

ABSTRACT

Farming in the United States is primarily a male occupation and farming is culturally considered masculine work. Despite this, more and more women are choosing farming as both a career and lifestyle. The national increase in female farmers has been significantly attributed to the paralleled increase in organic and sustainable agriculture operations and farmers' markets in the U.S. This research explores women's increase in farming and investigates how women farmers involved in sustainable agriculture in Vermont explain, perceive and interpret their roles and realities as farmers. Through this exploration, this research also investigates sustainable agriculture's compatibility with women's identities as farmers. Primary data was collected through ethnographic interviews with 12 female farmers in various geographic regions of Vermont. Findings reveal that participants closely attach why and how they farm with environmental care ethics regarding sustainability and local food. Participants also highlighted tractor use as their greatest, and most gendered, limitation. Further, participants found women's perceived, innate nurturing characteristics to be largely responsible for women's increased participation in sustainable agriculture. Through this research it became clear that sustainable agriculture does not challenge or deconstruct gender norms and women are not occupying new or revolutionary roles on the farm. However, sustainable agriculture clearly supports and is compatible with women's identities, as people and as farmers, and this is exactly what deems sustainable agriculture a space of empowerment for women.

Keywords: women farmers; Vermont; agriculture; gender