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WOMEN AS A FACTOR OF URBAN AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT¹

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Abstract

The paper is focused on analysis of female labour force on family farms as a factor of urban agriculture development. The problem is being analyzed from the aspect of socio-demographic indicators of female labour force as a development potential: economic activity and level of education. The purpose of the analysis is to point out the main characteristics of female economic activity and level of education as a potential for urban agriculture development in urban and periurban area of Novi Sad.

Key words: *women labour force, economic activity, level of education, (peri)urban agriculture, Novi Sad*

Introduction

One of the important elements in researching the development possibilities and potential benefits from urban agriculture³ is the issue of labour force or characteristics of urban farmers. In the research of labour force, one of the crucial aspects is gender issue. Gender issue in labour force in agriculture is a classical sociological question which, in the context of urban agriculture, opens new dilemmas and research problems. Thus, one of the questions that can be asked is whether urban agriculture, due to its

1 The paper is a part of the research on the projects „Multifunctional agriculture and rural development in function of Republic of Serbia integration in European Union“ (MSTD, No. 149007) and „Socioeconomic and cultural characteristics and potential of Vojvodina as a factors of regional connexion and European integration“ (MSTD, No. 149013).

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3 The concept of urban agriculture refers to a production of food and other goods that result from agricultural production within urban, periurban and suburban areas. Such concept is used in the meaning that are representing Mougeot (2000: 6-7; 2006: 4-5) and de Zeeuw (2004: 2-3).

specifics⁴, preserve or transform established gender relations in the sense of: changes in labour division, participation in decision making, availability of necessary resources/inputs for the production, orientation towards market (whether the farm owner is a male or female), etc. Essence in researching gender issues in labour force is to establish level of recognition of women as active participants in urban agriculture as a form of economic and social reproduction of family farms⁵.

Also, question of possibilities for urban agriculture development can be very significant in researching unemployment issues in urban areas, especially in transitional societies. In such context, gender issue is being additionally emphasized, due to the fact that the significant portion of unemployed are females of working age, with lower job qualifications who simply are not propulsive in the severe labour market. For one segment of such female population, especially ones living in periurban areas, there is a chance for self-employment in agriculture.

Aforementioned, research in gender issues also implies the basic insight into the main socio-demographic characteristics of urban farmers that derives from their social roles, social positions and general social and cultural features of the communities they live in. This context is the framework for the analysis of the female labour force on family farms in urban and periurban area of Novi Sad.

The paper is focused on the analysis of two socio-demographic features of female labour force on family farms – their economic activity and level of education. The purpose of the analysis is to point out the main characteristics of these socio-demographic features in the context of potential for urban agriculture development in urban and periurban area of Novi Sad.

Method of the research and data resources

Selected socio-demographic indicators of female labour force on family farms in (peri)urban area of Novi Sad are being analyzed based on the data collected in the *System of information in agricultural extension of Vojvodina*⁶. The analysis is based on data on household members of the family farms that are collected in the period January

4 On specifics of urban agriculture and differences from so called rural agriculture, more in: de Zeeuw (2004: 4-5).

5 On aspects of gender issues in urban agriculture labour force, more in: Hovorka, de Zeeuw, Njenga (2009: 13-25). Also, see matrix for the analysis of gender issues in urban agriculture labour force activities (Hovorka, 1998: 26). On development of the research interest and annotated bibliography regarding gender issues in urban agriculture see in: Hovorka (2003: 279-323).

6 System of information in agricultural extension of Vojvodina (approved by the Secretariat of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Vojvodina) is the official system for registering the main features of the activities of extension agents working in Agricultural Extension Service of Vojvodina as well as the main characteristics of households with whom agents work.

- March 2010. It is a total of 295 selected family farms that are cooperating with the extension agents of the AESV organizational unit in Novi Sad⁷. Portion of females in the total population of selected family farms (1.265 members) is 47,7%.

Women labour force on selected family farms in urban and periurban area of Novi Sad – economic activity and education

Contingent⁸ of female members of working age who are living on the selected family farms in (peri)urban area of Novi Sad consists of 427 women or 70,7% of total female farm population⁹. Comparing to total female members of all selected family farms in Vojvodina, contingent of female members of working age on family farms in (peri)urban area of Novi Sad is slightly larger which derives from their favourable age structure¹⁰. Recognized differences in the total and sample female population could be explained by the influence of the nearby large urban centre (Novi Sad). In general, rural settlements and suburban areas that are surrounding large urban centres are more convenient place to live than remote ones, in infrastructural, communal and institutional sense. Providing options for achieving higher living standard, these settlements retain better demographic structure, unlike smaller rural settlements remote from urban centres which do not get to answer their residents' life needs and aspirations.

While the size of population of working age shows only labour force potential, more significant indicator of existing female labour force on family farms is their economic activity¹¹ (Tab. No. 1).

7 Extension agents employed in organizational unit of Agricultural Extension Service of Vojvodina (AESV) in Novi Sad work with farms located in nine municipalities in the areas of the South Bačka District: Novi Sad, Bač, Bačka Palanka, Beočin, Sremski Karlovci, Temerin and Žabalj.

8 The contingent of female population of working age includes all women aged 15 to 59 years.

9 Contingent of females of working age is a little bit smaller than the contingent of male labour force of working age (75,9% of total male population in selected family farms).

10 Female members of working age living on selected family farms in Vojvodina make 67,2% of total female population. Favourable age structure characteristics of females living on family farms in (peri)urban area of Novi Sad in comparison to age structure of total female members of all family farms in Vojvodina reflect in lower average age (37,5 years to 39,3 years) and lower value of aging index (0,63 to 0,84).

11 Economic activity of population living on selected family farms is defined according to employment outside or on the farm. Those female members who are not economically active outside the farm and who have finished schooling are considered to be engaged in agricultural production on farm. Those female members who are still in school are considered to be supported.

Table No. 1. Female members of selected family farms in urban and periurban area of Novi Sad, according to the economic activity

Economic activity of the female members	Number	%
1. active outside the family farm	60	9,9
2. active in agriculture on family farm	332	55,0
3. supported female members	178	29,5
4. retired female members	34	5,6
Total	604	100,0

Resource: System of information in agricultural extension of Vojvodina; calculation by authors

Since among selected family farms in urban and periurban area of Novi Sad, according to income source, prevail strictly agricultural farms¹², as it was expected, economic activity rate of women that are employed outside the family farm is very low – only 9,9% of women have permanent employment in a company. Regardless their official employments outside the family farm, most of these women are also engaged in agriculture on family farms.

Unlike this, most of the women (55,0% of total female population on selected family farms in area of Novi Sad) aren't officially employed and they are considered to be economically active in agriculture on family farms. Although most of these women say for themselves that they are housewives (55,4% within this group), they, at least as helping members, participate in production of goods and services on family farm and therefore, generate total income coming from agricultural production¹³.

Presented data confirm the statement that women living on farms more often perceive themselves as housewives not as farmers, regardless to their almost equal participation in agricultural production. Such attitude indicates that women perceive their production role in terms of maintaining the household, in that way, depreciating their contribution to gaining income on family farm.

Other significant indicator of female labour force potential is their level of education. As it was expected, among women of working age on selected family farms prevail females with secondary school education (50,4% of total women of working age). Also, portion of women with the lowest level of education (only primary education) is significant (19,7% of total women of working age).

12 Of total 295 selected family farms, 197 (or 66,8%) of them have no single member employed outside the farm and their income is solely from agricultural production. Other 98 (or 33,2%) farms can be, according to the income source, define as mixed, considering the fact that at least one member is employed outside the family farm.

13 Only 21 female members of the family farms said for themselves that they are farmers.

Table No. 2. Educational structure of female members living on selected family farms whose schooling is finished, according to their official employment outside the family farm

Level of education	Females active outside the farm		Female engaged in agriculture on family farm	
	Number	%	Number	%
1. without school	0	0	2	0,6
2. primary education	1	1,7	130	39,2
3. secondary education	39	66,1	181	54,5
4. higher school education	4	6,8	12	3,6
5. faculty education	15	25,4	7	2,1
Total	59	100	332	100

Resource: System of information in agricultural extension of Vojvodina; calculation by authors

If level of education is examined in a relation to economic activity (Tab. No. 2), it can be observed that females who are active outside the farm have favourable educational structure (significant portion of female with higher school and faculty). As opposed to this, women who are engaged in agriculture on family farm have more often only primary education, which put this group of female into the vicious circle of difficult possibilities for working engagement outside the family farm agriculture. Also, while examining educational structure of women engaged in agriculture on selected family farms, it can be observed that only 20 of them (or 6%) have formal education in agriculture¹⁴. Presented data only confirm the statement that the agriculture, as those women's occupation, is not their first choice but imposed necessity.

Women as farm owners – formal right to decision making

Particular aspect in the analysis of the women's role in urban agriculture development is the issue on participation in decision making. This issues is a subject of few sociological researches¹⁵ which, apart from time distance, most of them have the same conclusion that the decision making process is still based on the pattern in which making decisions on organization of every day household activities is left to women, while decisions on organization of agricultural production and farm make men (in the most cases, the farm owners). For this reason, a significant element in researching women's role in agricultural development is to establish general socio-demographic characteristics of female farm owners. In the case when women are farm owners it is

¹⁴ Of total of 20 women in this group, 18 of them have secondary education and two of them have faculty education.

¹⁵ See: Erlih (1971), Babović, Vuković (2008).

presumed that there is more equal form of decision making, or that women's formal farm ownership facilitates their real participation in making vital decisions.

According to data, women as farm owners appear only on 18 selected family farms in (peri)urban area of Novi Sad¹⁶ (6% of total number of 295). Apart from the total population of female farm owners in Vojvodina (who became farm owners mostly because there is no male to overtake that role), among female farm owners in (peri) urban area of Novi Sad, this is not the case. To be exact, only in two cases women are farm owners because they are single or widow and in only five cases women are farm owners because their husbands are employed outside the farm.

Apart from the male farm owners (among them few have employment outside from the farm) there is none female farm owner who is employed outside the farm. This situation can be an indicator that the woman's right to decision making (which has been formalized through her status as a farm owner) is actually enforced. Women are entrusted with farm ownership in the absence of their other employment or income source.

Conclusions

Woman's active engagement in agriculture on family farm has always been understood, but not properly articulated or valued. Woman's productive role has often been marginalized and depreciated. Specifics of organization of agricultural production on family farm imply synergy of labour and life. Therefore, woman has multiple roles – besides being a mother and wife, she also takes care of a household and has active engagement in agricultural production.

According to the fact that they make a significant portion of economically active population, women are entitled to be considered as an important factor of farm development. Nevertheless, as it is shown, core barrier to women's more considerable engagement in agricultural development is a lack of sufficient self-perception as economically active members of farm households, with their, in general, unfavourable educational structure, especially lack of education in agriculture.

Thus, one of the first steps in urban agriculture development on our farms is to encourage women to educate and self organize in order to facilitate accessibility to institutions that can be of their assistance. A significant part in this process should have extension service because it is already familiarized and cooperating with family farms.

Also, it is of great importance to increase women's participation in decision making, especially in making decisions regarding farm management. Raising women's

16 Portion of women farm owners in periurban area of Novi Sad is a little bit higher than in Vojvodina, in general (6% to 3,4% of female farm owners in total number of selected family farms in Vojvodina). Also, among 18 family farms with female owners, five of them are located in urban area of Novi Sad. Nevertheless, due to the small number of cases in which this occurred, it cannot be concluded whether between farms members (who live in urban area) exist more gender sensitive and equal model of farm inheritance and management than between farm members in periurban or typically rural areas.

participation in decision making requires their encouragement to mobilize and take an active role in defining their own position on family farm.

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