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The Rise of Women Farmers and Sustainable Agriculture

Carolyn Sachs, Mary Barbercheck, Kathryn Braiser, Nancy Ellen Kiernan, Anna Rachel Terman

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A profound shift is occurring among women working in agriculture—they are increasingly seeing themselves as *farmers*, not only as the wives or daughters of farmers. The authors draw on more than a decade of research to document and analyze the reasons for the transformation. As their sense of identity changes, many female farmers are challenging the sexism they face in their chosen profession. In this book, farm women in the northeastern United States describe how they got into farming and became successful entrepreneurs despite the barriers they encountered in agricultural institutions, farming communities, and even their own families. Their strategies for obtaining land and labor and developing successful businesses offer models for other aspiring farmers.

Pulling down the barriers that women face requires organizations and institutions to become informed by what the authors call a feminist agrifood systems theory (FAST). This framework values women's ways of knowing and working in agriculture: emphasizing personal, economic, and environmental sustainability, creating connections through the food system, and developing networks that emphasize collaboration and peer-to-peer education. The creation and growth of a specific organization, the Pennsylvania Women's Agricultural Network, offers a blueprint for others seeking to incorporate a feminist agrifood systems approach into agricultural programming. The theory has the potential to shift how farmers, agricultural professionals, and anyone else interested in farming think about gender and sustainability, as well as to change how feminist scholars and theorists think about agriculture.

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