

# **“Breaking the Grass Ceiling”**

## **Challenges Women Experience in the Local Agriculture Sector**

### **Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs**

# Key Messages

- ▶ Women are **significantly underrepresented** in terms of farm ownership, primary farmer activities, participation in training support groups and on Boards of agri-food organisations
- ▶ Women face complex, multi-faceted and long-standing challenges which include **practical, social and cultural barriers**
- ▶ **Over 95%** of local women who completed our survey feel that **more needs to be done** to support women in the sector and less than half believe that farming provides equal opportunities for men and women
- ▶ There is a range of practical and policy measures which could be taken forward to promote, encourage and support women in the sector



# Context: The Local Agricultural Sector

- ▶ Generates around **£5.4 billion** in economic activity and supports thousands of jobs across hospitality, retail and other industries
- ▶ Around 25,000 registered local farm holdings with approximately 80% of farmland used to rear livestock and to produce meat and dairy products
- ▶ Total calorific output is sufficient to sustain around 10 million people and significant proportion of our agri-produce is exported to our neighbours
- ▶ On cusp of significant period of change due to development of a new system of farm payments, introduction of Climate Change legislation and the fallout of trade deals with other countries following Brexit

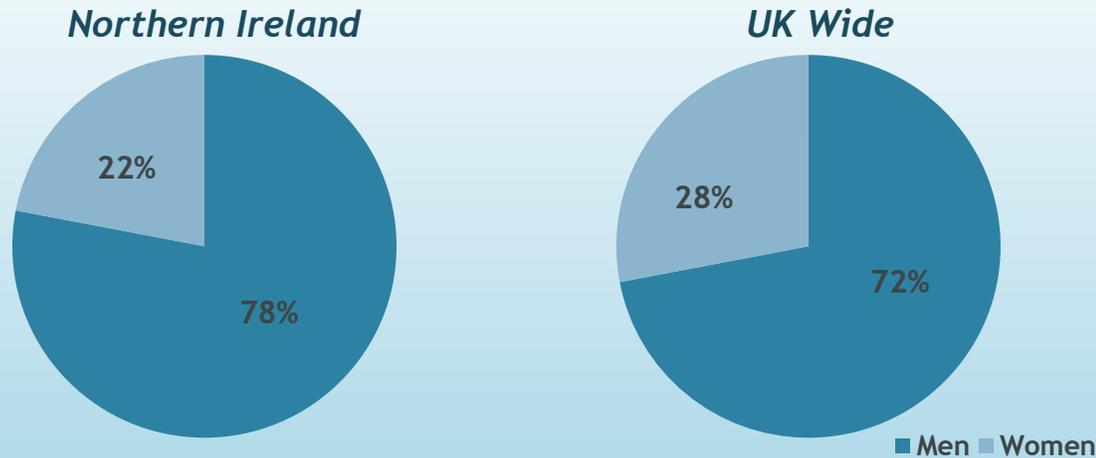


# Context: Women in Agriculture

- ▶ Traditionally farming has been perceived as a “man’s job” and women’s role in the sector has been overlooked or undervalued
- ▶ Stereotypical view of women as having a supportive role on farms, looking after the family and children, managing the household and taking care of paperwork
- ▶ Emerging change in some countries with more registered women farmers and owners. The EU’s Common Agricultural Policy 2023-27 requires member states to “*promote employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in farming*”
- ▶ Scotland and Ireland have introduced specific policies to support women in the agricultural sphere

# Women in Local Agricultural Sector

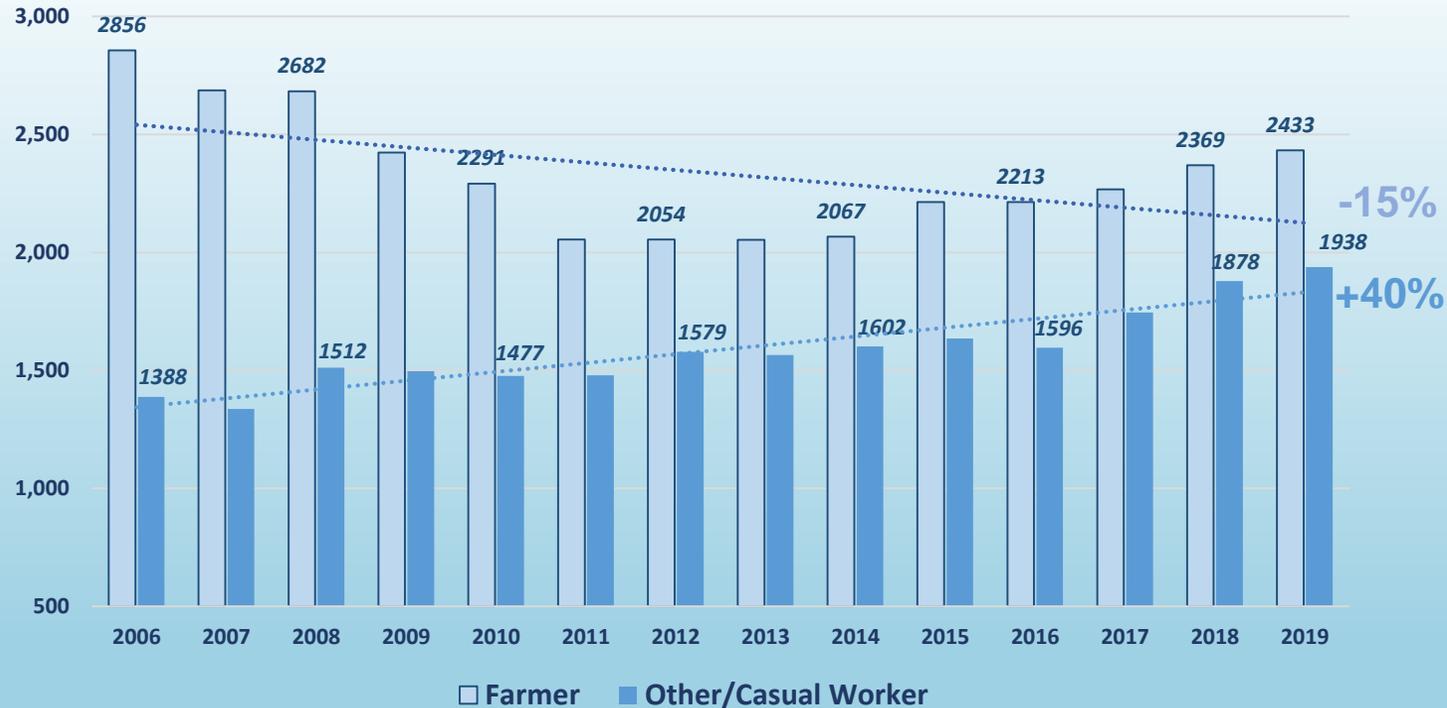
- ▶ Women comprise 22% of the local agricultural workforce which is lower than the UK-wide average



- ▶ 95% of principal farmers registered on the 2019 DAERA census were men
- ▶ 86% of Executive Directors at 14 large local agri-food organisations are men (as of Dec 2021)

# Women in Local Agricultural Sector

- ▶ The number of women farmers fell by 15% between 2006 and 2019 and women are increasingly working in other/supportive roles in the sector



▶ Women comprise just 4% of participants in Business Development Groups (BDGs)

# Committee Survey Results

- ▶ Survey accessible from 3 Dec 2021 to 14 Jan 2022: 178 responses from women currently living or working on local farms
- ▶ 83% of respondents told us that a man owns the farm on which they live/work
- ▶ Just 15% of the women who completed our survey consider themselves to be the final decision-maker on their farm and 23% feel they have “Little to No Say” over farm decisions:

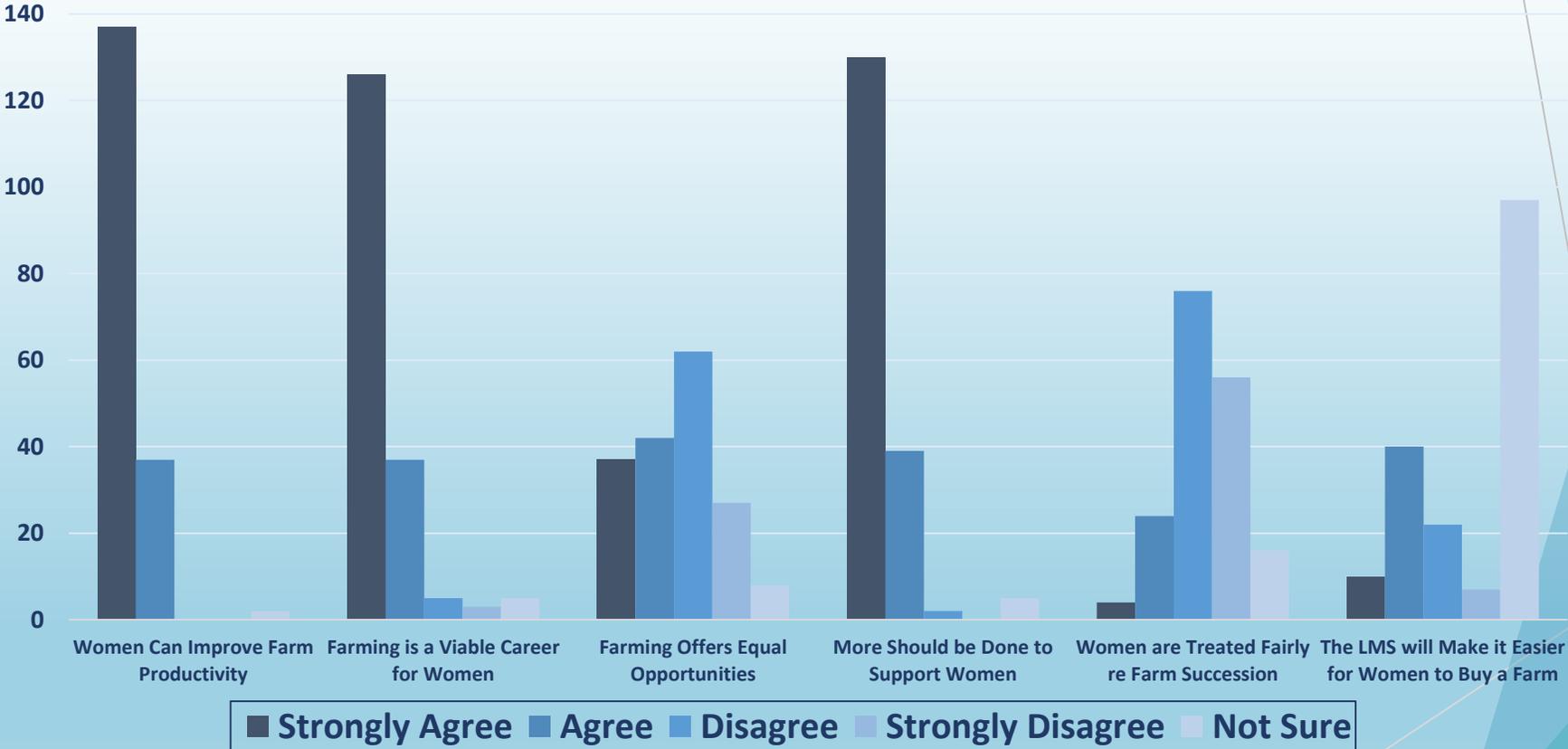
*“The farm is mainly run by the men of the family, but being a girl, I make sure I’m heard and if something isn’t working, I will make sure it’s sorted”*

- ▶ 98% regularly participate in on-farm activities and just under a third complete “hands-on” tasks in addition to supportive jobs like completion of paperwork and form-filling



# Committee Survey: Initial Findings

## View on Women's Role in Agriculture



# Committee Survey: Initial Findings

- ▶ The most frequently cited challenges for women in agriculture by respondents are:

Agriculture is a  
Male-Dominated  
Industry

Childcare Issues  
and Caring  
Responsibilities

Access to  
Finance

Social Stigma  
that Women  
Shouldn't Farm

Lack of  
Confidence

Inheritance:  
Gaining  
Ownership

Physical  
Challenges

