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WHY MORE WOMEN IN MISSISSIPPI ARE NOT MAJORING IN AGRICULTURE

By

A . Joseph¹, K . Dampeer², M. Pulliam³

^{1,2,3}Department of Agriculture, Alcorn State University



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Abstract

The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture varies greatly from region to region. But regardless of these variations, women are actively involved in various agricultural activities. Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development but have been underrepresented for a long time. Historically, in the United States agriculture has been a male-dominated industry. Gender equality is important. Empowering women can change policy choices regarding economic, political, and social factors, and make institutions more representative of a range of voices. Given opportunities women at the local level can lead to greater provision of public goods, such as water, sanitation, nutrition, and food security. Information gathered will be disseminated in the local community and school districts. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate aspects of underrepresented women in agriculture from selected Mississippi counties. It is important to understand why more of Mississippi women are not majoring in agriculture. Data was collected by means of face-to-face surveys. Analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 17.0, 2009). Two hundred (200) participants were surveyed with a response rate of 100 percent. Results indicate that respondents consisted of 90 percent African Americans, 9.1 percent whites, and 0.9 percent other. Fifty percent (50%) of respondents were female and 50% were male. Most respondents stated that more women in agriculture will bring new prospective to the profession and industry.

Keywords: Women in agriculture; Mississippi; Gender equality; Public good; Underrepresented

Introduction

Civilization began with agriculture. When our nomadic ancestors began to settle and grow their own food, human society was forever changed. Not only did villages, towns and cities begin to flourish, but so did knowledge, the arts and the technological sciences. Today, the main concern is the many gender disparities that remain even as countries develop. Corrective policies will yield substantial development payoffs if they focus on persistent gender inequalities that matter most to society. For decades in the United States, agriculture has been a male dominated industry. History tells us that for a long period of time, men was the main operators of family farms. However, women also played important roles behind the scenes on the farm.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) women are the backbone of the rural economy, especially in the developing world. Empowering and investing in women, especially rural women can significantly increase

productivity, reduce hunger and malnutrition, and improve rural livelihoods. Not only for women, but for everyone ([Faostat.http://faostat. Fao.org](http://faostat.fao.org))

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), for the last 25 plus years women are steadily moving into the industry but we have a long way to go. Although the number has doubled on the last 25 years, only about 10% of principal farm operators are women (www.ers.usda.gov). In a study done by the world bank reported that women are central to agriculture and make a strong contribution to food security and nutrition at both the household and community levels. Also, according to the FAO, women are the backbone of the rural economy, especially in the developing world. Empowering and investing in rural women has been shown to significantly increase productivity, reduce hunger and malnutrition and improve rural livelihoods. <http://bit.ly/1XifDyp> In many developing countries, they make up almost half of the agricultural labor force, but unfortunately their production is limited by barriers to



finance, input, and extension services, as well as land ownership and rights (worldbank.org).

The USDA'S 2022 Census of Agriculture reported that 36% of U.S. ag producers are women, and 56% of all farms have at least one female decision maker. Also, farms with female producers making decisions tend to be smaller than average in both acres and value of production. Women farmers are most heavily engaged in day-to-day farm and ranch decisions, along with recordkeeping and financial management. However, when it comes to young women in urban and rural communities in the United States, most have not the slightest idea about programs in agriculture, moreover a career in agriculture. All they know is working on the farm in the sun, and planting cash crops. In today's world economy, that is unacceptable. Therefore, efforts to empower in agriculture must include legal reform, education, access to resources, and gender sensitivity policies. Recognizing and addressing gender disparities in agriculture is vital for achieving food security, economic growth, and environmental sustainability.

Methods

Population description

Two hundred participants from selected southwest Mississippi counties participated in the survey. These participants came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and were selected using simple random sampling. The random sampling method was used because it guaranteed that the sample chosen would be representative of all the population, and the researchers wanted everyone in the target population to have the same chance of being selected to participate in the study.

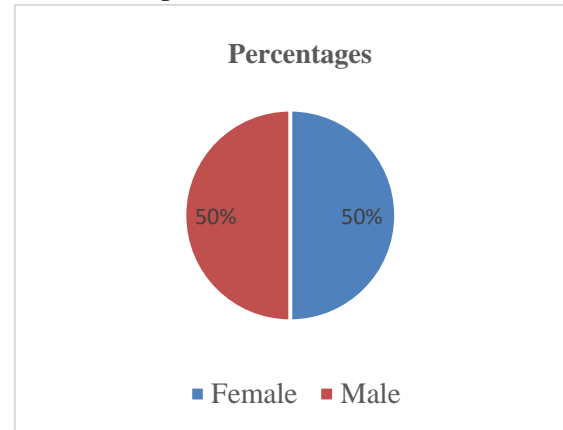
Research Design and Data Analysis

The design used for the study was the descriptive method. To meet the study objectives a two-part questionnaire was designed. Part one was designed to collect demographic data and part two determined participants' opinion on women in agriculture in Mississippi. Participants were to rate their level of agreement to statement by using the 5-point Likert scale ratings from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

Results and Discussions

Two hundred (200) respondents were administered a face-to-face survey instrument. The researcher received 100 percent completed surveys instrument. Most respondents, 50 percent were female, while 50 percent were male. One hundred and eighty (90 percent) of respondents were African American, eighteen (9.1 percent) were White, while two (0.9 percent) indicated other.

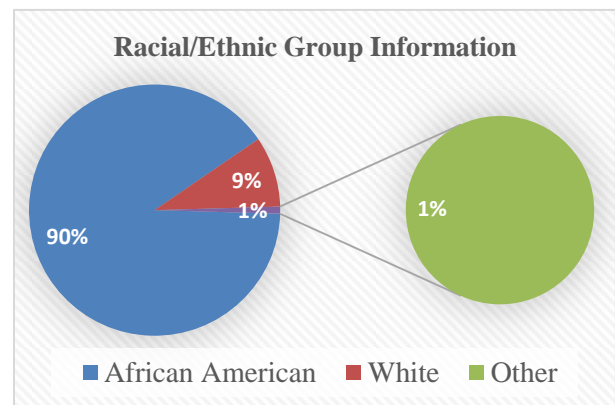
Figure 1: Gender Information



Gender

Figure 1 indicates the gender of the respondents in the study. Of the 200 participants, 100 (50 percent) were female and 100 (50 percent) were male.

Figure 2: Racial/Ethnic Groups



Racial/Ethnic Groups

Figure 2 shows the nationality of the participants in the study. One hundred and eighty (90 percent) of respondents were African American, 18 (9.1 percent) were white and 2 (.9 percent) indicated other.

Figure 3: Level of Agreement on Women in Agriculture (n= 200)

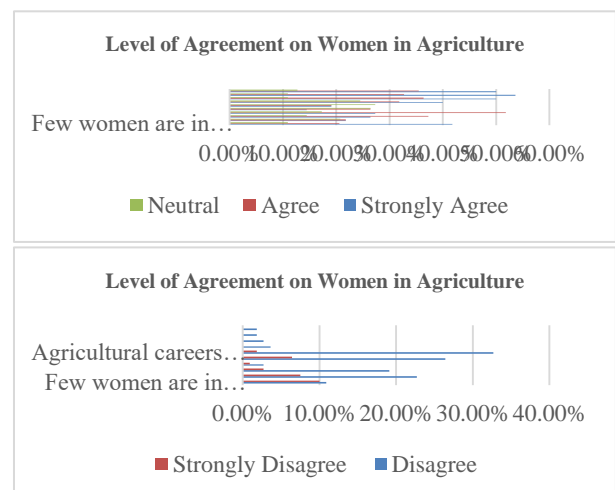
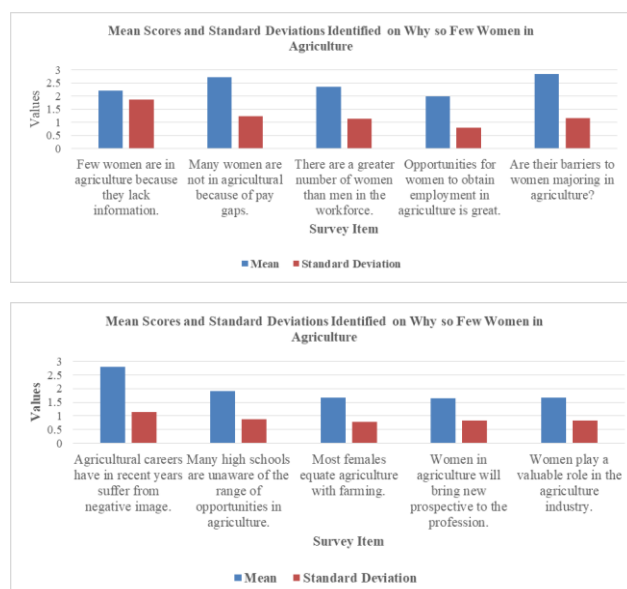


Figure 3

Over fifty percent (53.6 percent) of respondents strongly agreed that women in agriculture will bring new prospective to the profession., while 32.7 percent indicate that they agreed on the issue. When asked if high school females are unaware of opportunities in agriculture, 40 percent of respondents indicated strongly agreed and 31.8 percent agreed on the issue. On the issue most women equate agriculture to farming, 50 percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 36.3 percent agreed on the issue. When asked Fifty percent of respondents strongly agreed on the issue that women play a valuable role in the agriculture industry, while over 35 percent agreed on the issue. Over fifty-one (51) percent of respondents agreed on the issue that opportunities for women to work in agriculture is great, while over forty-seven (47) percent indicated that they strongly agreed on the issue that few women are in agriculture because of lack of information.

Level of agreement: Over fifty percent of respondents strongly agreed that women in agriculture will bring new prospective to the profession. When asked if most women equate agriculture to farming, 50 percent of respondents strongly agreed. Fifty percent of respondents strongly agreed on the issue that women play a valuable role in the agriculture industry, while over 35 percent agreed on the issue. Over fifty-one (51) percent of respondents agreed on the issue that opportunities for women to work in agriculture is great, while over forty-seven (47) percent indicated that they strongly agreed on the issue that few women are in agriculture because of lack of information.

Figure 4: Mean Scores Identified on Why So Few Women in Agriculture (n= 200)



A majority of respondents strongly agreed on five issues (Table 3), while 32.7 percent agreed that women will bring in

new ideas to the profession (53.6 percent, $M=1.64$), most females equate agriculture with farming (50 percent, $M=1.66$), women play a valuable role in the agriculture industry (50 percent, $M=1.66$), opportunities for women to obtain employment in agriculture is great (51.8 percent, $M=1.98$), few women are in agriculture because they lack information (41.8 percent, $M=2.21$)

Conclusion

Investigators were provided with valuable insight into southwest Mississippi on why more women are not majoring in agriculture. The investigators believe that the findings indicate that most people in southwest Mississippi have a basic knowledge of the issues of women in agriculture and the important role they play in the industry and society. It is important to note that empowering women can change policy choices regarding economic, political, and social factors, and make institutions more representative of a range of voices. Results also indicated that given the opportunities women at the local level can lead to greater provision of public goods, such as water, sanitation, nutrition, and food security.

It is vitally important to note that as leaders, it is our responsibility to make sure the next generation of women are educated, encouraged and empowered to take on the challenges of meeting the world's growing food, fuel and fiber needs. Women also play a major role in food production in the developing world, contributing as much as 60 percent of labor on family farms, for example, Sub-Saharan Africa although they often have no control over farm income or agricultural resources, such as seeds, fertilizer, and land. More importantly, women are less represented in higher level research, management, and decision-making positions compared with their male colleagues

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