



Netherlands

The inclusion of women and young people in the agricultural sector

Challenges and opportunities for generational renewal in Spain and the Netherlands

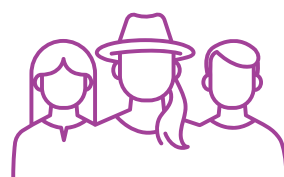


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List of abbreviations

AMCAE: Asociación de Mujeres de Cooperativas Agro-Alimentarias de España (Women Association of the Cooperatives Agro-Alimentarias de España)

ASAJA: Asociación Agraria Jóvenes Agricultores (Agricultural Organization for Young Farmers)

BOR: Bedrijfsovername regeling (Tax arrangement to support business take-over)

COAG: Coordinadora de Agricultores y Ganaderos (Coordinator of (Livestock) Farmers)

EU CAP: Common Agricultural Policy of the EU

FADEMUR: Federación de Asociaciones de Mujeres Rurales (Federation of Associations of Rural Women)

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GHG: Greenhouse Gas Emissions

LAN: Landbouw Attaché Netwerk (Dutch Agricultural Attaché Network)

(LTO Nederland): Land- en Tuinbouw Organisatie Nederland (Agriculture and Horticulture Organization)

LVVN: Ministerie van Landbouw, Visserij, Voedselzekerheid en Natuur (Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature)

MAD-LAN: Agricultural Attaché Network in Madrid

MAPA: Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación (Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fish and Food)

NAJK: Nederlands Agrarisch Jongeren Kontakt (Dutch Agricultural Youth Contact)

NL: The Netherlands

OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

UPA: Unión de Pequeños Agricultores (Union of Small-scale Farmers)

Chapter 1: Foreword and introduction

This report contains the results of a research project on generational renewal and the inclusion of women and young people in the European agrifood sector, with Spain as a case study. The study was conducted by Ms. Van De poll on behalf of the agricultural department of the Dutch Embassy in Spain: the Agricultural Attaché Network (LAN) in Madrid (MAD-LAN). LAN constitutes the representation of the Dutch ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature (LVVN) abroad.

Generational renewal is a relevant issue for both Spain and the Netherlands, as both countries deal with an ageing farming population and high barriers for women and young farmers to join the agrifood sector, take over farms, and participate in agricultural decision-making. Therefore, the main aim of the study was to learn how the MAD-LAN department can support initiatives, contribute knowledge and cooperate with Spain in this shared challenge. For LVVN, inclusion is furthermore a specific policy priority and a topic they would further like to explore, because of its importance in creating more sustainable food systems. They encourage their LAN offices to incorporate the theme in their work and develop projects to advance inclusion in foreign policy. As such, the research findings also provide insights that can be useful for other LAN postings around Europe.

The research focused on identifying the main barriers to the inclusion of women and young farmers in the Spanish agrifood sector, useful initiatives and policies to support and facilitate their participation, and the implications for policy-making at the European level. The study addresses these goals through a comprehensive desk and field research, including 14 interviews. First, the report portrays the general context and relevance of generational renewal, and then elaborates on the barriers and benefits of current (policy) initiatives, based on the outcomes of the interviews. Finally, the report reflects on possible future efforts for policy-making and investigation on this issue, and provides recommendations.

Due to the limited scope of the study, the report is meant as an exploration of the issue of generational renewal in Spain, which might serve to give inspiration and ideas for how the Netherlands (and other European countries) could approach the inclusion and incorporation of young and female farmers. The report is not meant to be exhaustive, and the findings cannot be generalized for the whole farming population in Europe, but are rather meant as a starting point for new efforts and further examination. Opinions and views expressed in this report are those of the writer, Beate van de Poll (Utrecht University), and do not necessarily represent an official position of the Dutch ministry or embassy.

Chapter 2: What is generational renewal and why is it important?

During the last decades, Europe has experienced a continuous decline and aging of its agricultural workforce, which is becoming a pressing concern for the future of agriculture. There are less and less people who choose to become farmers, and on top of that, farmers are relatively old: more than 50% of EU farm managers is over 55, while only 12% is below 40, and only 1% is below 25.¹ This trend is referred to as the ‘demographic challenge’ or ‘young farmer problem’ in EU agriculture. In this context, a **young farmer** is considered to be below the age of 40.

This demographic challenge is caused by a lack of new and younger people succeeding or replacing the older farming population. This process is called **generational renewal**, which implies that not only farms and land, but also all agricultural knowledge and experience are handed down to new generations so they can develop and adapt the sector. Younger and new people generally bring fresh ideas and perspectives, and these are highly needed to find new solutions to the growing challenges agriculture faces, especially in light of climate change.² In contrast, if there are not enough successors or new people to ensure the continuity and transformation of farms, the sustainability and viability of the agricultural sector will be in jeopardy.

Importantly, this issue not only reflects a lack of young people involved in agriculture, but also a lack of **women**. Over two-thirds of EU farm managers (68.4%) are men, while in comparison only 31.6% are women.³ The proportion of young women farm holders is even as low as 3%.⁴ On top of that, the female farming population is also aging: only 4.2% of female farmers are under 35, while 42% is over 65. This means that the gender gap in the agricultural sector could become even bigger in the upcoming years.⁵ The shortage of women in agriculture adds to the lack of generational renewal since women—just like young people—constitute potential successors for farms or new entrants to the agricultural sector. As such, they are a viable resource for generational renewal which is currently not sufficiently employed.

In order to ensure a sustainable and resilient agricultural sector, the inclusion of women and youth is vital. Inclusion means that all people—regardless of their status or identities like age and gender—are able to equally participate, contribute and benefit from economic, social and political life.⁶ It thus entails the full and active participation of women and young people in the whole agricultural sector, both on farms as well as at higher decision-making levels in agricultural entities (cooperatives, interest groups, unions), by ensuring they have equal access to resources and opportunities.⁷ At the end of the day, that is the key to generational renewal.

1 Nikolina Sajn, “EP Briefing: Generational Renewal in EU Agriculture” (Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2025), 2; Eurostat, “Farmers and the Agricultural Labor Force - Statistics - Statistics Explained” Eurostat, November 2022

2 EU CAP Network, “Thematic Group on Gen Z: Leading Generational Renewal in Farming” (EU CAP Network, October 2024); Caixa-bank, “El Relevo Generacional En La Agricultura. ¿Cuál Es El Futuro?”, Microbank, 2025, [El relevo generacional en la agricultura](#).

3 EU CAP Network, ‘Leading Generational Renewal in Farming’, 3

4 European Commission, “Young Farmers”, European Commission: Agriculture and Rural Development, [Young farmers - Agriculture and rural development - European Commission](#)

5 EU CAP Network, “Women in the New CAP”, European CAP Network, October 10, 2022, [Women in the new CAP | EU CAP Network](#)

6 FAO, “Intersectionality: A Pathway for More Inclusive, Youth-Oriented and Gender-Responsive Agrifood Systems” (Rome: FAO, 2024), 6

7 Sandra Phelps, “Gender Equality and Youth Inclusion in Agriculture: Findings from CABI Gender Research” (CABI, 2024)

Why is generational renewal a concern for food security and the future of food supply?

The lack of generational renewal in the agricultural sector is closely related to the widespread depopulation of rural areas across Europe.⁸ More and more people migrate to cities in search for better economic prospects and other qualities of life, leaving rural areas empty and deserted. The ensuing abandonment of farms and land leads to loss of productivity and environmental degradation, posing great challenges to both agriculture and rural communities in general.⁹

With less farmers, this situation results in a less diverse agricultural sector which is led by only bigger players in the food chain. When local food production declines, it becomes reliant on fewer producers. This could result in a loss of autonomy over food supply and prices in the EU, which is especially problematic in times of crises. The war in Ukraine for example had severe impacts on food prices in the rest of Europe and even the whole world. As a leading grain exporter, the acute drop in Ukraine's exports and ensuing spike in grain prices compromised the availability of affordable basic food for millions of people.¹⁰ In today's world, with rising geopolitical tensions, increasing climate disasters, and possible pandemics such as COVID-19, it thus becomes more and more important for the EU to obtain **strategic autonomy** and ensure **food security**. This means the EU is able to guarantee a fair, sustainable and resilient food supply for all its citizens, also in times of crises.

Strategic autonomy refers to the EU's ability to make its own choices and shape the world according to its interests, without dependence on others.¹¹ With the most elaborate regulations for the quality, safety and sustainability of food worldwide¹², the EU currently takes the lead in setting sustainability standards globally. Promoting sustainable food production through these standards is an important component of the EU's agricultural policy (CAP and Farm to Fork Strategy)¹³, and strategic autonomy is essential for the EU to maintain its pioneer position in this regard. By focusing on local channels of food production, investing in responsible and sustainable farming practices, and maintaining high food standards while also upholding them in trade relations (especially with external partners), this autonomy can be promoted. In this way, the EU not only retains control over the availability, but also the prices, quality and sustainability of food.

8 EU CAP Network, 'Leading Generational Renewal in Farming'

9 Mapfre, "Why Should Rural Depopulation Be Avoided?", Mapfre, January 19, 2021, [Why should rural depopulation be avoided?](#); Interreg Europe, "Environmental Risks Related with Depopulation and Ageing Population in Rural Areas" (Interreg Europe, 2025)

10 European Council, "How the Russian Invasion of Ukraine Has Further Aggravated the Global Food Crisis", European Council, January 31, 2025, [How the Russian invasion of Ukraine has further aggravated the global food crisis - Consilium](#)

11 European Economic and Social Committee, "Opinion: Strategic Autonomy and Food Security and Sustainability" (European Economic and Social Committee, 2021)

12 BIOSAFE, "Food Safety Regulations in the European Union", BIOSAFE, September 13, 2023, [Food safety regulations in the European Union](#)

13 European Commission, "CAP and the Environment", European Commission: Agriculture and Rural Development, April 8, 2025, [CAP and the environment - Agriculture and rural development](#); European Commission, "Farm to Fork Strategy" (Brussels: European Commission, 2020)

However, this can only be realized if the EU manages to sustain its own agricultural workforce and food production. Attracting more new and young farmers is therefore crucial.¹⁴ They drive innovation, thereby supporting the sustainable transition of the agricultural sector that is necessary to safeguard food supply for future generations. Generational renewal is thus essential for both the continuity and sustainable development of farming, making it a key concern for **food security** in the EU.

Why is generational renewal a concern for biodiversity conservation and complying with climate goals?

Agriculture is inherently dependent on soils and ecosystems, which provide the source for food production. In fact, 95% of food is produced directly or indirectly in soils.¹⁵ Healthy ecosystems, including soil, water and air quality, are therefore of fundamental importance for farming. Healthy soils also help combat and adapt to climate change because they store carbon and large amounts of water, which helps crops cope with drought and reduces greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. However, due to climate change, pollution and neglected management, soil and water quality are increasingly put under strain, leading to water scarcity and soil degradation.

Farmers can play a key role in maintaining healthy soils by regulating water, filtering pollutants and adding nutrients, which makes landscapes more resilient to climate disasters. However, when these farming activities cease and the land is abandoned, it becomes more susceptible to environmental risks like wild fires and floods, which could lead to soil degradation and biodiversity loss. This is especially the case for regions with extensive small-scale agricultural systems and arid climates,¹⁶ like many areas in Spain. Promoting generational renewal, and combating rural depopulation and land abandonment, are thus essential for ensuring healthy soil management and biodiversity conservation.¹⁷

On the other hand, while farmers maintain the land and the resilience of ecosystems, agriculture also could put a strain on natural resources and the climate. In 2023, agricultural emissions contributed 13% to the total GHG emissions of the EU.¹⁸ As such, agriculture has a substantial role to play in the EU's goal to reduce its emissions by at least 55% in 2030 and become climate neutral by 2050.¹⁹ The promotion of sustainable farming practices is important to reduce agricultural emissions and mitigate the negative effect farming has on both nature and the climate. Innovation driven by new and younger generations is highly needed for this sustainable transition, making generational renewal essential for achieving climate goals.

14 EESC, "Opinion: Strategic Autonomy and Food Security and Sustainability"

15 FAO, "Soils: Where Food Begins," FAO Open Knowledge (Rome: FAO, February 2023), 1

16 Liliana Castillo-Rivero et al., "Depopulation and Ecological Degradation, Two Dimensions of Marginalization, and Peripheralization. Ecosystem Integrity as an Assessment Factor in Local Revitalization," *Regional Science Policy & Practice* 15, no. 7 (2023)

17 European Commission, "A Vision for Agriculture and Food: Shaping Together and Attractive Farming and Agrifood Sector for Future Generations" (Brussels: European Commission, 2025)

18 Institute for European Environmental Policy, "Policy Options for Agricultural Emissions in the EU" (IEEP, 2025)

19 EC, "A Vision for Agriculture and Food"; European Environment Agency, "Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Agriculture in Europe," EEA, October 26, 2022, [Greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture in Europe | Indicators | European Environment Agency \(EEA\)](#)

Generational renewal: the role of young people and women

Besides young people, women are also essential for generational renewal as they play a crucial role in the agricultural sector. Not only are they an integral part of rural areas and the families predominantly running the farms across Europe, but they also perform an important part of the work on farms. They often do administrative work, assist their partners in the field or set up extra activities on farms to create new sources of income. Moreover, they do the majority of household and caregiving tasks. However, as this work is not always ‘official’ or remunerated, these contributions often remain invisible and unrecognized, while they are absolutely crucial to sustain farms. Besides that, many women manage their own farms and otherwise could be potential new farm owners.²⁰

For the preservation of farming we thus need both young people and women, and both of them are crucial to accelerate the sustainable transition of the agricultural sector. Research shows that young farmers are generally higher educated, and more likely to modernize farms, apply innovative business models and implement sustainable and ecological farming practices.²¹ Young people and women are also more likely to diversify farms through activities beyond food production, creating new sources of income.²² Women in particular tend to set up farm projects with a more local and social character, through which they also contribute to social cohesion and the vitality of rural areas.²³

While young people and women thus play an important role in the sector, their contribution often remains concealed because the statistics only cover farm holders.²⁴ Nevertheless, this does indicate that the highest ‘official’ decision-making and ownership positions—both on farms and in agricultural entities—are generally controlled by older men, while these are exactly the positions needed to bring about structural change.

Including women and young people at all levels of the agricultural sector leads to more diversity of ideas, perspectives, norms and behaviors, which helps to stimulate innovation.²⁵ Especially inclusion in leadership and management positions—where they get the opportunity to transform traditional practices—is crucial. Because, if agriculture continues in the way it has always been done, the result will always stay the same. Yet, if a new generation of farmers is given the opportunity to take the lead, it may be possible to shift towards a more environmentally sustainable and socially just agricultural sector.

20 Maldita.es, “¿El Campo Sigue Siendo Cosa de Hombres?”, Maldita.es, March 7, 2025, [¿El campo sigue siendo cosa de hombres? Solo 3 de cada 10 explotaciones tienen una mujer al mando · Maldita.es](#); ClosinGap, “Coste de Oportunidad de La Brecha de Género En El Medio Rural” (ClosinGap, February 2022); European Institute for Gender Inequality, “Gender in Agriculture and Rural Development” (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016)

21 European Parliament, “Resolution: Generational Renewal in the EU Farms of the Future”, (European Parliament, October 19, 2023); Lukas Zagata and Lee-Ann Sutherland, “Deconstructing the ‘Young Farmer Problem in Europe’: Towards a Research Agenda”, *Journal of Rural Studies* 38 (2015)

22 Lee-Ann Sutherland, “Who Do We Want Our ‘New Generation’ of Farmers to Be?”, *Agricultural and Food Economics* 11, no. 3 (2023); European Network for Rural Development, “Youth and Generational Renewal,” EU CAP Network (European Union, 2019)

23 Marcel aan de Brugh, “De Boerin Wordt in Europa Nog Altijd Achtergesteld Bij de Boer,” NRC, March 7, 2025, [De boerin wordt in Europa nog altijd achtergesteld bij de boer - NRC](#)

24 Sajn, “EP Briefing”

25 Sutherland, “New Generation of Farmers”

Why is generational renewal relevant for the EU, especially for Spain and the Netherlands?

Ageing is not only an issue within the EU's agricultural workforce, but across Europe's entire population. As the number of older people continues to rise while the pool of younger and working individuals shrinks, this puts a strain on economic growth and social services.²⁶

However, the ageing farming population is a concern in its own right, not only because it has wider implications that go far beyond economic ones, but also because there are distinct barriers that complicate generational renewal in the agricultural sector. As explained, addressing this issue is vital for both food security as well as the preservation of biodiversity and combating climate change. This makes generational renewal a primary concern for the EU. While the issue is pressing on the whole continent, there are quite some regional differences between member states. In Spain, the situation is particularly alarming, but also in the Netherlands generational renewal warrants attention.

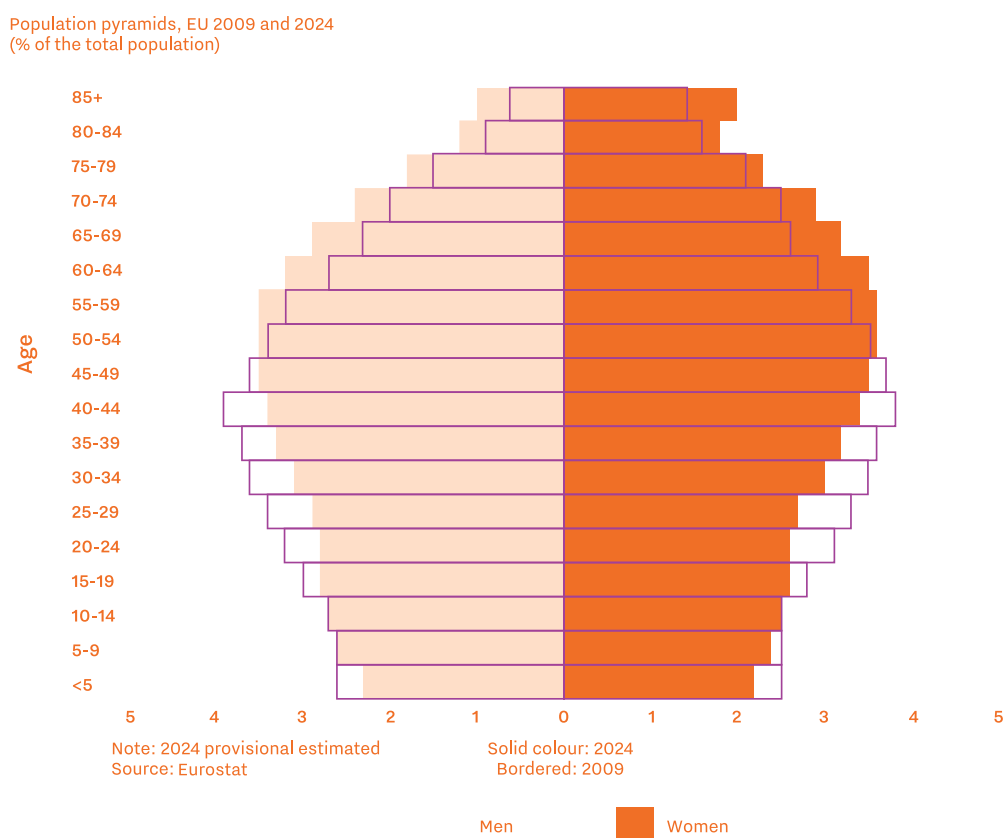


Figure 1: Demographic pyramid of European population (source: Eurostat²⁷)

²⁶ Joana Jacinto, "Inverting the Pyramid: Addressing Working-Age Depopulation in the European Union" (Bruegel, 2022)

²⁷ Eurostat, "Population Structure and Ageing - Statistics Explained," Eurostat, February 2025, [Population structure and ageing - Statistics Explained - Eurostat](#)

Spain

In Spain, the amount of young farmers is particularly low: only 7.7% of farmers is young (below 40), in comparison to 41.3% of farmers aged above 65. This makes Spain (together with Portugal, Cyprus and Greece) one of the member states with the fastest greying farming population in the EU.²⁸ There is also a significant gender gap in the Spanish agricultural sector: only 29% of the farms are managed by women, and women only represent 22.8% of young farm managers. On a positive note, the number of farms managed by women has increased in the last years in Spain, namely 22% in the last decade. However, these farms are generally of smaller scale and lower economic weight.²⁹

This greying farming population means generational renewal in the Spanish countryside is basically non-existent. In less than 10 years, the large majority of the workforce will be retired, and there are not enough young people and (young) women to take over their farms and modernize them.³⁰

This situation goes hand in hand with a very serious depopulation of Spain's rural areas. Within the EU, Spain is one of the countries with the highest concentration of its population in urban and coastal areas. While 77% of Spain's territory is rural, only 3.4% of the population lives there, leaving a large part of its rural mainland deserted. In Spain, they call this *la España vaciada* or *la España vacía* (emptied/empty Spain). Between 2011 and 2018, 63% of Spanish municipalities experienced depopulation, amounting to an extreme rural exodus.³¹

This rural depopulation and the decline of agricultural activities have severe repercussions for Spain's rural areas, both economic, social and environmental. As explained, land abandonment leads to biodiversity loss and more frequent and severe wild fires, as unmanaged forest land and natural vegetation provide a lot of fuel for fires.³² With the impacts of climate change, wild fires are only becoming more severe, making depopulation an increasingly pressing issue for the environmental sustainability of Spain's rural areas.³³ Because of these challenges, the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture (MAPA: Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación) has defined generational renewal, and the revitalization of rural areas, as a top policy priority.³⁴

28 Eurostat, "Farmers and the Agricultural Labor Force", 3

29 MAPA, "Una Visión Global de La Agricultura Española a Través Del Análisis Del Censo Agrario 2020" (MAPA, 2023)

30 Caixabank, "El Relevo Generacional En La Agricultura"

31 Federico Martínez-Carrasco Pleite and José Colino Sueiras, "Rural Depopulation in Spain", *Agriculture* 14, no. 295 (2024): 1–2; European Commission, "Spain," European Commission: Agriculture and Rural Development, October 25, 2023, [Spain - Agriculture and rural development - European Commission](#)

32 Interreg, "Environmental Risks"; Greenpeace, "España Vaciada," Greenpeace España, n.d., [España vaciada | Greenpeace España - ES | Greenpeace España](#)

33 Rosie Frost, "Deadly Wildfires in Spain and Portugal Fueled by Climate Change," *Euronews*, September 4, 2025, [Climate change fuelled wildfires of 'unprecedented intensity' in Spain and Portugal, experts say | Euronews](#)

34 MAPA, "España Trabaja Para Impulsar El Relevo Generacional Como Una Prioridad Para Asegurar El Futuro Del Sector Agrario," MAPA, 2025, [España trabaja para impulsar el relevo generacional como una prioridad para asegurar el futuro del sector agrario](#)

The Netherlands

The Netherlands is also dealing with issues around generational renewal, although the situation is very different from Spain.

Data from 2023 shows that in the Netherlands 62% of farm managers is aged 55 or older³⁵, while only 9.4% is aged under 40. 20% is even older than 67. The agricultural workforce is thus also greying significantly. That said, the number of young farmers has grown during the last years: new data from 2025 shows a share of 10% of young farmers, compared to 8% in 2015.³⁶ Considering these numbers, we thus see that the aging of the farming population is less severe in the Netherlands than in Spain. However, speaking of women the picture is a bit more bleak: the EU reports that the NL is one of the member states with the biggest gender gap, as only 6% of farm managers are women.³⁷ Nevertheless, many Dutch farms are managed in partnership ('maatschap'), meaning there are multiple farm managers besides the owner that share in profits. If you include the women involved in these partnerships, you get 30% of female farm managers, which is roughly the same as in Spain and the average in the rest of the EU.³⁸

Rural depopulation in the Netherlands is also less severe than in Spain. The Netherlands is a lot smaller and very densely populated; only a very small share of the land is actually 'rural' (2% of Dutch territory compared to 77% in Spain).³⁹ Rural depopulation does occur, but it is not as massive as in Spain and therefore, also because of the smaller territory, has less serious consequences for rural areas in terms of economic and social vitality, and environmental sustainability.⁴⁰ Representatives from the Dutch ministry and Dutch interest group for young farmers (NAJK) confirmed that connectivity and provision of services in rural areas are generally quite good in the Netherlands. Rural challenges are thus not so much linked to the lack of generational renewal in agriculture, while in Spain this is a very important factor.

The Dutch and Spanish agricultural sectors also differ substantially. Dutch farms are in general larger and more intensive (due to the limited space available), while in Spain agriculture is generally more small-scale and extensive.⁴¹ Where they are similar is that in both countries the majority of farms are family businesses.

35 P. Berkhout, H. van der Meulen, and P. Ramaekers, "Staat van Landbouw, Natuur En Voedsel" (Wageningen: Wageningen University & Research (WUR) & CBS, 2023), 59

36 CBS, "Aandeel Jonge Boeren Neemt Iets Toe," CBS, August 13, 2025, [aandeel jonge boeren neemt iets toe | CBS](#)

37 Eurostat, "Farmers and the Agricultural Labor Force", 3

38 NRC, aan de Brugh, "De Boerin Wordt in Europa Nog Altijd Achtergesteld Bij de Boer"

39 European Commission, "Factsheet of the 2014-2022 Rural Development Programme for the Netherlands" (European Commission, April 2025); European Commission, "Factsheet on 2014-2022 National Framework for Rural Development in Spain" (European Commission, November 2021)

40 To compare, see: Eurostat, "Urban-Rural Europe - Demographic Developments in Rural Regions and Areas," Eurostat, May 2024, [Urban-rural Europe - demographic developments in rural regions and areas](#)

41 EC, "Factsheet Rural Development the Netherlands"; Pedro Álvarez Ondina, "What Does the Latest Agricultural Census Tell Us about Spanish Farms?," CaixaBank Research, October 18, 2023, [what does the latest agricultural census tell us about Spanish farms?](#)

Despite these differences, generational renewal is still a primary concern and policy priority for the Netherlands, for the reasons indicated before. A recent study concluded that the environmental and societal impact caused by the Dutch agricultural sector amounted to 18,6 billion euros, which far exceeds its economic and societal benefits.⁴² Besides that economic links to other operators in the chain and the so called ‘waterbed effects’⁴³ were not taken in account in that study, an important factor in the debate about agriculture is that economic figures are not the only elements that count. Agriculture is not merely an economic sector, but also a strategic one for food security and landscape management. Nevertheless, the debate about agriculture’s high nitrogen emissions and the need for a drastic restructuring and transformation of the sector is arguably one of the most salient topics in Dutch politics and society today. This makes generational renewal a highly relevant topic for the Netherlands.

What policies already exist for generational renewal?

Due to the increasing urgency of the issue, promoting generational renewal has already been an important policy priority for the EU for many decades. The EU’s goal is to attract more new and young people to farming, thereby lowering the average age of farmers and stimulating innovation and the development of sustainable farming practices.⁴⁴ Mainly within the CAP framework, the EU has therefore designed policies that aim to provide young (which includes young female farmers) with the necessary financing, land and knowledge to start and maintain their farming business. Given the inherent connection between agriculture and the rural world, several EU policies for rural development are also part of this framework.

Both Spain and the Netherlands have their own tailored policies on generational renewal within their CAP Strategic Plans, as well as some additional national initiatives and legislation. To give an idea of the current policy context, a short review of these measures—both on EU and national levels—will follow (for more details see Annex 1).

EU Level

Generational renewal in the CAP

As the EU’s main agricultural policy framework, the CAP provides several policy tools to stimulate generational renewal, which is one of its key objectives. These policies aim to make farming a more attractive and viable career option for women and young people and rural areas more attractive places to live. The policies are structured under the CAP’s two main pillars: 1) income support and direct payments, and 2) financing for rural development. They include measures like complementary income support for young farmers, installation aid for farm businesses (set-up grants), investment support, and a cooperation scheme to support farm succession and take-over.

42 Erik van der Walle, “Deloitte: Schade Door Landbouw Miljarden Groter Dan Opbrengsten,” NRC, November 6, 2025, [Deloitte: schade door landbouw miljarden groter dan opbrengsten](#)

43 The waterbed effect in sustainability is a metaphor for a rebound or displacement problem: when you push environmental impact down in one place, it pops up somewhere else instead of disappearing—like pressing on a waterbed.

44 Sajn, “EP Briefing”

Each member state must allocate at least 3% of their direct payments to support for young farmers, but they can decide themselves how to implement this through the various policy tools (outlined in their CAP Strategic Plans). There are strict norms for farmers to be eligible for this support: they must be young (40 or younger), be the holder of their farm, and meet minimum requirements regarding training and skills (specifics determined by member states).⁴⁵

As for women, the latest CAP (2023-2027) mentioned the importance of gender equality in the agricultural sector and expressed a commitment to support the participation of women in farming and rural areas. It required member states to evaluate the position of women in the sector, and address the challenges to their participation and inclusion in their strategic plans. There are no specific CAP policy tools for supporting female farmers (this is left up to individual member states), but some general purposes are stated that CAP funds could be used for in this regard.⁴⁶ However, it is remarkable that women are not specifically mentioned in the briefs on the CAP objectives (neither the brief on generational renewal nor the one on rural areas).⁴⁷

Rural development policies

The EU policies on rural development, forming the second pillar of the CAP, have as their objective to create stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040, and they play an important role in the EU's framework for promoting generational renewal. As agriculture is embedded in rural areas and vice versa, the vitality and sustainability of the agricultural sector and the rural world are interdependent, and both need to be addressed for a sustainable generational renewal.

Member states include their own rural development programs in their CAP Strategic Plans, outlining policies for structural development in rural areas, for example to improve connectivity, infrastructure and provision of basic services, or support rural businesses.⁴⁸ A much used policy is the LEADER program: a community-led local development initiative which supports local actors in designing and implementing projects for their own rural areas. By promoting the participation of young people and women, this contributes to gender equality and addressing issues around generational renewal.⁴⁹

Strategy for Generational Renewal

To support these policy instruments, the European Commission has recently come up with a Strategy for Generational Renewal. This plan aims to double the number of young farmers by 2040, striving for 24%. It requires member states to increase their investments in policies for generational renewal to 6% of their agricultural spending, and to develop national strategies with targeted support measures by 2028. These policies should give young farmers better access to land, finance and skills, improve conditions in rural areas, and support farm succession. The strategy proposes several additional policy instruments for this, such as a financial starterpack for farm businesses, interest rate subsidies and pension schemes.⁵⁰

45 EU CAP Network, "Leading Generational Renewal in Farming"

46 EU CAP Network, "Women in the New CAP"

47 See: [Key policy objectives of the CAP 2023-27](#)

48 European Commission, "The Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas: Key Achievements and Ways Forward" (Brussels: European Commission, 2024) [Rural Vision - European Union](#)

49 EU CAP Network, "LEADER Explained," EU CAP Network, June 21, 2023, [LEADER Explained](#)

50 For more information, see: [Strategy for Generational Renewal of Farming in Agriculture](#)

Spain

CAP Strategic Plan

Spain makes use of multiple CAP policy tools to promote generational renewal, including complementary income support for young farmers and several rural development measures. Income support is implemented on national level, and it gives priority to young farmers who are first-time holders of a farm (supporting new entrants), and women farmers (both owner or co-owner), who get 15% more payment. Notably, the gender component in the CAP 2023-2027 was introduced on Spain's initiative, and in their own Strategic Plan they specifically mention women and the reduction of the gender gap in the sector as an objective in relation to generational renewal.

The rural development policies are implemented by the Autonomic Communities (semi-autonomous regional governments) and tailored to their specific regional context. Here environmentally vulnerable areas are given priority, as the presence of population and stimulation of agricultural activity is especially important in these areas.⁵¹ The most important measures are investment support and installation aid, and additional rural development policies such as the LEADER program or cooperation schemes are employed.

Specific grant amounts and eligibility criteria for support differ per region, but a general rule is that young farmers have to provide a business plan on top of the general EU requirements. Other additional requirements can be a minimum viable farm size and economic output, or investment obligations. To facilitate the coordination of the different support measures, MAPA has made a Strategy for Generational Renewal, detailing the different policies available.⁵²

Ley de Agricultura Familiar

Spain is currently also working on a law for family agriculture (Ley de Agricultura Familiar) which forms part of its commitments on generational renewal. Family agriculture is still the main model of farming in Spain: 80% of farms are family farms⁵³, and in the whole EU this is 93%.⁵⁴ These are farms managed by families, where the majority of the workers are family members of the farm holder. In Spain, these farms are generally of smaller or medium-size and use more extensive and traditional farming practices. They are also deeply rooted in local communities, generating local employment and maintaining the social fabric in rural areas.⁵⁵ However, because of their small size and economic weight, it is increasingly difficult for them to adapt to the modernization of the agricultural sector and compete with bigger farm businesses.

51 MAPA, "Medidas PAC," MAPA, 2020, [Medidas PAC](#); MAPA, "Plan Estratégico de La PAC" (MAPA, 2022)

52 MAPA, "Estrategia de Relevo Generacional" (MAPA, 2024), [ESTRATEGIA DE RELEVO GENERACIONAL](#)

53 UPA, "Debemos Asegurar El Relevo Generacional Para Garantizar El Futuro de La Agricultura Familiar," UPA, July 2, 2025, [Noticias](#)

54 Alberto Navarro Gómez and Patricia Rodríguez Dorribo, "La Agricultura Y Ganadería Familiar Y Los Espacios Protegidos" (European Climate Foundation, 2025), [Informe Agenda 2030-pacto verde-WWF](#)

55 Ibid

Therefore, MAPA has initiated the process of a new law to protect the model of family farming in Spain, by prioritizing these farms in the provision of support. Through its positive effects on the environment, and the job opportunities it creates for women and young people in rural areas, they see it as a strategic tool to decrease rural depopulation and ensure generational renewal. One of the law's specific objectives will be to attract more women and young people to farming, for example by facilitating access to farm ownership, financing and new technologies.⁵⁶

Ley de Titularidad Compartida

Another regulation related to generational renewal—specifically the inclusion of women—is the law of shared ownership of farms (Ley de Titularidad Compartida de Explotaciones Agrarias), passed in 2012. This law changed the regime of farm ownership in Spain. Before farms could only have one owner, practically always the man, while women were only registered as spouses of the primary holder (their husband). They were thus seen as ‘family help’, even if they often equally shared the work and decision-making with their partner. This made women's contribution to agriculture invisible, reducing their professional work to mere extensions of their domestic and caregiving tasks.

To recognize women's labor and contribute to gender equality in the agricultural sector, the Spanish government passed the law of shared ownership, making it possible for couples to register as shared farm owners. This also enabled the equal share of profits, and equal access to benefits and subsidies for the farm. Through the professionalization of women's agricultural activities the law also aimed to promote female participation in agricultural organizations, improve the quality of life in rural areas and help with the settlement of rural populations.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, the law has had limited effect. Currently only 3.6% of women are registered as co-owners of the farm they have with their partner.⁵⁸ According to agricultural organizations and women farmers themselves this is mainly due to the high levels of bureaucracy which makes the application very complex and time-consuming.⁵⁹ Also the fact that it is barely promoted by public authorities is mentioned as a barrier.⁶⁰

Programa Cultiva

Besides this legislation, MAPA also initiated a project to support young and female farmers in acquiring practical education and knowledge. This project, Programa Cultiva, is a formative program which gives young farmers the opportunity to stay for a period of 1-2 weeks at other farms and learn from other farmers how they manage their agricultural business. The program is a collaboration between MAPA and several agricultural entities, which coordinate and organize these ‘stays’.⁶¹

56 MAPA, “Nota de Prensa: El Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca Y Alimentación Inicia La Consulta Pública Previa de La Ley de Agricultura Familiar,” MAPA, March 3, 2025, [consulta pública previa de la ley de agricultura familiar](#)

57 MAPA, “Manual Informativo Sobre Titularidad Compartida de Las Explotaciones Agrarias” (MAPA, 2018) [Información sobre la Titularidad Compartida](#)

58 Matías Helbig, “La Igualdad No Llega al Campo: Solo El 3,6% de Las Mujeres Son Cotitulares de La Axplotación Que Tienen Con Su Pareja,” El País, July 28, 2025, [La igualdad no llega al campo](#)

59 María José Lara, “¿Qué Es La Titularidad Compartida En El Campo Y La Ganadería? Una Fórmula Para Visibilizar a Las Mujeres Rurales,” RTVE.es, December 16, 2023, [¿Qué es la titularidad compartida en el campo y la ganadería?](#); FADEMUR, “Mujeres Rurales: 20 Años Avanzando En Igualdad” (FADEMUR, March 2025)

60 El País, Helbig, “La Igualdad no Llega al Campo”; FADEMUR, “Mujeres Rurales”

61 MAPA, “El Programa CULTIVA,” MAPA, 2025, [El Programa CULTIVA](#)

The Netherlands

CAP strategic plan

The NL generally uses the same policy tools for generational renewal as Spain, namely installation aid, investment support, and cooperation schemes. Furthermore, there is funding for LEADER (and additional area-based projects) and other rural development policies such as vouchers for training, and projects for advice and knowledge exchange. Complementary income support for young farmers is available under the current CAP Strategic Plan but only for applicants who requested it in the previous period. In the government's vision other instruments in the strategic plan are seen as more effective and more specifically targeted like establishment support, cooperation support, and investment support for young farmers. There is however general farmer income support that also young farmers can apply for. Notably there is no extra (financial) support for women farmers in the NL, only general young farmer support. As eligibility requirements, young farmers have to be holders of their farm (meaning they own at least 50% of assets), and additionally, like in Spain, provide a business plan, have minimum agricultural training, and meet a threshold of economic viability (15.000 euros).⁶²

Transition Program for Sustainable Agriculture

Besides the CAP policy tools, the NL has additional policy initiatives to support young farmers. They can for example make use of the transition program for sustainable agriculture (omschakelprogramma duurzame landbouw), which provides support measures for farmers who want to transition to more sustainable production models. These measures include an investment fund where young farmers can get a loan under extra favorable terms, subsidies for creating a business plan, and a credit guarantee.⁶³

Farm succession: knowledge platform & BOR (bedrijfsovername regeling)

To facilitate farm succession and takeover there are two additional measures in place, namely an online knowledge platform and a regulation called the BOR (bedrijfsovername regeling, or business takeover regulation). The knowledge platform (bedrijfsovernamewijzer.nl) provides practical knowledge and tools for young farmers in the process of farm takeover. The initiative is a collaboration between the government and several agricultural organizations and universities/knowledge institutions.⁶⁴ The BOR is a regulation through which entrepreneurs taking over a family business can receive tax benefits, to ease the financial burden of the process. It is available to family businesses in general, but considered especially important in the agricultural sector, since the financial burden of taking over a farm is almost impossible to carry by young farmers alone.⁶⁵

62 See: [Subsidie bedrijfsovername voor jonge landbouwers](#); Ministerie van Landbouw, Visserij, Voedselzekerheid en Natuur (LVVN), "Strategisch GLB-Plan" (LVVN, 2025) [Programmadocument NSP-GLB](#)

63 Ministerie van Landbouw, Visserij, Voedselzekerheid en Natuur, "Omschakelprogramma," Groeien naar Morgen, [Omschakelprogramma | Groeien naar morgen](#); Nationaal Groenfonds, "Investeringsfonds Duurzame Landbouw," Nationaal Groenfonds, [Investeringsfonds Duurzame Landbouw](#)

64 See: [Home | Bedrijfsovernamewijzer](#)

65 Sietse Draaijer, "Geen Bedrijfsovername Zonder Bedrijfsopvolgingsregeling (BOR) – NAJK," NAJK, June 11, 2020, [Geen bedrijfsovername zonder bedrijfsopvolgingsregeling \(BOR\)](#)

Chapter 3: Challenges and barriers to inclusion

After setting the context of an ageing farming population, gender gap and lack of generational renewal in the agricultural sector, we are left with the question of why this is the case. Why are relatively little women and young people incorporated in the agricultural sector? And why do so many of them leave rural areas and migrate to cities?

This has a lot to do with the many challenges young people and women face in rural areas, and in entering and participating in the agricultural sector in particular. These challenges are not similar among this group: (young) men and women are confronted with different barriers to inclusion, related to economic, social and political factors. Many of these challenges are similar across the EU, but there are also some challenges specific to the Spanish context. The following chapter outlines these challenges, based on what was found in the literature.

The rural environment

First of all, the challenges experienced by people living in the Spanish countryside are central to understanding the issue of generational renewal. However, before going into them, it is important to depict what the rural landscape in Spain looks like. Spain is a big country, of roughly 500 km², divided in 17 autonomous regions with very different environmental, climate and institutional contexts. It is one of the EU's most biodiverse countries: while the north and many coastal areas are wet and green, the south deals with severe droughts.⁶⁶ These contrasts shape agricultural systems, from Galicia's strong livestock sector to Andalucía's major fruit and vegetable production. Because autonomous regions have broad political authority, agricultural policies and regulations also vary significantly across Spain's 'rural world'.

Although specific circumstances vary, rural areas throughout Spain face several challenges which negatively affect residents' living conditions and quality of life. Economic perspectives are limited: there are fewer job opportunities and incomes are generally lower in rural areas than in cities.⁶⁷ It is hard to find suitable housing and there is often inadequate or limited infrastructure, both in terms of transport as well as electricity. This results sometimes in limited digital and physical connectivity,⁶⁸ making it complicated to live in rural areas and work in the city or elsewhere. Moreover, rural areas generally lack good provision of basic public services, including education and healthcare.⁶⁹ Sometimes there is not even a supermarket or bank.⁷⁰ Another challenge is the impact of climate change, causing environmental challenges like increased temperatures, droughts, and natural disasters such as wild fires.⁷¹ All these issues could make living in rural areas and working in agriculture challenging and unattractive, incentivizing many people to leave and migrate to cities.

66 OECD, "Environment at a Glance: Spain," OECD, June 30, 2025, [Environment at a Glance: Spain](#)

67 Enrique San-Martín González and Federico Soler-Vaya, "Depopulation Determinants of Small Rural Municipalities in the Valencia Region (Spain)," *Journal of Rural Studies* 110 (2024)

68 UPTA, "España Ante el Desafío de la Despoblación del Mundo Rural" (UPTA, 2018); Oficina de Ciencia y Tecnología del Congreso de los Diputados, "Desarrollo Territorial: Oportunidades Y Desafíos En Los Ámbitos Rurales" (Oficina C, 2025)

69 Josefa García Grande, "La España Rural Abandonada: Desafíos Y Oportunidades" (Alcalá: Universidad de Alcalá, 2023)

70 Oficina C, "Desarrollo Territorial"

71 Ginés Donaire, "Los Desafíos Del Medio Rural Ante El Cambio Climático: Reformular El Turismo, Energía Verde Y Materiales Clásicos En Las Viviendas," *El País*, August 30, 2025, [Los desafíos del medio rural](#)

As the agricultural sector is deeply embedded in rural areas, these low rural living conditions and rural exodus severely affect generational renewal, creating a kind of mutually reinforcing loop. On the one hand, the general obstacles of rural life contribute to the unattractiveness of farming as a profession, leading many (young) people to choose other careers.⁷² On the other hand, agriculture is one of the main sectors generating economic activity and employment in rural areas.⁷³ The decline in farming thus negatively affects rural economies and job opportunities, contributing again to the difficulties and unattractiveness of rural life in general.

Mainly young people, and in particular young women, leave rural areas and migrate to cities to find better work opportunities or continue their education.⁷⁴ This has led to the ageing and masculinization of Spanish rural populations. Especially young women face difficulties, as gender inequality—still more pronounced in rural areas than in cities—leaves them with even fewer opportunities.⁷⁵ For farming to be a viable career option, young people and women need the right conditions to build their lives in rural areas.⁷⁶ Improving rural living standards, and making the environment in which farms are embedded more attractive to women and young people, is thus vital for generational renewal.

Economic barriers

On top of the general rural context, there are also more specific obstacles for women and young people to enter or remain in the agricultural sector which hinder generational renewal. First of all, there are many economic barriers, with access to land often being mentioned as one of the most challenging.

In the EU, because of the low availability of fertile land and high competition for its use, land prices are very high. This creates a significant barrier for young farmers, especially newcomers entering the farming sector.⁷⁷ In Spain this is also the case: because young farmers and new entrants have less resources than established ones, they often cannot afford the land to start a farm unless they inherit it from family members. Consequently, many young farmers do not own land but instead have to rent it against high prices.⁷⁸

Women face unique obstacles because they rarely inherit farm land and face enduring difficulties in obtaining shared ownership. Land has been traditionally inherited by the sons in the family, and this pattern still largely persists on farms, leaving women with less opportunities to own land. This translates in the substantial gap between women and male land owners,⁷⁹ and the fact that only 3.6% of women are co-owners of the farm they have with their partner.⁸⁰

72 EU CAP Network, “Leading Generational Renewal in Farming”

73 García Grande, “La España Rural Abandonada”; European Commission, “CAP Brief: Jobs & Growth in Rural Areas” (European Commission)

74 EU CAP Network, “Leading Generational Renewal in Farming”; UPTA, “España Ante el Desafío de la Despoblación”

75 ClosinGap, “Coste de Oportunidad”; MAPA, “Diagnóstico de la Igualdad de Género en el Medio Rural 2021” (MAPA, 2021)

76 European Commission, “Commission Proposes Measures to Support Generational Renewal in Agriculture to Secure Europe’s Food, Farming and Rural Future,” European Commission, October 1, 2025, [Strategy](#)

77 EU CAP Network, “Leading Generational Renewal in Farming”

78 MAPA: Subdirección General de Dinamización del Medio Rural, “Estudio Sobre El Acceso a La Tierra: Documento Final Del Grupo Focal de Acceso a La Tierra” (MAPA, 2021)

79 Sally Shortall, “Gender Mainstreaming and the Common Agricultural Policy,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 22, no. 5 (2015); Sutherland, “New Generation of Farmers”

80 El País, Helbig, “La Igualdad no Llega al Campo”

Young farmers also have substantial difficulties in accessing financing. Establishing a farm involves high start-up costs, but because young or newly entrants generally lack capital, they are very dependent on funds and loans for this. However, these are not easily accessible for them since they lack credit history. Young farmers are therefore often rejected in loan applications.⁸¹ Women face extra challenges because loans and credit are often only available to farm owners, which is a status the majority of women still lack.⁸²

Another barrier is the general low profitability of traditional agriculture, making the profession unattractive to many young people. On EU level, farming incomes are only 58% of the average income,⁸³ and young farmers generally even earn less than older farmers.⁸⁴ Consequently, young and educated people often prefer other career options.⁸⁵ For women this is even more so, because there is a significant gender pay gap in Spanish rural areas and the agricultural sector, and a high female unemployment rate. Women often do temporary or part-time work, and they occupy lower or more basic positions in agriculture. Their farms are also on average smaller, less profitable and economically more vulnerable. This gives women generally a more precarious economic position in the sector than men.⁸⁶

Besides these economic obstacles, accessing knowledge through adequate training and education is also a challenge for young and new farmers. Running a farm requires a wide variety of skills and know-how, not only in agriculture, but also in the use of technologies, business organization and entrepreneurship. Because of limited opportunities and practical and financial constraints, this is often hard to obtain for young farmers, especially those coming from non-farming families.⁸⁷

81 EU CAP Network, “Leading Generational Renewal in Farming”; MAPA, “Estudio Acceso a la Tierra”

82 Justas Streimikis and Grigorios L. Kyriakopoulos, “Gender Dimension in EU Agricultural Policy,” *Polish Journal of Management Studies* 29, no. 1 (2024); Shortall, “Gender Mainstreaming”

83 Sajn, “EP briefing”, 3

84 EU CAP Network, “Leading Generational Renewal in Farming”

85 Mathias Eistrup et al., “A ‘Young Farmer Problem’? Opportunities and Constraints for Generational Renewal in Farm Management: An Example from Southern Europe,” *Land* 8, no. 70 (2019)

86 ClosinGap, “Coste de Oportunidad”; Streimikis & Kyriakopoulos, “Gender Dimension”; MAPA, “Diagnóstico de Igualdad”; FADEMUR, “Mujeres Rurales”

87 Sajn, “EP Briefing”

Political and institutional barriers

Another hurdle for women's and youth inclusion is the high level of norms and regulations in the agricultural sector, creating administrative burdens. These turn the procedures for purchasing land, taking over a farm or applying for support services into highly complex and time-consuming tasks. This not only makes farming less attractive, but also means the support available to women and youth often does not reach them, rendering the existing policies ineffective in many cases. A general disconnect between these legislative initiatives and the needs and realities of young and female farmers further adds to this problem.⁸⁸ For example the fact that CAP policies only interact with farm holders, while women and young people often don't have this position, is seen as an essential flaw in the legislation.⁸⁹ 60% of young farmers currently enter the sector without help from the CAP, showing the need to improve access to these policies and their ability to respond to young farmer's needs.⁹⁰

There is furthermore a low representation of women and youth in higher level decision-making positions in Spain's agricultural entities. In agricultural cooperatives, young farmers represent only 7.9% of the governing boards, 4.1% of the presidencies, and 7.1% of management positions (data from 2022). The representation of women is also very low, amounting to only 10.1%, 4.8% and 14.3% in these respective positions.⁹¹ This limited inclusion in governing bodies restricts their ability to voice their needs and perspectives, and influence decision-making at a higher level. This problem also extends to the farm level, where management positions are largely held by older men, giving younger and female perspectives less prominence on the ground.

To understand the specific position of women in agriculture, it is essential to consider the sociopolitical context of the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975). During this period women were almost completely removed from public life and relegated to a secondary place in society: the domestic sphere. There was a strict regime of gender roles through several laws severely impeding women's rights. Women were prohibited from working and owning a bank account (unless they had their husband's approval), and they lost their right to vote. Consequently, Spanish women largely disappeared from universities, the labor market and public institutions until not so long ago.⁹² This situation is still reflected in unequal representation, decision-making power and opportunities for women in Spain, and the persistence of gendered stereotypes, also in the agricultural sector.

88 MAPA, "Estudio Acceso a la Tierra"; Consuelo Calafat-Marzal et al., "Ensuring Agriculture's Future: How to Foster Generational Renewal in Semi-Arid Mediterranean Region," *Cities* 168 (2025); Áron József Borda, Balázs Sárvári, and Jeremiás Máté Balogh, "Generation Change in Agriculture: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *Economies* 11, no. 129 (2023); Jaime Rodríguez, "Ayudas Que Llegan Tarde, Sobrecarga Burocrática... Tres Jóvenes Del Campo Explican Su Complicado Futuro," *Diario AyE*, October 9, 2025, [El relevo generacional](#)

89 Shortall, "Gender Mainstreaming"

90 Alfredo López, "Catálogo de Medidas Para El Relevo Generacional En El Agro," *Agronegocios*, July 4, 2024, [Catálogo de medidas para el relevo generacional en el agro](#)

91 Cooperativas Agro-Alimentarias de España, "Informe 2023" (Cooperativas Agro-Alimentarias de España, 2023), 42-45

92 Berkley Center, "Familia Y Franquismo: The Social Evolution of the Spanish Woman," Georgetown University, 2017, [Familia y Franquismo](#); FADEMUR, "Mujeres Rurales"; El País, Helbig, "La Igualdad no Llega al Campo"

Cultural and social barriers

Lastly, there are cultural and social beliefs that play a role in attracting women and young people to agriculture. In general, farming is not viewed as a prestigious profession in Spanish society. It is a very demanding job, requiring a high physical and personal commitment, and it comes with a lot of uncertainties. Especially young people often view it as heavy work, and prefer a more modern and urban lifestyle. But also many farmers themselves have encouraged their children to find a job in urban areas, believing it will give them more security and better opportunities.⁹³ This lack of social appreciation fueled discontent among farmers, adding to frustrations over low prices and overregulation, and sparked a wave of protests around Europe.⁹⁴ In Spain, for example, the campaign “si yo no produzco, tú no comes” (if I don’t produce, you don’t eat) was launched to push back against this narrative and underline the essential role farmers play in feeding the population.⁹⁵

Women furthermore face particular prejudice and bias in rural areas and as farmers. Ideas about traditional gender roles, with the woman as the main caretaker of the household and children, are still very present in rural societies. Agriculture is a very male-dominated sector and farming is generally seen as a men’s job. Consequently, women are not viewed to be capable of or destined to be a farmer, and female farmers are often underestimated and not taken seriously.⁹⁶ The low presence and visibility of female farmers reinforces this. Because women don’t see themselves represented, they are discouraged to join the sector because they don’t see agriculture as a possible career path. As Shortall (2015) puts it: “the fact that the public domain of farming is almost entirely male takes on a cultural power of its own, making it even more difficult for women to participate”.⁹⁷

The strong belief in traditional gender roles also translates in the fact that women carry out the bulk of family care and household tasks. In Spain, rural women spend on average 55.4% more time on family care than men (data from 2021),⁹⁸ making it very difficult for them to combine family life with farming. While this is a general trend (also in urban areas and other sectors of the economy), the demanding nature of farm work and scarce availability of care services for children and elderly in rural areas make this extra challenging for female farmers. Conciliation, or work-life balance, is thus also a significant barrier to the inclusion of women.

These stereotypes and beliefs underpin the general gender inequality in the rural world and the before-mentioned gendered barriers to participation in agriculture, as they create a situation where in general, women have less ownership of and access to resources and decision-making power than men.⁹⁹

93 Borda et al., “Generation Change in Agriculture”; Cooperativas Agro-Alimentarias de España, “Elecciones al Parlamento Europeo 2024: Documento de Cooperativas Agro-Alimentarias de España” (Cooperativas Agro-Alimentarias de España, 2024)

94 Jeroen Candel, “Echoes of Discontent: Understanding the European Farmers’ Protests,” Agricultural and Rural Convention, January 29, 2024, [Echoes of Discontent: Understanding the European Farmers’ Protests](#)

95 See: [Si yo no produzco tú no comes](#)

96 Maldita.es, “El Campo Sigue Siendo Cosa de Hombres?”; FADEMUR, “Mujeres Rurales”

97 Shortall, “Gender Mainstreaming”, 722

98 MAPA, “Diagnostico de Igualdad en el Medio Rural”

99 ClosinGap, “Coste de Oportunidad”; Oficina C, “Desarrollo Territorial”

Civil society initiatives

In Spain there are many civil society initiatives to advance the inclusion of women and young farmers, and alleviate the difficulties they encounter in the agricultural sector and rural areas. These initiatives come from different organizations, such as agricultural entities, unions and interest groups, and private institutions like companies and rural banks. These initiatives mainly aim to create a platform for women and young farmers to voice their needs, make their work visible, and provide support.

One of the most important agricultural entities, also active on this topic, is the Cooperativas Agroalimentarias de España, the overarching organization for agricultural cooperatives in Spain. They have a separate working group on young farmers, and a sub-organization for women farmers in cooperatives (AMCAE: Asociación de Mujeres de Cooperativas Agroalimentarias de España). Through these two separate fora they seek to advance the position of young people and women in the cooperatives, by organizing events, giving training courses and providing a platform to address concerns and exchange experiences.¹⁰⁰

Interest groups and farmers unions in Spain working on this topic are UPA, COAG, and ASAJA. UPA (Unión de Pequeños Agricultores y Ganaderos) is an agricultural union defending the interests of professional (livestock) farmers, specifically those of medium/small-sized family farms, on national and European level. Besides projects for young farmers (they e.g. participate in the Programa Cultiva), they also have a sub-organization focused on rural women (FADEMUR: Federación de Asociaciones de Mujeres Rurales). This is one of the most prominent organizations for women in agriculture, and it provides training and organizes events to advance gender equality in Spain's rural areas.

COAG (Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos), another farmers advocacy organization, is part of the agricultural advisory group for the Spanish government. They have a separate section on youth (Juventudes Agrarias), through which they mainly provide union training to young farmers, and they also have projects on women. ASAJA (Asociación Agraria Jóvenes Agricultores) is an advocacy organization for young farmers, providing professional advice and training. Through ASAJA Mujeres they also defend the interests of female farmers.

Besides agricultural organizations, there are also several private initiatives. Banks, like Cajamar and Caixabank, have set up projects and carried out studies on the topic of gender inequality in the rural world and the position of young farmers, and provide specific financial support. Other initiatives are for example Premios MujerAGRO, an award show for female farmers to promote and support their enterprises,¹⁰¹ and the Rural Women Congress (Congreso de la Mujer Rural), another event to promote female entrepreneurship in rural areas.¹⁰²

100 See: [Jóvenes - Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias](#) ; [Igualdad - Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias](#)

101 See: [#mujerAGRO - MujerAGRO – La igualdad es una tarea de tod@s](#)

102 See: [Congresos de la Mujer Rural](#)

In the NL, there are also several organizations active on this topic. One prominent organization is NAIJK (Nederlands Agrarisch Jongeren Kontakt), the main interest group for young farmers. Besides advocating for young farmers' interests in government, they also have several projects to support them, for example by bringing young farmers without land to inherit into contact with retiring farmers looking for a successor ('farmer searches farmer' program).¹⁰³ LTO Nederland is also an interest group for farmers which has projects on for example entrepreneurship for women and young farmers, and mental health. One notable project is Taboer, a contact point that farmers can turn to if they struggle with mental health issues, through which they also organize activities for awareness creating.¹⁰⁴ A more regional initiative is *Boeren met Lef*¹⁰⁵ (Farming with Courage) formed by a group of agricultural companies. One of them is the Rabobank who by their cooperative structure and their position as largest agricultural financier supports all kinds of initiatives on national and local level

Another relevant organization is Eye for Nature, a consultancy organization focused on finding nature-based solutions to societal challenges, mainly in the agricultural sector. They also focus on the inclusion of young farmers, assisting them in farm take-over and working to increase their influence in institutions and policy processes. They do this through coaching programs, advocacy and consulting with companies, individuals and government entities.¹⁰⁶

103 See: [Projecten – NAIJK](#)

104 See: [TABOER - voor de mens achter de ondernemer - LTO](#)

105 See: [Home | Boeren met LEF](#)

106 See: [Eye for nature](#)

Chapter 4: Main findings from field research

Besides a desk and literature research, providing the contextual framework, a field research was carried out to discover how young and female farmers experience challenges in practice, and what helps them to deal with them. In other words, to further find answers to the central questions of this report: what are the main barriers to youth & women inclusion in Spanish agriculture, and what initiatives and policies are useful to address these challenges? And how do these challenges compare and relate to the Dutch and wider European context?

These questions were addressed through 14 interviews, conducted with young and female farmers, people from relevant framework organizations from both the NL and Spain, and government officials.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, I attended several relevant events, such as fairs and conferences of the Rural Women Congress. With our LAN team we participated in one of the conferences in Belorado, Burgos and co-organized a Rural Women Congress in Lugo, Galicia.¹⁰⁸ During these events (and their preparation), I had many conversations and made observations which added to the interview findings and helped me understand and contextualize them. The main findings from this field research are detailed below.

Note: regional learning

The field research mainly focused on the regions Castilla y León and Galicia. As mentioned before, Spain is very big and regionally diverse, so it was necessary to limit the scope of the research to specific areas. Castilla y León and Galicia were chosen because both these regions' rural areas experience severe depopulation, making the topic of generational renewal very salient. Also, the Madrid LAN office and its contacts were already active here, among others because of cooperation during the summer 2025 wildfires, which facilitated the possibility for field research in these areas. All interviewed farmers were based in these regions, with the exception of two participants from neighboring areas (Castilla-La Mancha and Aragón).

Main challenges for young & female farmers

First of all, the field research has shown that there is not one barrier that sticks out above the others: all challenges form a complex interplay of factors and dynamics that together complicate the incorporation of young and female farmers. These different factors cannot be isolated, but instead all interact and mutually reinforce each other. All barriers are thus equally important, and there is no hierarchy. Different farmers experience different things to be the most challenging in their projects and work, dependent on their specific circumstances, but all before-mentioned barriers came across in one way or another in the conversations I had.

¹⁰⁷ Relevant organizations were introduced in Chapter 3 (see p. 17). To review which organizations I conducted interviews with, see the methodology section in Annex 2.

¹⁰⁸ For more information, see the methodology section in Annex 2.

Accordingly, I have divided my findings on the barriers to generational renewal into the following categories: economic barriers, rural environment, knowledge and skills, social discredit, legislation, decision-making, and gender inequality (which comes back as extra obstacles for women throughout the different categories). All in their own right, these challenges create obstacles to the incorporation and inclusion of young and female farmers, by reducing the sector's attractiveness or limiting young people and women's ability to participate (or both). They thus form a web of interconnected factors together creating the issue of generational renewal in agriculture (see figure 2).



Figure 2: Map of challenges for the inclusion of young and female farmers (source: own animation)

Economic barriers

In economic sense, the impossibility of starting a farm without family inheritance—because of the huge start-up costs for land and machinery—was stressed by many. This also becomes clear from the fact that the farmers I spoke with all inherited or worked on the farm of their parents. Many indicated that high investments coupled with volatile food prices and low profitability of farming are demotivating for young people, and make it financially almost impossible (especially for new entrants) to build a viable farming business without inheritance or economic support. As mentioned, **access to land** is also a big complicating factor in this. Farmers therefore generally view the financial support measures (from the CAP) as absolutely essential for the incorporation of young farmers.

Knowledge and skills

The topic of education and training also came up often, and it was emphasized as something very important. However, obtaining education in itself does not really seem to be the issue. All farmers I interviewed have very high levels of education: they all have university degrees (in different sectors), and some also did additional studies or training in agriculture. This shows that these young and female farmers are very well prepared, which is also supported by statistical data showing young farmers are generally higher educated than older ones.¹⁰⁹ What is mainly difficult for young and new farmers is getting access to all the necessary knowledge and skills for running a farm, both technical, administrative and business-related. It is impossible to have degrees in all the necessary fields, and above all there are practical skills that are not taught in school, and are very hard to obtain if you can't learn them from family. Therefore, advisory services and training courses (from agricultural organizations) are considered to be very important, but also having a **network** of people in the vicinity that can teach you unconventional and practical know-how. That is something that the literature does not really stress, but came out of the interviews and events: the importance of traditional knowledge and practices, and the necessity of maintaining **communities** in rural areas (neighbors, family) to bring this knowledge across.

For example, one livestock farmer stressed the importance of the knowledge she acquired from her neighbors when taking over the farm of her deceased father. As she had no previous agricultural training or experience and couldn't rely on her parents, they taught her many practical skills, such as how to tell whether her cows were sick by feeling the back of their ears. Because she had to learn everything from zero, she considered this support from her neighbors as absolutely essential.

Besides this type of specific knowledge, some organizational representatives also mentioned that young farmers often lack the **soft skills** needed for farm take-over, like the social skills to manage family relations during the process or the ability to shape their own **vision** for how they want to run and develop their farm. They said these soft skills are not valued enough, and therefore not offered in schools or training courses, while they are actually very important to make young farmers' projects viable and durable.

109 Sajn, "EP Briefing", 2; Juventudes Agrarias COAG, "Agro-Millennials. Perfil de Los Nuevos Agricultores/as Y Ganaderos/as Del Siglo XXI" (COAG, 2022)

Another obstacle related to knowledge and education mentioned during the interviews and events was the lack of **digital tools** in rural areas. Because not everybody has access to IT hardware with good internet connection in these regions, it is hard for many farmers to access training courses, which are largely offered online. The digitalization of rural areas is therefore seen as a vital tool for improving generational renewal.

Rural environment

In terms of rural challenges, isolation and a lack of community feeling was found to be a significant barrier as it negatively affects the social wellbeing of farmers and rural populations. **Social wellbeing** involves the extent to which people have positive and meaningful relationships, and a sense of belonging in a community.¹¹⁰ Interestingly, this is one of the challenges that does not feature as much in the literature and is not emphasized, but was mentioned very often by the farmers and organizations I interviewed. The literature speaks a lot about rural challenges, mainly the lack of services and infrastructure, and these were also confirmed by farmers to complicate their life and work. However, the social side of rural life is generally overlooked, while this is actually a very important aspect. The fact that so few people live in these rural areas and there is little possibility for social activities causes loneliness among farmers and rural populations. These Spanish rural municipalities have a very low population density, at 17.8 inhabitants per km² compared to 96.3 per km² nationally.¹¹¹ There is also often not a lot of entertainment (bars, cinemas, playgrounds etc.) or community facilities in isolated rural towns, which not only makes life there less attractive but adds to the a lack of community feeling and social isolation.

As the interviews with Dutch stakeholders confirmed, this is not really an issue in the NL, as population density is much higher, and rural areas are thus not as depopulated and isolated as in Spain. This is a very big difference between the Dutch and Spanish contexts.

Social wellbeing and a lack of community is an obstacle for the incorporation of young and female farmers, who stress it is important to feel supported in the difficult process of taking over a farm and have people to reach out to for help and advice. **Community** is thus important for access to knowledge and practical support, but it is also essential for farmers to be able to live a decent life, including fun activities for them and their children, and neighbors to chat to. These things might seem trivial or less relevant to generational renewal, but I found they are actually a crucial factor. As one of the farmers said: “we are not only here to work, we are also here to live”¹¹², and without the facilities to live a decent and good life with their families, they will not make the decision to establish their homes and farms in these places.

110 Daniela Ramirez-Duran, “What Is Social Wellbeing? 12 Activities for Positive Relationships,” *Positive Psychology*, May 2, 2021, [What Is Social Wellbeing?](#)

111 MAPA, “Informe Anual de Indicadores 2024: Resumen Medio Rural, Población Y Empleo” (MAPA, 2025), 1

112 Interview with male farmer from town close to Valladolid

This brings me to the next barrier, which is **conciliation**. While the literature only discusses this in relation to women, I would argue based on the field research it goes a bit further than this, covering the general difficulty of reconciling farming as a profession with a personal and family life. The farmers I spoke to affirmed work-life balance in isolated rural areas can be challenging, because everything takes more time and effort: going to the supermarket, doctor, or school. It is true that for women this is extra difficult, mainly when it comes to the lack of services for child and elderly care, because of the extra load they carry in the household (as mentioned, they generally dedicate 55.4% more time to this than men). However, some female farmers said they don't experience conciliation as extra challenging, and are actually very content with their work-life balance.

Another barrier in relation to rural life and depopulation is the difficulty for farmers to access **labor**. Because of the low accessibility of (especially isolated) rural areas, and the few people that live or want to live there, farmers have trouble finding workers for their business. This obstacle is not often discussed in the literature on generational renewal, but it came up in several interviews and especially during the events I visited as something hindering the incorporation of young and female farmers. Mainly women seem to struggle with this, because they are sometimes not accepted or taken seriously as employers. We did record one positive case, of one farmer in the North of Spain who took this challenge so seriously that she decided to create an online platform to advertise vacancies and housing. The project has been picked up by the regional government.

Decision-making

In terms of decision-making on farms, it was often mentioned that it can be difficult for young farmers to bring new ideas or change the model of farm management or production when they take over the farm from their parents. They often leave the farm to go studying, and come back with new insights and ideas that are different from how their parents have always run the farm. This can cause tension or lead to difficult situations, as parents often have a lot of pride in what they build and sometimes find it hard to accept or feel criticized when their children want to change things. In this way, farm take-over can be emotionally tough and put a strain on **family relations**, which is something that is not examined or underlined so much in the literature (here the focus is more on the financial side). As mentioned, several stakeholders see that young farmers often miss the skills to deal with this, and therefore organizations like NAJK, LTO Nederland and Eye for Nature do projects specifically focused on this '**soft side**' of **farm take-over**. Also educational curricula and service providers like financiers pay nowadays more attention to this. However, not all farmers I spoke to experienced issues with this; some have changed or introduced new things together with their parents without any conflict or difficulty.

In terms of **representation** and influence in **decision-making** at higher (institutional) levels and in policy processes, experiences from farmers differed. Some feel included, and have for example participated in consultations with the Spanish ministry, while others do not feel heard or represented at this level. Almost all farmers I spoke with are active members in agricultural organizations, but as FADEMUR stressed, it is mainly the representation at the highest levels (in the directive boards etc.) that is still lacking. They said this is especially difficult for women, because it is hard to combine these jobs (which many do besides running their own farm) with their disproportionate responsibilities in the household, and because they are often not elected by the still very male dominated committees.

Also for young farmers representation at higher decision-making level is still difficult. Several stakeholders mentioned that young farmers are now almost always invited to the table (at events, congresses, policy processes), so that is not the issue anymore, but they do not feel like their demands

are taken seriously or acted upon afterwards. In short: they can participate, but not actually make decisions. Therefore, stakeholders stressed the need to include young farmers in boards and directives so they can meaningfully influence decision-making.

However, as the Eye for Nature representative pointed out, it is also essential to include the most powerful stakeholders—like agro industries and companies—in decision-making processes on generational renewal. Because these currently have the most influence, they are the ones that will have to make space for the perspective of new generations. However, according to him, this does not happen enough currently, and is a short-coming of institutional efforts to stimulate generational renewal.

Social discredit

One of the barriers that was mentioned by roughly all interviewees is the negative image of agriculture that exists in wider society. According to them, the sector itself has often reinforced this idea by mainly focusing on all the challenges farmers face without also highlighting the positive aspects, and by encouraging their own children to leave the countryside and look for another profession. Some of the farmers I spoke to experience this **social discredit** themselves, but they do say this is changing now and happens less than before. It is true that if you look at all the challenges compiled above, you get the idea that being a farmer is only very rough and complicated, which is also the idea I got after doing my desk research. However, when you speak with farmers you discover that they are actually very passionate and happy with their jobs, and they would not prefer to do anything else.

The people I interviewed mentioned there is often a **prejudice** that farmers only do the job because they have no other options or don't know anything else, but this is far from the truth. They are all highly educated, and most did other jobs before becoming a farmer, but they actively chose to return to the countryside and take over their parents' farm because they either didn't want the family business to disappear, preferred life in rural areas over the city or fell in love with the profession. They all affirm it can be demanding, but they also stress a lot has changed and improved with the use of technology, making farming a lot less physically demanding and easier to combine with family and personal life than before. The same goes for rural life: they admit it can be challenging, but also say there are a lot of positive sides to it, and for most of them these advantages outweigh the disadvantages. For example, some experience more calm and less stress, and enjoy being in closer connection with nature. This is something that the literature does not show very well, as it mainly focuses on the difficult aspects.

So, even though farmers think it is important to acknowledge the challenges they experience, they all emphasize the need to disseminate a more positive picture about what it is like to be a farmer, especially to younger generations and people outside of the rural context, so they will view it as a viable career option. Also for women this is important, to show that while farming may present specific challenges for them, it can also be rewarding and they are equally capable of doing it. Some proposed to do this for example by organizing talks in schools, or sharing stories through social media. They call this '**dignifying the profession**': creating a more positive discourse around agriculture, also focusing on its crucial role for food production. This is seen as an absolute key factor to attract more young and new people to the sector.

Prejudice and discrimination against women

Regarding **prejudice** and **bias** against women, all female farmers I spoke to confirmed that they deal with sexist remarks and behavior towards them. They mentioned several examples of people asking for

their father or husband, and state these comments are patronizing and assume they are not capable to be in charge. For some it even went as far as receiving grave insults and having to deal with aggressive behavior. They all said the agricultural and livestock sector are very ‘machista’ and generally ‘a men’s world’, and that some men have trouble with women voicing their opinions, making decisions or talking back at them. Several organizational representatives also pointed to the general persistence of **gender roles** in rural areas, even though they say that these ideas are slowly changing.

Notably, none of the women I interviewed started about these prejudices themselves when I asked them about the barriers they experience, and most of them said they are not too bothered by them. Even though it is sometimes emotionally hard to deal with them, they almost all say they do not pay any attention to it and it has never stopped them from doing their work. They told me they only know female farmers who are strong and stubborn, because otherwise you will not be able to persist in the sector. It might thus be that more timid or sensitive women are discouraged from becoming a farmer because of these prejudices, but for the women I spoke to this was not the case at least. Some even mentioned they use these beliefs to their advantage, for example the fact that people assume you know less or can’t do it alone also means they help you more easily.

Legislation: The (in)effectiveness of current policies

As the literature suggests, the field research showed that there are also many barriers related to **legislation** and policies. Perspectives on the effectiveness of current policies are diverse: some farmers view them as effective, some not at all. Generally the CAP economic support and direct payments are thought to be very helpful and highly essential for young farmers, but many also see limitations and substantial room for improvement. In short, they all agreed current policies form a barrier to the incorporation of young and female farmers in at least some kind of way.

Firstly, **administrative burden** and **bureaucracy** was mentioned by almost all as a significant obstacle. The application process (e.g. for CAP support) is experienced as very time-consuming: first to find and understand the policies available, then to apply with all the information and paperwork requested, and then the long waiting time for a decision. Farmers therefore often need a technical adviser or other support to navigate the application process. Taken together, these factors are seen as demotivating and restricting. Someone also mentioned this strict application process puts the focus too much on accountability beforehand, while there is little follow-up to see if the support actually contributed to its intended goals.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that available support measures are not sufficiently **disseminated** and incentivized by public authorities. This was mainly mentioned by organizations, who said this creates the situation in which many farmers are not aware of the support they are eligible for and a lot of them incorporate without any help. Farmers reported mixed experiences: some were unaware that certain policies even existed, and many said they generally have to seek out information themselves or rely on agricultural unions, rather than receiving information directly from the government. Some livestock farmers from Galicia, however, told me they were informed at the local government when they went to do the paperwork for their farm. Generally it seems that experiences differ because regional governments in Spain have a big role in how measures are implemented and promoted. It also seems that those farmers closer to authorities or with more experience in working with governments have less difficulty finding and accessing policies.

This issue was also raised in relation to the Spanish **law of shared ownership** (*titularidad compartida*),

mainly by FADEMUR and AMCAE. They view the law as a valuable measure for the inclusion of women, but according to FADEMUR it has not been promoted enough by the government and therefore has had limited effect in giving women more ownership of farms and revenue. Moreover, both FADEMUR and AMCAE believe that there has been insufficient economic incentive for women to apply and therefore argue that the law should include more financial benefits. Farms with shared ownership can now receive an annual bonus of up to €1,500, which they consider helpful, but they believe stronger incentives are still needed. The AMCAE representative also said the law's limited success is due to the reluctance of some male farmers to give up their privileges and share profits with their spouses.

It seems that in the NL this issue is less prominent, as Dutch stakeholders (e.g. from the ministry) see that many young farmers make a claim on available policies and feel policies are generally effective in their outreach. This is probably because the Netherlands is a lot smaller than Spain and more densely populated, which makes it easier to implement policies and reach beneficiaries.

Another limitation of current policies identified in the interviews is that they are often **incompatible with realities in rural areas** and the agricultural sector, particularly regarding the **norms and criteria** that they set. The fact that you need a minimum level of investments and economic volume to access support—which is almost impossible to have for any young or new farmer—was the most commonly cited barrier. According to one interviewee, this tying of support to the means of production also creates the wrong incentive. Other incompatibilities mentioned were that national and European policies frequently apply different environmental and financial requirements that do not align and may even be contradictory, and that policy criteria tend to treat all sectors and products uniformly, failing to account for their specific characteristics. Also, the age limit of 40 was questioned by some, since older new entrants willing to take over farms are now excluded from extra support.

Furthermore, policies are perceived to be incompatible in their **focus**. One livestock farmer reported that support measures focus too much on modernization and innovation (like investment support for buying machinery and technology), and too little on helping young farmers acquire the basic necessities for starting a farm. She said it makes no sense that there is so much money available to buy a new tractor, but no one to help you buy animals or land. Several interviewees also noted that policies focus too much on financial barriers, while it is not sufficiently combined with measures for rural development, especially the social and cultural aspects. According to them, there should be more effort in making life in rural areas more accessible and fun, through more community initiatives and better public services. One farmer even thought that incentivizing young farmers through economic support is not effective or sustainable, because many then leave when payments stop after 5 years and things become difficult. He instead suggested to put more effort in making rural life more attractive and promoting the sector, so young people join because they want to and not just because they get money for it.¹¹³

113 Interview with male farmer from town close to Valladolid

On top of this, support measures do not distinguish between professional farmers and large-scale (international) companies, meaning the latter are often favored by current policies over young farmers, as they have more economic volume and resources. This was mentioned by several interviewees, both from Spain and the NL, who said that policies should make a distinction between the kind of farmers and businesses that they benefit. As the representative from COAG put it: “generational renewal is not only about maintaining those who feed us, but also about considering who we want to feed us”.¹¹⁴ According to her and several others, professional farmers¹¹⁵ with medium-size (family) farms should get priority in the allocation of support, which would both help in settling population in rural areas and in improving their environmental sustainability.¹¹⁶ Also because of the services they provide for the rest of society (wildfire prevention, maintaining rural areas) farmers in isolated and depopulated areas should get additional benefits or payments.

Overall, I found that all these incompatibilities mean that current policies do not adequately respond to the needs of young and female farmers, and often fail to make them the primary beneficiaries of support.

Furthermore with regard to women, I observed that their role—and the importance of their inclusion for generational renewal—is often overlooked in policy frameworks, particularly at the Dutch national and European level. Here the focus is primarily on the incorporation of young farmers, and women are mentioned but not really addressed in their own right. I feel this might be because youth inclusion is easier to explain, while the link between women’s inclusion and generational renewal is more indirect and therefore often not immediately understood, which was also mentioned by a representative from the Dutch ministry. She also said it’s politically difficult (at least in the NL) to bring the topic under the attention because it challenges the status quo and therefore clashes with some people’s interests.

As she told me, the inclusion of women is not a separate policy topic in the NL, and hardly addressed at the ministry of agriculture. Therefore she started a working group on her own initiative, but feels it is often met with resistance at the ministry and therefore tries to keep it low-profile. In contrast, in Spain, women inclusion is a very clear separate policy priority, and there is much more specific effort on this. Notably, Spain is one of the few EU member states that specifically targets female farmers in CAP support measures¹¹⁷ and they have a separate policy unit on rural women at MAPA. This is thus a very big difference between the Spanish and Dutch policy context.

Nevertheless, I have noticed in general that generational renewal, and the inclusion of both young and female farmers, is not the most urgent policy priority for public institutions. There seem to be more pressing matters that are prioritized over this issue, perhaps because its wider impacts will only be felt in the future. Partly for this reason, I feel it was sometimes hard to get into contact with organizations, and especially government stakeholders, for interviews.

114 Interview COAG representative, who is also a female farmer in Aragón

115 With this, they mean people that actually have farming as their profession, as opposed to land owners that are not working on the land themselves but extract output and resources, and have no connection to the local territory and community.

116 If there are more smaller and medium-size farms, there are more families and people living in and taking care of the territory. Also, these farms use generally more extensive agricultural methods which are better for the environment.

117 EU CAP Network, “Assessment of Generational Renewal Strategies across EU Member States” (European Union, 2025), 8

In summary, policies are generally perceived to be very important, but only partly effective in their current design. Even though the available support and initiatives are appreciated, many still view them as insufficient and ill-suited to farmers' needs and realities, and think they should be adjusted and improved. The identified aspects for improvement are: alleviating the administrative burden, increasing **public dissemination** of policies, setting less strict and more realistic criteria, and making policies better suited to rural realities, with the right focus on the local context.

Initiatives and projects

Besides setting out all the barriers to generational renewal, the field research has focused on identifying the initiatives and projects that help women and young people with these challenges, and seek to advance their inclusion in the agricultural sector. Next to the interviews and events I visited, the experience of co-organizing the Rural Women Congress has also provided more insights into this. All these observations have contributed to a better understanding of what initiatives and projects are out there, which ones farmers and organizations consider to be helpful and effective, and in what ways they could be improved.

Advice and coaching

First of all, as mentioned, **advisory support** (such as that provided by COAG and ASAJA) is experienced by many farmers as essential and helpful, both for navigating institutional processes as well as acquiring knowledge and information. At ASAJA they provide technical and legal advice, and also help young farmers making business plans and plans for farm improvement. One of the farmers I interviewed is active in their organization in Valladolid, and had a very positive experience with their services. Also at the Cooperativas they give advisory support, and act as mentors for young farmers in the first years of incorporation.

At Eye for Nature they provide similar support. They have leadership programs for young farmers through which they coach them in the soft aspects of farm take-over, like how to participate in decision-making and design a vision for your farm business. Besides **coaching** for young farmers themselves, they also do this kind of programs with governments and farm businesses to create awareness on how they can make space for new generations to participate in decision-making.

Education and training

Furthermore, educational initiatives and **training courses** are considered very important to access knowledge and skills. For example, several female farmers had participated in the Ruraltivity program from FADEMUR, through which they provide basic training courses and **workshops** in different areas such as female entrepreneurship, ecological agriculture or drone pilot courses. They are generally considered useful, but also a bit basic. Another limitation is that most courses are offered online, which makes them difficult to access for many people in rural areas that still don't have a computer or live in isolated regions with poor internet connection. One farmer therefore argued that providing **digital tools** in rural areas should be the first priority, to make sure the courses can be accessed by everyone who needs them.

Other initiatives to facilitate access to knowledge are **formative exchange programs**, such as the Programa Cultiva that was already mentioned before. Several of my interviewees had participated in this program, or knew others that had, and experienced it as a very useful way to learn new skills and be able to discuss shared struggles. It was also helpful for changing their perspective and getting new ideas on how to run their farm business.

Regarding the social discredit of the agricultural sector, COAG has an initiative called the maleta pedagógica (pedagogical suitcase). This is a package of learning materials teachers can use in class to teach kids and adolescents about agriculture and farming. Furthermore, they give talks to children and youth at schools and other events to create more awareness about the sector. They view this as a very important project to change stigmas and improve the sector's societal image.

In terms of female representation and influence in decision-making, FADEMUR and the Cooperativas/AMCAE also give training and workshops on the topic of equality and co-responsibility. AMCAE for example organizes trainings for governing boards on the importance of women inclusion, and do presentations for female members to create awareness about the possibility they have to put themselves up for election in these high-level decision-making organs. They also do this kind of **awareness training** for young people in the Cooperativas. The AMCAE representative stressed the importance of role models and **representation**, so that women and young people feel they are also capable of participating in decision-making. Both FADEMUR and AMCAE also emphasized the importance of changing social beliefs about women and their role in society, especially in rural areas and the agricultural sector. Even though it is hard to involve men in these initiatives, and underrepresentation and gender roles still persist, they do feel like these trainings are useful and that the situation has already improved a lot and is slowly changing.

Advocacy and policy deliberation

Organizations like COAG, ASAJA, Cooperativas Agroalimentarias, and AMCAE are also active in several political fora (on regional, national and European level) to do **lobbying** and defend the interests of (young and female) farmers. They are all involved and consulted by the government during the elaboration of new policies, FADEMUR was for example very active in pushing for the law of shared ownership. NAJK and Eye for Nature are involved in this kind of advocacy and policy deliberation in the NL. However, although they are included in the process, and this enables them to raise concerns and demands from the rural context, the organizational representatives I talked to often feel they cannot really influence policy-making. According to some this is because their interests and those of the government often do not align, which they partly attribute to the power of big-industry lobbies in the government.

Events

Mainly, I found that besides training and advisory support, some of the initiatives most appreciated by farmers are those focused on **building community** and creating spaces for interaction. Many farmers stressed the importance of being able to connect with people, talk about shared experiences and challenges, and exchange ideas and strategies about how to deal with them. This is largely facilitated through different kinds of **events** on women and youth inclusion, such as fairs, congresses, workshops, presentations etc. All of the organizations I interviewed organize these kinds of events, and all farmers I spoke with attend at least some of them and experience them to be very helpful. Some also indicated that local business and entrepreneurial networks are valuable for facilitating this kind of support.

Besides fostering community and making young and female farmers feel less alone in their struggles, events are also considered important for creating a platform for **knowledge exchange** and to make the issues of women and young people in the sector more visible to wider society. They furthermore facilitate **collaboration**, which is very helpful to farmers with a starting business. Also, especially in the case of women, the importance of representation was mentioned. Many events give female farmers a platform to tell their story and promote their projects, which can make other women feel capable of

undertaking a similar career path. This kind of domino effect of **representation** and **visibility** of women was also mentioned by the representative of Cooperativas/AMCAE in relation to increasing women's inclusion in directive bodies.

However, events also have their short-comings and difficulties. From our own experience, and also that of different organizations I spoke with, it is very hard to get people involved, especially when it comes to organizing events in depopulated and isolated rural areas. In general, farmers are very busy and physically bound to their farms, which makes it hard to get them to events. One of the farmers I interviewed acknowledged this, saying farming is generally a solitary profession, and people don't tend to leave their territory unless they really need to. Furthermore, it is often hard to reach people in rural areas because not everybody has social media, while this is the biggest medium through which events are promoted. Consequently, often a lot of the people that the events are actually meant for are not there, which then of course limits their effect. The same farmer therefore suggested to, besides promotion online and on social media, also contact local authorities such as mayors, to reach the local population in rural areas. We also noticed with our own event, that it was absolutely essential that we had a contact in the area to get local people involved.

I found it is especially complicated to get women involved and participating in events. We noticed that events on women inclusion are still quite male dominated, especially in terms of the people that organize and lead them. This links back to the importance of representation, as it seems to create an environment in which women often do not feel capable or comfortable to speak or present their projects, and men end up doing this on women's behalf and take the 'spotlight' while women remain in the background. The more this happens, the less other women will feel confident enough to participate, and this becomes kind of a vicious cycle. We experienced situations where women invited as speakers often doubted or even cancelled last-minute because they didn't feel they had something valuable to add, even though they were really experienced and qualified in our opinion. This left us with the question of how we can create a more conducive and secure environment for women to take the center stage in events, which is essential if we want to promote women inclusion. I think at least one key factor is to have more women visible as organizers, to motivate others to join, but this question definitely requires further thought and investigation.

Another important aspect for inclusion and visibility at events is language, which not only relates to women but to farmers in general. One farmer mentioned she declined invitations to participate and speak at several events (from OECD and FAO) because this was only possible in English, and she didn't feel her proficiency was good enough to meaningfully participate in discussions. She felt this as a big shortcoming, because many farmers do not speak English. The availability of translation and interpretation services is thus very important to make farmers feel included and get them involved in events.

Lastly, a limitation of events mentioned was that they often lack follow-up. During the events there is a lot of attention for the issue and a lot of interesting things are discussed, but then nothing happens with it afterwards. According to Eye for Nature, there should therefore be more efforts to design processes for translating inputs to concrete instruments and policies. One important aspect here is to involve young and female farmers themselves as a continuous stakeholder, also after events have finished.

Local community initiatives

Besides events on inclusion, also other initiatives focused on **strengthening community** in rural areas are viewed as very valuable by farmers. These are considered important to make rural life more attractive and less lonely. For example, local artisanal markets or workshops in traditional music were mentioned by one farmer as small events organized in her town that she really appreciated. The online platform mentioned before created by one of the farmers from Galicia to advertise vacancies and housing, also serves to connect people with similar needs, thereby creating community and social connections in rural areas. The same farmer also mentioned an initiative by the Red Cross that is being undertaken in Galicia, called CRECE, which is focused on building sustainable local networks of support in depopulated rural areas,¹¹⁸ which she considered very important. Through this initiative, she might be able to get a physical space for her platform, so also people without digital skills can access its services.

To conclude, there are thus many initiatives and projects being undertaken in Spain to promote the inclusion of women and young people in the agricultural sector, and there are also many that really help young and female farmers in the challenges they experience. Besides the essential CAP economic support, mainly advisory support, training courses, events and local & social community initiatives are considered helpful. With all these initiatives, the key aspect that is valued by most farmers is their ability to facilitate interaction and connection, and promote a sense of community.

The value of inclusion

Lastly, there are some important findings related to the importance of the inclusion of youth and women. Besides maintaining food production in the future, what was mainly stressed throughout the events and interviews was the propensity of women and young people to develop new and innovative ideas, and transform farms into more sustainable enterprises. This is also confirmed by the fact that roughly all farmers I interviewed completely changed and innovated their parents' farms into ecological or regenerative models, with a clear focus on the local territory and community. For example, one farmer from Valladolid managed to reduce emissions of his farm to zero and several others innovated by starting additional projects like commercializing and selling their own products. One livestock farmer from Castilla-y-León developed a system to sell her ecological beef directly to people's houses without intermediaries. This shows the great potential of young and female farmers to advance the sustainable transition of the agricultural sector.

For women, I found that they are also indispensable for generational renewal because they form the social glue of rural communities. In the family context, women often make the final decisions about whether families come and stay in rural areas or not. Moreover, they take more social initiatives which help to build stronger communities. In short, as emphasized by FADEMUR: without women there is no rural world.

118 To read more about this project, see: [CRECE: el proyecto de Cruz Roja para prevenir la institucionalización - Cruz Roja](#)

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

As highlighted by this report, generational renewal is absolutely essential for the preservation of a vital agricultural sector and the acceleration of sustainable transitions, and thereby for safeguarding food supply for our future generations. However, nowadays in Europe, not enough young and female farmers seem to be able to incorporate in the agricultural sector and take the lead to make this necessary transition happen. So, where does that leave us?

This report has demonstrated that the issue of generational renewal in the agricultural sector—and the question of why it occurs and how it can be addressed—is highly complex. Unfortunately, it is not a simple one-sided problem with a straightforward solution, as no societal challenge ever is. Instead, as has become clear from the research findings, the lack of generational renewal is caused by an interplay of different factors, ranging from economic to legislative and social ones. All in different but equally significant ways, these challenges create barriers to the inclusion and incorporation of women and young farmers, together obstructing generational renewal.

To conclude this research report, it is now time to look at what this means for further investigation, policy-making and implementation on this issue. How can the findings help us to improve efforts and envision new ways to tackle generational renewal? And more specifically: how can the LAN office at the Dutch embassy in Madrid—and other European LAN offices—act on the situation of generational renewal in Europe? The conclusions and recommendations set out below will seek to answer these final questions.

Conclusions

Inherent complexity

One of the main conclusions of this research is that the issue of generational renewal is complex as it is. Not only because of the wide variety of challenges causing the problem, but also because there is not one aspect or factor that is more limiting or important than another. The field research clearly revealed that all barriers, in their own right, contribute to the issue. While structural barriers like access to land and finance are often mentioned as most restricting in the literature, the interviews demonstrated that social, cultural and political factors—like community feeling, the ‘soft side’ of farm take-over, the discredit of the agricultural sector, and institutional representation—are just as important. Furthermore, an extra layer of complexity is added because experiences of farmers differ a lot, not only dependent on national context (Spain/NL), but also (particularly in Spain) on local and regional circumstances. And of course, personal experiences, and those of female and male farmers, vary as well.

The importance of community

As indicated by the interviews, mainly community building in rural areas is a particularly important aspect for improving the inclusion and participation of young and female farmers. It not only helps to build networks of practical support and knowledge exchange, but also contributes to farmers’ social wellbeing and quality of life. Farmers and organizations stressed this is absolutely essential to combat rural depopulation and foster generational renewal. Therefore, they consider socially-oriented initiatives that create spaces for interaction, connection and the exchange of experiences especially helpful. These include different kinds of events on inclusion, but also smaller and informal community initiatives in rural areas.

One does not fit all

The inherent complexity and diverse causes of the issue ask for a comprehensive approach with multiple angles. This is one of the reasons why current policies targeting generational renewal seem to be ineffective in many cases. Not because they do not help at all, but because their focus is too limited to adequately respond to the needs and realities of young and female farmers. They mainly consist of economic support with a focus on modernization and innovation, while in practice farmers need other kinds of assistance for social wellbeing, community building and basic necessities and services. Furthermore, the need to build a more positive societal image of the agricultural sector is strongly felt. Economic support is still considered helpful, but does not suffice on its own. It can only lead to a durable generational renewal if it is combined with other positive incentives and structural improvements to the rural context.

This means that the issue of generational renewal cannot be solved with one-sided solutions or one-size-fits-all approaches. Instead of only focusing on specific elements, the whole context needs to be taken into account. While this is not a convenient conclusion from a legislative perspective, the complexity of the issue simply demands more than one type of policy. Efforts should be more diversified, mainly focusing more on social aspects that are neglected in current approaches. These primarily include soft skills for farm take-over and decision-making, community building and social facilities in rural areas, and positive promotion of the agricultural sector. Furthermore, to respond better to individual farmers' needs, policies should leave more room for regional and local differences. This also means that more different public institutions might have to get involved, instead of only the ministries of agriculture and environment.¹¹⁹

Decision-making & representation: from the top to the bottom

To facilitate such a comprehensive approach, initiatives and policies need to be more bottom-up and locally driven. If policies are to respond better to the needs and realities of young and female farmers, they have to clearly arise from them. Therefore, it is essential that women and young people have more influence in policy processes and at higher decision-making levels. However, while they are often invited to policy consultations, their representation (especially of women) at these higher levels is very low, and therefore they lack real influence in decision-making. As the research findings indicated, women and youth thus need more seats in boards and directives of relevant framework organizations, and be included as permanent stakeholders at the government level.

To achieve this, however, current members of decision-making organs and government entities need to be willing to make space for their perspective. It is therefore important that they understand the importance of the increased participation of young and female farmers at these bodies. For the same reason, other influential actors like big companies should also be involved in decision-making processes, because they are the ones that will have to make room for this new generation in practice. Thus, policy efforts should be initiated from the bottom, but in cooperation with the top. Because in the end, all actors are needed to realize a transition like generational renewal.

119 In Spain, there is already involvement from the Ministry of Inclusion, but in the NL the topic mainly falls under LVVN. Cooperation with ministries of e.g. housing, economic affairs and infrastructure could be valuable to explore.

Capacity building: make the bottom strong

Besides creating space from the top, it is also essential that young and female farmers themselves have the skills to meaningfully participate in decision-making and develop initiatives. That they are able to raise their needs and put forward their own vision and perspective. This goes for both policy-making level, as well as decision-making on farms. Empowerment and capacity building from the bottom are thus highly important.

However, more capacity building for technical knowledge and skills does not seem necessary. The research has shown that young and female farmers are very well-equipped, highly educated and innovative, and above all greatly motivated to make the best of an imperfect situation. What the findings mainly pointed out is that farmers often have little confidence in their ability to bring about change or influence decision-making, have trouble navigating how to promote their interests and miss a community to fall back on.

Capacity building should therefore be more targeted at soft skills for decision-making, strengthening confidence, and building networks of support. That could take the form of different kinds of training for how to drive change at both farm and policy level, or events to facilitate encounters and connections between farmers. For strengthening confidence, mainly representation and visibility is important: that young people, and in particular women, see themselves represented at different levels and start to believe in their ability to become farmers, take on leadership roles and influence decision-making. For this reason, young and female farmers should always be included at events, workshops and institutions, particularly in organizational and directive roles on the stage.

Recommendations

The research findings and conclusions give way to several recommendations for further investigation and follow-up on this topic. Where do we go from here? What could be explored further and where should we focus our efforts to support the inclusion of women and young people in the agricultural sector?

These more general take-aways also translate into more specific recommendations for the Madrid LAN department, that seek to address how they could contribute knowledge, support initiatives or collaborate with institutions to contribute to generational renewal and inclusion in their bilateral work. Furthermore, best practices from Spain and the NL will be added to provide ideas for what both countries could learn from each other's initiatives. While these recommendations are specifically addressed to the MAD-LAN department—and focused on the context of Spain and the NL—they also provide insights and ideas for the work of other LAN offices around Europe.

General recommendations for follow-up

→ *Policies: diversification instead of standardization*

- It has become clear that the current European policy approach to generational renewal is too standardized and could be improved to effectively tackle the issue. We should further examine how policies can take the whole rural context into account, and be more tailored to the diverse needs of young and female farmers. That is a very complex question which requires more careful thought and discussion from all actors involved: farmers, companies, framework organizations and public institutions. A good starting point could be to identify and examine existing initiatives from individual farmers and local civil society organizations that created positive impacts. As an

alternative approach, more of these bottom-up initiatives could be supported instead of using standardized top-down policies. Also, involving more public institutions than only ministries of agriculture is an option that could be explored. How this would exactly work in practice within the EU policy framework requires further investigation.

→ *Socially resilient communities: pilot cases*

- Given the fundamental role of community, there needs to be more investigation into how rural and farming communities can become more socially resilient. Through this research, several stories arose from Spanish rural towns that had become more populated in the last couple of years, with more vibrant communities. Other positive examples are the online platform created by a farmer from Galicia to bring people into contact, or the Taboer initiative from LTO Nederland.¹²⁰ It could be useful to look into these kind of positive pilot cases, investigate farmers' experiences with them, and see what kind of tools or approaches could be applied to other areas. Further investigation could look into how social wellbeing has been promoted in the NL in the last years, and what type of initiatives might be useful for Spain.

→ *Representation*

- The representation of young and female farmers at higher decision-making levels needs to be increased, to ensure their perspective is included and policies become better responsive to their needs. Further investigation should focus on how this can be achieved. Awareness creating and advocacy with boards, directives and government entities done by organizations like Eye for Nature and Cooperativas Agroalimentarias provide useful examples of mechanisms that could be explored. Also, quotas for gender and youth representation could be considered.

→ *Capacity building*

- Farmers are far better prepared and educated than is often assumed. Currently provided training courses may be useful to some farmers, but for many they are too basic. It is therefore valuable to think of new ways in which capacity building for young and female farmers could be organized. We recommend to focus more on training in soft skills, while combining it with facilitating interaction to build networks and communities among farmers. Trainings and projects from Eye for Nature and NAIJK could provide useful examples.

→ *Telling a more positive story*

- Farmers are generally very happy and passionate about their work, but this positive side of agriculture does not seem to be communicated well to the rest of society. Farmers often feel misunderstood by other people and public institutions. Further investigation should focus on how this gap can be bridged, and a more positive story about the sector can be conveyed.

→ *Explaining the specific role of women*

- While young farmers are central to the EU's efforts on generational renewal, the inclusion of women is often overlooked and therefore not always understood. More effort should be put into explaining the fundamental role of women for generational renewal in agriculture, and communicating this better at both European and national levels.

120 For more information, see p. 19, or look at: [TABOER - voor de mens achter de ondernemer - LTO](#)

→ *Creating a more conducive environment for women*

- We noticed in the organization of events that especially women farmers often lack the confidence to speak or present their projects, while this is such an important factor in increasing their visibility and inclusion. There should be more thought and discussion about how a more conducive environment can be created at (international) meetings and events so that women feel more encouraged and comfortable to participate.

→ *The role of migration*

- Something that has not been explored in this study is the relation between generational renewal and migration. Further research could investigate how these two topics are connected, and how migration policies and generational renewal policies could possibly be aligned to facilitate the inflow of young workers to the agricultural sector.

Recommendations for LAN: Lessons learned

→ *Keep organizing and sponsoring events for community building*

- Besides sharing knowledge, events like conferences and workshops are a valuable instrument to build networks and foster a sense of community among farmers. It is important to keep facilitating networking and interaction between farmers at these gatherings. At the Rural Women Congress we saw that several women connected at the cocktail reception and exchanged contacts to further talk about their projects. In this way, these networks also help to bring initiatives and insights discussed at events further than the event itself.

→ *Be continuously mindful of inclusion & representation*

- Representation and visibility is an essential element to involve farmers, especially women, and build their confidence. When organizing events, workshops or other activities, it is important to make sure women and young people are involved in the organization and visible during the events. Consider for example speaking time of women vs men, who gets the center stage, who opens the event, who is invited as speaker. Besides gender, keep in mind that language is another important factor for farmer inclusion. Try therefore to host events in the local language when possible, or provide translation services.

→ *Continue to take a regional approach*

- The research showed that a complex and multifaceted issue like generational renewal really benefits from a regional approach, especially in a diverse country like Spain. Focusing on specific regions and their agricultural context instead of approaching the issue nationally, and involving local stakeholders in the research proved to be very useful.

→ *Invest in local networks*

- The experience of co-organizing the Rural Women Congress revealed the fundamental importance of local networks for involving people at events and activities, especially those targeting farmers and rural communities. It is therefore essential to keep investing in contact and relations with local companies, organizations and governments in the regions of interest. As these often have close connections to the local population, they are key for reaching farmers.

→ *The social perspective to agriculture is relevant*

- We noticed that this study which focuses more on the social and political aspects of agriculture evoked a lot of interest and response from stakeholders (both farmers, organizations and public institutions). In contrast to more technical agricultural topics, this issue seemed interesting and important to everyone. The social perspective to agriculture is thus a relevant approach for the work of LAN offices.

→ *Foster diversity in teams for trust and engagement*

- The fact that this study about inclusion was carried out by a young woman really helped to reach participants, especially women farmers. We noticed it contributed to building relationships of trust with farmers participating in the study and events, and made them more comfortable and engaged. Also, the presence of a native Spanish speaker in the team really contributed to involving farmers. This shows that diversity, both in gender and nationality, is an asset for LAN teams and their work.

Best practices

Spain

- **Women as a separate policy area:** Spain is one of the few EU member states that has specific generational renewal policy efforts on women, and they have a separate policy unit for rural women within their ministry (MAPA). Given the specific role women play in generational renewal and the distinct challenges they face, Spain's approach offers valuable lessons for other member states, including the Netherlands, on how to design more targeted and responsive policies.
- **Programa Cultiva:** This formative exchange program is very positively evaluated by young farmers in Spain. It helps them to acquire knowledge and experience, and builds a relationship between them and their host. As such, it is a perfect example of how capacity building can be combined with creating networks and fostering community among farmers.¹²¹

The Netherlands

- **Farmer searches farmer program from NAJK:** This program is a successful civil society initiative in the Netherlands which has been able to match older farmers without a successor with young and motivated farmers without inheritable land to take over their business.¹²² Spain or other member states could draw inspiration from this program and explore opportunities to set up similar initiatives.
- **Knowledge platform for soft side of farm take-over:** The knowledge platform—set up by the Dutch government and several agricultural organizations & universities—offers free information and practical tools for the different phases of farm take-over.¹²³ It's an innovative instrument that responds to the need of young farmers for soft skills, which is often overlooked in European policy approaches. Other EU member states like Spain could explore how this kind of instrument could add to their own generational renewal policies.

¹²¹ For more information, see p. 12-13

¹²² For the success stories, visit the NAJK website: [Boer zoekt Boer – NAJK](#)

¹²³ For more information, see p. 12-13

Further actions

European level

Through the research we have noticed that European policies and funds like CAP do have a young farmer component but women or inclusion often isn't mentioned. We recommend to take this into account for the upcoming CAP negotiations. If not as a component for subsidies then as a topic of interest to be stimulated by national governments. This could foster the debate about the importance of the topic and make member states aware of the importance of it.

Spain/NL bilateral level

We have discovered that the theme of inclusion is of interest for both countries. After the successful workshop at the OECD in Paris, the NL and Spain could give a follow-up on this topic by addressing this together during the monthly agri-fish councils, and promote it together as a topic of interest for the upcoming CAP negotiations. A possible start could be a joint position paper (possibly with other likeminded member states) depending on the interests of the Dutch government soon to be formed. Besides that, NL and Spain could organize exchange visits between the relevant ministries which includes visits to governmental, private and societal initiatives.

ANNEX 1: Policies

EU CAP policy tools

The most important CAP policy tools are:

Complementary income support (for young farmers) = Annual payments to young farmers who are first time holders of a farm, for a maximum of 5 years.

Setting-up/installation aid = A one-time grant to assist farmers in establishing their business. Notably, this support is also available to farmers over 40 starting a farm for the first time (new entrants), and for rural businesses connected to agriculture, forestry or non-agricultural activities focused on rural community-led development.

Investment support = A measure that helps farmers invest in infrastructure, equipment, modernization, sustainable practices, restructuring or diversification of their business. It can take the form of grants or subsidies, but also financial instruments such as loans or guarantees, which is decided by individual member states. It is used for generational renewal by giving young farmers extra grants or extra favorable terms.

Cooperation scheme for rural development = Funding for different (unconventional) projects and initiatives which seek to facilitate farm succession and transfer. It can for example cover the costs of setting up a registered farm partnership that ensures a transfer of farm assets to a young successor. Only a few member states—notably both Spain and the Netherlands—make use of this tool.¹²⁴

Complementary income support and installation aid are direct payments to farmers, the rest of the policy tools are funding for projects or support regulations. The policy tools for rural development are part of the CAP—constituting its second pillar—and funded through the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development** (EAFRD). While complementary income support is part of the 1st pillar of the CAP, measures like investment support and cooperation schemes are funded through this 2nd pillar. The EU's framework for rural development consists of a Rural Pact and Rural Action Plan, guided by the EU's long-term vision for rural areas (Rural Vision).

The **Rural Vision** consists of 10 shared goals to make the EU's rural areas more attractive to live, on economic, social, environmental and institutional level. More specifically on generational renewal, they have the goal to foster inclusive rural communities (open to newcomers and with equal opportunities for all), and a goal of diversity (committing to make use of all assets, talents and potential). The **Rural Action Plan** contains 30 actions to be implemented by the European Commission, and the **Rural Pact** is aimed at promoting cooperation between different stakeholders (governments, businesses, civil society organizations, academics and citizens) to achieve these goals. One of the goals of the Rural Pact is to amplify 'rural voices' and increase their prominence on the political agenda.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ [Rural development and the CAP ; Rules and financial support for CAP Strategic Plans | EUR-Lex](#)

¹²⁵ EC report Rural Vision; [Home - Rural Vision - European Union](#)

Policies in Spain

Details on CAP instruments (from Spain's CAP Strategic Plan):

Complementary income support = Top-up direct payments to young farmers' incomes for 5 years, arranged on national level. The payments comprise an extra 15% for young and women farmers, on top of general farmer income support.

Start-up grants (installation aid) = One-time grants to young farmers setting up their farming business, exact amounts differ per region. In some regions, the amount is increased under certain conditions, for example if the person establishes its farm under shared ownership (titularidad compartida). In Castilla y León this means an extra payment of 10-15.000 euros.¹²⁶

Investment support = Support for the modernization of farms, through which costs for investment in e.g. equipment or technology are covered. In the case of young or women farmers the percentage of costs covered increases, exact percentages are determined by the regions.

Cooperation scheme = Used in Spain to support farm succession by facilitating a cooperation project between retiring/exiting farmers and successors/new entrants interested in taking over their farms.

Establishment measures for young farmers = Diverse regional interventions to generate rural employment for young people and give them favorable treatment, for example in training, advisory services or rural business start-up. In Spain, the budget allocated to the **LEADER program** is double the minimum amount required.¹²⁷

Policies in the Netherlands

Details on CAP instruments (from the Netherlands' CAP Strategic Plan):

Start-up grants (installation aid) = One-time grant subsidy of up to 80.000 euros for young farmers who have completely or partially taken over a farm business. Goal is to move forward the moment of farm takeover, so young farmers can earlier get responsibility and exercise control over farm decision-making.

Investment support = Under investment support the Netherlands has a subsidy regulation for young farmers, through which young farmers get 10-15% extra subsidy for investments.

Cooperation scheme = Support for bottom-up projects/ideas focused on two issues not addressed by the other interventions: 1) new entrants, and 2) access to land. For example projects that seek to create new farm business structures, or facilitate contact between land owners and new entrants.¹²⁸

126 [Convocadas para 2025 las ayudas de incorporación y mejora - ASAJA Castilla y León](#)

127 Plan Estratégico de la PAC España: [PEPAC 4.2.pdf](#)

128 Strategisch GLB-plan: [Programmadocument+NSP-GLB+2023-2027](#) ; Jonge landbouwer strategie

Measures part of the transition program sustainable agriculture:

Investment Fund Sustainable Agriculture (Investeringsfonds Duurzame Landbouw) = available to farmers who want to invest to shift to more sustainable production on their farms. Fund is meant to take away insecurities of these investments, and financially support this transition. Per business a maximum loan amount of 500.000 euros is available, with favorable terms such as low interest rate and no obligatory pay-offs in the first years. For young farmers there is extra financial support available. While this fund is open to any farmer planning to make a sustainable transition, it is especially relevant for young farmers who after just starting their business lack the financial means to make the necessary investments.¹²⁹

Credit guarantee agriculture (Borgstellingskrediet voor de Landbouw) = Loan arrangement which forms part of the investment fund, through which the government guarantees a large part of a business loan. For banks, this takes away the financial risk in providing a loan to young farmers with little capital or credit history, and thus makes it easier for them to access financing.¹³⁰

129 [Borgstellingsregeling jonge boeren opengesteld - Nieuwe Oogst](#)

130 [Credit Guarantee for Agriculture - BL | RVO.nl](#) ; [Landbouwsubsidies | Landbouw en tuinbouw | Rijksoverheid.nl](#)

ANNEX 2: Methodology

The study was conducted through a desk and field research. The desk research consisted of the thorough study of relevant literature: academic papers, policy reports, newspaper articles and government studies. The field research mainly consisted of 14 semi-structured interviews, and observations made during relevant events.

The interviews were conducted with young and female farmers, representatives from relevant framework organizations from both Spain and the Netherlands, and government officials from the Dutch ministry of agriculture (LVVN) and one Spanish municipality. The framework organizations that were interviewed include: Cooperativas Agroalimentarias de España, FADEMUR, COAG, NAJK and Eye for Nature. 6 interviews were conducted with farmers (4 women and 2 men), 3 with government officials and 5 with framework organizations, of which almost all representatives were young or female farmers themselves as well.

The events I visited were relevant fairs and conferences, where I attended talks by some of the above-mentioned organizations, and talked with farmers. Through these encounters, I made a lot of observations which added to the interview findings. On top of that, with our LAN team we participated in a Rural Women Congress in Belorado, and co-organized a separate edition of the conference in Lugo, Galicia. We co-organized this event together with TuRepueblas, AEMME (the organizers and initiators of the Rural Women Congress) and UNED Lugo. This edition was specifically focused on the link between rural women and the protection of biodiversity.¹³¹ The experience of organizing this event, as well as the event itself, provided a lot of insights for the study.

Because of the small scope of the study, no generalizations can be made from the findings. It is an exploratory study, which is not meant to make generalized statements for the whole of Spain, the NL or Europe. The aim instead is to give an idea of current challenges and opportunities for generational renewal in the operating context of the LAN office in Madrid, and provide insights for other LAN offices around Europe.

¹³¹ Read more about the event here: [V Congreso de la Mujer Rural | Extensión Universitaria en Lugo | UNED](#); [V Congreso de la Mujer Rural - handelsmetspanje.com](#)

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