passed out, by inheritance, from generation to generation, and it is the male offspring the main target of the farm heritage (Kelly & Shortall, 2002; O'Hara, 1998). Whenever a woman comes into possession of farm it is almost exclusively in the case of the in the case of the death of her husband (O'Hara, 1998; Dept. of Justice, E., & Gender Equality Unity, 2004).

The woman in the farm are becoming increasingly more involved in off-farm occupation. This work is often what permits the farm to survive (O'Hara, 1998; Kelly & Shortall, 2002). The terms that is often been used is “pluriactivity”, which means that beyond the farm work the family engages in “other gainful activities” (Kinsella, Wilson, Jong, & Renting, 2000). This represent a shift in the role of the woman in the farm that become the “*breadwinner*”¹² inside the household, (Kelly & Shortall, 2002).

(<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/farms-managed-by-women-are-more-profitable-conference-hears-1.1572233>)

⁸ The COA is carried out approximately every 10 year. It's the most comprehensive source of agriculture data in Ireland and it samples all the operational farm.

⁹ Is worth noticing that is a common problem also in other European Country, as well as in America and Canada (Shortall, The Dearth of Data on Irish Farm Wives: A Critical Review of the Literature, 1991).

¹⁰ Created in 1991 to fill the gap between years. Collected in June of each year it has the same questionnaire of the COA and is part of the EU FSS (Farm Structure survey). The information collected is much more limited due to the significantly smaller sample size.

¹¹ Carried out on an annual basis, by the Tergas, with a sample over 1000 farm from the CSO farm database. It gathers similar information of the COA and the FFS. The difference with the COA is about the questionnaire design that goes in more detail.

¹² The primary income-earner in a household.

Comparison of the 200 and the 2010 COA on female family farm holder

Overview data from 1991 to 2000

Before going into the detail of the 2000 and 2010 COA is interesting to take a look to the yearly data in our possession¹³, where it is visible that the trend from 1991 to 1999 the present a slight, non-constant, decrease trend with a sudden surge between 1999 and 2000 (Figure 1).

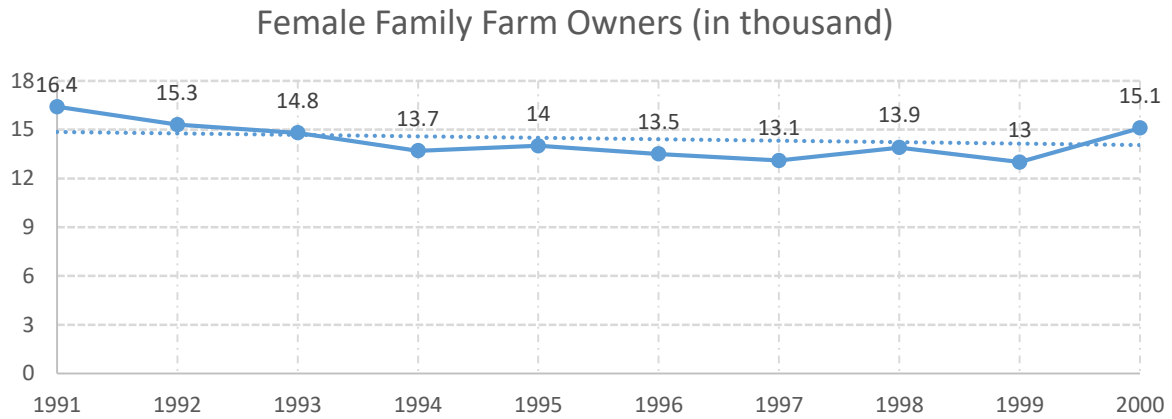


Figure 1 - Female family farm owners (in thousand) for the period that goes from 1991 to 200

The unevenness of the graph is representative of how this is a complex phenomenon that is in all probability influenced by many factors (economic and social).

Ratio between Male and Female Holders

The first observation to make is that in the first decade of the millennium the total number of family farm decreased by about 14%, with a difference of about 19.1 (thousand) units.

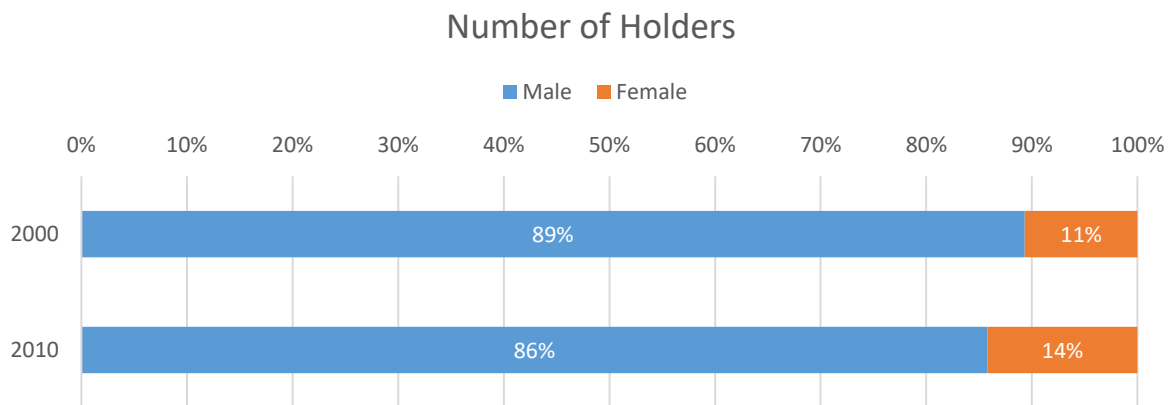


Figure 2 - Ratio between male and female farm holders in 2000 and 2010

¹³

http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Database/eirestat/Agriculture%20Labour%20and%20Size%20of%20Holdings/Agriculture%20Labour%20and%20Size%20of%20Holdings_statbank.asp?SP=Agriculture%20Labour%20and%20Size%20of%20Holdings&Planguage=0 (TABLE ASJA2)

AWU of the Holders

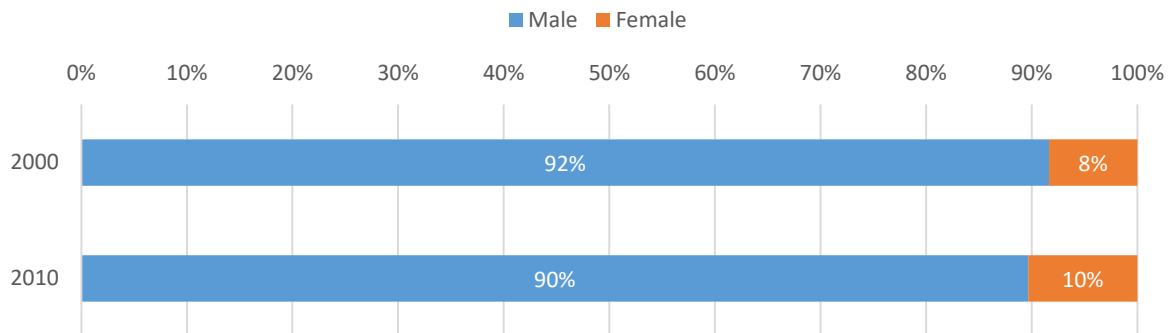


Figure 3 - ratio of the annual work units between male and female in 2000 and 2010

As we can see from the graphs (Figure 2 and Figure 3) the female presence and the amount of work performed (AWU)¹⁴ by the female holders is increased only by a very small portion and the possession of the farm is still a male prerogative.

Breakdown of the Data on Female Holders

The next analysis consist of the breakdown of the Female holder by different characteristics, such as: Age, Size of the Holding and Significance of Farmwork.

By Age

The following graphs (Figure 4 and Figure 5) shows the number (in thousand) of the female farm holder divided in various age ranges. The AWU in this case will be not considered as the finding are consistent with the ones drawn with persons' numbers.

Number of Femal Hodlders (in thousand)

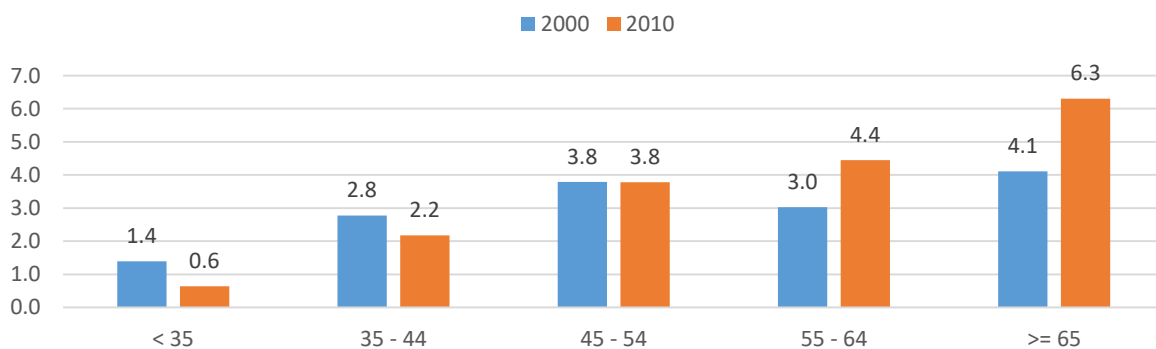


Figure 4 - Number of female holder (in thousand) divided by age ranges, in 2000 and 2010

¹⁴ One **annual work unit**, abbreviated as **AWU**, corresponds to the work performed by one person who is occupied on an agricultural holding on a full-time basis. Full-time means the minimum hours required by the relevant national provisions governing contracts of employment. If the national provisions do not indicate the number of hours, then 1 800 hours are taken to be the minimum annual working hours: equivalent to 225 working days of eight hours each. (EUROSTAT)

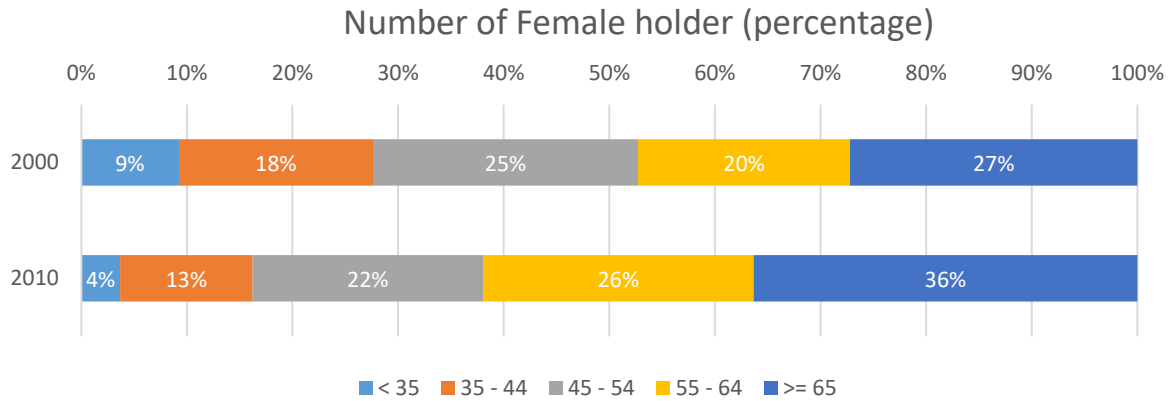


Figure 5 - Percentages of female holders divided by age in 2000 and 2010

As is observable, even more clearly in the graph showing the percentages (Figure 5), between 2000 and 2010 the number of the female holders in the ranges below 54 years old is decreased (even more significantly for the women under 35), while the older range (55 and up) have increased. This describe a **lack of a generational turnover**.

By Size of the Holding

The holdings are divided by their size (AAU)¹⁵

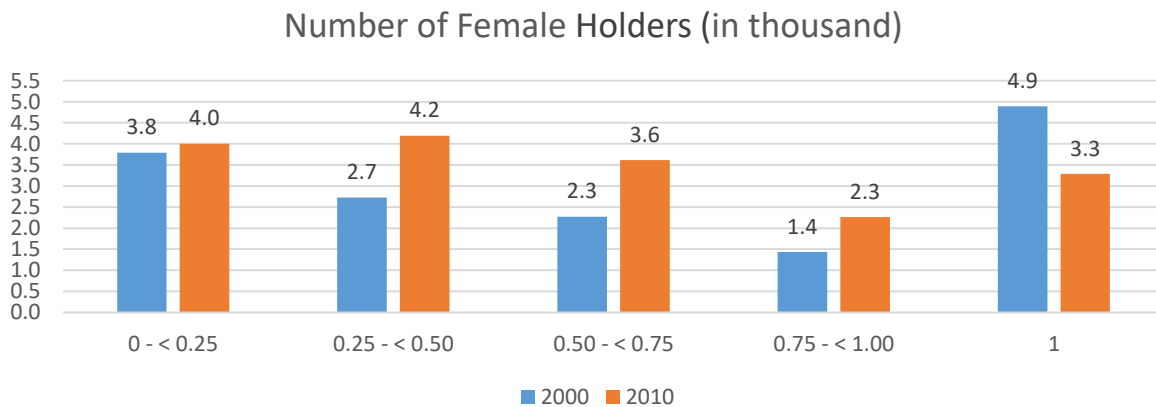


Figure 6 - Number of female farm holders (in thousand) divided by farm size (AAU), in 2000 and 2010

¹⁵ The AAU (UAA in the Eurostat glossary) or area farmed is the combined area under crops, silage, hay, pasture and rough grazing land in use (including fallow and set-aside land). Areas taken up by roads, tracks, water, bog, marsh, rocks, unused rough grazing land, buildings etc. are excluded. Commonage used by the farm is not included as part of the area farmed but livestock etc. held on such land are returned as belonging to the farm.

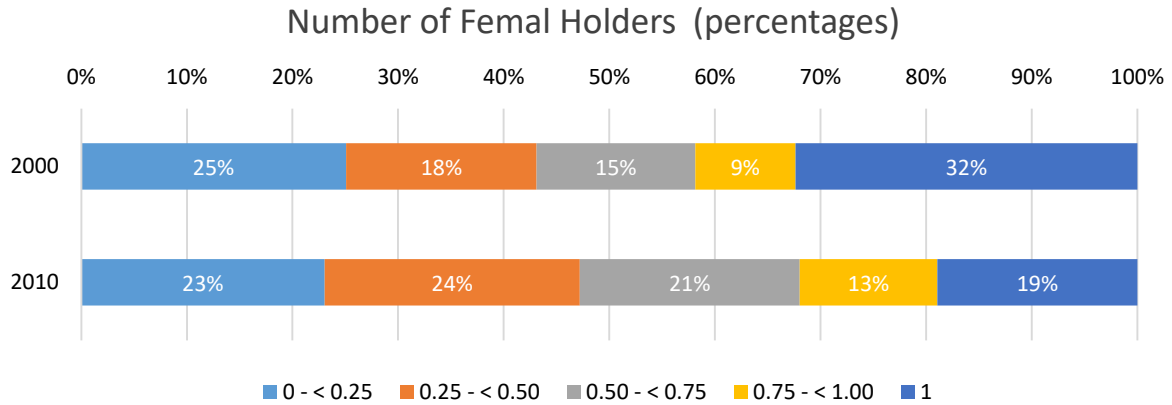


Figure 7 - Percentages of female farm holder divided by farm size, in 2000 and 2010

The major change occurred in the decade considered is the reduction of female owned farm with a bigger farming area and increase both factual and in proportion of all the other holding size. This could be also related to the general increase of small holds compared to larger ones.(!)

Some consideration must be given to the AWU (Figure 8 and Figure 9):

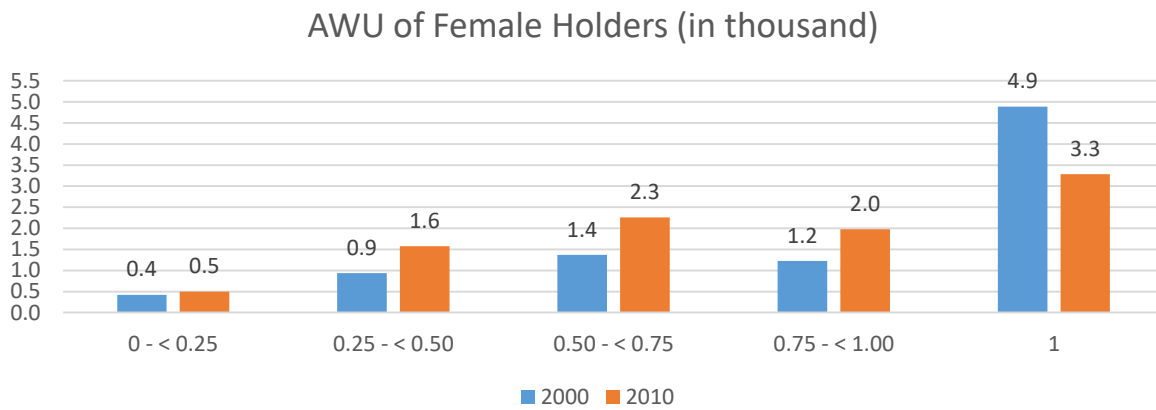


Figure 8 - Annual work unit of female farm holders (in thousand) divided by farm size, in 2000 and 2010

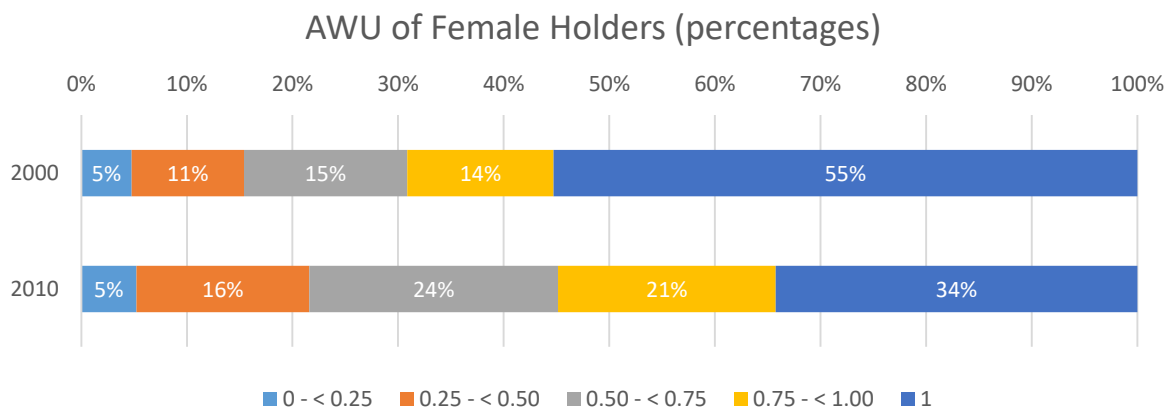


Figure 9 - Percentages of annual work units of female farm holders (in thousand), in 2000 and 2010

What is observable is that the work performed follow predictably the trend of the quantities of people already analysed, but with an increase that is a little more significant. This could mean that beyond the figures also the involvement of the female holders in the farm activity is increased.

By significance of Famrwork

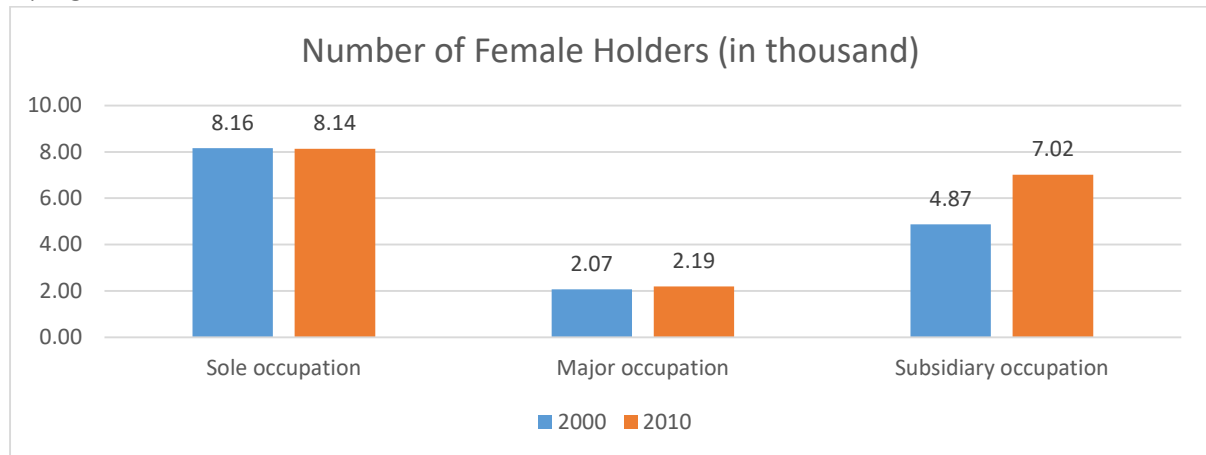


Figure 10 - Number of female holders (in thousand) divided by the significance of farmwork performed, in 2000 and 2010.

From the data available (Figure 10) it can be seen that not much changed for the female owners that consider the work in the farm as their sole or major occupation. Instead the growth of subsidiary work means that most of the increase witnessed (in the number of female holders) from 2000 to 2010 converged into a secondary presence of the Female Holder in the farm activities.

Conclusion

In the decade that goes from 2000 to 2010 can be observed a slight increase in the number of female family farm holder. But this increase is not very relevant in terms of a renewed role of the woman inside the farm. From this set of data we can't really assess the success of the politics put in motion around women and agriculture, because such politics had much larger scope, involving awareness, education and safety among others. It must also be considered the changing in the socio-economic landscape and the "crisis" of the family farm as an attractive and viable career.

And even if the family farm activity is carried out by the next generation, this is viewed predominantly as *a male heritage*. The increasing age of the female owners indicate *a lack of generational turn over*, and the absence of interest of the young women to take in their hand the family farm. This does not mean that the female presence is not relevant in the farm hold, but women rarely take in their hands the control of the farms. Instead their effort has shifted toward a more off-farm dimension, in order to ensure the survival of the farm hold itself and a comfortable life of their family, therefore the farm work is viewed much more as a *subsidiary occupation*.

Appendix 1 – Table of figures

Figure 1 - Female family farm owners (in thousand) for the period that goes from 1991 to 200

Figure 2 - Ratio between male and female farm holders in 2000 and 2010

Figure 3 - ratio of the annual work units between male and female in 2000 and 2010

Figure 4 - Number of female holder (in thousand) divided by age ranges, in 2000 and 2010

Figure 5 - Percentages of female holders divided by age in 2000 and 2010

Figure 6 - Number of female farm holders (in thousand) divided by farm size (AAU), in 2000 and 2010

Figure 7 - Percentages of female farm holder divided by farm size, in 2000 and 2010

Figure 8 - Annual work unit of female farm holders (in thousand) divided by farm size, in 2000 and 2010

Figure 9 - Percentages of annual work units of female farm holders (in thousand), in 2000 and 2010

Figure 10 - Number of female holders (in thousand) divided by the significance of farmwork performed, in 2000 and 2010.

Appendix 2 – Data tables

Statistic on Females Family Farm Holders (CSO, 2000; CSO, 2010)				
	2000		2010	
	Persons	AWU	Persons	AWU
Male	126243	96928	104866	83429
Female	15099	8837	17345	9590
Total	141342	105765	122211	93019
<i>Age</i>				
	2000		2010	
	Persons	AWU	Persons	AWU
< 35	1396	802	637	334
35 - 44	2776	1602	2179	1173
45 - 54	3790	2251	3783	2141
55 - 64	3031	1869	4446	2641
>= 65	4106	2313	6300	3291
<i>Annual work units (Farm)</i>				
	2000		2010	
	Persons	AWU	Persons	AWU
0 - < 0.25	3787	422	3999	500
0.25 - < 0.50	2723	939	4191	1572
0.50 - < 0.75	2269	1366	3611	2257
0.75 - < 1.00	1433	1225	2260	1978
1	4887	4885	3284	3284
<i>Significance of farmwork</i>				
	2000		2010	
	Persons	AWU	Persons	AWU
Sole occupation	8155	5345	8137	5468
Major occupation	2070	1328	2188	1442
Subsidiary occupation	4874	2164	7020	2680

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