

Analysing problem representations of women farmers in Dutch agricultural policy

A 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' approach analysis of The Netherlands National Strategic Plan CAP 2023-2027

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Abstract

Including women farmers in agricultural policy is often an afterthought, despite women making up a major part of the agricultural work force. In the Common Agricultural Policy for 2023 – 2027, it is only since recently that member states are required to assess and improve the position of women farmers. In this thesis I analysed 'problem representations' (how policies understand 'problems' and how these problems are represented) regarding women farmers in the Dutch National Strategic Plan (NSP) using the 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' approach from Bacchi. In this thesis I focused on analysing problem representations concerning women farmers in the sections on advisory services and knowledge exchange, generational renewal and direct payments. In these sections, the representation of women farmers is minimal, and inequalities in the agricultural sector are not problematised. Most 'problem representations' fail to include a gender perspective. In the aforementioned themes of the NSP, there are only two 'problem representations' that explicitly mention women farmers: 'female agrarian entrepreneurship needs strengthening' and 'not enough women farmers apply for subsidies to buy farms'. To each of these two 'problem representations', a few sentences are dedicated, leaving much of the details to these 'problems' unproblematised. The results of this thesis show that there is a limited number of problem representations regarding women farmers in the NSP and that these problem representations are not given much attention.

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1. Introduction

“Do people nowadays still visualise a man when they hear the words ‘agrarian entrepreneur?’” wonders the former chair of LTO Vrouw & Bedrijf, a women’s farming organisation in the Netherlands (Koning-Hoeve, 2021). Despite women making up a major part of the agricultural work force, including women farmers in agricultural policy is often an afterthought (Arora-Jonsson & Leder, 2020). In the Common Agricultural Policy for 2023 – 2027, it is only recently, that women farmers are explicitly acknowledged in the CAP and that member states are required to improve the position of women farmers (European Commission, 2023a).

1.1 Barriers for women participating in agriculture

The needs of rural women, including women farmers, are frequently overlooked by stakeholders in politics (Oedl-Wieser, 2015). Compared to men, women farmers are less involved in politics and decision-making processes (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022). This is partly due to the fact that women’s labour on farms is often reduced to ‘merely helping out’ (Fletcher & Kubik, 2016). Policy makers see only full-time farmers as ‘farmers’, and farmers who work part-time (frequently women) are often not considered to be ‘farmers’ (Farnworth & Hutchings, 2009). Women’s farming organisations are not always consulted for policy matters as they are sometimes considered to be simply ‘women’s organisations’ rather than farming organisations (Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022). Including women in agricultural policy is often an afterthought (Arora-Jonsson & Leder, 2020).

Women farmers have less access to productive resources (Pilgeram & Amos, 2015). In 2017, in The Netherlands, 33% of the working force on farms in the Netherlands were women, but only 6% of the women were farm managers (CBS, 2018). However, according to Bock, this number is based solely on farm managers, and doesn’t take into account partnerships (with women as co-owners); if those partnerships were included in the numbers, 28% of farm managers are women (Welink, 2021). Access to farmland for women famers is usually tied to the farm manager, who is often the male partner (Pilgeram & Amos, 2015). Women are also less likely to receive government subsidies and have less access to credit (Bock, 2004).

Women are underserved in agricultural education and technical assistance (Pilgeram & Amos, 2015). They are less likely to have followed agrarian education: only 28% of women farmers have received an agrarian education, compared to 82% of the Dutch male farmers (CBS, 2018). Because women are usually not landowners, they are targeted less by agricultural training services compared to men (Dunne et al., 2021). Learning spaces are generally male-dominated and based on ‘expert knowledge’, and women are rarely included as sources of knowledge (Trauger et al., 2008). Women’s demands for agricultural education are not always met by education services (Dunne et al., 2021). Training groups are also frequently viewed as for men only, and women have indicated to feel unwelcome in these settings (Bock & Shortall, 2017).

Despite women playing an integral role in agriculture, it is often men who claim the identity of ‘farmer’ (Peter et al., 2009). Conventional farming is strongly tied to expressing rural masculinity (Farnworth & Hutchings, 2009). This connection has accelerated since the start of mechanisation (Peter et al., 2000). Women’s work, which used to be laborious tasks in the field, is not as necessary as it used to be since the mechanisation of agriculture (Saugeres, 2002). While mechanisation per se doesn’t exclude women from farming, its effect is that it pushes some women farmers out of the fields (Farnworth & Hutchings, 2009). The perception that agriculture is a ‘male’ industry is difficult to break down (Bock

& Shortall, 2017). It also creates strongly male-dominated spaces, e.g. farm fairs, to which women farmers may have less effective access (Farnworth & Hutchings, 2009).

1.2 Gender equality measures in European agricultural policy

To combat policy failures regarding gender inequality, the European Union has been aiming to incorporate gender into policy via 'gender mainstreaming' since the '90s (Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014). Gender mainstreaming is "not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality" (European Commission, 1998). Its aim is to "bring women into the mainstream forefront of agriculture, rather than further marginalising them with small, isolated projects" (Karl, 2009).

Unfortunately, gender mainstreaming is not normalised in policy making and does not have a standard approach (Minto & Mergaert, 2018). It lacks a clear methodology and sometimes goals are not even defined properly (Oedl-Wieser, 2015). As Shortall (2015) notes, "to be effective, and truly transformative, it requires robust baseline information, careful monitoring, and evaluation against clear goals of change". Critics say that gender mainstreaming bureaucratises gender, which has led to organisations not doing anything substantive to change gender inequality (Arora-Jonsson & Leder, 2020). As a result, "women and gender remain at the margins of agricultural policy" (Sachs & Alston, 2010).

However, measures are taken in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for 2023 – 2027 to improve gender equality in agricultural policy. The current state of women farmers had to be assessed and measures to improve the position of women farmers included in National Strategic Plans (NSP) of member states (European Commission, 2023a). Understanding how the CAP represents the problem of the position of women farmers in the EU can help critically analyse this policy.

1.3 Gender equality in the Dutch National Strategic Plan

The measures from the CAP affect Dutch agricultural policy, as each member state is required to include measures to improve the position of women farmers in the National Strategic Plans. The European Commission commented on the initially submitted NSP for the Netherlands that there are concerns about "the low level of commitment in the Plan to promote gender equality, the Commission encourages the Netherlands to reflect on ways to support women and improve their situation in rural areas (beyond participation in agriculture)" (European Commission, 2022). Furthermore, there were comments on the proportion of female business successors that lag behind the European average and that it needed to be ensured that the number of young women farmers should grow (European Commission, 2022). The Netherlands were also reminded that a balanced participation of bodies in the monitoring committee representing women youth and the interests of people in disadvantaged situations needed to be ensured (European Commission, 2022). A women's farming organisation is now involved in the monitoring committee for the NSP, namely 'LTO Vrouw & Bedrijf' (Staatscourant, 2022).

In the unfinished Dutch 'Landbouwakkoord' (an 'agriculture agreement' between various parties related to agriculture and the government), no measures to improve the position of women farmers were included, nor was there any acknowledgement of problems of gender inequality in the sector (Landbouwakkoord, 2023). The agreement was nearly finished when one of the farmers organisations, LTO, dropped out of the negotiations because too many farmers would have to stop farming and farmers would have to decrease the number of livestock on their farms (NOS, 2023). Despite the agreement being in the final stages of development, gender inequality was not mentioned once.

1.4 Research aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to analyse 'problem representations' (how policies understand 'problems' and how these problems are represented) regarding women farmers in a Dutch agricultural policy document. The policy document I analysed is 'The Netherlands National Strategic Plan CAP 2023-2027', which is the interpretation of the Common Agricultural Policy from the European Union for the Netherlands. I have used the 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach from Bacchi (1999) to critically analyse this policy document and look into the problem representations regarding women farmers.

The main research question I formulated is: "What are the problem representations regarding women farmers in The Netherlands National Strategic Plan CAP 2023-2027 (NSP)?" To answer the main research question, I formulated the following sub-questions:

1. Which problem representations are in key sections of the NSP?
2. How are women farmers represented in the in the NSP?
3. What is left unproblematic regarding women farmers in the NSP?

In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the theoretical framework. The third chapter contains the methodology and explains how I have executed the policy analysis. In the fourth chapter, I present the results of my policy analysis of the problem representations regarding women farmers in the NSP, including what is left unproblematic. In the fifth chapter, I summarise and discuss the most important findings, as well as the limitations of my thesis. The final chapter contains the conclusion and recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach

The 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach is an analytic framework from Carol Bacchi, used to facilitate critical analysis of public policies (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012). The WPR approach is based on problem questioning rather than problem solving (Beutler & Fenech, 2018). Public policies are often seen as a reaction to something that needs to be 'fixed' -in other words, a 'problem' (Bacchi, 2017). The focus in policy analysis is often on different ways of how problems are solved (Bacchi, 2009). Such approaches to policy analysis also assume that there is neutral and impartial evidence on what works to fix any given problem (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012). The difference with such types of policy analysis and the WPR approach is that the WPR approach questions "why and how some issues make it to the political agenda, while others do not" (Bacchi, 1999).

2.1.1 Theoretical basis of the WPR approach

The WPR approach draws upon several theories, namely poststructuralism, social constructionism, governmentality studies and feminist body theory (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). First, poststructuralism is concerned with how 'knowledge' is produced, the relation between power and 'knowledge', and how 'knowledges' shape the lives of people (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). Poststructuralist approaches were developed based on insights from structuralism, which aims to identify patterns in social arrangements (such as language) (Barker, 2010). Structuralism argues that cultural texts can be read like a language, based on the signs they are constructed with (Barker, 2010). Structuralism has been critiqued to have deterministic tendencies, and it does not always include the consideration of power and freedom of individuals (Turner, 2009). Following up, poststructuralism considers meaning to be fluid and flexible, instead of universal and predictable (Barker, 2010). This consideration of flexibility of meanings is included in the WPR approach as well, as it highlights how meanings are contested and definitions change over time, i.e. there is no fixed 'truth' (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). Discourses, understood in poststructuralism as "the knowledges through which we are governed", also play a role in the WPR approach (Bacchi, 2017). Second, social constructionism understands 'knowledges' as being socially constructed (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). In the WPR approach, it is highlighted how 'problems' and 'knowledge' on those problems are socially constructed (Bacchi, 2009). Third, feminist body theory is part of the WPR approach as it pays attention to the effects that policy has on living bodies (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). 'Problem representations' have impacts on political interventions, which consequently have real effects on the treatment of people and how people live their lives (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). Finally, governmentality studies look into the government and all the other institutions, agencies and knowledges, that impact social behaviours (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). The WPR approach takes into account governmentality studies by analysing 'problem representations' in public policies (made by governments or other institutions) and the impact 'problem representations' have on social behaviour.

2.1.2 Representations of 'problems'

Bacchi (2009) argues that public policy is supposed to fix things, and that implies that something requires fixing: a 'problem'. A 'problem' in the WPR approach is the "kind of change implied in a particular policy proposal" (Bacchi, 2009). Public policies implicitly represent what is considered to be problematic (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012). These problems are understood in policies as a particular sort of 'problem', and therefore policies give shape to 'problems' (Bacchi, 2009).

How public policies understand these problems brings about particular ways in which these 'problems' are represented (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). Such 'problem representations' direct attention to what is

considered significant (Bacchi, 2009). The WPR approach is a systemic methodology that can help to critically analyse these taken-for-granted assumptions in policies (Bacchi, 2009). The WPR approach can help “to uncover the norms embedded in particular constructions of policymaking strategies, which are far from neutral and rather reflect hegemonic assumptions and taken-for-granted beliefs” (Lombardo et al., 2012). Through problem questioning we can examine whether the ‘problem’ addressed is the problem that should actually be addressed (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010).

2.1.3 Gender and ‘problem representations’ in policy

Policy can be thought of as gendering practices; policy produces gender, rather than being simply a response to gender inequalities (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). Therefore Bacchi & Eveline (2010) argue that policy proposals should be analysed for their gendering effects. ‘Women’ and ‘men’ are social categories constructed by language in policy, which is a gendering practice (Bacchi, 2017). Policies contributes to the organization of society that categorises people in certain ways and encourages them to fit into these categories (Bacchi, 2017). Bacchi & Eveline (2010) argue that policy therefore produces gendered lives. The people that write and create policy should be more aware of gender, what the meaning of “gender” is and which effects that meaning produces (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010).

Andersson, Petterson and Lodin (2022) conducted a research on gender inequality in agricultural policy in Rwanda, and used the WPR approach to analyse the gendering impacts of that policy. In this research, the use of the WPR approach helped to uncover the discourses that underpin gender inequality as a problem, which is an objective of this research as well. In this particular policy document, gender inequality was mostly left unproblematised, and the problem of gender inequality that was framed in the agriculture policy was focused on the low agricultural output from women (Andersson et al., 2022). Andersson et al. (2022) found that “the policy thus problematizes women’s farming practices rather than the drivers for women and men’s different farming”.

2.1.4 Effects of ‘problem representations’

Because public policy affects every dimension of our lives, the way ‘problems’ are represented in policy affects our daily lives (Bacchi, 2009). How ‘problems’ are represented has effects on “what can be seen as problematic, for what is silenced, and for how people think about these issues and about their place in the world” (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). The WPR approach directs attentions to how these ‘problem representations’ shape the way we are governed (Bacchi, 2009). These ‘problem representations’ affect what gets done or not done (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012). Furthermore, the particular way in which we are governed contributes to who and what we are (Bacchi, 2009). Policy problems can also sometimes represent as if individuals are to blame for their failures, and not the social structures that reinforce inequality (Bacchi, 2000). Bacchi (2009) divides these effects of public policy into three categories: discursive effects, subjectification effects and lived effects. Discursive effects are the limits that are created about what can be said or thought about a problem representation. Subjectification effects relate to in what ways subjects are considered, and how we are produced as subjects because specific behaviours are rewarded. Lived effects concern the impact on people’s lives and existence created by problem representations.

3. Methodology

3.1 Coding for problem representations

Using the ‘What’s the Problem Represented to be?’ (WPR) approach I have analysed The Netherlands National Strategic Plan CAP 2023-2027 (NSP) concerning problem representations about women farmers. The WPR approach is an analytic framework used to facilitate a critical analysis of public policies, and can uncover what policies implicitly represent as problematic. The public policy I analysed is the Dutch National Strategic Plan. Each member state of the European Union implements a Strategic Plan, which addresses the specific needs of the agricultural sector of the country (European Commission, 2023b). The Dutch NSP aims to connect European agreements to the context of the Netherlands, aiming to improve the degraded environment (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, 2022).

First, I coded the NSP for all problem representations present. For practical reasons, I have decided to code sections related to challenges that women farmers face, as informed by the literature review, described in Chapter 1. Thus the chapters I chose are about social sustainability, vitality of the agricultural sector, budgetary interventions, education, diversity and social inclusion. In the tables below I have categorised the chapters the challenges that women farmers can face based on the literature review; direct payments relates to problem representations in the financial area, education relates to problem representations related to education and access to education, and relates to problem representations related to involvement in decision-making process, cooperative projects and politics.

In the tables below are the chapter titles and page numbers of the parts of the NSP that could possibly describe problem representations that concern women farmers, based on the challenges women farmers experience identified in the literature review. The NSP starts with a general strategic statement for the next four years (see Table 1). I included this chapter in the analysis as well as it functions as an introduction and describes the most important problem representations that are found in this policy.

Chapter title	Page numbers	Challenge
1 Strategic Statement	20 – 28	direct payments, education, politics

Table 1: chapter title, page numbers and challenges related to women farmers of Chapter 1 of the NSP.

The second chapter of the NSP describes nine goals for the Dutch agricultural sector (see Table 2). The NSP lists 31 needs that are identified for the Dutch agricultural sector, based on SWOT-analyses. These needs are based on problem representations and these are described in these chapters as well. The NSP states that the largest problems are related to biodiversity, climate and water quality. I did not include the needs that are solely focused on environmental measures and instead focused on the needs that relate to challenges women farmers face. I also included the targets plan, which lists measurable indicators for the nine goals.

Chapter title	Page numbers	Challenge
2.1.SO1 Support viable farm income and resilience of the agricultural sector across the Union in order to enhance long-term food security and agricultural diversity as well as to	39 – 46	direct payments

ensure the economic sustainability of agricultural production in the Union		
2.1.SO2 Enhance market orientation and increase farm competitiveness, both in the short and long term, including greater focus on research, technology and digitalisation	47 – 51	education
2.1.SO3 Improve the farmer's position in the value chain	53 – 60	direct payments
2.1.SO7 Attract and sustain young farmers and other new farmers and facilitate sustainable business development in rural areas	107 – 111	direct payments
2.1.SO8 Promote employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry	112 – 117	direct payments, politics
2.1.XCO Cross-cutting objective of modernising the sector by fostering and sharing of knowledge, innovation and digitalisation in agriculture and rural areas, and encouraging their uptake	129 - 133	education
2.3 Targets Plan: R36 – R42	136 – 144	direct payments, politics, education

Table 2: chapter title, page numbers and challenges related to women farmers of Chapter 2 of the NSP.

The third chapter of the NSP mostly discusses the environmental and climate-related objectives of the EU. It also includes an overview on the generational renewal strategy, which discusses problem representations about young women farmers (see Table 3).

Chapter title	Page numbers	Challenge
3.2 Overview of the generational renewal strategy	192 – 196	direct payments, politics

Table 3: chapter title, page numbers and challenges related to women farmers of Chapter 3 of the NSP.

The fourth chapter is about elements that are common to several interventions and includes several social inclusion measures and education-related measures (see Table 4). It is also relevant as it states the requirements for farmers to apply for direct payments, and who is thus considered to be a 'farmer'.

Chapter title	Page numbers	Challenge
4.1.4 Active farmer	230 – 231	direct payments
4.1.5 Young farmer	231 – 232	direct payments
4.1.6 New farmer	232	direct payments
4.1.7 Minimum requirements for receiving direct payments	232 - 233	direct payments
4.3 Technical Assistance	243 – 244	education
4.4 CAP Network	244 – 250	education, politics

Table 4: chapter title, page numbers and challenges related to women farmers of Chapter 4 of the NSP.

The fifth chapter is about direct payments, and these direct payments are related to access to all sorts of resources such as land, education, innovation, setting up new farms and investments (see Table 5). As women farmers might have less access to government subsidies, it is important to analyse the problem representations found in this chapter.

Chapter title	Page numbers	Challenge
5 Direct payments, sectoral and rural development interventions specified in the strategy	259 – 302	direct payments
INVRE(47(1)(a)) - - investments in tangible and intangible assets, research and experimental and innovative production methods and other actions	306 – 315	education
ADVI1(47(1)(b)) - - advisory services and technical assistance, in particular concerning sustainable pest and disease control techniques, sustainable use of plant protection and animal health products, climate change adaptation and mitigation, the conditions of employment, employer obligations and occupational health and safety	316 – 321	education
TRAINCO(47(1)(c)) - - training including coaching and exchange of best practices, in particular concerning sustainable pest and disease control techniques, sustainable use of plant protection and animal health products, and climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as the use of organised trading platforms and commodity exchanges on the spot and futures market	322 – 326	education
COACH(47(2)(j)) - - coaching to other producer organisations and associations of producer organisations recognised under Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 or under Article 67(7) of this Regulation, or to individual producers	384 – 387	education
INVEST(73-74) - Investments, including investments in irrigation	436 – 472	direct payments
INSTAL(75) - Setting up of young farmers and new farmers and rural business start-up	474 – 483	direct payments
COOP(77) - Cooperation	491 – 539	education, politics
KNOW(78) - Knowledge exchange and dissemination of information	553 – 561	education

Table 5: chapter title, page numbers and challenges related to women farmers of Chapter 5 of the NSP.

The sixth chapter is a follow-up on the previous chapter and contains the financial plan and lists the allocated budgets for each intervention (see Table 6).

Chapter title	Page numbers	Challenge
6 Financial plan	561 – 580	direct payments

Table 6: chapter title, page numbers and challenges related to women farmers of Chapter 6 of the NSP.

The eighth chapter is about transferring knowledge to farmers, in order to innovate and modernise the agricultural sector (see Table 7). In the literature agrarian education is identified as a challenge for women farmers, therefore it is relevant to see how this is represented as a problem in this chapter.

Chapter title	Page numbers	Challenge
8 Modernisation: AKIS and digitalisation	597 – 612	education

Table 7: chapter title, page numbers and challenges related to women farmers of Chapter 8 of the NSP.

By reading through these chapters and coding them for problem representations, I collected my data that would later be used to analyse the problem representations.

3.2 Policy analysis using the “What’s the Problem Represented to Be” (WPR) approach

After coding the NSP, I collected all the problem representations in a spreadsheet and identified the common themes (see Figure 1). Due to time constraints, I selected three themes to apply the WPR approach to:

1. advisory services and knowledge exchange;
2. generational renewal;
3. direct payments.

I selected advisory services and knowledge exchange because based on the literature, women farmers are underserved in agricultural education and technical extension services (Pilgeram & Amos, 2015). Second, I selected generational renewal as a theme because in the sections about generational renewal, gender inequality was explicitly addressed. Finally, I included direct payments because based on the literature, women farmers may receive less government subsidies (Bock, 2004). The direct payments are also a major part of the NSP, and this has the potential to allocate productive resources more equally. I have translated the codes that I used for the policy analysis from Dutch to English, but I have included the Dutch codes in the footnotes.

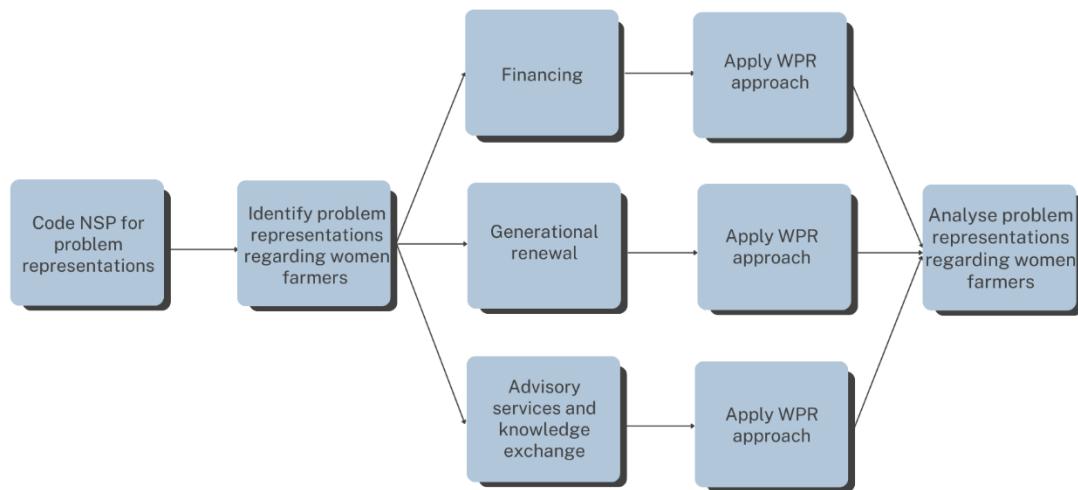


Figure 1: Schematic overview of the methodology.

I have analysed the aforementioned three problem themes using the WPR approach, in order to answer the main research question. To analyse policy, the WPR approach includes six questions that are applied to the policy (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012):

Q1. What’s the ‘problem’ represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?

Q2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the ‘problem’?

Q3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?

Q4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?

Q5. What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?

Q6. How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?

I answered Q3 briefly and I have left out Q6 entirely. I wanted to focus more on the problem representations concerning women farmers in the NSP, which means the focus is on Q2, Q4 and Q5. Both Q3 and Q6 require more sources aside from the NSP, and I wanted to focus on the NSP explicitly.

Answering the questions of the WPR approach was not a straightforward process; it required me to go back to previous questions, to switch to different themes and to see how interconnected all the themes were. First, I compiled all the coding I had for each theme. I identified the most important interventions and wrote an introduction aiming to describe all the interventions relevant to a theme. Then I answered the questions of the WPR approach, which involved going back and forth between the different questions and themes. With the answers to the questions of the WPR approach I was able to answer the main research question.

3.3 Positionality statement

I am a 25-year old Dutch student of the master’s Resilient Farming and Food Systems at Wageningen University and Research. I have always had an interest in food and the production of food, which is a result from my upbringing and my mother’s work as a food technologist. Taking care of nature and the environment are values instilled in me by my father and grandmother. Growing up in this day and age and the pressure of our food system on the land is very visible to me. Studying resilient farming and food systems feels like an intersection of my interest in food and nature, and I bring this perspective with me in my research and writing. I identify as a woman and I’ve always been interested in gender equality and feminism. However, I do not have an academic background in gender studies. While I grew up in the Netherlands in an agricultural area with mostly dairy farms, no one in my family is employed in the agricultural sector.

4. Results

In this chapter I discuss the ‘problem representations’ identified through the application of the WTP analysis of the Dutch NSP. As noted above, I have categorised the problem representations into three categories; advisory services and knowledge exchange, generational renewal and direct payments. I first discuss the problem representations per theme and follow up with an elaboration of the WPR approach applied per theme.

4.1 Advisory services and knowledge exchange

The first theme of ‘problem representations’ is advisory services and knowledge exchange. Advisory services and knowledge exchange are deemed important by the NSP, as this should help farmers to make their farms more sustainable. However, women farmers are often not considered and included in educational spaces, so in this section I analysed if and how women farmers and advisory services and knowledge exchange are problematised by the NSP.

In the NSP there are several interventions aimed at improving farmer’s knowledge and skills, in order to produce sustainable food at a fair price.¹ Currently, new knowledge does not reach farms easily.² There is also a lack of synergy between education, research and advisory services.³ There is a limited overview of innovation initiatives that emerge from the field.⁴ There is also a too large supply of information from large number of sources.⁵ Smaller farms do not have the resources to pay for knowledge and information and there is a general lack of willingness to pay for advisory services.⁶ Farmers also require new knowledge and skills to participate in innovation projects or in partnerships that aim for improved market positioning, as farmers have not acquired this knowledge in agronomy-focused conventional education.⁷

The NSP proposes to support farmers with the help of coaching and advice when farmers are making sustainable changes on their farm.⁸ There is a need for impartial and objective advisors and coaches.⁹ To ensure that these coaches and advisers are impartial and have the right knowledge and skills, these coaches and advisers should be registered in a system with quality assurance.¹⁰ There are 4000

¹ “Om duurzaam te kunnen produceren voor een eerlijke prijs, is het nodig dat de ondernemers beschikken over actuele kennis en vaardigheden.”, p. 24, (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, 2022)

² “Gebrekkige doorstroming van kennis naar het ‘boerenerf’”, p. 129

³ “Beperkte synergie tussen onderwijs, onderzoek en adviesorganisaties”, p. 129

⁴ “Beperkt overzicht van uit de praktijk afkomstige innovatie initiatieven”, p. 129

⁵ “Overaanbod van informatie uit groot aantal informatiebronnen”, p. 129

⁶ “Beperkte middelen voor kennis en innovatie voor toeleverende MKB-bedrijven” and “Beperkte bereidheid om te betalen voor advies en ondersteuning”, p. 129

⁷ “Participeren in innovatietrajecten of in samenwerkingsverbanden die inzetten op verbeterde marktpositie, vergen nieuwe kennis en vaardigheden, die een agrariër in de gangbare vakopleidingen, met accent op agronomie, niet heeft opgedaan.”, p. 59

⁸ “De echte veranderingen in de landbouw gebeuren door de beslissingen die aan de keukentafel of op het boerenerf genomen worden en vervolgens - met collega’s – worden vertaald in een innovatie of samenwerking. Ondersteuning in de vorm van coaching en adviezen is daarbij essentieel.”, p. 59

⁹ “Voor onderdeel kennis is er een behoefte aan onpartijdige adviseurs en coaches.”, p. 130

¹⁰ “Om te borgen dat deze coaches en adviseurs onpartijdig zijn en beschikken over de juiste kennis en vaardigheden is er behoefte aan een erkenningssysteem waarbij de coaches en adviseurs geregistreerd staan en een kwaliteitsborging plaatsvindt.”, p. 130

vouchers of €1500 euros available for individual farmers (Nieuwe Oogst, 2023). These vouchers can only be used for getting advice from recognised advisors.¹¹

Within all these interventions aimed at knowledge exchange, special attention will be given to organic farming, agroforestry, animal welfare, participation of young farmers and strengthening female agricultural entrepreneurship.¹² However, these topics are not as explicitly mentioned now that the application for advisory services has opened, as it lists the following topics: nitrogen emission and nutrient cycling, healthy soil, water and production systems, resilient production systems and crop protection, circularity of crops and resources and new plant protein sources, nature-inclusive agriculture, precision agriculture, personal growth of the entrepreneur and his business, horizontal collaboration, taking over farms and sustainable earning power (RVO, 2023).

4.1.1 What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?

The main 'problem representation' is that farmers do not have the right knowledge nor skills that is required for transitioning to a more sustainable agricultural system, and they lack capabilities to gain that right knowledge. Farmers have not acquired this type of knowledge after following a more conventional agrarian education.

Another 'problem representation' is that that innovation emerging from research does not get applied quick enough in practice on farms. It is problematised that knowledge exchange is too slow of a process currently.

Finally, female agrarian entrepreneurship requiring strengthening is mentioned once. As it is mentioned that attention will be given to strengthening female entrepreneurship, it is considered to be a problem that this is currently lacking in advisory services. However, it is one of many topics listed that requires attention, and it is not elaborated and problematised in other places in the NSP.

4.1.2 What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the 'problem'?

The main presupposition (knowledge that is taken for granted as true) is that farmer's skills are not up to par for a sustainable transition and that they need to be educated. It is assumed that farmers have followed an agronomy-focused agrarian education. There is also an assumption that advisors and coaches are the most fitting people to guide farmers, that they have the necessary knowledge and that they are objective and unbiased.

This builds further on the assumption (knowledge that is unconsciously accepted as true) that innovations and advisory services are an important measure to move to a more sustainable agricultural sector. It also implies that innovations are always a positive, relevant and should be applied to farms as soon as possible.

It is assumed that the oversupply of information and the lack of information on innovation in practice is what holds farmers back from using innovative practices. It is also assumed when there is more overview on this (if that is even possible!), farmers will innovate more readily. A similar assumption exists that farmers are not innovating because farmers lack resources to pay for advisory services, and that they are unwilling to pay for advisory services.

¹¹ "Voor vouchers ten behoeve van bedrijfsadvies geldt dat deze alleen aangevraagd kunnen worden door landbouwers en dat zij deze alleen kunnen gebruiken voor advies van erkende adviseurs.", p. 555

¹² "Binnen deze kaders wordt aandacht gegeven aan biologische landbouw, agroforestry, dierenwelzijn, deelname van jonge landbouwers en het versterken van vrouwelijk agrarisch ondernemerschap.", p. 554

Another assumption is that women entrepreneurs need to be empowered and that their entrepreneurship is lacking. This suggests that there are assumptions about what entrepreneurship is and what it should look like, but what precisely requires strengthening is not elaborated on.

4.1.3 How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?

These problem representations have come about as a result of sustainability concerns linked to the agricultural sector. It is thought there needs to be a shift from agriculture that focuses on maximising production to a more sustainable agricultural system. Because farmers have been pushed to maximise their production in the past, it is now problematised that they do not have the right skills and knowledge to transition to more sustainable farming methods.

The problem representation of strengthening female agrarian entrepreneurship results from a lack of data on women farmers, and as well as the decisions made in the past to not collect any data on this. There is not that much known about how women farmers see entrepreneurship and what they would like their entrepreneurship to be. It is also not known what type of education and advisory services women farmers want and require for entrepreneurship.

4.1.4 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?

There is a lot unproblematised regarding women farmers. With regards to the topic of advisory services and knowledge exchange, only one sentence in the NSP relates to women farmers and female agrarian entrepreneurship. Moreover, gender inequality is not mentioned in the SWOT-analysis in the intervention strategy. The ‘solution’ proposed in the NSP, that advisory services need to pay special attention to strengthening female entrepreneurship, implies that this is seen as a problem that is easily addressed, and not a problem that is systematically perpetrated. This contradicts the findings in the literature presented above.

Within the NSP, there is not much problematised regarding ‘entrepreneurship’ and women’s agrarian entrepreneurship. It is not made clear in the NSP what good and strong entrepreneurship entails. It seems that women farmers are pushed to follow the same path of entrepreneurship as other farmers are already doing. But it is also mentioned in the NSP that current business models in agriculture don’t guarantee an adequate long-term income and that farmers need to be supported with basic income support.¹³

The NSP mentions that female agrarian entrepreneurship needs “strengthening”, but it is not elaborated on what precisely needs to be “strengthened” for women farmers. This suggests that it is not problematised at all in the NSP. Given that advisory services are offered to women farmers on how to strengthen their entrepreneurship, the solution for this problem is for women farmers to resolve, and not that others might need to make space for women farmers. What is also not problematised is that women, in contrast to men, have often not followed an agrarian education; 28% of women vs. 82% of men (CBS, 2018). On the other hand, it is problematised that a conventional agrarian education does not help farmers with a sustainability transition.

What remains unproblematised is whether advisory services even meet the demands of women farmers. There is a lack of data regarding this in the Netherlands, but there is data from Europe, Australia and the United States that women participate less in agricultural education and training (Dunne et al., 2021). What restricts women’s willingness in participating in advisory services is the male-targeted nature of advisory services (Charatsari et al., 2013). In Ireland, it was found that

¹³ “Dit zal zo blijven zolang er voor landbouwers in Nederland onvoldoende verdienmodellen zijn die een grotere garantie geven op een langjarig redelijk inkomen.”, p. 262

agricultural training is about work that is most frequently done by men (Shortall, 1996). In Greece, agricultural extension services do not respond to the needs of women farmers due to prejudices about the role of women in agriculture (Charatsari et al., 2013). In the United States it was found that women farmers prefer interactive learning settings (Braiser et al., 2009).

4.1.5 What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?

The discursive effects that are produced by this representation are that it expresses that farmers need more education, done in the same way as it has been done before (by advisors). The ‘problem representation’ also shows that the current agrarian education system is not beneficial for a sustainable transition in agriculture. What type of education is even needed and wanted is not considered nor discussed. The NSP proposed learning from ‘qualified’ and ‘impartial’ advisors, but it does not discuss any other learning environments and whether this type of learning meets the needs of women farmers. There is no discussion on how gender impacts farmers and their education and knowledge exchange. Neither is there a discussion about what type of agrarian entrepreneurship is wanted or what it could look like for women farmers.

The subjectification effects is that farmers are somewhat helpless in finding their way to the right information. Farmers are seen as entrepreneurs that need to be guided by advisory services. It also seems to lump farmers together as if their farms are at the same step of the sustainable transition, and it does not consider that some farmers have already made their farms more sustainable in other ways than using advisory services.

The lived effects that are produced by this problem representation is that women probably will have less access to agrarian education, and it might not be even the type of education they want if they were to access it. The vouchers for advisory services might thus not be interesting for women farmers at all.

4.2 Generational renewal

The second theme of ‘problem representations’ concerns generational renewal. This is elaborately discussed in the NSP, as generational renewal is required to keep the agricultural sector resilient and vital in the future. The NSP recognises that policy measures for generational renewal can impact women farmers differently. Therefore it is relevant to see how the NSP problematises young and new women farmers.

Generational renewal is an urgent problem to facilitate a sustainable transition in the agricultural sector.¹⁴ Young and new farmers are needed in order to build a resilient agricultural system.¹⁵ However, young farmers are in decline, and only 8% of farm managers are under 40 years old.¹⁶ The NSP aims to increase this number to 10% in 2027.¹⁷

¹⁴ “Generatievernieuwing in de agrarische sector is urgent om de transitie in de landbouw mogelijk te kunnen maken.”, p. 108 (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, 2022)

¹⁵ “Voor een toekomstbestendige agrarische sector zijn jonge landbouwers en zij-instromers (of: nieuwe landbouwers van belang.”, p. 109

¹⁶ “In 2020 waren er 51.334 landbouwbedrijven (inclusief tuinbouw) in Nederland. Van de bedrijfshoofden, was 8% ‘jonge landbouwer’ van onder de 40 jaar en 52% ouder dan 55 jaar.”, p. 108

¹⁷ “Als dat lukt kan voorzichtig gestreefd worden naar een lichte stijging van het aantal jonge bedrijfshoofden tot 10% in 2027.”, p. 195

The main threat for generational renewal are other jobs outside of the agricultural, which are more attractive than becoming a farmer, according to young farmers, advisors and banks.¹⁸ Second, having enough capital at a young age to buy a farm is difficult.¹⁹ Third, future prospects are insecure, especially when the farm is close to nature or when land is sought after for other purposes, such as housing and business parks.²⁰

Young farmers will receive extra financial support. Young farmers can receive €2,800 per year on top of the basic income support.²¹ Young farmers can also receive a minimum of €25,000 if they are (partly) buying or taking over a farm.²² A third of young farmers manage a very small farm, and therefore the 'standard earning capacity' requirement for this intervention is lowered to €15,000 per year so that enough young farms are still able to apply.²³ By showing proof of purchase young farmers can receive this financial support.²⁴

Another intervention aimed at helping young and new farmers to access land is for cooperation to support bottom-up ideas.²⁵ Projects that are supported by this intervention can divide ownership and cultivation of the land between participants, use new land rent systems or alternative funding sources to access.²⁶ There is an average of €50,000 allocated for five such cooperation projects per year.²⁷

The NSP describes that after taking over a farm, young farmers do not have enough funds left over to invest in modernising their farm or to invest in sustainability-related measures.²⁸ Subsidies for

¹⁸ "Uit de SWOT-analyse, behoeftenanalyse en uit gesprekken met de doelgroep, adviseurs en banken komt naar voren dat de grootste bedreiging voor generatievernieuwing bestaat uit de aantrekkingskracht bij jonge landbouwers om buiten de sector te gaan werken.", p. 192

¹⁹ "Het is niet eenvoudig om op jonge leeftijd aan voldoende kapitaal te komen om een landbouwbedrijf te starten of over te nemen.", p. 109

²⁰ "Er is een onzeker toekomstperspectief in gebieden in en nabij natuurgebieden en/of in de gebieden waar grond gewild is voor woningbouw of bedrijfenterreinen.", p. 192

²¹ "De top-up zal verleend worden in de vorm van een lump sum ten bedrage van € 2.800 per jaar. Voorwaarde is dat de jonge landbouwer ook recht heeft op de BISS.", p. 276

²² "Jonge landbouwers kunnen een steunbedrag krijgen van minimaal €25.000,- als zij op basis van een ondertekende koopakte laten zien dat zij het bedrijf geheel of gedeeltelijk hebben overgenomen.", p. 474

²³ "Van de jonge landbouwers is 31% bedrijfshoofd van een zeer klein bedrijf. Door een ondergrens van 25.000 SVC te hanteren zouden veel jonge landbouwers geen aanspraak meer kunnen maken op vestigingssteun. Daarom wordt de ondergrens gelegd bij een SVC van 15.000 euro.", p. 477

²⁴ "Jonge boeren komen in aanmerking als zij op basis van een ondertekende koopakte laten zien dat zij het bedrijf geheel of gedeeltelijk[4] hebben overgenomen.", p. 193

²⁵ "De GLB-interventie Samenwerking voor generatievernieuwing biedt mogelijkheden om bottom-up ideeën uit de sector te ondersteunen die zich richten op twee knelpunten waar de andere interventies niet aan bijdragen: 1) zij-instromers en 2) toegang tot grond.", p. 194

²⁶ "Projecten kunnen zich richten op nieuwe bedrijfsconstructies waarbij het eigenaarschap en de exploitatie gescheiden zijn en/of op het in contact brengen van landeigenaren en zij-instromers. Projecten die zich richten op de toegang tot grond kunnen ook gaan over nieuwe pachtsystemen waardoor de jonge landbouwer makkelijker grond kan pachten. Het kan ook gaan over alternatieve financieringsbronnen voor de aankoop of pacht van grond.", p. 194

²⁷ "Samenwerkingsverbanden bestaan uit minimaal twee partijen, waarvan minimaal één jonge landbouwer. Deze samenwerkingsverbanden kunnen aanvragen indienen voor projecten van gemiddeld € 50.000, -. " "Omdat het thema nieuw en specifiek is, wordt vooralsnog ingezet op het ondersteunen van gemiddeld vijf projecten per jaar van gemiddeld €50.000,-.", p. 500 and p. 501

²⁸ "Omdat de jonge landbouwer na de overname of bedrijfsstart weinig financiële ruimte over heeft om te investeren in het moderniseren en verduurzamen, wordt de GLB-interventie 'Investeringen' ingezet.", p. 193

investments will be 10% to 15% higher for young farmers.²⁹ There will also be an intervention that allows young farmers to loan more money to use for investments.³⁰

To qualify as a ‘young farmer’ and to be able to apply for support from these interventions, it is required to either have an agrarian degree or to have proof that the farmer has at least two years of experience and has followed a course on taking over and running a farm.³¹

Concerning gender, more gender segregated data will be collected. The gender of young farm managers will be collected, as well as differences in sector, type of business and region.³² In the targets plan, “Number of young farmers benefitting from setting up with support from the CAP, including a gender breakdown” (p. 143) is also included.

By using better communication by focusing on gender equality the NSP aims to increase the number young women farm managers that can apply for the financial support to buy or take over a farm.³³ Currently, only 7% of young farm managers are women and 16% of farm heirs are women.³⁴ Given that 16% of farm heirs are women, the NSP states it is realistic to aim for 16% of the young farm managers who qualify for this subsidy to be women.³²

4.2.1 What’s the ‘problem’ represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?

The ‘problem representation’ is that there are not enough young and new farmers. It is problematised that without young and new farmers there will be no resilient agricultural sector in the upcoming future.

According to the NSP, potential young and new farmers choose not to become a farmer due to not having enough capital to buy a farm. The insecure future of the agricultural sector and employment outside of the agricultural sector being more attractive that decreases the number of young and new farmers.

²⁹ In het GLB-NSP zal de steun aan jonge landbouwers geïntegreerd worden in algemene investeringsregelingen, waarbij de jonge landbouwers extra subsidie krijgen in de vorm van een hoger subsidiepercentage (+10% of +15%).”, p. 193

³⁰ “Naast de GLB-interventie, kunnen jonge landbouwers nationale steun voor investeringen ontvangen via de Garantieregeling Vermogensversterkende Krediet (VVK). Met dit financiële instrument kan de jonge landbouwer de leencapaciteit vergroten doordat de overheid garant staat voor een groot deel van een achtergestelde lening.”, p. 193

³¹ “Een landbouwdiploma ofwel een bewijs van vakbekwaamheid. Hiervoor geldt minimaal één van volgende bewijzen: 1. een diploma of een getuigschrift van een basisopleiding landbouw, tuinbouw of aanverwant op het niveau hoger secundair, hoger niet-universitair of universitair onderwijs 2. een bewijs van ten minste 2 jaar aantoonbare ervaring met land- en tuinbouwproductie op het tijdstip van de steunaanvraag, aangevuld met een diploma of een getuigschrift van een cursus op het gebied van bedrijfsovername, agrarische bedrijfsvoering of aanverwant.”, p. 232

³² “Hierbij zal aandacht zijn voor de verschillen per gender, landbouwsector, bedrijfstype en regio.”, p. 195

³³ “Om dit aandeel te halen, wordt ten eerste gebruik gemaakt van communicatie. Uit workshops met boerinnen over de positie van de vrouw in de agrarische sector kwam vooral naar voren dat de beeldvorming van belang is. Daarom zal bij de interventie voor vestigingssteun nadrukkelijk aandacht worden besteed aan de gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen in communicatie-uitingen zoals in beeldmateriaal (foto’s, video’s) en in teksten.” “Met deze cijfers als context, is het realistisch om te streven naar een aandeel van 16% vrouwelijke bedrijfshoofden die in aanmerking komen voor vestigingssteun.”, p. 475

³⁴ “Volgens de statistieken is slechts 7% van de bedrijfshoofden onder de 35 jaar van het vrouwelijk geslacht.” “Uit een recent onderzoek uit 2020 van landbouwvakblad De Nieuwe Oogst, blijkt dat het aandeel vrouwelijke opvolgers 16% is.”, p. 475

Another ‘problem representation’ is that young and new farmers do not have enough funds for innovation after they have bought farms, therefore not being able to make their farm more sustainable and resilient.

There is also a ‘problem representation’ relating to gender equality: there are not enough young women farm managers, and they apply less for financial support to buy a farm compared to men.

4.2.2 What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the ‘problem’?

The ‘problem representations’ are focused on buying farms, and not renting land for farming. It also assumes a larger scale of farm, which can be expensive for young and new farmers to take over because of high land prices.

The ‘problem representation’ is also focused on the assumption that financial reasons are the main driver for potential young and new farmers to move away from agriculture. There is also a presupposition that (costly) innovations are the only way to make farms more sustainable.

It is assumed that when communication is improved and equality of men and women is emphasised, that more women will become farm managers. There’s an assumption that communication from the government can influence women’s decisions, and that their decision to not become a farmer is mostly based on perceptions of farmers’ gender created by the government.

4.2.3 How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?

Several policy interventions in the past have led to farms scaling up in size, which makes buying or taking over a farm considerably more expensive. Farms averaged 5.7ha in 1950, whereas in 2016 the average farm was 32.6ha (CBS, 2017). This has been a trend since the second World War, as the government aimed to improve food security, which was mainly achieved through land consolidation and mechanisation (CBS, 2023).

The NSP states that farmers usually enter the business at a younger age and gradually build up capital to take over the farm. The older generation of farmers usually stays farm manager until retirement, which means that the farm heir is already older than 40 years. The NSP describes that there is a need for a vital and resilient agricultural sector. Older farmers are considered to be problematic by the NSP as it risks that farms will not have heirs, which leads to land being acquired by larger farms (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, 2021, p. 192). This drives up land prices and makes it continuously more difficult for young farmers to establish themselves. The financial difficulties that potential young farmers face leads to them leaving the agricultural sector and search for jobs elsewhere.

4.2.4 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?

The NSP represents the problem of generational renewal as ‘urgent’. Given that barely anything is written about young women farmers and that the measures are minor, it reads as if the NSP represents this ‘urgent’ problem that young *men* do not want to work in the agricultural sector any more. Furthermore, it seems mostly targeted to young men that are heirs to farms, because there is barely anything discussed about how to involve newcomers outside of the agricultural sector who are not able to inherit a farm.

The NSP states that young workers leave the agricultural sector because other jobs are more attractive to young people. This stems from conversations had with young farmers, advisors and banks. It is not elaborated on who precisely were involved in these discussions; were women involved at all? Are

there more threats that young women farmers might experience that did not arise from these conversations?

It is unproblematised that farmers are required to qualify an 'active farmer' before they can apply for subsidies. Being an 'active farmer' means that the farm is larger than two hectares. As land prices are high in the Netherlands, this can be an expensive venture, especially for new farmers. The NSP indicates having subsidies available to invest in alternative food production methods, such as agroforestry (p. 51), but these are usually done on smaller plots of land, which are excluded from these subsidies for young farmers.

It is left unproblematic that proof of experience (a degree or work experience for at least two years) is required in order to receive any subsidies. As the difference between men and women having followed an agrarian degree is substantial (28% of women vs. 82% of men), can mean that potentially more women are excluded. The requirement to have proof of experience can also deter young and new farmers, or at least it might mean that not all young and new farmers are able to apply for financial support.

The support for taking over or starting a farm is focused on buying land, and it excludes other forms of land access, such as renting. Such alternatives might be more accessible for young and new farmers with less capital. This subsidy is aimed at farmers who already have a substantial sum of money as the subsidy is granted upon having proof ('koopakte') that a young farmer has (partially) bought a farm. There is also nothing problematised whether women face different struggles when accessing farm land.

There is little problematised regarding the inequalities between men and women benefitting from CAP support. There will be a gender breakdown on which young farmers are supported by the CAP. It is not clear whether this gender breakdown includes any more research on the differences; if after four years women still benefit less from CAP support, will there be any analysis done on these results?

There is also nothing problematised about the fact that only 16% of the heirs of farms are women. It is not described where those differences stem from. The NSP only aims to increase the percentage of young women farm managers to match the numbers of women farm heirs, but there is no intention to do something about increasing the number of women farm heirs beyond 16%. There is no reason given on the lack of young farmers that includes a gender perspective, while the fact that only 16% of farm heirs are women suggests that for some reason, women do not inherit farms.

What is problematised regarding gender differences between young farmers is that communication needs to show that men and women are equal. Will improved communication solve these gender inequalities? It is not targeting any structural and systematic problems, and neither is this in any way problematised in the NSP.

4.2.5 What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?

The discursive effects that are produced by this 'problem representation' is that it silences discussions on farm scale (and subsequently, monoculture), as well as discussions on gender inequality for young farmers. The focus of the NSP in regards to generational renewal is on buying farms, and farms have a large amount of hectares and are therefore too expensive for young farmers. The 'problem representation' does not discuss the fact that farms are that large. It silences discussion on there being other ways of accessing land that might be cheaper, or that smaller farms are an economically viable option as well. The 'problem representation' touches on the differences in gender regarding farm heirs and farm managers, but doesn't continue with a deeper discussion on these differences. With improving communication and collecting gender segregated data as the only interventions, it silences

the discussion on systemic issues relating to gender (what seems to be a patriarchal succession of farms, for example).

The subjectification effects that are produced by this ‘problem representation’ is that young and new farmers are seen as farmers that want to set up farms in a particular manner, i.e. by buying a farm with a large amount of land. Considering women farmers, the NSP paints women farmers as easily involved, as if by tweaking communication young women will suddenly become farmers. It implies that without communication on gender equality women are not aware that they, as women, can also be farmers! Women farmers are also depicted as a minor side issue.

The lived effects that are produced by this ‘problem representation’ is that women farmers will still receive less financial support than men, as only collecting gender segregated data and ‘better communication’ do not address this inequality. Women farmers that set up farms smaller than two hectares are not receiving any support at all, thus excluding new and young women farmers.

4.3 Direct payments (BISS, CRISS, eco-schemes)

The third theme of ‘problem representations’ is direct payments. A major part of the NSP is about the budgetary expenses. How problems are represented in the financial realm has the potential to lead to a more equal allocation of productive resources.

The main aims of the CAP are to contribute to food security and to provide a fair income for farmers.³⁵ Agriculture is an economically vulnerable sector due to market conditions.³⁶ Farmers earn on average 40% less than workers in other sectors.³⁷ Land and labour are expensive in the Netherlands and imported products are often cheaper for consumers.³⁸ Farmers also have weak bargaining power compared to the rest of the supply chain.³⁹ Most farms are also too small to earn enough income from their business.⁴⁰ Therefore a reliable income is important.⁴¹ Until there are other business models that guarantee a better income, the BISS will remain.⁴²

The ‘Basic income support for sustainability’ (BISS) is to support all farmers, as a volatile market cannot guarantee farmers a reliable income.⁴³ The BISS contributes to the continuity of the agricultural sector

³⁵ “Terwijl de noodzaak tot verduurzaming urgent is, behoren voedselzekerheid en een eerlijk landbouwinkomen -zowel in 1962 als vandaag- tot de hoofddoelen van het GLB.”, p. 21 (Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, 2022)

³⁶ “Toch maken de marktomstandigheden de sectoren in economisch opzicht kwetsbaar.”, p. 20

³⁷ “Ondanks het belang van de voedselproductie, is het inkomen van boeren ongeveer 40% lager dan in andere sectoren.”, p. 21

³⁸ “Hoge kostprijs als gevolg van dure grond en arbeid”, “Ongelijk speelveld; markt neemt producten af uit buitenland die onder andere (veelal lagere) eisen zijn geproduceerd”, p. 39

³⁹ “Matige onderhandelingspositie in de keten, beperkte organisatie van marktmacht”, p. 53

⁴⁰ “Het merendeel van de bedrijven is te klein om een marktconforme beloning voor arbeid en kapitaal uit het bedrijf te kunnen halen.”, p. 40

⁴¹ “Behoud van een ‘zeker’ deel van het inkomen is dan ook van belang.”, p. 40

⁴² “Dit zal zo blijven zolang er voor landbouwers in Nederland onvoldoende verdienmodellen zijn die een grotere garantie geven op een langjarig redelijk inkomen.”, p. 262

⁴³ “De BISS is voor alle boeren in Nederland, die als actieve landbouwer zijn aan te merken conform de definitie weergegeven in hoofdstuk 4 van het NSP. In heel Nederland en in alle sectoren hebben boeren te maken met onzekerheid in de (wereld)markt (fluctuaties in prijs en volume), waardoor het genereren van een voldoende jaarinkomen geen garantie is.”, p. 262

in the EU and the Netherlands, and therefore helps food security as a result.⁴⁴ The BISS especially helps smaller farms, as those are even more vulnerable to price fluctuations.⁴⁵

The minimum requirement to apply for BISS is when a farmer receives €500 (about 2 hectares of land), and considering especially the smaller farms can contribute goals of the NSP, they should not be excluded from direct payments.⁴⁶ If farming is not the main activity on land, at least a third of the economic activities should be farming.⁴⁷

The BISS will be reduced in the upcoming years because it raises land prices and it is difficult to direct the BISS to specific needs.⁴⁸ The focus instead will be on more goal-focused payments, such as eco-schemes and interventions in the second pillar of the CAP.⁴⁹ The BISS will be gradually lowered from €342 per hectare in 2023 to €165 per hectare in 2027.⁵⁰ The BISS is essential for the sustainable transition of agriculture: as transitioning requires time and effort, the BISS is indispensable for farmers and can also contribute to investments.⁵¹ In the past direct income support has been lowered in other sectors (namely the starch and calf industries), which did not lead to a significant decrease in income.⁵² However, the BISS is a requirement in the CAP and therefore will remain essential.⁵³

Smaller farms will be supported by the ‘Complementary redistributive income support for sustainability’ (CRISS). Because small farms are extra vulnerable and the additional costs of a sustainable transition will reduce farmer’s yearly income even more, they will receive extra support on top of the BISS. It is also a requirement from the EU to re-distribute at least 10% of the direct payments to small farms.⁵⁴ The Netherlands will redistribute 10% of direct payments as minimally

⁴⁴ “Deze subsidie vormt ook een compensatie voor de in het algemeen slechte marktpositie van landbouwers, en draagt bij aan het borgen van de continuïteit van de landbouw, en daarmee van de voedselzekerheid, in de Europese Unie, inclusief dus die in Nederland.”, p. 262

⁴⁵ “Bovenstaande is des te meer van toepassing op kleinere landbouwbedrijven, aangezien deze extra kwetsbaar zijn.”, p. 262

⁴⁶ “De drempel van 500,- komt overeen met ca. 2 ha landbouwgrond. Juist ook de wat kleinere boeren, met betalingen tussen de 500,- en 2000,- dragen bij aan de realisatie van de doelen d, e en f.: het betreft ca. 4200 boeren in die groep. Die willen we niet uitsluiten en door de drempel gelijk te houden wordt voorkomen dat een grote groep landbouwers niet meer in aanmerking zal komen voor betaling.”, p. 232

⁴⁷ “Indien de landbouwactiviteit een nevenactiviteit betreft, waaronder begrepen het in stand houden van het landbouwareaal, moet worden aangetoond dat de landbouwactiviteit een aanzienlijk deel (1/3) uitmaakt van de economische activiteiten (met inbegrip van de directe betalingen) van het bedrijf.”, p. 230

⁴⁸ “De steun verhoogt de grondprijs en is lastiger doelgericht te maken op een specifieke behoefte.”, p. 262

⁴⁹ “De reden om de BISS steeds verder af te bouwen, is dat uiteindelijk steeds meer het accent moet komen te liggen op doelgerichte betalingen in de vorm van ecoregelingen en de interventies in de tweede pijler.”, p. 263

⁵⁰ “Dat betekent dat Nederland al in kalenderjaar 2023 kiest voor een verlaging van de basispremie van € 342 (kalenderjaar 2022) naar € 221 per hectare excl. CRISS om deze vervolgens stapsgewijs te laten dalen in de daarop volgende jaren naar € 165 per hectare excl. CRISS.”, p. 265

⁵¹ “De ontwikkeling van een duurzaam verdienmodel voor Nederlandse landbouwers vergt tijd en inspanning. Voor veel Nederlandse landbouwers is de basisinkomenssteun een onmisbaar onderdeel van hun inkomen, te meer om bij te kunnen dragen aan investeringen in verduurzaming van het bedrijf.”, p. 262

⁵² “Bovendien heeft het verleden geleerd dat bij sectoren (met name gebleken bij de zetmeel- en de kalversector) waar de directe inkomenssteun is verlaagd het inkomen uiteindelijk niet ingrijpend vermindert.”, p. 263

⁵³ “Inkomenssteun in de vorm van een basispremie blijft nog altijd noodzakelijk. Dat komt vooral, omdat de BISS een verplicht onderdeel is in de GLB systematiek.”, p. 265

⁵⁴ “Omdat kleinere landbouwbedrijven extra kwetsbaar zijn, terwijl de kosten voor de transitie naar een verduurzaming van het bedrijfsmodel extra zwaar drukken op het jaarinkomen, wordt voorzien in een top-up

required by the EU, but it is not deemed necessary to redistribute more payments as farms do not vary in size as much as compared to the rest of the EU.⁵⁵ However, the Netherlands does not want to support farms without a promising future, and therefore farms smaller than 4 hectares are excluded from CRISS. This is also because of simplification purposes and the fact that these farms are usually viable because they are not dependent on a large amount of land, such as pig farms.⁵⁶

Eco-schemes will be employed to help the transition to resilient farming, aiming to stimulate farmers to contribute to climate, soil and air, water, biodiversity and landscape goals.⁵⁷ Through eco-schemes farmers will be rewarded for services that contribute to an improved environment.⁵⁸ Currently, farmers do want to put effort into such services, but this creates dilemmas for farmers as they need to produce as efficiently as possible to have a viable farm.⁵⁹ Using a scoring system, the eco-scheme requires that farmers reach a minimum number of points into all five sub-goals in order to apply for a financial compensation.⁶⁰ It is expected that 80% of the farmers will join the eco-schemes.⁶¹ Farmers will be paid by a fixed price per hectare.⁶² Before the start of the farm season the farmer specifies his or her planned eco-scheme activities, and in autumn a farmer will officially apply for the eco-schemes and indicates which eco-scheme activities are done.⁶³

4.3.1 What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?

The main 'problem representation' is that the market is too volatile to guarantee a reliable income for farmers. On the other hand, the NSP states that farmers are deemed essential for food security.

bovenop de BISS, zodanig dat daarmee tegelijk wordt voldaan aan de verplichting om minimaal 10% van de directe betalingen te herverdelen.”, p. 44

⁵⁵ “Nederland zal hierbij inzetten op de minimaal verplichte 10%, omdat een herverdeling van inkomenssteun in Nederland minder noodzakelijk is dan in andere lidstaten. De variatie in bedrijfs grootte in Nederland is namelijk minder groot dan in de rest van de EU.”, p. 267

⁵⁶ “Nederland wil geen bedrijven kunstmatig in stand houden, die niet levensvatbaar zijn en feitelijk geen toekomstperspectief hebben. Uit oogpunt van vereenvoudiging en het feit dat er weinig budget mee gemoeid is, maken we voor bedrijven met minder dan 4 hectare echter geen uitzondering, te meer het in deze categorie eerder zal gaan om bedrijven die wel levensvatbaar zijn, doch voor hun bedrijfsvoering niet afhankelijk zijn van (veel) landbouwgrond, zoals bijvoorbeeld varkenshouders.”, p. 271

⁵⁷ “De ecoregeling wordt ingezet om de omslag naar toekomstbestendig boeren te bevorderen, en om uitvoering van landbouwpraktijken te stimuleren die primair bijdragen aan vijf subdoelen: klimaat, bodem & lucht, water, biodiversiteit en landschap, zonder een negatief effect te hebben op één van deze doelen.”, p. 282

⁵⁸ “Via de eco-regeling kan iedere agrarische ondernemer extra inspanningen leveren ten bate van die drie doelen en geven we vorm aan het idee dat we boeren naast hun inkomsten uit de markt, ook belonen voor het beheren van het landschap en het verbeteren van het milieu.”, p. 23

⁵⁹ “Boeren willen zich graag inzetten voor maatschappelijke diensten, maar dat zorgt voor dilemma's. Hij of zij moet namelijk tegelijkertijd zo efficiënt mogelijk produceren om rendabel te zijn.”, p. 22

⁶⁰ “Puntensysteem: om in aanmerking te komen voor de ecoregeling behoort een begunstigde minimaal een aantal punten te halen voor de doelen klimaat, bodem & lucht, water, biodiversiteit en landschap.”, p. 280

⁶¹ “Niet iedereen doet echter mee aan de eco-regeling in 2023, maar we verwachten desalniettemin een deelname van 80%.”, p. 265

⁶² “Daarom is gekozen voor een vast hectarebedrag, voor alle hectares op een (groep van) bedrijf(f)(ven).”, p. 286

⁶³ “De landbouwer geeft voor de start van het beheerjaar zijn of haar voorgenomen eco-activiteiten aan, door het indienen van een deelnamemelding. In 2023 heeft de landbouwer de mogelijkheid om de deelnamemelding ook in het begin van het beheerjaar in te dienen. In het najaar van het beheerjaar wordt een betaalverzoek ingediend, dat tevens diens als officiële aanvraag. Daarop wordt aangegeven welke ecoactiviteiten zijn uitgevoerd. Op basis van het betaalverzoek wordt bepaald of de landbouwer in aanmerking komt voor uitbetaling van de ecoregeling en het niveau van de vergoeding; brons, zilver of goud.”, p. 287

A second ‘problem representation’ is that the BISS cannot be directed to specific needs. It is problematised that it can’t be directed to sustainability goals, which is one of the main aims of this NSP. Furthermore, the BISS raises land prices as well.

A third ‘problem representation’ is that smaller farms are more vulnerable for price fluctuations, and it is problematised that their income is more at risk than farmers who own larger farms. On top of that, the NSP states that sustainability measures will put extra pressure on incomes of farmers that have smaller farms.

A final ‘problem representation’ is that farmers do not have enough capital for measures for a sustainable transition in agriculture. The low rewards farmers receive for their products create a dilemma between efficient production and sustainable production.

4.3.2 What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the ‘problem’?

A presupposition is that the BISS is essential for farmers to earn a living income, to help farmers to deal with a volatile market and fluctuating prices. It is one of the main ways to reach food security. It also assumes there are no alternative business models for farmers to guarantee a long-term income.

Regarding the CRISS, it is assumed that smaller farms are not viable at all, but the NSP contradicts itself at times regarding this assumption. It also assumed that smaller farms are more vulnerable and that they do not have enough funds for sustainability measures. The assumption is also that sustainability measures can only be done with capital investments. It is also assumed that variation in farm size dictates the level of necessity for redistribution of direct payments.

It is assumed that farmers do not have the money for sustainability measures and therefore need financial rewards. It is also assumed that farmers experience a dilemma between efficient production and nature management.

4.3.3 How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?

Farming is represented as a risky and costly business in the NSP and the main problem representation in this section is that the market is too volatile to guarantee a reliable income for farmers. Market price volatility, due to globalisation and fluctuations in price and demand, gives shape to this problem representation (European Commission, 2023d). The BISS is a measure to help with food security and to function as a safety net for farmers (European Commission, 2023d). With regards to the CRISS, the EU represented the problem being that under the previous CAP, financial support for farmers was unfair (European Commission, 2023c). Larger farms benefit more from economies of scale, while the majority of farms in the EU are considered small (European Commission, 2023c). The eco-schemes are new measures in the CAP, to re-directs some of the BISS to specific targets. Direct payments are represented as a problem by the EU, as a significant portion is not targeted towards environmental objectives, and with the eco-schemes farmers will be rewarded for environmental care (European Commission, 2021).

4.3.4 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?

It is left unproblematic that the BISS is deemed essential as farmers do not receive enough financial compensation for their products, but why farmers catch such a low price for their products is not discussed at all. It is not problematised that the agricultural sector hence needs to be subsidised. It is left out that other actors in supply chains influence the prices of agricultural products and thus farmers’ incomes. The NSP only targets the agricultural sector, but the agricultural sector is part of the food system, and other actors are barely considered.

It is unproblematised that most of the BISS ends up going to farmers with plenty of land, which are mostly cattle farmers in the case of the Netherlands. There is no distinction made in the NSP about types of farmers and which farmers are most harmful for the environment. The fact that the BISS mostly ends up going to meat and dairy farmers is not addressed at all.

It is left unproblematic what the definitions of ‘economically viable’ and ‘future prospect’ are in the NSP. On one hand, smaller farms are deemed less economically viable and the NSP doesn’t want to support farms without a promising future. On the other hand, the NSP writes that all farms, including larger farms, need BISS for farmers to earn a secure income. In contrast, it also states that there are certain smaller farms that do not even require BISS, such as pig farms. Economic viability in the NSP is linked to economies of scale, without even considering other means of reaching economic viability (e.g. diversification of income, better pricing for products, direct trade, eco-schemes).

Furthermore, this system of direct payments is not problematised regarding gender. In the EU, women run farms of 6.4 hectares on average, while men run farms of 14.4 hectares on average (Franić & Kovačiček, 2019). I have not been able to find specific data on this in the Netherlands. If women have significantly smaller farms, that means they receive much less income via direct payments per hectare compared to men.

It is neither discussed that the NSP excludes smaller farms. Farms smaller than two hectares will not receive any direct income support, and are also excluded from the eco-schemes. Regarding the eco-schemes, the monetary rewards are written down as per hectare. The example of the calculation of the eco-scheme for a farm is given for a farm of 50 hectares. It all seems to be aimed at larger scale farms, while smaller farms with lots of different sustainability measures are not mentioned and will not be rewarded for their efforts.

It is unproblematised that the reason for CRISS is the variation in farm size. In the NSP it is written that the Netherlands will redistribute the required minimal 10% as they deem redistribution in the Netherlands less necessary than in other EU countries, because “the variations in farm size are smaller than in the rest of the EU”. The EU describes this problem differently; smaller farms cannot benefit from economies of scale, therefore redistributive payments can help support smaller farms (European Commission, 2023c). The NSP is not focusing on how many small farms there are in the Netherlands and how much they are missing out on not having economies of scale. Large scale farms are not problematised in the NSP, the CRISS is a measure that is dictated from the EU.

The eco-schemes are measures that target the problem representation that farms need to produce as efficiently as possible to be economically viable, while harming the environment in the process. The eco-schemes are an incentive for farmers to produce more sustainably, but there is no discussion whether the business model of farms need more of an overhaul. The eco-schemes also require farmers to get a minimum amount of points in five different areas, which might de-motivate farmers from applying sustainable measures. There are no incremental steps, but farmers have to go all-in in order to receive some financial compensation. Moreover, farmers receive their financial rewards at the end of the growing season. It raises the question whether this creates the incentive that farmers need. The payments for eco-schemes are calculated per hectare, which suggests a certain scale of farming. It doesn’t include discussion on smaller acreages with lots of different environmental measures.

4.3.5 What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?

The discursive effects that are produced by these ‘problem representations’ are that it does not lead to discussions regarding inequalities that direct payments can create and reinforce. It is at least

acknowledged that farmers that own smaller farms will struggle more with a sustainable transition financially. There is no discussion regarding the effect of direct payments on the position of women farmers.

The subjectification effects that are produced by these 'problem representations' is that this policy is aimed at a very specific type of agricultural worker. Women farmers, migrant workers or non-farm manager employees are not taken into account.

The lived effects that are produced by these 'problem representations' is that these direct payments provide farmers a part of their income, but everyone that does not fit this profile of farm managers does not receive a direct payment. Farmers who own less land also receive a much lower amount of BISS, as that is paid per hectare. There is no gender segregated data concerning direct payments, but the effects of these direct payments could mean that women farmers are in a disadvantage.

5. Discussion

5.1 Problem representations of women farmers

To answer my research question (“What are the problem representations regarding women farmers in The Netherlands National Strategic Plan CAP 2023-2027 (NSP)?”), I have found two ‘problem representations’ in key sections of the NSP that concern women farmers: ‘female agrarian entrepreneurship’ is weak and less women farmers compared to men apply for subsidies to buy farms. The main ‘problem representations’ found in key sections of the NSP can be seen summarised in Table 8. ‘Problem representations’ in these sections do not appropriately consider the position of women working in the agricultural sector. Furthermore, ‘problem representations’ often fail to include a gender perspective, for example, in sections addressing direct payments (BISS, CRISS and eco-schemes), effects of direct payments on women farmers and their livelihoods are not considered. The Netherlands has done the minimum to tick the box of the CAP goal to include policy measures in the NSP to improve the position of women farmers in the Netherlands.

The NSP follows a trend that is described in previous literature on gender inequality in the agricultural sector in the EU; gender mainstreaming in policy has been criticised, because it lacks a general methodology and sometimes lacks clearly defined goals (Oedl-Wieser, 2015). In the NSP the only measurable goal concerning women farmers is to increase the percentage of women farmers who apply for subsidies to buy a farm. This goal is set to 16%, as results from a survey show that 16% of farm heirs are women. The assessment why women farmers apply less for these subsidies is superficial and the measure to improve this (through ‘better communication’) are barely elaborated on. Furthermore, there are critiques that for policy to be transformative, robust baseline information and careful monitoring are required (Shortall, 2015). It was required by the CAP for member states to assess the current state of women farmers. However, in the NSP, detailed information about the state of women farmers is missing. This, then, begs the question whether this information is intentionally left out or if there is a profound lack of information. Concerning careful monitoring, LTO Vrouw & Bedrijf (who aim to strengthen the position of women farmers) are involved in the monitoring committee. As Sachs and Alston (2010) described, women farmers “remain at the margins of agricultural policy”, and women farmers in the NSP are no exception to that.

	‘Problem representations’	Measures	Unproblematised
Advisory services and knowledge exchange	‘Female agrarian entrepreneurship’ is weak	Special attention paid to female agrarian entrepreneurship within advisory services	What strong female agrarian entrepreneurship looks like, not a topic on website to apply for voucher
	Farmers lack knowledge to make their farms more sustainable and are too slow to innovate	Vouchers to use for advisory services	Top-down knowledge seen as legitimate, vouchers can only be used with certified advisors
Generational renewal	Less women farmers apply for subsidies to buy a farm	Collecting gender segregated data and improving communication	Gender inequality as a systemic problem

	Buying a farm is too expensive	Subsidies for extra yearly income, subsidies after buying a farm, subsidies for five projects per year with innovative cooperation practices	Only able to receive subsidies if farm is larger than 2ha ('active farmers'), when a farmer already bought a farm
	Young farmers do not have enough money to invest and innovate after buying a farm	Higher subsidies and extra loans	Financial investments seen as the only way of sustainable farming practices, only for 'active farmers'
Direct payments	Farmers do not earn a sufficient and reliable income	Basic income support (paid per hectare)	BISS mostly goes to cattle farmers, no gender breakdown, no problematisations of why farmers receive less compensation for their products
	Farmers of smaller farms are more vulnerable financially and extra costs for a sustainable transition will reduce their income even more	Redistributive income support	Farms smaller than 4ha excluded, supporting smaller farms is not a priority, farms considered only economically viable at a certain scale
	Farmers do not have enough funds to make a sustainable transition	Eco-schemes to pay for environmental measures	Paid per hectare, paid after the measures are already executed

Table 8: summary of problem representations of women farmers

5.1.1 Advisory services and knowledge exchange

The only 'problem representation' on women farmers in the sections on advisory services and knowledge exchange is that 'female agrarian entrepreneurship' is weak. In these sections, it is stated that special attention should be given to strengthening female agrarian entrepreneurship. What 'stronger' female agrarian entrepreneurship should entail, however, is not elaborated on.

Furthermore, where this special attention could be used to include women farmers in communication surrounding the application for vouchers, this topic is not addressed on the website for application at all. Finally, the sections on advisory services show a narrow view on accessing knowledge by suggesting it should simply be done through an advisor. The fact that vouchers for advisory services are only to be used for 'recognised' advisors also does not problematise what 'legitimate' knowledge is.

5.1.2 Generational renewal

Women farmers and generational renewal are briefly represented as problems in the NSP. There is a minor 'problem representation' to be found that young women farmers apply less for subsidies to buy a farm compared to men. Gender segregated data will be collected on who applies for this subsidy. The measure described to combat this problem is to improve communication addressing gender inequality. However, improved communication does not target structural and systematic inequalities. In order to qualify for various subsidies targeted at supporting young and new farmers, the farmer is required already needs to have access to a certain amount of resources. As some women farmers may have less access to resources, they are excluded from such measures. This is not problematised in the NSP. An example highlighting this exclusion is that in order to qualify as a 'young farmer' and receive subsidies, two years of agrarian education, or 'proof' of two years of experience, are required. Another example of this is that subsidies for buying a farm are only given after purchase (for which capital is needed), only putting young farmers with capital in a more advantageous position. A final problem representation is that young and new farmers lack capital to invest and innovate their recently acquired farms, for which there are measures to give out higher subsidies and extra loans. This does not problematise that sustainability in farms is seen as something that is exclusively achieved by financial investments.

5.1.3 Direct payments

The NSP does not problematise who is currently benefitting from direct payments, and several subsidies are only given after something is already paid for, prioritising farmers who already have capital. Gender segregated data concerning this issue is profoundly lacking, neither will it be collected in the future (only gender segregated data on young farmers buying farms will be collected). First, the basic income support excludes small farms as they are not deemed as economically viable. While there is no gender segregated data on farm sizes for the Netherlands specifically, data from the EU shows that on average, women farmers own smaller farms. This can mean that women farmers receive less basic income support compared to men. Second, the redistributive support is set at a minimum of 10%, and in the NSP it is not deemed necessary to redistribute more of the direct payments. The reason given is that farms in the Netherlands vary less in size when compared to other EU countries. However, redistributive support as described by the CAP is to support small farmers who cannot benefit from economies of scale. Finally, eco-schemes are paid per hectare (assuming large farms again) and the subsidies are paid after the implementation of an eco-scheme, hence it is required to have resources in order to apply sustainability measures on a farm.

6. Conclusion

There are many problem representations to be found in the Dutch National Strategic Plan (NSP), and this thesis focused on analysing problem representations concerning women farmers in the sections on advisory services and knowledge exchange, generational renewal and direct payments. In these sections, the representation of women farmers is minimal, and inequalities in the agricultural sector are not problematised. Most 'problem representations' in the key themes fail to include a gender perspective. In the aforementioned themes of the NSP, there are only two 'problem representations' that explicitly address/mention women farmers: female agrarian entrepreneurship needs strengthening and not enough women farmers apply for subsidies to buy farms. To each of these two 'problem representations', a few sentences are dedicated, leaving much of the details to these 'problems' unproblematised.

The NSP follows a trend that has been described in previous literature on gender inequality in the agricultural sector in the EU. 'Gender mainstreaming' (including gender equality in all policies) is criticised as lacking a methodology, clearly defined goals and careful monitoring. In the NSP there are a few goals defined, but how these goals ought to be reached is barely described. The Netherlands has done the minimum to tick the box of the CAP goal to include policy measures in the NSP to improve the position of women farmers in the Netherlands.

The limitations of this thesis are that I have only analysed three themes, that I have not been able to answer all questions of the WPR approach thoroughly. Further, this is written as if gender is a binary and that there is a lack of data on women farmers in the Netherlands to affirm this analysis. There are many more themes and problem representations to be found in the NSP, but due to time restrictions I have only addressed a few. One theme in particular that I would have wanted to analyse is on collaboration and cooperative projects, as inclusivity and diversity are discussed in this theme. Second, I have only briefly discussed the third question of the WPR approach ("How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?") for each theme and I have left out the sixth question ("How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?") altogether, again due to time constraints. Expanding more on these questions would have improved the policy analysis in terms of its depth and completeness. Third, the NSP frames gender as a binary, and hence this analysis is also written using the terms "women" and "men", but "women" and "men" are social categories and gender is not a binary. Finally, there is a lack of research regarding women farmers in the Netherlands. While I used the NSP as my main source of data for the policy analysis, if I had been able to supply this analysis with country-specific data I would have been able to more deeply analyse the problem representations.

The recommendations for further research are thus to analyse the remaining themes in the NSP and to research agricultural policy documents in a way that can properly address intersectionality. If the European Union and The Netherlands want to honour their commitment to improve the position of women farmers, other inequalities should be considered in order to not mutually reinforce gender inequality.

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