



The Munster Institute in Cork, where most of the poultry instructresses of this era would have trained.

Women in Irish agricultural history

The role of women in the Irish poultry industry is a fascinating example of the history of women in Irish agriculture, and illuminates the need for greater collaboration between men and women in the sector.

Three students of NUI Galway's MA in Gender, Globalisation and Rights worked with Teagasc researchers and Teagasc's Steering Committee for the History of the Irish Agricultural Advisory Services to examine historical records documenting the role of women in Irish agricultural history. The records are in the library of Ireland's Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), and are the Annual Reports of the County Committees of Agriculture (ARCCA) for 1901-1980. The project sought to answer the question: how have women been involved in Irish agriculture historically? It sought evidence specifically of a number of types of 'feminisation' (**Table 1**). The literature on the role of women in agriculture discusses how women's participation in agriculture may be optimised by leveraging and exploiting women's traits and work styles. This optimisation benefits both women and society generally, and increases the potential for innovation.

Integrative and substitutive feminisation

Poultry and egg production was associated with and operated almost exclusively by women, but it was integrated as a small-scale activity ('pin money') on male-owned farms. According to the ARCCA for Galway, the Hatcheries Act (1947) "introduced a radical change to the system of poultry-keeping", leading to its masculinisation. This substitution of women by men was explained by their lack of property ownership and professional organisation. According to the Cork ARCCA, by the end of the 1940s the poultry sector was highly male dominated, and women participated mainly as workers. However, what had not

changed was women dominating the occupation of poultry instruction (**Figure 1**). Laois ARCCA showed that poultry instructresses worked daily irrespective of weather conditions, were not entitled to holidays, and were initially paid £150 per annum, which was £50 more than male horticultural instructors, although the latter enjoyed different employment terms. As they had to resign upon marriage, many women were not employed for long.

Progressive and competitive feminisation

Poultry instructresses were highly innovative in designing strategies for breeding, packaging and marketing for their clients so that they could progress their businesses. For instance, after the world poultry exhibition in Britain in 1903, they advised their clients of the importance of having trap nests and pedigree stock. A particularly entrepreneurial instructress, Nora Keating in Galway, noted that her turkey scheme "was most successful" and the "chicks" were of "superior quality", while cautioning that it was "premature to speak of markets" lest an inferior product gave "Galway a bad name". Eventually, the sector proved remarkably successful, leading to the exporting of stock. Mary E. Daly noted that of all agricultural sectors, "poultry was one that progressed". There was an impression that instructresses were successful because they were "wives" and "mothers"; hence, they could understand the temperaments of the birds. However, progressive business acumen is evident from the data. It is notable that Keating – who outstepped the integrative/substitutive boundaries – was dismissed from her

Table 1: The feminisation framework: how women may become involved in agriculture.

Type	Definition	Example
Integrative	Women 'slotting into' roles designated to them by society	Particular types of farm work (e.g., poultry-keeping, young calf care), often unpaid and without ownership of farm assets/land
Substitutive	Women undertaking roles disdained or rejected by men	Poultry-keeping/dairy farming before it became policy supported/industrialised
Competitive	Women vying for equal opportunity, engaging in the same type of work as is typically dominated by farm men, and often imitating the established male style	A woman managing one of the largest dairy herds in Ireland, a role occupied frequently by men. Agricultural education was supportive to her gaining the respect of peers and entering the occupational category of 'dairy farmer'
Progressive	Women following enterprise/career development paths considered uniquely associated with women, carving out a different path in agriculture	Examples given in the international literature are: high nature value/organic agriculture; on-farm diversification; high value-added agriculture/food processing. Note: these activities are becoming more frequently engaged in by men
Reconstitutive or collaborative	Women entering into collaborative relationships with men, with both parties committed to principles and actions of gender equality	Farm partnerships or other collaborative farming ventures involving farm women and men

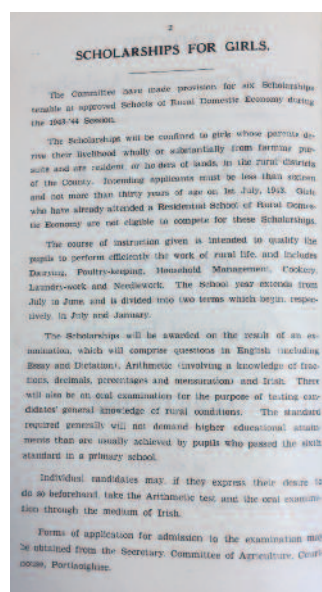
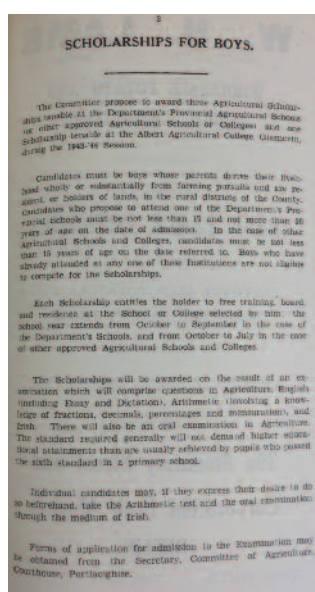


FIGURE 1: Different scholarships for girls and boys. (Source: Laois ARCCA, 1942-1943.)

post. Her actions represented both progressive and competitive feminisation, in the ways in which she created new pathways with a style that was then perceived as ostensibly male.

Collaboration between men and women

A substitutive and integrative role for women in Irish agriculture was highly evident in the historical data. There was some evidence of a progressive and competitive role, but no evidence of a collaborative, reconstitutive role involving both women and men. Understanding the historical scene – its norms, challenges

and missed opportunities – illuminates the need for greater collaboration between men and women in Irish agriculture, which, according to recent Teagasc research, has strengthened in the sector over the past decade in particular.

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