

# GENDER CHALLENGES IN FAMILY FARMING: HAVE THEY BEEN OVERCOME?

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## PRE-PROOF

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## ABSTRACT

The study presents gender issues on small rural properties. This qualitative, study was to identify and discuss the challenges and potential of women in family farming, based on Feminist Theory and the dimensions of the FIRO Theory. Eighteen women were interviewed, and primary data were analyzed using content analysis. The interviews revealed 104 obstacles,

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with lack of income, gender devaluation, and difficult working conditions as the most salient issues. This study provides insights into the gender-based challenges faced by women in family farming and proposes sustainable interventions to address them. It was possible to understand how women relate to other family members, considering their position in businesses.

**Keywords:** Family farming. Woman challenges. Decision-making process. Gender issues. Rural women

## DESAFIOS DA MULHER NA AGRICULTURA FAMILIAR: AS DIFERENÇAS DE GÊNERO FORAM SUPERADAS?

### **RESUMO**

O estudo apresenta questões de gênero em pequenas propriedades rurais. Este estudo qualitativo teve como objetivo identificar e discutir os desafios e potencialidades das mulheres na agricultura familiar, com base na Teoria Feminista e nas dimensões da Teoria FIRO. Dezoito mulheres foram entrevistadas e os dados foram analisados usando análise de conteúdo. As entrevistas revelaram 104 obstáculos, com falta de renda, desvalorização de gênero e condições de trabalho difíceis como as questões mais salientes. Este estudo fornece insights sobre os desafios de gênero enfrentados pelas mulheres na agricultura familiar e propõe intervenções sustentáveis para enfrentá-los. Foi possível entender como as mulheres se relacionam com outros membros da família, considerando sua posição nos negócios.

**Palavras-chave:** Agricultura familiar. Desafios da mulher. Processo de tomada de decisão. Questões de gênero. Mulheres rurais

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many unfavorable and problematic issues come to mind when considering the rural business environment. Some 10.1 million (4.7%) of Brazil's 214.3 million inhabitants work in the family farming sector, representing roughly 77% of rural establishments. This also represents 23% of the total area of these establishments, according to the 2017 Agricultural Census (IBGE, 2017). However, women manage 19% of agricultural establishments and only

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29,916 women (0.59%) are rural landowners (IBGE, 2017). Family farming in Brazil is defined by Law 11.326 of July 24, 2006, establishing a maximum of four fiscal modules that can fall under this category. However, the term "family farming" is used in a broader sense for this study and is associated with a way of life that preserves the familial nature of agricultural activities and is based on kinship relations and inheritance between people, which facilitates quicker decisions and actions (Schneider, 2006).

Family farming remains lacking in some advances to achieve its full potential. Among these is women being considered important social actors within the sector, and thus requiring greater attention, inclusion, and empowerment. Despite the active participation of rural women in agricultural activities and responsibilities, including household tasks and child-rearing, they are not always valued or recognized (Brandao et al., 2018; Chanana e Aggarwal, 2020; Curimbaba, 2002; Erwin, 2011). Gender differences in family farming are a latent factor (Chanana e Aggarwal, 2020; Kristjanson et al., 2017) and effective solutions are needed.

Gender inequality has been studied in urban and rural areas, various activities, and numerous countries (Curimbaba, 2002; Hansen, 2020; Lawson e Lahiri-Dutt, 2020; Poza e Messer, 2001; Velásquez, 2020). Several previous studies have noted aspects such as male domination, the opportunity for succession being limited to male children, and heavy manual labor being carried out by women (Curimbaba, 2002; Erwin, 2011; Lawson e Lahiri-Dutt, 2020). However, these studies have left a lacuna regarding the association of contemporary challenges women family farmers face with aspects of Feminist Theory and *Fundamental Interpersonal Relation Orientation* (FIRO) Theory that discuss gender relationships.

Justifying such a research direction, an ongoing global debate is linked to Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that present central themes for humanity. In this sense, "Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (Pnuma, 2015, s/p) ratifies the importance of women as a social pillar without disregarding others. Accordingly, the present study was developed to understand aspects related to women who reside, work, and live in rural areas. While many social actors that work in rural agricultural production, the woman farmer certainly contributes significantly to its development. However, rural women are subject to specific challenges, gaps, and expectations (Dal Moro e Brandli, 2019; Dal Soglio

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e Kubo, 2009; FAO, 2011; IBGE, 2017; Joosse e Grubbström, 2017; Sottomayor, Tranter e Costa, 2011). The present research proposes to map and discuss these challenges.

From this perspective, the Feminist Theory aims to analyze how human beings think, do not think, or sometimes deliberately avoid thinking about gender (Flax, 1991). This theory can contribute to discussions and foundations based on the challenges of female family farmers, related to, amongst others, power, male domination, and issues of the role of women, their purposes, and ambitions. The FIRO Theory, in turn, measures how an individual behaves when relating to others, aiming to build a measure of how a subject acts in interpersonal situations (Schutz, 1958).

The objective of the present work was to identify and discuss the challenges and potential of women in family farming, with an emphasis on gender issues, in addition to proposing sustainable actions. The theoretical discussions are based on Feminist Theory and the dimensions of the FIRO Theory.

### **THE CHALLENGES FOR GENDER EQUALITY (SDG 5)**

The sustainable development agenda aims to achieve gender equality, with SDG 5 explicitly identifying it as the crucial fifth goal among the 17 SDGs. A decade ago, women comprised 43% of the agricultural workforce in developing countries, carrying out numerous family responsibilities such as agricultural labor, child and elder care, food preparation, and household chores (FAO, 2011). Data from the 2017 Census of Agriculture shows an increase in women's involvement in rural activities. However, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, holding only 19% of farms in Brazil and 12% in Rio Grande do Sul (IBGE, 2017).

The goals of the SDGs, launched by the United Nations (UN) in 2015, foresee sustainable actions and practices to be thought, planned, and practiced until 2030, giving rise to the Global Agenda 2030 (UNEP, 2015). In this sense, actions and initiatives related to local sustainability are extremely valuable and essential, considering global aspects and accounting for specific regional characteristics or peculiarities. The SDGs recognize that all countries have economic, social, and environmental problems and challenges to overcome. Furthermore, each

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region deserves attention and practical initiatives designed together with the community to solve or minimize such problems. Although the SDGs were proposed by the UN in 2015, research remains necessary to discuss actions to achieve them. Women are often perceived merely as assistants to men, even when they play central roles in production, property management, and the transmission of agroecological knowledge.

SDG 5 seeks to realize human rights and achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including those living in rural areas. According to the goals of SDG 5, reforms must take place (by 2030) to give women equal rights of access to economic resources, ownership, and control of the land. Likewise, under national laws, women should be entitled to other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources. This study focuses on the importance of the role of women in the countryside and the challenges and expectations they can expect to meet there. It aims to contribute to filling the gaps related to the role of women in family farming. Despite the growing participation of women in family farming in northern Rio Grande do Sul, their work remains marked by invisibility and undervaluation — a reflection of the patriarchal structure historically rooted in the region's rural practices.

There exists gender inequality in agriculture stemming from a culture that treats men and women differently; consequently, undervaluation of women's work and sexual division of labor occurs (Eden e Wagstaff, 2021). Sectors that are segregated by gender have limitations for women's growth. Collaboration between government agencies, higher education institutions, businesses, and most importantly, society itself, is necessary for this to be reversed (Franco, Meruane e Derbyshire, 2020). This scenario highlights the need for a critical perspective that acknowledges gender inequalities in rural areas and promotes public policies that recognize and support female leadership, challenging the patriarchal logic that restricts women's economic and social autonomy.

## **GENDER RELATIONS IN FEMINIST THEORY**

Feminist theory is used in the current study as theoretical assistance to clarify the interview script and, in particular, to promote conversations regarding the difficulties

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experienced by women in family farming. This approach also helps the conversations regarding gender issues in agriculture.

There is more than one accepted feminist theory in academics while discussing feminism. The multiplicity of theoretical schools stems from feminist thought's emphasis on overthrowing inherited conventions rather than developing precise theoretical frameworks (Dias, 1992). Although "feminisms" are far from developing a coherent conception and expressing a plurality (of academic, political, and thought epistemological and methodological references, and organizational forms), they nonetheless share some fundamental ideas (Safiotti, 2001, Bandeira, 2008). This way, and in light of this article's goal, we won't present the numerous feminisms and their manifestations. The emphasis will be on looking for interlocutory components that aid in understanding the empirical occurrences under study.

This study emphasizes that feminist social and political theory is grounded in social practice and results from the need to address specific inquiries regarding women's lives and citizenship. However, practically all theoretical perspectives acknowledge that social and cultural factors have contributed to the historical state of women's subordination (Safiotti, 2001, Bandeira, 2008).

When explicitly taking into account feminist critical theory, it has gone beyond and beyond just criticizing the exclusion and invisible nature of women in the scientific community and discusses the fundamental tenets of modern science, underlining that it is not "neutral" (Woolf, 1936; Bourdieu, 1997). Additionally, the feminist critique dismantles the historical-material, cultural, and psychological processes through which various forms of dominance, oppression, and exploitation of women are created, maintained, and repeated (Bandeira, 2008; Costa, 1998; Dias, 1992; Rago, 1998).

Faced with feminist social, environmental, and economic challenges, Gandhi (2018) presents an important work, citing thinkers and their reflections on the issues of women, feminist movements, and their criticisms regarding the position of women in a patriarchal society. In this context, it is important to mention some philosophers, such as John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, who in their works defended equality for all. However, they did not include the female gender as deserving of equality in debating political issues.

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A culture where males hold more authority than women, as in patriarchy, male dominance, and their connections, has yet to advance (Flax, 1991). In this society that has, in one way or another, been dominated by men, thinking about these features might be helpful with social, environmental, and economic issues, even in rural areas and agriculture (García et al., 1995a; Vedana et al., 2023; Breitenbach e Foguesatto, 2023).

In 1791, Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the founders of feminist philosophy and a supporter of feminist movements, was already discussing and supporting women's independence. In her 1792 essay *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, written in response to Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord's 1791 *Rapport sur l'instruction publique*, Mary criticized the fact that women were deemed to have been created to please men, rather than be independent. In her work, Wollstonecraft reinforced the need for women to obtain the same education as men so that they too, could have opportunities to lead independent lives. This view disagreed with thinkers such as Rousseau, who defended the notion that a woman's education should differ from a man's (Gandhi, 2018).

Creating opportunities for problematization and gender discussions was an important advance for society. The Feminist Theory shows that other health issues, violence, religion, and culture are marked by power relations and gender domination in society (Flax, 1991). Over the years, gender studies have been debated by researchers from different schools of thought, bringing contributions and repercussions in different areas of knowledge (Gabrielli, 2007). The feminist movement that has materialized over the years, seeks solutions to specific women's anxieties, as well as encouraging the understanding of women of their dissatisfactions (Gandhi, 2018).

Although much progress has been made regarding women's emancipation, much remains to be explored about how a new model of feminist critical theory can contribute to the advancement of democracy and justice in times of globalization (Matos, 2010). Likewise, much progress can be made in understanding how this theory can actively contribute to considering and appreciating women farmers in general and family farmers in particular. Particularly in agriculture, productive and economic systems affirm women's participation in occupations with low social visibility, and the social division of labor caused by this is visible in agricultural facilities, which results in these social divisions (Filipak, 2021; Vedana et al., 2023; Breitenbach

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e Corazza, 2021). For instance, women typically perform unpaid household and family tasks, farm work with lower market pay, and in certain circumstances lack financial independence (Breitenbach e Corazza, 2021). The Firo Theory is now put forth as a foundation for upcoming talks.

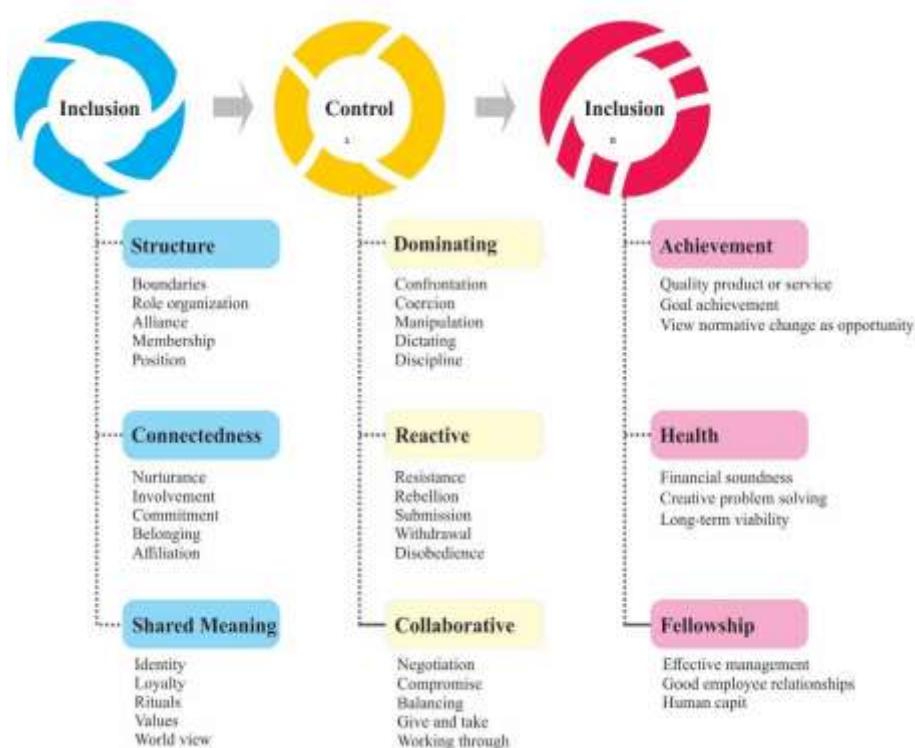
### FIRO THEORY

Another theory with a behavioral focus employed we have implemented as a basis for understanding the challenges of women in family farming is *Fundamental Interpersonal Relation Orientation* or FIRO Theory (Figure 1). This theory originated in Schutz' theory, which states that an individual is responsible for actions towards others (interpersonal relationships). Over time, it was adapted to other contexts, such as organizational and family environments (Haberman e Danes, 2007). Initially, this theory was designed to measure and predict communication and interaction between people to link highly productive teams in distinct roles (Schutz, 1958).

FIRO not only serves as a conceptual model to guide research or academic study, but it also reveals itself as a problem-solving model that anticipates a definition of prioritized changes and dynamics in a family business (Danes e Olson, 2003). Thus, FIRO Theory can contribute to several behavioral approaches, favoring analysis of decision-making by women in a given field. FIRO Theory consists of three dimensions (inclusion, control, and integration) that are subdivided, creating a model that can be used or applied to different areas of knowledge. Furthermore, it has a behavioral focus and means *Fundamental Interpersonal Relation Orientation*. Figure 1 presents the Firo Theory model.

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**Figure 1-** Illustration of how the Firo family model is used in family businesses.



Source: Adapted from Danes and Olson (2003)

Haberman and Danes (2007) found that the three dynamics of FIRO theory influenced each other; therefore, both the sense of inclusion (roles, decision involvement) and the form of control (power and conflict management) have important influences on the integration of the family business (realization of goals, trust, and companionship).

### METHOD

This section presents the study, the data collection instrument, the methodological procedures, and the mechanisms for data analysis. Based on the characteristics of these investigative approaches, this research is classified as qualitative and adopts a multiple case study design, analyzing more than one case to investigate a specific phenomenon. Through this approach, the aim was to understand how different contexts affect a common phenomenon (Yin,

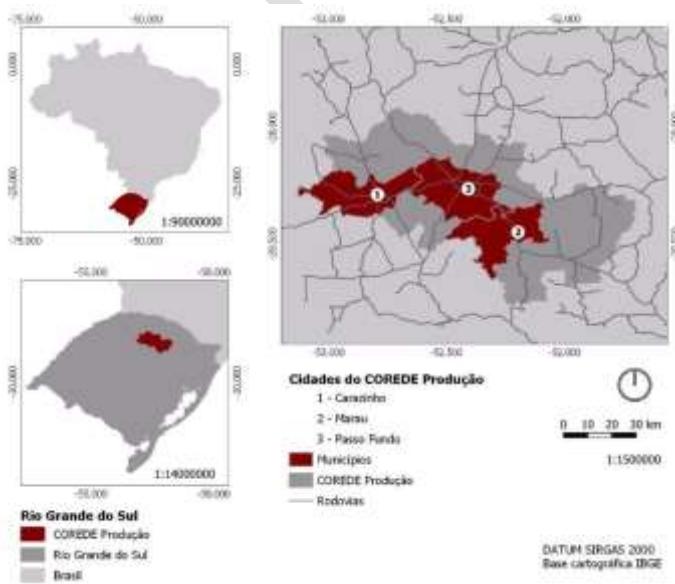
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2005). According to Minayo (2001), such a design considers the study of relationships, beliefs, perceptions, and opinions.

The study was delimited by a sample of municipalities in the *Corede Produção* region, in the northern Rio Grande do Sul, southern Brazil (Figure 2). The municipalities chosen were Carazinho, Passo Fundo, and Marau because they offered the most significant representation concerning the total number of inhabitants within the regional limits. In this region, family farming predominates as the primary source of income. It mainly produces grains, especially soybean [*Glycine max* (L.) Merr.] monoculture. The total population is 358,923 inhabitants in an area of 6,002.7 km<sup>2</sup> (FEE, 2015). The three cities studied are responsible for 78.90% of the whole food (grain) produced in the region. More than 75% of agricultural establishments in this region are family farms, which offers diversity in their productive organization and a long legacy in food production and industrialization (IBGE, 2017). (Pelegrini e Gazolla, 2009).

The agricultural establishments that are the subject of this study have up to 80 hectares because the fiscal module developed in the study region is, on average, 20 hectares. Grain agriculture, particularly soybean monoculture, and milk production stand out as the main sources of revenue in the study region (IBGE, 2017).

**Figure -** The research area



Source: Prepared by the authors (2022)

To choose the research participants, the inclusion criteria were women family farmers residing in the countryside of the selected municipalities, over 20 years old, and active in family

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farming for more than five years. The exclusion criteria considered were women residing in urban centers, those who did not carry out tasks in agriculture, and those who did not reside in the surveyed municipalities.

Thus, six female family farmers were interviewed in the three municipalities selected for the research, making of 18 actors. Local leaders were consulted to select these women, considering the factors of inclusion and the local representation of women family farmers. The definition of the number of interviews was based on the saturation method, and non-participant observation was also used. Data collection is considered saturated when no new element is identified, so no further collection of additional information is required, as it would not change the understanding of the phenomenon studied (Nascimento et al, 2018). The profile of the interviewed women farmers is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1-** Profile of family farmers interviewed.

<i>Age group</i>	28% (n=5) from 25 to 35 years old
	28% (n=5) from 36 to 45 years old
	11% (n=2) from 46 to 55 years old
	28% (n=5) from 56 to 65 years old
	5% (n=1) over 65 years old
<i>Marital status</i>	78% (n=14) married
	11% (n=2) widowed
	11% (n=2) single
<i>Children</i>	28% (n=5) do not have them
	39% (n=7) have one to two
	22% (n=4) from three to four
	11% (n=2) more than four
<i>Education</i>	56% (n=10) incomplete primary education
	22% (n=4) complete elementary school
	11% (n=2) agricultural technical course
	11% (n=2) higher education (one in business administration and one in veterinary school)

Source: Prepared by the authors (2021)

As an instrument for data collection, in-depth, individual, and semi-structured interviews were used. The interview script consisted of questions that addressed women's

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challenges, weaknesses, and difficulties in the activity, as well as the potentials, expectations, and dreams that encourage the permanence of the female gender in family farming. Five experts in the area validated this instrument.

To conduct the interviews, contact was initially established by telephone with the women farmers to explain the study and verify their interest and availability to participate in the research. With their agreement to participate in the study, the interviews were scheduled considering the most convenient date and time for the participants. The women farmers were interviewed face-to-face and in locations of their choosing. Each interviewee received a 45-minute allotment of time for the interview. These were recorded with the participant's consent and afterward, transcriptions allowed for future content analysis. A friendly conversation was started with the farmers before the interviews, letting them know it was a place where they could freely share their thoughts and feelings about their situation and the people they interacted with in agriculture.

The data was studied through a content analysis methodology considered pre-analysis, exploration of the material, treatment of results and interpretation, using MaxQDA v. 2018 software. According to Bardin (2011), this form of analysis consists of a set of research techniques in which the objective is to search for a single sense or multiple senses of documentation. Thus, the categories of analysis (inclusion, control, and integration) were defined as *a posteriori*, according to the dimensions of FIRO Theory. Through this procedure, the research based on women family farmers investigated how women's challenges can be minimized, culminating in guidelines for future actions based on these three dimensions. As the categories were defined *a posteriori*, in addition to the literature, interviews were used as evidence. In this way, it is possible to connect the challenges and potentialities mentioned with the literature used, with the interviews collected, as well as with the theories studied.

The dimension of inclusion signals how the woman feels towards her family, that is, how a person feels towards a group. It was possible to understand how women relate to other family members, considering their position within the structure and family businesses. In the control dimension, how the problems are treated was analyzed and the influence or power exercised by the woman was assessed in the context of challenges and considering her family

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position. Finally, the levels of the integration dimension were investigated, identifying how women express their affection, companionship, and engagement in solving problems.

The Feminist Theory, on the other hand, brought theoretical support to discussions on the difficulties women face in family farming, with an emphasis on issues related to gender. The FIRO Theory was the basis for identifying and comparing these challenges and the potential of the participants in this process. Through FIRO Theory, which dimension is the most affected was identified.

The local Research Ethics Committee approved this study's project, "The 2030 Global Agenda and the Challenges of Family Farming for Women," under Permission Form: 36602920.6.0000.5319. Resolutions 466/2012 and 510/2016 of the National Health Council state that this procedure complies with the requirements for human subject research.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The objective of the present work was to identify and discuss the challenges and potential of women in family farming, with an emphasis on gender issues, in addition to proposing sustainable actions. The theoretical discussions are based on Feminist Theory and the dimensions of the FIRO Theory. Considering content analysis as a technique for analyzing and discussing the objective proposed by the study.

The women participating in this study have always been involved in working the land, even though their labor was long rendered invisible or considered merely an extension of domestic duties. Family farming in northern Rio Grande do Sul is characterized by a diversity of crops—such as corn, beans, vegetables, and livestock—and relies heavily on the work of these women to remain active and resilient.

*"My grandmother, my mother, and I have always worked in the same place. We cultivated a small piece of land, but we never made any money because my father always reinvested everything into the property."*

Access to land, rural credit, technical assistance, and professional training remain ongoing challenges, but they have been addressed through organization and collective mobilization. Initiatives such as ecological fairs, family-run agribusinesses, and solidarity

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economy networks demonstrate how these women have been transforming their lived experiences into innovative forms of resistance and income generation. Their lives are marked by a deep connection to the land, but also by a continuous struggle for recognition and dignity. They are the protagonists of an agriculture that nourishes communities with care, identity, and a strong commitment to sustainability.

### **CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL FOR WOMEN IN FAMILY FARMING**

An attempt is made to present a diagnosis of the challenges and potential of women family farmers and to identify possible actions in favor of the permanence of women in the countryside and their quality of life. FIRO theory presents a panorama of inclusion, control, and integrity in this case, showing how women act and interrelate. It is essential to mention that the categorization through the dimensions of the FIRO theory framed the meaning of the responses regarding inclusion, power, and feelings arising from challenges and potential.

Women farmers have multiple roles and their contributions are often overlooked in statistics and public policies. Recognizing and valuing this leading role is important to promote gender equality in rural areas and strengthen fairer, more sustainable production models that are rooted in local realities, such as in Africa, where some regions remain underdeveloped (Abdulai, 2025).

According to Schutz (1958), inclusion, in general, means who is inside and who is outside of a process. The present research focus represents the role of women and how they are part of family farming. The control dimension refers to who controls and is controlled: who is involved in the decision process and power. And finally, integration reveals how much feelings are shared, who is close, and who is distant in the activity context, involving more sentimental issues. The content analysis (Table 2) considered and correlated the FIRO categories with the challenges and potentials mentioned by the participating women. As a result, the predominance of the "Control" category becomes evident.

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**Table 2** – Content analysis of challenges and potential for women in family farming according to FIRO Theory

Categorization and Frequency	Challenges
Control - 53.8% (56 mentions)	Lack of specific income for women
	Climate change
	Judgment (criticism) of society concerning female farmers
	Patriarchy - women feel controlled by their fathers or husbands
	No autonomy to make choices on the property
	Inspection and bureaucracies
	Production and investment costs in agriculture
	Rural exodus
	Lack of leisure
	Family conflicts and lack of dialogue
Inclusion - 30.8% (32 mentions)	Devaluation of gender in agriculture
	Hard work for women
	No autonomy to participate in decisions about rural property
Integration - 15.4% (16 mentions)	Lack of labor in agriculture in general and consequent work overload
	The difficulty for women to study
	Structure and difficulty in accessing the property
	Aging of women
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>
Categorization and Frequency	Potentials
Control - 51.1% (24 mentions)	Quality of life and food
	Home and family
	Routine and schedules
	Income
	Capital
	Division of tasks
Inclusion - 21.3% (10 mentions)	Access to technology
	Friendships and good neighbors
Integration - 27.7% (13 mentions)	Opportunity for growth and change
	Planning, dreams, and achievements
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>

Source: Prepared by the authors (2022)

Some challenges women face in family farming (e.g., lack of income, devaluation of women farmers, and arduous work) stood out, given the number of times they were noted.

*“One of the biggest difficulties out here is the lack of income distribution with those who work in the activity, we never see money, we invest everything in the property.”*

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As for potentialities, women farmers prioritized those related to agriculture, rural life, and family life. However, aspects that specifically concern a woman's life were rarely mentioned.

*“Out here we have our family, our home and our service, we have quality of life, and our children are still here with us.”*

We also look at the categories defined by FIRO theory, in which women mentioned the dimension of control most regarding challenges and potential. It was empirically observed that, in general, within family environments, there is a person who controls and people who are supervised (women).

*“It was like that with my father too, the man speaks and the woman obeys, it's a culture from outside. But I talk a lot with my son not to replicate it with his wife.”*

Generally, women farmers working in family businesses do so without income or a clear description of their tasks. The necessity of financial independence for rural women, as well as the opportunity for engagement with the outside world and participation in the public sector, is emphasized by García et al. (1995b; 2000). These aspects generate conflicts that, when not resolved immediately, affect another dimension, integration (Danes & Olson, 2003).

FIRO theory can be used to understand interpersonal relationships and predict interpersonal behavior in different studies (Ackerman, 1960). In this case, FIRO theory helps to understand the role of women in family farming, their involvement in the decision-making process, and their feelings towards other members of the family and society.

Given the statements expressed by the female farmers, a feeling of dissatisfaction with some aspects of agricultural activity, family, and social behavior expected of female family farmers is evident.

*“It is a huge challenge here, man always has preference over everything, capital, succession and property income. We serve to cook food, clean the house and help in the fields, but without salary.”*

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An ideal of a woman who performs domestic services and assumes educational responsibility for her children is projected on women family farmers, who, however, rarely occupy a managerial position with the opportunity to make decisions and be seen as rural entrepreneurs (Sharma, 2004).

Although female labor force participation in agriculture is rising, family farming ownership transfer and control are not rising. For instance, the three states that makeup Brazil's Southern Region have a low proportion of women who own farms, according to statistics from the 2017 Brazilian Agricultural Census. Women make up 12% of rural proprietors in Rio Grande do Sul (RS), 10% in Santa Catarina (SC), and 13% in Paraná (PR) (IBGE, 2017).

Parents' preference for the male son to succeed in family farms, which has been happening globally, is one of the causes of this issue (Lobley et al., 2010). This emphasizes the unequal power dynamics between the genders in rural areas and the sexual division of labor (Silva, 2019), where rural women's labor is underappreciated, undervalued, and underpaid (Villwock, Germani e Roncato, 2016; Kessler, 2006).

### **INCOME SITUATION AND ORIENTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

Given these challenges, the current situation of women in family farming activities was outlined, and drivers for a future scenario were developed (Table 3). Such guidelines are generic, considering the empirical research scenario, the farmers' demands, and the researchers' proposals. The guidelines apply to a context that would require co-management involving the action of the Federal, State, and Municipal government, added to the participation of the interested actors, either individually or from their social representatives, *e.g.*, cooperatives, unions, and associations.

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**Table 3** - Future orientations to combat or minimize women's challenges in family farming

<b>Current scenario</b>	<b>Future orientations</b>
Lack of income	Create opportunities for women to earn their income, as well as financial subsidies for rural female investments.
Gender devaluation	Value women socially and economically through events and women's fairs.
Hard work	Facilitate the acquisition of technologies for work and value young people in the field (dilution of tasks).
Climate change	Facilitate the payment of investments made in the property.
Judgment (criticism) of society	Promote public policies for the safety and comfort of women in agriculture.
Not be able to participate in decisions	Foster female entrepreneurship in the countryside as well as promote training and the empowerment of women in agriculture.
Labor shortage	Value young people in the countryside, fostering rural succession.
Patriarchy	Create entrepreneurship projects promoting dialogue and practical actions of young people in the countryside, aiming at the growth of the property.
Not being able to make choices	Promote women's quality of life in agriculture and ways to increase their income.
Inspection and bureaucracies	Minimize bureaucracy for agro-industries, fairs, and enterprises where women perform profitable activities.
Cost of living	Minimize the costs arising from the basic needs of the activity, such as agriculture, livestock, and hardware projects. Facilitate payment methods.
Difficulty to study	Promote courses, training, and meetings to disseminate knowledge and practices on certain issues related to property.
Structure and difficulty of access	Facilitate the structure of roads and access roads, even though the property is further away from the urban environment.
Aging	Value young people in the countryside, promoting succession planning.
Rural exodus	Foster entrepreneurship in rural activities, motivating young people and women.
Lack of leisure	Restart activities such as meeting neighbors, scavenger hunts, community parties, and football tournaments, among other sports.
Family conflicts	Plan the succession, direct the activities of the property, and promote dialogue in the family.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2022)

We attempted to provide a united solution to the three primary issues raised by female family farmers by collectively thinking about them (Table 3). The rules for a future scenario consider social, environmental, and economic factors, which lessen the challenges in numerous areas and offer a critical and comprehensive look.

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**Table 4** - Actions to correct the main challenges identified by women in family farming

Challenges pointed out by women	Practical solutions
Lack of income	Each municipality should create a public/private partnership with institutions such as unions and grain, milk, and credit cooperatives to maximize opportunities for family farming women to increase their income. Create workshops (training) in crafts, cooking, and profitable distribution channels, such as weekly or biweekly women's fairs. In parallel to this, make it possible to obtain technology on the properties through these partnerships to reduce arduous work, valorize young people in the countryside and, consequently, succession, and reduce rural exodus.
Gender devaluation	
Hard work	

Source: Prepared by the authors (2022)

Another focus of the study revealed two significant findings that are directly related to the theories that underpinned the research discussions:

The first concerns the direct relationship between the challenges women face in family farming and the historical reflections of Feminist Theory. This intertwining between the empirical results found in this research and Feminist Theory proves that, although much has been done to favor gender equality, inequalities exist, especially in family farming.

The second finding has to do with behavioral elements. Using the FIRO Theory, it was feasible to measure the dimensions in a three-dimensional framework, demonstrating the necessity for efforts that assist women in overcoming social stigma against them and gaining access to engage in family business decisions actively. This study made it clear that there is still a lack of awareness of the variables that motivate women to hold leadership positions, as mentioned in earlier studies (Sharma, 2004).

Therefore, studies carried out under the aegis of Feminist Theory and the control dimension of the FIRO Theory support the present study and discussions regarding the continual lack of gender equality in family farming. Even after approximately 50 years of studies drawing on feminist theories, a society in which consumption, commerce, activities, and employability, among other aspects, prioritize the male gender in some way still prevails. Therefore, the need to value women in family farming is latent, as men still occupy a dominant position in this sector, as pointed out by other studies carried out over a decade ago (Pini, 2005).

The role of women in family farming goes beyond productive activities and is fundamental in preserving traditional knowledge, managing resources sustainably, and ensuring food security within communities. This study makes a significant contribution to recognizing

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and valuing this role by examining the practices developed by women in the field, promoting innovations adapted to local realities, and enhancing their social and economic visibility.

### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This research aimed to list and discuss the challenges and potential of women in family farming, emphasizing gender issues, considering Feminist Theory and the dimensions of the FIRO Theory. The resumption of the aspects listed in the research allows us to infer a regional diagnosis that allows us to point out the current challenges faced by women in family farming. It also made it possible to advance some solutions to these challenges in a future scenario for women farmers and institutions that support family farming, such as unions and cooperatives.

From a managerial point of view, based on the results obtained in this research, it was possible to provide information capable of promoting the 2030 Agenda, especially SDG 5. These discussions have contributed to maximizing the quality of life and the empowerment of women farmers, supporting the arguments through Feminist and FIRO Theory.

This research has advanced the academic understanding of women's situation in rural farming by listing and categorizing the challenges of women farmers. This was particularly the case in revealing the latent problem of gender differences, with devaluation, low autonomy, low income, and less decision-making power of women farmers. This issue is commonly neglected in family farming in southern Brazil, where its discussion is avoided in the presence of male farmers. This is considered one of the main advances that this research brings to the academic community.

The integration of women farmers' empirical knowledge with scientific research has strengthened sustainable practices, reinforced cooperation networks, and supported the development of more inclusive and gender-sensitive public policies in rural areas.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors reported no potential conflicts of interest.

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