

‘Land is a huge integral part of our identity’: Patriarchy and the gender asset gap

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine female participation in farming and more specifically, the reasons for the low rate of female farm ownership in Ireland where only 13% of Irish farm owners are female. Females are excluded from the occupation of a farmer because land ownership is the key needed in most instances to being a farmer in one's own right. Females are farming, but too often, they are not owners of the farms they work on. We investigate the structural and cultural factors that alleviate or contribute to the inequality in Irish farm ownership. To address the research question, a qualitative study involving 35 semi-structured interviews was carried out with both women and men in the Irish farming sector. This research recognises the positive role the state can play, as supported by cultural and institutional theory, by making legal and financial policy changes that can help effect change.

KEYWORDS

asset, farm, female, gender, land, patriarchy, qualitative, rural family

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INTRODUCTION

Not all forms of property are considered equal. Land as an asset is durable and permanent and has traditionally been a source of political power and social status, providing a sense of identity and rootedness, features that make it more significant than other assets (Agarwal, 1994). However, 'land—the most valuable asset—is owned almost exclusively by men' (Deere & Doss, 2006, p. 5). The aim of this article is to examine female participation in farming and, more specifically, the reasons for the low rate of female farm ownership in Ireland, concentrating on qualitative data from 35 semi-structured interviews. Pomeroy (2023) asserts that family farming holds an atypical position within a capitalist society where both owner of the means of production and direct producer are one and the same. This article extends on that view by looking at the role played by females in farm families, where their capacity to become the owners of the means of productions is inhibited by structural and cultural barriers owing to a patriarchal society.

Ireland is an interesting context to study due to the contentious history of land ownership and because Ireland has quickly moved from being a predominantly agricultural rural-based economy to now being a largely service-driven economy. Coupled with that, Ireland is now considered to be one of the progressive countries on issues relating to equality following a raft of political changes introduced over the decade relating to family status and gender pay gap reporting. However, such measures only exacerbate the stark differences in gender norms within farming communities. Although extensive literature exists on the gender wage gap, there has been much less work done on the gender asset gap (Deere & Doss, 2006). There is a need for increased focus on female asset ownership given its importance for many reasons such as income, economic and social status, security and family wellbeing (Doss et al., 2020).

There are stark differences in the ratio of farms owned by men and women in Ireland today. Females represent only 13% of Irish farm holders (CSO, 2020). Women generally do not own the land they work on, instead they are farming land that is owned by their husband, brother or father. In 2016, of the 71,700 females working on Irish farms, less than one quarter were holders of the farms on which they worked (CSO, 2018). Thus, while many women 'farm' in Ireland, it is not reflected in the legal ownership of that land.

Farming is one of the oldest occupations in the world. However, the classification of farming as an occupation or a sector remains a topic of deliberation (Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022) and becomes particularly nuanced when examined from a gender perspective. It is important to note that farming and farm ownership are different. Farming as work and ownership of the land worked are not synonymous. In Ireland, it is predominantly the landowner that manages their own land in a family farm system, pursuant to a self-employed system, and therefore the ownership of land is key. Being a farmer does not mean you are a landowner, and being female makes it less likely that you are a landowner. This is due to the continued patriarchal practices that have persisted in Ireland and in the agricultural community. Addressing this research gap is important given land ownership is the 'grass roots' of the agricultural industry and is an area where gender still remains a significant factor.

Research related to land ownership in Ireland is relatively recent and began with Arensberg and Kimball (1968) and was further built on by Hannan and Katsiaouni (1977), and subsequently the gender dimension has been focused on by Shortall (1991, 1992, 2017) and O'Hara (1997, 1998). Agarwal (1994, p. 1455) described research on females and land ownership as a 'critical gap' and noted that the link between gender inequities and command over property was a 'much-neglected issue'. Brandth (2006, p. 17) now notes that gender-focused agricultural literature has 'flourished'. There

is research on females and farming (cf. Annes et al., 2021; Cush et al., 2018; Haugen, 2008; Laoire, 2005; Price & Evans, 2006; Shortall, 2015; Shortall et al., 2020; Voyce, 1994), and this research contributes to the growing literature by examining the combined effect of structural, social and cultural barriers on the rate of female farm owners, specifically in the Irish context today by performing a qualitative study investigating attitudes in farming. Literature highlights the need for continued research on females and farming (Dunne et al., 2021).

This research also contributes to our understanding of the lived experience of being a female farmer/landowner in Ireland and the barriers they perceive to exist. Gender equality is a multidimensional concept; thus, this article draws on a range of disciplines that may elucidate the barriers to participation and identify pathways to gender-balanced participation.

In this article, we first begin by outlining the theoretical framework and methodical approach. The findings are based on an analysis of 35 interviews. Our findings centre on key themes, beginning with social/cultural barriers, before examining stereotypes and the media, followed by structural barriers and finally enablers and incentives for increased female participation in farming. We conclude with a discussion of the key findings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two key theories frame this research: institutional theory and cultural theory. Both theories have similarities given they focus on patterns of behaviour and practices that emerge through collective meanings. Institutional theory encompasses a large body of work focusing on cultural understanding and shared expectations as a collective foundation to social order (David et al., 2019; Janićijević, 2015). Institutional theory has been applied to agriculture, and, therefore, farming can be considered an institution (Dong et al., 2021; Glover et al., 2014; Janssen & Nonnenmann, 2017; Michelsen, 2001). According to institutional theory, an institution has long-held beliefs and practices, but it also incorporates change, it recognises 'that over time new ideas, processes, and organisations are instituted' (Janssen & Nonnenmann, 2017, p. 50). Therefore, both stability and change are present, and the aim is to encourage change while maintaining stability. A feminist angle on cultural theory specifically looks at how gender identities are formed through cultural practices. However, like institutional theory, cultural theory denotes that culture is not permanent, it is processual and dynamic as individuals and social systems change (Boholm, 1996). Therefore, it is the change that cultural and institutional theory refer to that is of importance in this context.

Both institutional and cultural theory recognise that culture and social systems are processes. Scott (1995) put forward the idea of three pillars of institutionalisation: regulative, normative and cognitive. Regarding the regulative pillar, the state can enact laws and regulations (David et al., 2019). In terms of the normative pillar, the state can give socio-political legitimacy to certain norms, and as regards the cognitive pillar, the state has influence in terms of how we apprehend and organise the social world. Therefore, policy changes can help influence social and cultural change—to make the culture in farming more conducive to women's participation.

The patriarchal family model is a fundamental concept for understanding the current culture in farming and women's positions on Irish farms (Cassidy, 2014). Patriarchy can be considered a theory, a framework and a social system. Patriarchy refers to a male-dominated power structure where men are predominantly the leaders and control property and resources (Walby, 1989) or more broadly as a gendered power system 'of social, political and economic relationships through which men dominate and control female labour, reproduction and sexuality as well as define women's status, privileges and rights in a society' (Kalabamu, 2006, p. 237).

Access to farming is primarily through inheritance, and therefore patriarchy is a primary contributor to the gender asset gap and the occupational sex segregation of farming (Shortall et al., 2020). Balaine (2019) notes one son is usually chosen as the farmer, and he is the one working on the farm, while the other children, mainly daughters, help on the farm but are directed towards education, perpetuating gender stereotyping in farming. Farming in Ireland privileges men as farmers (Byrne et al., 2013). Shortall (1997, p. 112) notes ‘as inheritance patterns stand, they deny women access to property and the ability to farm in their own right’; therefore, access to farmland is the single most important factor shaping the role of women in agriculture.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The authorship team is entirely female, and half are actively engaged in farming (including the lead author), and thus careful design of the questions and analysis was required across multiple iterations to ensure the study was not biased. A qualitative study of in-depth interviews with both women and men employed an interpretative approach to understand the context of constraints and barriers to gender equality in farm-ownership and capture the complexity involved (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). This article focuses on 35 interviews, carried out in 2022, with both women and men involved in the Irish farming sector, including farmers, landowners, stakeholder group representatives and legal professionals in the agricultural industry (see Tables 1 and 2). Nineteen interviews were conducted by phone/online and sixteen were in person. Theoretical saturation was used to guide the sample size. Both snowball sampling and purposive/judgemental sampling methods were employed in gathering interview participants in order to capture a range of participants which reflected the diversity of Irish farming across farm type and size. In line with the distribution of Irish farming, most participants are drawn from the beef or dairy sector, operating small to medium holdings under 100 hectares of land. The stakeholder interviews attempted to capture a range of interest and representative groups aligned with the sectors captured in the interviews but also to capture the knowledge of those typically dealing with land rights as legal professionals.

The questions designed for the interview are drawn from the literature and cover a range of areas related to perceptions of gender equality in farming (see Table 3). As the interviews were semi-structured in nature, the participant had some autonomy over the process, which worked well and allowed rich, detailed data to be collected.

The optimum analytical strategy for the qualitative phase was considered to be the reflexive ‘Thematic Analysis’ method. Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2021) guidelines were adapted for this study. Analysis of the qualitative data was supported through the use of NVivo software. Codes were generated and analysed, which were combined into different themes. Themes were based on whether something was captured in the data and whether it was important to the overall research question. Following further refinement of and reflection on the themes, the data was ready for the analysis and write-up stage, the aim of which was to explain the story of the data.

FINDINGS

The findings will be discussed by theme, beginning with an examination of participants’ views of social and cultural issues, stereotypes and participants’ views of how female farmers are portrayed

TABLE 1 Participant profile.

Interviewee number	Gender	Age	Landowner	Farmer	Type	Location	Hectares
1	Female	30–39	Yes	Yes	Beef	South	20–100
2	Male	50–59	Yes	Yes	Beef	South	20–100
3	Male	30–39	Yes	Yes	Sheep	South	20–100
4	Female	50–59		Yes	Sheep	East	20–100
5	Male	30–39	Yes	Yes	Dairy	West	20–100
6	Male	20–29	Yes	Yes	Beef	West	20–100
7	Female	30–39				East	
8	Female	60–69		Yes	Dairy	North	20–100
9	Male	20–29		Yes	Beef	East	20–100
10	Female	70–79		Yes	Dairy	East	20–100
11	Male	70–79	Yes	Yes	Dairy	East	>100
12	Female	60–69		Yes	Tillage	East	20–100
13	Female	40–49		Yes	Equestrian	North	<20
14	Male	60–69	Yes	Yes	Equestrian	South	20–100
15	Female	30–39	Yes	Yes	Beef	South	20–100
16	Female	70–79	Yes	Yes	Beef	South	20–100
17	Female	50–59	Yes	Yes	Dairy	West	20–100
18	Female	20–29		Yes	Dairy	West	20–100
19	Female	40–49	Yes	Yes	Dairy	South	20–100
20	Female	70–79				East	
21	Female	40–49				South	
22	Male	40–49	Yes	Yes	Beef	West	20–100
23	Male	30–39	Yes	Yes	Beef	South	<20
24	Male	40–49	Yes	Yes	Tillage	South	>100
25	Female	30–39	Yes	Yes	Sheep	West	20–100
26	Female	40–49	Yes	Yes	Dairy	West	20–100
27	Female	50–59	Yes	Yes	Beef	North	20–100
28	Female	40–49	Yes			South	20–100
29	Female	60–69		Yes	Tillage	North	20–100
30	Female	50–59	Yes	Yes	Tillage	North	20–100
31	Female	70–79		Yes	Dairy	South	20–100
32	Female	50–59	Yes	Yes	Beef	South	20–100
33	Female	20–29	Yes			West	<20
34	Female	40–49	Yes	Yes	Beef	West	20–100
35	Female	60–69	Yes	Yes	Sheep	East	20–100

in the media as well as a discussion of structural factors, which are contributing to the situation. Finally, we will conclude with a discussion of enablers as suggested by participants. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the themes that emerged from the data.

TABLE 2 Stakeholder profile.

Interviewee number	Gender	Age	Landowner	Farmer	Interest group/representative body
2	Male	50–59	Yes	Yes	Rural politician
3	Male	30–39	Yes	Yes	Farm relief services
4	Female	50–59		Yes	Agricultural journalist
5	Male	30–39	Yes	Yes	Agri service provider
7	Female	30–39			Barrister
8	Female	60–69		Yes	Irish Country Women’s Association
9	Male	20–29		Yes	Solicitor
12	Female	60–69		Yes	Irish Farmers Association
13	Female	40–49		Yes	Irish Organic Association
15	Female	30–39	Yes	Yes	Women in agriculture stakeholder group
19	Female	40–49	Yes	Yes	Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association
20	Female	70–79			Agricultural stakeholder
21	Female	40–49			Solicitor
22	Male	40–49	Yes	Yes	Agricultural college principal
26	Female	40–49	Yes	Yes	Irish Cattle and Sheep Association

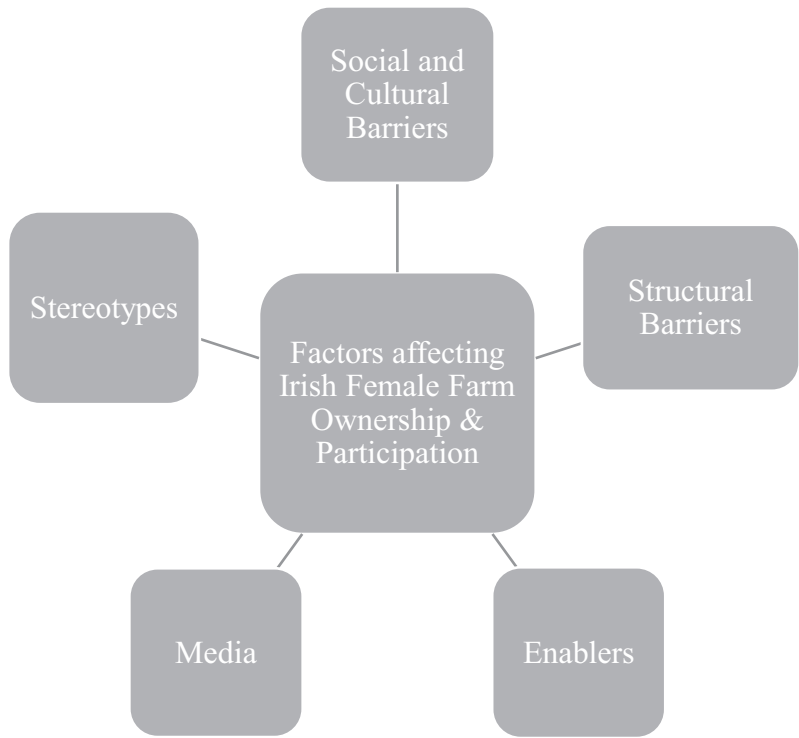


FIGURE 1 Overview of thematic analysis.

TABLE 3 Interview guide.

Subject	Questions	Literature that informed the decision to include these questions
Contextual questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did you come to farm? (inherit/buy/farming with...?)• Do you enjoy farming?• What is the most challenging part of farming for you?• What do you think others perceive of the profession?• What barriers/enablers do you perceive to female farm ownership?	O'Hara (1998), Trauger et al. (2008), Shortall (1991, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2014, 2015, 2017)
Occupation-related perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why do you think women in the occupation of farmer has been slower than women in other fields?• What do you think of the portrayal of women in farming in the media?	Shortall (2001), Haugen (2008), Shortall and Marangudakis (2022)
Patriarchy and gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you think has contributed to the current situation?• What is needed to create change?• Do you think the traditional gender role ideology is still alive?• Do you think it is a generational or a rural issue?• Do you think gender roles are instilled within families and communities? How?	Laoire (2005), Price and Evans (2006), Heggem (2014), Cush et al. (2018), Cassidy (2019), Shortall et al. (2020)
Finance and tax issues. Legal rights-based questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Were there any financial or legal issues that affected your decision when transferring land?• What do you think of prenuptial agreements in the farming context?	Shortall (2017), Buckley (2018), Meehan (2023)

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

Social and cultural barriers were the predominant issue identified by participants for the continued low rate of female farm owners in Ireland. The literature identified patriarchy as a key reason for the dominance of men in farming (O'Hara, 1998; Shortall, 2017), and so an important feature in interviews was how people understand and view patriarchy in farming and the patrilineal succession lineage as it provides a frame for understanding women's positions on Irish farms. The patriarchal family model underpins the culture of farming and the socialisation of children on Irish family farms (Cassidy, 2014). Participants identified patriarchy as one of the key contributors to the low rate of female farm ownership. Patriarchy was described as—*the pattern of the older people. It was an inheritance if you like that went from one generation to the other and it was never changed* (Participant 20: female—stakeholder).

It was the predominantly done thing in Ireland, whether people like it or not, that it is the oldest boy in a family that inherits (Participant 2: male—landowner, farmer and stakeholder).

For example, Participant 24 (male—landowner and farmer) was asked if it was a possibility that any of his sisters might inherit land at home:

Was it ever understood, I don't think the interest was expressed, so I don't think the question was ever answered, but maybe it was implied because I am the oldest son ... I don't think it was ever regarded as an option, I would say wasn't maybe even considered by either dad or my sisters.

This unquestioned assumption of the son farming is a comparative finding across genders. The male viewpoint above was reiterated by many of the female respondents. The assumption that it is the son who inherits, is often not questioned. When a boy was born, it was taken for granted that he would follow in the footsteps of his father. This was the custom or practice and it remained unchallenged.

That is what has been passed down to them, and it's not a conscious decision, it is just something that happens. Culture, labour is used for different genders. What's a woman's job, what's a man's job, and there is no question, still in Ireland today—farming is a man's job (Participant 8: female—farmer and stakeholder).

A key finding from the interviews is that the surname is still a significant issue in the farming community and is one of the primary reasons for the gender inequality in land ownership as people try to foster the family heritage. There is a fascination with wanting to keep the name on the land, which is generally only achieved and guaranteed by giving the farm to a son or nephew and thus keeping the land in the patrilineal line. Shortall (1997, p. 112) notes that for many, keeping the name on the land is imperative and thus sons, 'regardless of interest or ability, are seen as the natural heirs'. The surname was noted by the majority of participants as a key reason and factor for choosing a son over a daughter. When one participant was asked who he would like to see inherit the family farm—I'd sooner the grandson because it would carry on the name—and when asked how he would feel if a granddaughter inherited the land—*left the family*,

the farm had left the family ... I'd say it would be gone then (Participant 11: male—landowner and farmer).

There's a huge issue there with the family name as well and family names being passed with farms and it's still in the mind of a family that if a farm passes to a woman, that the family name will be lost and the family name will be lost on that land and as we know in Ireland land is a huge integral part of our identity (Participant 15: female—landowner, farmer and stakeholder).

Others, however, acknowledged that the name is not of paramount importance—*I don't understand the keeping it in the name because I mean male or female, you are part of that family. It is the family genes* (Participant 16: female—landowner and farmer).

People mentioned different solutions to the surname issue with many of the farming women making the decision to keep their own name or use a double-barrelled name. However, it was noted that there is no true solution to the problem the surname causes.

Something that emerged from the interviews was the different expectations placed on sons and daughters unconsciously. Sons were expected to take on the responsibility of the land; many interviewees referred to this 'burden' on boys and the expectation that they would farm and stay home and look after the parents—*I think it was as much the expectation on them, it was nearly a burden for some guys as well* (Participant 29: female—farmer). Meanwhile, the girls often pursued education and were not expected to labour at home. Therefore, boys were sometimes pressured into it. As Participant 14 (male—landowner and farmer) noted—*I just took it for granted that I was to stay at home and look after the place and be there for mother and father, but I had to go working as well to support the farm*. The responses of the stakeholder group also endorsed this view as evident from what they see happening in practice. As noted by Participant 21 (female—stakeholder)—*sometimes a son might be taking over the farm and it might almost be a burden to him in that he had to stay at home, and he can't maybe go to college and do something else*. Therefore, the patriarchal practice of the son inheriting is sometimes a negative for the son, he has to take on the expectation and pressure of keeping the farm going. Participant 30 (female—landowner and farmer) who has an only child—a daughter—noted:

I was glad I didn't have a son because the son would have been locked down to the farm and not been able to get off the farm, and if the daughter wants to come home, it's going to be here for her, and if she doesn't want to come home, she doesn't have to do it.

Therefore, it seems that the same level of responsibility or expectation is not demanded of a daughter. Women are more regularly afforded the opportunity to study and work off farm. Whereas, males are treated otherwise. Interestingly, even when there is an only child and it is a female, the female is still often not expected to farm as illustrated by Participant 1 (female—landowner and farmer).

Even though I'm an only child and it was always obvious that the land was coming to me, I was never encouraged really to make that my primary decision or career ... when I reflect back, I do often think if I had been a boy would it have been a very different conversation of almost you know why would you be thinking of doing anything else when you have this coming to you.

Therefore, patriarchy in farming is not a straightforward or simple matter. Much of the blame for females not inheriting farms is attributed to patriarchy, but there are additional findings that emerged in relation to the role of women themselves in perpetuating patriarchal practices and the weight these handed-down expectations have on sons.

The findings however did note some instances of women's attempts to resist patriarchal norms. Something of note was that female farm owners are less willing than their male counterparts to add their partner to the title of the land. As Participant 33 (female—landowner) noted—*I think there's that element of a lot has been taken away from us and there is not a lot that we can hold on to as women particularly*. Therefore, females are less keen to share the land or give away some of the control, which can sometimes be attributed to apprehension given—*a woman with a farm is seen as an easy target sometimes* (Participant 32: female—landowner and farmer).

Another contributor to the continuation of patriarchy in farming and the patrilineal succession lineage is the stereotype of the farmer as male, which many acknowledge is due to physical attributes, which will be discussed next.

STEREOTYPING

One of the primary stereotypes in farming is that women are physically unsuitable to farm. There is a lot of work on a farm. Traditionally, the work was often divided based on gender (Heggem, 2014; Laoire, 2005; Trauger et al., 2008). The man working out in the fields and the woman working in the house and around the yard was considered the most efficient use of labour. It was recognised by interviewees that, historically, the physicality involved in farming was a barrier for a woman:

It was very manual work, and I think this is you know quite pragmatic, but you know for a woman to do the amount of physical work that was there at the time was very difficult especially if you're childbearing (Participant 17: female—landowner and farmer).

The male body is the symbol of agricultural work whether physical labour is required or not (Brandth, 2006). Sons were favoured for their perceived physical strength. However, it was also noted that farming now is much different to the farming that prevailed before.

The physical work is gone out of farming this day and age. There is a machine for everything, and you know there is not as much physical work involved in it as there was maybe going back through the generations (Participant 6: male—landowner and farmer).

It was noted that there is not this distinct divide between the genders and that the physicality of farming is an issue for all.

It is very physically demanding, and I wouldn't say it's a man's job, I'd say it would take a lot of strength regardless of gender, you would want to be a strong man or woman to farm (Participant 9: male—farmer and stakeholder).

Many of the female interviewees acknowledged how technology has facilitated their entry into farming.

I mean I wouldn't have been able to go farming if it wasn't for the technology that became available back in the 90s. You had machinery for lifting and loaders and things like that and so you know the onset of technology created a space for me to farm you know, an opportunity for me to farm (Participant 19: female—landowner, farmer and stakeholder).

As I like to say my tractor doesn't know if there's a man or a woman turning the key in the ignition (Participant 15: female—landowner, farmer and stakeholder).

However, some of the females noted that they lacked mechanical and specifically tractor driving skills. There were different reasons cited. One female noted it was lack of opportunity, given that growing up, she would be involved more with the animals rather than working with machinery.

I'd say lack of opportunities. Just it wouldn't be me that would have been out, I'd be handling the animals more than out with machinery and I'd be afraid of it too (Participant 34: female—landowner and farmer).

Therefore, even though machinery is available, which overcomes much of the physicality required in farming, women are sometimes lacking confidence or the skills required to use machinery.

Stereotyping was discussed in interviews in terms of how women are perceived and treated as farmers by others and how they see themselves. For example:

I think one of the stereotypes is that if you're a woman and you're farming and you're in a relationship where the other person is also farming that you're the secondary one, that you are the helper out as opposed to being the primary driver irrespective of who necessarily owned the land originally (Participant 1: female—landowner and farmer).

In terms of stereotypes, there is a strong perception by some that women will not farm or are incapable or that they are uninterested or lack the ability. A problem identified by female farmers was lack of encouragement be it from family, including both mothers and fathers, from the farming community in general or also at school:

You know in school, I was never encouraged to be a farmer despite everyone knowing that I came from a farm. You know lots of boys who come from farms, it's automatically assumed that they'll go into agricultural education ... I never had any external encouragement, and I didn't really have a huge amount of internal maybe family encouragement as well ... I feel like there would be more encouragement if I was a man rather than a woman (Participant 15: female—landowner, farmer and stakeholder).

It was noted that the idea women should not farm is very much a rural issue and those working outside of farming do not face the same bias. Females also sometimes feel that they must try harder in order to prove themselves—*there is that proving that you actually are able to farm and are a capable farmer* (Participant 19: female—landowner, farmer and stakeholder).

Some noted that this is a societal issue and one very much at large in the farming community. In terms of facilitating the survival of this stereotype, the literature pointed to how we treat our children and how the toys a child receives can stereotype them into a role (Kretchmar, 2011). This was discussed by Participant 13 (female—farmer and stakeholder),

You know it's a cultural thing, I mean you've all seen it, you buy the pink wrap for the baby girl, the blue for the boy and you know the tractors for the boys, the dolls for the girls. I mean we stereotype people, in some effects we say we are educating children at a young age; I dispute that and say we are indoctrinating them at a young age actually.

However, it seems that in a lot of cases, boys do like to play with tractors and girls play with dolls, be that social constructionism or not. Participant 34 (female—landowner and farmer) has three young children, a son and two daughters. She remarked how much her son loves to play with his farming toys and that he is more interested in going outside on the farm than her daughters. When questioned why she thought this was so, she said—it just seems to be the way he is. I think whether it's to be like dad. Be like dad out on the farm, and the boys want to be dad and I think that possibly is part of it—being dad.

Although not as pervasive as it once was, farming is still considered to be predominantly male. Although females are farming, it is still not reflected in farm ownership figures. Women are capable of farming. Farming can be considered a job like any other occupation, although one needs specific resources such as land. Women need to be seen as worthy successors; daughters are capable and can work and farm the same as any son. Some interviewees noted that the media is responsible for perpetuating that farmers are men and this, therefore, adds to bias in farming.

MEDIA

The media is a very powerful source be it print newspaper, online platforms or the television. It permeates people's houses and lives and fashions ideas and norms in people's attitudes. Many outlets traditionally used the image of the male as representing farmers, which was justified (Morris & Evans, 2001). However, an image of a man does not reflect all farmers. The predominant image of the male farmer may also be somewhat responsible for women themselves not identifying as a farmer. Some participants believed the media could be a positive tool towards normalising women in agriculture and providing role models.

The more you expose the women that are farming in agriculture and the more people see of them and see them being successful and see it becoming the new normal ... you would hope that they would review their own thoughts hopefully and accept it (Participant 6: male—landowner and farmer).

However, others took issue with the way women are sometimes portrayed in the media. In that women should not be seen as a novelty but just as another farmer doing their job.

I honestly cannot bear the pink sparkly crap because I mean like we are gone so far from that. Yes, it is cute and lovely and all that but it's hard work. It requires a reasonable amount of knowledge and understanding and ability and willingness to

learn and not to stagnate, but you know women are often portrayed so badly in the media, in agriculture, it's rotten (Participant 27: female—landowner and farmer).

However, the reason behind the media highlighting females in farming was something people were wary of in that they wonder is it for the benefit of females or for the outlet themselves needing to be seen to be doing something—*there is more of an effort in the media you know to speak to women, but I don't know is it just because they want to be seen to be doing it or is it genuine* (Participant 3: male—landowner, farmer and stakeholder). Regardless, the media was highlighted as an enabler for increasing females in the sector, but it depends on the way it is written and the way it is publicised.

I think the exposure is needed. To create change sometimes, things need to be forced, and I know a lot of people do say oh there's just representation in this TV show just for the sake of representation, but I think in the long run that's not such a bad thing in the media because it will create change or so we hope (Participant 18: female—farmer).

The media has a big role to play in that it normalises the image in people's minds as to what a farmer is and challenges the stereotype that existed for so long. The extant literature has also highlighted the role that media can play in the perpetuation of patriarchy (Shortall, 2017). Shortall (2001) noted that the media coin gender stereotypical phrases to describe women in farming such as 'lady in a man's world', 'farmerettes', and 'queen of the plough'. Yet they fail to engage with the real issue around the low participation rate of women in farming. Shortall (2001, p. 179) warns 'treating women as a novelty limits the extent to which they are taken seriously and reinforces their anomalous position'. Shortall and Marangudakis (2022) highlight that the European Parliament and the Council consistently refer to farmers as men, using the term 'he', 'him' and 'his' when referring to farmers in official documents and thus they are reinforcing cultural norms and gender stereotypes relating to the occupation of farmer.

Another factor impacting decisions relating to land transfer in Ireland is financial and legal concerns.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Taxes and costs associated with land transfers apply to all irrespective of gender. However, they do hinder more women indirectly given that land and farming accounts are usually in the male's name, which can lead to tax and pension repercussions (Meehan, 2023). A key finding is that the current Irish tax regime is a significant issue affecting families' decisions relating to land transfer. When a child is gifted or inherits property from parents as is the usual case with a family farm, it is typically transferred to the child alone because of tax considerations, not to the child and the child's spouse. When Participant 10 (female) was transferring land to her son, she noted that herself and her husband only put the land into their son's name and not the son and his spouse because of tax—*Just to the one name because I think there are tax implications of putting it into the double name because that's what we were told anyway. The husband anyway in his own time can always put it in*. However, an individual must wait a number of years before they can transfer land into joint names to avoid further tax issues. Many then do not get around to it or see no reason to do so. For example, Participant 23 (male—landowner and farmer) noted—*when I was getting the farm I was married, and the solicitor said I couldn't add my wife because she would have to pay*

tax, so the financial incentive was totally against it—and when asked has he added her to the title since—Well, it costs money to do it. I would do it only for that... she did mention it once or twice alright... let her pay for it no problem, work away.

Different legal issues also arose. The legal professionals interviewed were asked about farming cases and issues that arise where the wife is not on the title. Topics such as creditors and asset redistribution on divorce were discussed. For many interviewees, the fear of the impact of divorce on farm ownership was a key issue given and a barrier to adding the wife's name to the title. This is clearly a situation that could be addressed by legal reform, more specifically clarification of the enforceability of prenuptial agreements. While there is a fear that prenuptial agreements could be used to limit or restrict women's access to land (Shortall, 2017), many of the interviewees were very positive in their attitudes to such agreements. There is clearly a role for prenuptial agreements, and they could be encouraged in a similar way to succession plans. While prenuptial agreements are not legally enforceable in Ireland, there is no reason why a couple cannot enter into one; it is an area that is evolving but the absence of clarity in relation to their enforceability is leading to difficulty (Curtin et al., 2023). As noted by a stakeholder-

There are a lot of them happening in practice, particularly where both people are coming in with property or pensions. They are trying to secure their interest before they get married. We are seeing a more educated generation coming through. So, one of the issues you're having now is they can do one and they can pay for one, but it might not be enforceable, which is a difficulty (Participant 7: female—stakeholder).

Opposing views arose in interviews. Those against the use of prenuptial agreements focused on the effect they would have on the relationship.

If you are at that level with somebody you should be trusting them and you imagine that you would trust them and so therefore you wouldn't need to be going to the likes of a prenup or something like that. I think it could probably do more damage than good in the long term (Participant 6: male—landowner and farmer).

Although some were wary of prenuptial agreements, many thought prenuptial agreements could play a beneficial role.

It involves communicating about what you both want for the future and how you both see yourself going and if you agree on a prenup then it's mutual and it's right, it's written and it's legal and I think that's a very good thing (Participant 33: female—landowner).

The contrasting views regarding prenuptial agreements also emerged when discussing enablers and incentives.

ENABLERS/INCENTIVES

There were opposing views as to whether gender-specific financial incentives are beneficial or not to women and the farming community as a whole. Some believed that they were long overdue

and necessary, while others believed they would represent a step backward. In support of extra supports or grants for females, many cited the added challenges women face.

In terms of institutionally, there are no added supports to being a female farmer as opposed to being a male farmer, but there are added challenges like caring for your family, physical activity and size and the stereotypes that you face as well (Participant 1: female—landowner and farmer).

Some interviewees feared that positive discrimination could encourage farm transfers to women for the wrong reasons, for example, for the financial gain. Some feared creating a divide and that men could resent the perceived discrimination against them.

I think it's a double-edged sword, I must admit. I think one of the key things here is really important is that from my understanding certainly is that female farmers would like equality not preferential treatment (Participant 13: female—farmer and stakeholder).

Men will get their back up, and it's showing inequality in the other direction, so integrate incentives in a better way than paying women more for the same thing (Participant 28: female—landowner).

Some believed a policy group in government would help. However, others felt differently given there are other perceived bigger issues in farming, such as climate change. Bringing in supports was considered a more realistic step if the government wants to encourage females in farming. Education was also noted as an enabler and a way to get more females into farming. That the option is highlighted to children and teenagers. That farming and agriculture is put to them as an occupational choice. Participant 30 (female—landowner and farmer) is a teacher and noted:

I have sent girls off who wanted to be hairdressers, and I said well there is work experience here working with animals for a day, would you mind doing that, and they ended up being dairy operatives and having a career, but it's never mentioned to girls in school, it is never upheld as a possibility, and I think it would be a good idea.

We would have to start first of all in a whole educational system... encouraging young women into farming and promoting farming to them and what areas of farming would be interesting particularly say through transition year in schools and educational guidance and you know that it is an option. Are you going to be a nurse or a teacher? No, I want to be a farmer (Participant 8: female—farmer and stakeholder).

In terms of the future, the majority of interviewees stated that they would like to see more women in farming, but some noted that the gender issue specifically should not be pushed, that we should be encouraging all the youth into farming. Many agreed that the decision as to who to pass the farm onto should be based on interest, ability and work ethic irrespective of gender. Discussion of the issue is crucial. There are men and women working alongside each other on farms every

day and supporting one another; it is for couples to come to an understanding and recognise the contributions being made.

Succession is a key area for the future, and conversations must happen within families so that the decision is not automatically based on gender.

I think the biggest thing we have to do to try and get women into farming is to work more on the area of inheritance and succession ... get this open table discussion where people and families will discuss the future of farms ... we might get more women saying, putting their hands up and saying yes, I think I could give it a go... I don't think too many parents would turn their daughter down if they said they wanted to do it but there would have to be a good reason why they wanted to do it (Participant 12: female—farmer and stakeholder).

There are very strong gender traditions in farming culture. Change in this instance -

Could be perceived as disruptive change, all change is disruptive by its nature and then change generally doesn't occur for the sake of it, it occurs when it has to happen... is the problem of female ownership of land causing enough say unhappiness or discomfort or problems for people to come out against it and make change happen? (Participant 24: male—landowner and farmer).

Many of the interviewees, especially the female farmers are unhappy. They want change, particularly in attitudes. That the traditional mindset that a son had to inherit and that farming is a man's job changes. That there is no difference between a male and female farmer, a farmer is a farmer.

DISCUSSION

The literature identified patriarchy and patrilineal succession as a key contributor to the rate of women in farming (Cush et al., 2018; Shortall et al., 2020), which was corroborated by the qualitative findings. The research finds that patriarchy and patrilineal culture are still impacting females inheriting and owning land and women being severely underrepresented by the official CSO (Central Statistics Office) figures. The findings of this study provide additional insight into the experiences of women farming in Ireland today. Some female interviewees demonstrated no angst at the fact they did not inherit the home farm or were not added to the legal title of the farm they married into. They accepted it and took it for granted. So, while there are many women quite content with not being added to the title or have any legal link to the farm, the data collected did highlight that many believe that the role women play is not recognised or sufficiently valued. It is frequently the female's income from an off-farm job that enables the male to stay in the occupation of farmer as the women's income supports family living and facilitates any farming income to be reinvested (Kelly & Shortall, 2002). There are also many women directly working on the farm be it 'hands on' work or by doing the paperwork. Bureaucracy has now become a large part of all types of farming enterprises, and frequently the female carries out this role (O'Hara, 1998; Shortall, 2017). Therefore, many females are contributing to the farm either directly or indirectly, yet their contribution frequently goes unrecognised.

This study supports the existing literature of Shortall (2017) and Shortall et al. (2020) that there are various reasons for the continued domination of males in farming and the occupational clo-

sure of farming for many women. Fischer and Burton (2014) noted factors that affect who inherits a farm such as position within the family and intergenerational hierarchy; however, this research demonstrates that gender is still a primary consideration in the Irish context. Results from this study's qualitative findings reveal that there are cultural issues at play in addition to structural barriers by virtue of the Irish tax and legal system.

The social and cultural barriers to participation rooted in traditional cultural norms and beliefs regarding the role of women in the home and society in Ireland are still a primary cause of the lack of equality in female farm ownership largely due to the practice of patriarchal succession and inheritance. Patriarchy is embedded in society. Culturally through beliefs and succession praxis and structurally through the tax system that favours a sole farm owner. The findings from the interviews also correspond with the views expressed by Deere and Doss (2006) who note that contributing factors to the gender asset gap are our marital and inheritance regime. Arensberg and Kimball (1968) noted that women were rarely the farm successor; decades later, this is still an issue as supported by the qualitative data. Of the female farm owners interviewed who inherited land, the vast majority were only daughters or had sisters but no brothers. When farmers and stakeholders were asked about neighbours and females farming in the community, their situation seemed to be that they usually had no brothers interested in farming.

For a change to occur in family farm succession, both parents must change, not simply male attitudes, which is where focus is generally directed (Shortall, 2015). Patrilineal succession is also supported by women's willingness for their sons and brothers to inherit (Price & Evans, 2006). The interviewees noted that in many cases, it is both the mother and father who want the successor to be a son. The reasons given included that some mothers wanted a stable life and career for their daughters and that farming given the volatile nature of incomes and dependency on uncontrollable factors such as the weather was not a stable career (O'Hara, 1997). Interviewees wondered whether women are supporting the reproduction of patriarchy in farming; or are they contesting patriarchal structures in their own way or are women on farms both contesting and co-operating (O'Hara, 1998). A key finding is that many people, especially the females believe that patriarchy still exists and is a current and prevalent issue, one perpetuated by maternal lines as well. Patriarchy affects both males and females in the farming context, including the weight of producing an heir—interviewees noted the joy experienced when a son was born as it meant that that generation's duty had been fulfilled. Linked with that, the family surname continues to be a significant issue when it comes to land and is one of the primary reasons for favoring a son over a daughter. According to Kennedy (1991), there is a sense of immortality having one's name and descendants on the land.

During the interviews, some participants stated that they thought farming was a man's job. A key finding is that both men and women supported this view and age was not an influencing factor. The findings indicate that Irish succession practice continues to be persistently male-positioned, and the shift away from patriarchy is too often because there are no sons or because the son lacks interest (Cassidy, 2019). It was noted by Hannan and Katsiaouni (1977) and Kennedy (1991) that in the overwhelming majority of cases, land is inherited directly through the patrilineal line or from other paternal relatives. During interviews, some referred to it as an unspoken rule, decades later the findings demonstrate that this perspective is alive and well in Ireland. However, nearly all participants admitted that the females they knew who were farming in their own right were well capable and successful, but there is still a bias against them that they cannot seem to shrug off in some instances. It was remarked that there is an assumption that females, especially those farming independently, require extra help (hired in or otherwise) even though it is a common practice in farming irrespective of gender.

The topic of physicality as a barrier to female farm ownership was discussed in interviews. Traditionally, farming is a physical and manual job. Many participants in the study acknowledge that lack of physical strength meant women were generally less suited to the hard physical labour that was traditionally entailed in farming. However, technology and machinery were praised for changing that and allowing women to fully engage in farming. As Trauger et al. (2008, p. 434) note, 'male bodily advantage in farming dissipates with the availability of agricultural machinery which eliminates much of the need for physical strength and endurance'. It was noted by respondents however that machinery and technology cannot always fix the physicality problem and that there will always be a physical aspect to farming (the degree depending on the type of farming). However, it was acknowledged that this is not a gender-specific issue as men and women may both struggle physically.

Females are equally represented in almost all aspects of the agricultural industry, for example, as vets and agricultural advisors. As illustrated by the qualitative data, this is because daughters on farms are often pushed and encouraged into education, while the son is the preferred successor for the land. This study proposes combating the inequality in farming through practical reforms such as tax change and legalising prenuptial agreements. Rational choice theory can be applied to prenuptial agreements and the autonomy of creating and designing such an agreement. A prenuptial agreement has similar benefits to drafting a succession plan or a partnership agreement for any other type of family business. Prenuptial agreements can act as an important protection device for landowners as divorce, like death, and can harm multigenerational family businesses; and so, as every farm should have a business and succession plan, there should also be a plan in case of relationship breakdown (Rincker, 2019). However, participants differed in their support for prenuptial agreements being made enforceable in Ireland. Although some participants acknowledged that they would be beneficial in certain circumstances, many were apprehensive of them.

Financial costs relating to solicitor fees and taxes were mentioned as reasons for not adding the partner to the title. Tax is frequently used as an incentive to change or alter behaviour, which allows manipulation of the system and peoples' practices (Hines, 1999). There are various reasons why people add their partner/spouse to the title, for example, to obtain a mortgage, or as a gesture or an acknowledgment of their contribution (O'Sullivan, 2020). Tax and legal processes are constraining change. The tax rules are causing real issues for people; they were a clear reason given for parents transferring the farm to a child alone even though they would have liked to transfer it to the child and that child's spouse. The cost of a solicitor is also a reason why a farmer does not want to add their spouse to the title. In terms of participants' views of incentives specific to females, some were very much in favour, while others were strongly against. Some thought incentives would be a bad thing, and instead they wanted change to happen 'naturally' (Participant 2: male—landowner, farmer and politician), which shows the sense of hope but perhaps does not address how long this might take in terms of addressing cultural issues. Many felt incentives were required in an attempt to increase the number of female landowners, while many others felt (not specific to any gender) that it would demean females.

Both cultural theory and institutional theory play a significant role in understanding the situation and how to address it. Scott's (1995) three pillars of institutionalisation: regulative, normative and cognitive are central. The state, by enacting laws, taxes and regulations (regulative), gives socio-political legitimacy to norms (normative), which in turn influences how we understand and structure our social world (cognitive). Therefore, practical policy changes can help influence social and cultural change—to make the culture in farming more conducive to women's participation. As noted by Fairchild (2019), the patriarchal structure of society is the root of the barriers

imposed upon women, and therefore structural change is needed; it is institutions that can address the barriers by initiating policies that promote equitable conditions for women.

This study finds that it is the combined effect of the law, tax policy and cultural norms that has contributed to the unique form of occupational segregation that now exists in farming and farm ownership. The continued occupational segregation also adds to the social and cultural norm and the perpetuation of a vicious cycle of influence. The findings from this research highlight that traditional theories such as human capital theory, which usually combats occupational segregation by advocating education and training (Dolado et al., 2003; Marginson, 2019) will not fix this issue in farming, as land is the main resource needed to farm, not education.

The capability approach is a key means to showcase that gender should not be a deciding factor in someone owning land or property (Nussbaum, 1999, 2003; Sen, 1993). As farms are most often acquired through inheritance, it is important that the decision as to who will inherit the farm be based on ability and interest, and not gender alone as has commonly been the case (Shortall, 2017). Women are capable, able farmers. Denying females the opportunity to farm because of patriarchal or stereotypical views is unjust. The capability approach highlights the value of people, irrespective of gender, race or religion, achieving a life they are capable of fulfilling. Those females who want the opportunity to farm should be afforded it and not denied it for no reason other than their gender. The capability approach is about the importance of choice.

A business case for more female farm participation can also be made. This would be advantageous and pragmatic in terms of increasing the diversity of views and optimising the potential for the industry. Therefore, proposing this angle may be helpful to get people and government on board. It is in every person's interest that our food is produced in the most sustainable way and gender equality is seen as enhancing sustainability (Giner et al., 2022).

In general, there was no great divide between age groups, genders or among the stakeholder and farmer/landowner group, but many of the stakeholders interviewed are also farming or come from a farming background. All, apart from two, agreed and were open to more female participation and females as farm owners. While there are many women content to have no role in the farm business, it is the women who are involved in the farm that the interviewees noted deserve recognition. The interviewees, particularly the stakeholder group, noted that men and women are not in oppositional roles. Both roles are needed and complement the other. It is a family farm model for a reason. There are usually multiple generations involved on a day-to-day basis. As noted by Participant 9 (male)—*The families that I know that farm would do it as a household... and everyone would be working together.* Participant 12 (female) noted—*We also have to respect and accept the differences and the complimentary of sexes. That we cherish both of them and at the same time we try and bring a balance into it and keep that balance.*

CONCLUSION

Farms are not just a business but a family legacy, and as such, their transfer is value-laden not just in financial terms but also with regard to carrying on the family name and tradition (O'Hara, 1998; Shortall, 2017). Many factors influence farm property ownership, and given gender equality is multidimensional, this research demonstrates how structural and cultural factors are impacting the gender asset gap in farm ownership. This work adds to research on the experiences of farmers and stakeholders in Ireland. Specifically, this work increases the understanding of the intricate interpersonal relationships at play on Irish farms in terms of how parties feel regarding recognition of work and worth. This study also adds to the research on the current barriers and

enablers for female farm ownership in Ireland. This study identifies the barriers faced by many women on Irish family farms today and the need to give them a voice. Women are undoubtedly involved in farming, but not enough has been done to eliminate gender discrimination regards farm ownership. Ownership is important as it affords a sense of security, protection and belonging.

This research recognises the positive role the state can play, as supported by institutional and cultural theory, by making legal and financial policy changes that can help effect change. Structural factors account for the gender asset gap as females' ability to own property is conditioned by the state and the family (Deere & Doss, 2006). Land is a key resource in farming, and given land is usually attained by inheritance, family relations are a significant aspect. The custom of patriarchal inheritance continues to prevail in Ireland, which means that daughters are effectively excluded as possible heirs. Females are excluded from the occupation of a farmer because land ownership is the key needed in most instances to being a farmer in one's own right (O'Hara, 1998).

This research has focused specifically on female farm ownership in the Irish context and represents a snapshot of the farming community in the midst of a transition. The farming community is changing but the rate of change is slow because of gendered structural and interactional social closure in that it is thought women would rather 'lead from the shadows' (Shortall et al., 2020, p. 51). Farming is not impervious to change albeit reluctant to let go of traditions, and it is acknowledged that tradition has many good points too. Society is changing in terms of how it views and values women, and this includes how women value themselves. Family farms involve complicated and intricate family dynamics (Steen, 2011). The nuance of relationships plays a key role in increasing the figure of female farm ownership. Males make up the majority of current Irish farm owners, and therefore men can play a key role in increasing female farm ownership and changing mindsets.

Additionally, we also argue that in the case of wives who dedicate their time and money to the farm, their name should be on the title. While there were opposing views on issues such as the portrayal of female farmers in the media and the use of financial incentives to encourage more female landowners, one issue that the majority of participants were in agreement on was that the land should go to the person who is interested. What is needed is to take gender out of farming and instead pick the best person for the job—meritocracy. Therefore, the social implications of this research would involve a significant change in the family farm dynamic, which has persistently continued to be male-led, especially regarding asset ownership. The media can play a role in this regard—normalising female farmers, the focus not being their gender but their work caring for the land and animals; to help break down the stereotype of who we think can farm and own land. Furthermore, Ireland contrasts with farming structures in other contexts. For example, while Pomeroy (2023) points out that in New Zealand although members of farming families (including co-owners) may have their own occupations, professions or businesses, those incomes are separate from and not necessary for the survival or thriving of the farm business, the interviews conducted here found that in many cases the female contribution is vital.

In conclusion, females are farming, but too often they are not owners of the farms they work on. As Pomeroy (2023) contends, the marginalisation of those without capital assets requires examination to expose and address social, economic and environmental issues and concerns. For current and future farming generations choices to farm should be based on interest and ability rather than gender. It was noted that females increasing as farmers and farm owners will change the dynamic and status quo that has existed and could be disruptive, but change does need to happen. Women are farming, but many are hidden, informal contributors to this occupation, and it is time to officially recognise the role played by females.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Research Ethical approval for this study was granted by the KBS Research Ethics Committee, University of Limerick on the 20th of September 2021. Approval number: 2021_09_KBS_03.

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