



AGRI MAGAZINE

(International E-Magazine for Agricultural Articles)

Volume: 03, Issue: 02 (February, 2026)

Available online at <http://www.agrimagazine.in>

© Agri Magazine, ISSN: 3048-8656

Farm Women: The Hidden Success in Agriculture

*Anshul Patidar

M. Sc. Ag. (Hort.) Vegetable Science, Samrat Vikramaditya Vishwavidyalaya,
Ujjain, M.P., India

*Corresponding Author's email: patidaranshulgami2000@gmail.com

Agriculture is the backbone of many economies around the world, especially in developing countries such as India, where it provides livelihood to more than half of the population. Often, when we speak of agriculture, the image conjured is that of male farmers ploughing fields or driving tractors. However, this stereotypical portrayal overlooks a foundational reality: farm women are the hidden pillars of agricultural success. They play multifaceted and indispensable roles in agricultural production, livestock management, post-harvest operations, family nutrition, and rural household welfare.

Despite their significant contributions, farm women remain largely invisible in policy debates, decision-making processes, access to resources, and ownership of assets. This article explores the varied roles of farm women, the challenges they face, and why acknowledging and empowering them is crucial for sustainable agricultural development.

Roles and Contributions of Farm Women in Agriculture

Agricultural Production and Farm Labour

Women form a substantial part of the agricultural labour force globally. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), women contribute approximately 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries (FAO, 2011). In India, women's participation in agricultural work rises even higher, especially in states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal, where they often contribute more than 50% of on-farm labour.

Farm women participate in all stages of crop production:

- Land preparation
- Sowing and transplanting
- Weeding and intercultural operations
- Crop care and harvesting

These activities demand arduous physical effort and agricultural knowledge, yet women's labour is often under-reported or classified as unpaid family labour, masking their true contribution.

Livestock Management and Dairy Activities

Beyond crop production, farm women play a central role in livestock rearing. They feed and water animals, clean sheds, assist in milking, and care for sick livestock. In India, for example, women manage 60-70% of dairying activities (Birthal & Rao, 2017). Livestock provides not only nutrition and food security (milk, eggs) but also steady income, particularly for women who may sell dairy products in local markets. Women's strategic involvement in livestock enhances household resilience and economic stability.

Horticulture and Kitchen Gardens

Farm women contribute heavily to horticulture and allied activities like kitchen gardening, vegetable cultivation, and floriculture. These activities are crucial for family nutrition, ensuring a supply of essential vitamins and minerals. Kitchen gardens, often managed exclusively by women, enhance dietary diversity and reduce household food expenditure.

Post-Harvest Operations and Value Addition

Women are deeply involved in post-harvest tasks such as sorting, threshing, winnowing, drying, storage, and processing of agricultural products. Value-added activities such as making pickles, papad, jaggery, and dairy products are largely undertaken by women, contributing to household income and rural micro-enterprise development.

Seed Selection and Preservation

Seed selection is a skill that ensures crop quality and resilience. Women traditionally preserve and select seeds based on traits like drought tolerance, yield, and storage longevity. These informal seed systems are vital for maintaining biodiversity and sustaining local agriculture.

Family Nutrition and Food Security

Women are primarily responsible for ensuring family food security. They influence decisions about food allocation, nutritional choices, and meal preparation. Research shows that when women control household income, spending on food and health increases, leading to better nutritional outcomes for children and family members (World Bank, 2012).

Barriers Faced by Farm Women

Despite their immense contributions, farm women face systemic barriers that limit their empowerment and productivity.

Limited Access to Land and Assets

Globally and in India, women rarely own land. While they work on it intensively, land titles and ownership rights are predominantly held by men. According to National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) data, only about 13% of Indian women own land or a house (IIPS & ICF, 2020). Lack of land ownership restricts women's ability to access credit, make independent decisions, or secure collateral.

Inadequate Access to Credit and Financial Services

Farm women often lack access to formal financial institutions due to limited collateral and financial literacy. As a result, they rely on informal moneylenders at high interest rates, leading to debt dependence. This financial exclusion limits investment in quality seeds, fertilizers, machinery, and technology.

Unequal Access to Technology and Extension Services

Agricultural extension services training, machinery, irrigation advice, and modern farming techniques are often biased toward male farmers. Women receive fewer opportunities to participate in training programs or adopt new technologies. This digital and informational divide reinforces gender gaps in productivity and income.

Heavy Time Burden

Women juggle multiple roles farm work, household chores, childcare, fetching water and fuelwood leading to a "time poverty" that restricts their ability to engage in income-generating activities, education, or rest.

Invisible and Unpaid Work

Much of women's agricultural labour is unpaid or classified as family labour. National statistics often ignore this work, rendering women's economic contributions invisible in official figures. This invisibility weakens their bargaining power and undermines policy support for gender-equitable interventions.

Pathways for Empowering Farm Women

To unlock the full potential of agriculture and ensure gender-responsive development, specific policy actions and programs must be adopted.

Enhancing Women's Land and Asset Rights

Securing land ownership and registration for women is essential. Policies should promote joint land titles, inheritance rights, and gender-equitable land reforms. When women own land, they are more likely to invest in productivity, improve household welfare, and gain economic independence.

Promoting Financial Inclusion and Credit Access

Women need easier access to financial services such as:

- Bank accounts

- Microcredit and low-interest loans
- Savings and insurance products

Self-help groups (SHGs) and community finance initiatives have shown success in enhancing women's financial autonomy. Linking women farmers to formal credit institutions can unlock capital for investments in agriculture.

Gender-Responsive Agricultural Extension

Extension services must be tailored to women's needs:

- Training programs conducted at accessible times
- Women extension workers
- Use of mobile and digital learning

Programs like ATMA (Agricultural Technology Management Agency) and KVKs (Krishi Vigyan Kendras) should actively include women to bridge the knowledge gap.

Access to Technology and Mechanization

Technological tools small-scale machinery like two-wheel tractors, seeders, and threshers can reduce women's drudgery and increase productivity. Government schemes should subsidize gender-appropriate tools and ensure women's participation in demonstrations and credit programs.

Strengthening Women's Cooperatives and Value Chains

Women's cooperatives in dairy (e.g., CHCs: Cluster Level Dairy Federations) and produce marketing can improve bargaining power and income. Governments should support women-led producer organizations and collectives with market linkages, branding, and value addition training.

Social Protection and Support Systems

Public investments in childcare, clean water, fuel access, and social safety nets can reduce women's time burden and improve productivity. Policies should integrate nutrition and gender objectives with agricultural programs.

Case Studies and Global Perspectives

India: Self-Help Group Movement

India's SHG movement, supported by the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), has empowered millions of rural women through savings, credit, and enterprise development opportunities. Studies show that women in SHGs have better incomes, improved decision-making, and enhanced social status.

Africa: Women in Staple Crops

In many African countries like Kenya and Uganda, women dominate production of staple crops such as beans, bananas, and cassava. Initiatives supporting women with improved seeds and extension services have increased yields and food security.

Latin America: Women Cooperatives

In countries like Ecuador and Peru, women's cooperatives in coffee and cocoa value chains have gained international recognition. These cooperatives achieve better prices, fair trade certifications, and improved household incomes.

The Economic and Social Case for Investing in Farm Women

Empowering farm women is not just a matter of equity it is an economic imperative. Studies estimate that if women had the same access as men to productive resources, agricultural yields could rise by 20-30% and global hunger could decrease by 12-17% (FAO, 2011). When women control income, household spending on food, health, and education increases, leading to broader social development.

Conclusion

Farm women are the hidden success in agriculture—yet their contributions are undervalued and under-supported. They are producers, labourers, caregivers, innovators, and managers who sustain agricultural systems and rural families. To achieve sustainable agriculture, food security, and equitable rural development, we must recognize farm women not as invisible helpers but as central agents of agricultural transformation. Empowering farm women

through secure land rights, financial inclusion, technology access, gender-responsive extension, and social support will unlock agricultural productivity and build more resilient, prosperous rural communities.

References

1. Birthal, P. S., & Rao, P. R. (2017). Role of Women in Agriculture and Rural Development in India. Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics.
2. FAO. (2011). The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–2011: Women in Agriculture Closing the Gender Gap for Development. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
3. IIPS & ICF. (2020). National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) 2019-21: India. International Institute for Population Sciences and ICF.
4. World Bank. (2012). World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development. World Bank.