



1. What are some of the key challenges women and youth in agriculture are facing? For example, many rural areas in the developing world aren't stimulating places for youth to live and develop? How can we make rural areas more attractive to youth?

In Europe, there are a number of women farm holders; around 1/3 of heads of holding in the European Union (EU) are female. However, in many cases they are less formally educated and trained than their male counterparts, despite the fact that across other sectors, they consistently achieve higher qualifications. For young farmers therefore, in particular young female farmers, it is essential that the attractiveness of the agricultural sector is promoted to them and that vocational education and training in agriculture is widely available, accessible, attractive and affordable – considering that incomes in rural areas are lower than in urban ones.

As well as this, the lack of rural infrastructure both in Europe and around the globe is a significant problem. For example, both women and young people need good education services, social infrastructure, accessible health services, better accessibility including phone and internet coverage, enough attractive job opportunities and cultural and leisure activities. It is essential that these goods and services are invested in if we are to ensure that women and young people have incentives to stay in rural areas to bring up their children or to forge a career or to settle down with their families.

The above are just some of the challenges faced by youth in agriculture, and can somewhat explain the very low levels of European young farmers (only 7% are under the age of 35 in the EU). Other challenges relate to entering the sector, including access to land, credit and low returns on high investments in the first years of production.

It is for this reason that CEJA calls for positive discrimination in public policy in order to facilitate the entry of young people into the sector. This should also help raise public awareness of the importance of farming everywhere and how much those who produce our food should be appreciated, although this should be a policy objective in itself.

Farmers have to be intelligent, driven business entrepreneurs as well as hard workers willing to give up long hours, weekends and holidays in order to make a success of their enterprise. They should be revered for providing us with high quality food at affordable prices, and farming should be celebrated as an employment opportunity which provides young people with the chance to be their own boss, be at one with nature, and nurture high quality production which they can be proud of and profit from. In some countries of the world, agricultural activities are even seen as a form of punishment – obviously this is bound to reflect badly on the profession, those who work in it, and those who wish to enter it. However, farmers are business-minded, determined entrepreneurs who work hard to keep to the highest of standards wherever possible so that the rest of the population can enjoy a diverse variety of food products every single day. Farmers should be rewarded for this but also recognised for it, as well as the environmental services they provide, by society at large. This could, and should, be achieved through information campaigns, for example at schools or food outlets.



2. Please share any programs and initiatives you are leading/participating that are helping to strengthen the role of woman and youth in agriculture.

As the European representative organisation for young farmers from across the Union, CEJA works exclusively on programs and initiatives that help to strengthen the role of youth in agriculture and the opportunities for young people to engage with the farming sector in a bid to increase the number of active young farmers in the EU today. This includes frequent meetings with policymakers and other stakeholders on the subject of youth in agriculture, as well as presentations and conferences on the subject, and internal discussions on how to find better solutions for the challenges ahead – both on the ground and in the Brussels policy arena. However, as well as this, we are involved in two very relevant concrete European projects, too.

In the context of trying to attract more women to careers in agriculture and rural areas, CEJA is currently taking part in the MWE: Mentoring Women for Entrepreneurship Project. This initiative aims to create new training courses and social networks for women in rural areas. In this context, we hope to foster and inspire the entrepreneurial spirit of young women in rural communities in order to improve their social and professional status and gain equal gender rights across Europe.

CEJA is also one of the main partners in the Rural/Iter project, which aims to invest in agricultural education and training in order to increase entrepreneurial skills among young, female and new farmers. Through the transfer of knowledge and innovation to young, female and new farmers, the competitiveness and sustainability of rural businesses is likely to improve. If RURAL/ITER succeeds in its aims, the development of rural employment will enhance economic diversification across Europe and make rural areas more attractive for the youth of tomorrow.

3. What measures can family farmers' organizations, governments, development organizations, the private sector take to ensure empowerment and equal rights of women and youth in agriculture?

Because of the improved productivity of young people compared with their older counterparts as well as the alarming age balance in some parts of the world, it is reasonable, and in fact, absolutely necessary, to demand positive discrimination for young farmers in public policy. The EU has recognised many of these elements and sent an important political signal with young farmer support in the new CAP; however, this must be mirrored elsewhere in the world and go further still in Europe. Considering the extent of the demographic crisis, especially in Europe, and the scale of the barriers to enter the sector, support for young farmers must go further – with increased rates of support for all young farmers across all EU Member States and a varied selection of tool policies available so as to accurately target support and tailor it to relevant sectors and geographical areas.

There must also be increased cooperation between farming organisations, governments, private companies and other stakeholders. CEJA in its everyday work strives to foster these links! For example,



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private entities can cooperate with young farmers in terms of sponsorship, organising information seminars and the exchange of best practices across the globe, cooperation on innovation and research, thereby enhancing the economic conditions for the young farmer while giving private entities insight into the use of their products and services on the ground and in the field. We must come together to promote the benefits of the family farming model and ensure its survival, which can only be done through the increased public support of young people and women in agriculture and rural areas, which in turn must be asked for by the public at large and not just farming representatives – because that is exactly who a more accessible sector for young people will benefit: society at large, not just farmers.