

# Family farming and gendered division of labour on the move: a typology of farming-family configurations

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**Abstract** Family farming, understood as a household which combines family, farm and commercial activity, still represents the backbone of the world's agriculture. On family farms, labour division has generally been based on complementarity between persons of different gender and generations, resulting in specific male and female spheres and tasks. In this 'traditional' labour division, gender inequality is inherent as women are the unpaid and invisible labour force. Although this 'traditional' labour division still prevails through time and space, new arrangements have emerged. This paper asks whether we are witnessing changes in the unequal structure of family farming and analyses the diversity of farming family configurations, using the Swiss context as a case study. The typology of farming-family configurations developed, based on qualitative data, indicates that inequalities are related to status on the farm and position in the configuration rather than to gender identity per se. This insight enables a discussion of equality and fairness in a new light. This paper shows that farming-family configurations are often pragmatic but objectively unequal. However, these arrangements might still be perceived as fair when mutual recognition exists,

resulting in satisfaction among the family members. The paper concludes that although family farming presents challenges to gender equality, some types of farming-family configurations offer new pathways towards enhanced gender equality.

**Keywords** Gender equality · Family farming · Switzerland · Farming-family configuration

## Introduction

Family farming is often declared as the base for better and sustainable agro-food systems. This has notably been the case in the context of the United Nations International Year of Family Farming.<sup>1</sup> While strong arguments exist supporting this idea, we tend to forget that family farming might also have some drawbacks. One drawback is related to gender inequalities. As underlined by Brandth (2002), in the past, research on family farming was gender blind. However, after the impetus given by feminist studies in social sciences (e.g., Delphy 1983; Whatmore 1991), family farming has been identified as a stronghold of patriarchal labour relations. In this literature, a classic representation has emerged of male and female farm roles in relation to social definitions of rural masculinities and femininities, with strong similarities throughout Europe and around the globe (e.g., Brandth 2002). Men are the farmers and farm managers who drive tractors and do most outside work, while women are the helpers who support their husbands by taking care of young cattle, hens, garden,

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the dedicated webpage of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization: <http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/en/>, accessed 26 March 2015.

household and family. This short and caricatured description highlights strong gender inequalities. We argue that these inequalities within family farms, and especially gender inequalities, are important in the discussion of socially sustainable food systems. As Price (2012, p. 370) states, gender inequalities seem to play an important role in the development of socio-psychological problems in the farming population. Understanding the patrilineal family farming culture and its potentially harmful impacts on both men and women is thus urgently needed.

We believe that research has yet to provide satisfactory tools to understand the new forms of labour division and changes occurring in European and Western family farming. One of the main reasons is that most analyses exclusively focus on sexual identities (men vs. women). Therefore, in this paper we look at gender inequalities in family farming in a different way and propose that inequalities are related to status on the farm and position in the family configuration, rather than to sexual identity.

Despite a widespread conservative division of labour on Swiss farms (Rossier and Reissig 2014), reports in newspapers, informal discussions and official discourses indicate an ongoing change in social contexts and family dynamics in Switzerland. Farming women more often develop an individual professional career in and outside farming, farmers of both sexes organise into groups in order to gain more free time and holidays for their families and farming couples seem to face growing rates of divorces (Beerli and Steingruber 2015).<sup>2</sup> While the ‘traditional’ farming couple is still a widespread reality, divergent situations are emerging, which challenge and transform existing inequalities. Switzerland has thus become an interesting social laboratory for the study of evolving family configurations in agriculture. It offers a fruitful comparison for other national contexts as strong agricultural policy has provided massive support to the Swiss farmers, resulting in the survival of small-scale structures. Simultaneously, progressive market deregulation is exerting pressure on family farms (Contzen 2015; Droz and Miéville-Ott 2001; Forney 2012). This situation requires adaptation in daily life, as well as in the organisation and division of labour, and therefore provides an interesting context for the study of social and cultural changes.

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the challenges faced by farming families by exploring inequalities between men and women in Swiss agriculture in a context of structural and social change. We do this by exploring the evolution and diversity of family farming in Swiss agriculture and by constructing a typology of farming family configurations. The

goal is to address the following questions: What are the existing family configurations on farms? How do these configurations relate to fair gender relations? Which inequalities are at stake and how are they challenged by new ways of organising labour and decision-making on the family farm?

With this paper, we aim to contribute to the debate on gender equality in Switzerland and agriculture in general by presenting an innovative, empirically sound typology of farming-family configurations which can be considered as gender- and generation-neutral. With the discussion of these ideal types, we point to existing and lived pathways towards enhanced gender equality in family farming.

The section which follows describes the role and evolution of family farming and inherent gender inequalities. The subsequent section presents the conceptual framework of family configurations based on the sociology of Norbert Elias. ‘Background and methods’ describes the Swiss context and the methods and sample used for the study on which this paper is based. ‘Typology: four ideal types of family-farm configurations’ sets out the typology of farming-family configurations in Switzerland, including four ideal types, and highlights mobility from one type to another by presenting three trajectories. ‘Understanding the strength of the *‘traditional’ complementarity type*’ discusses issues of gender inequality, perceived fairness and the role of reciprocity. The concluding section emphasises that certain farming-family configurations present opportunities for overcoming existing gender inequalities.

### Family farming, gender inequalities and perceived fairness

Farm structures play a major role in the debate on the future of agriculture, giving rise to the question: what kind of agriculture do we need and want? Around the world, family farming is the predominant farm structure, but diversity within this structure is significant (e.g., Purseigle and Hervieu 2009). A family farm can range from a 2 ha mixed farm in Ghana to an intensive dairy farm with 300 cows in the Netherlands. Despite the fast evolution of farm structures, in most western industrialised countries the ‘discourse of the family farm’ remains dominant or hegemonic (Brandth 2002, p. 196; see also Bohler et al. 2014). Paralleling this discourse, a definition of the ‘traditional family farm’ has developed following the general traditional western family model, which is based on a restriction of women’s rights and their confinement to unpaid care work (Folbre 2001). According to this definition, the organisation of farm labour is mainly based on complementarity between persons of different gender and generations, the head of the farm and the family being the man

<sup>2</sup> The rise in divorces among farm couples has so far only be anecdotally reported but not yet objectively measured.

(e.g., Brandth 2002; Silvasti 2003; Little 2006). Despite country-specific or even region-specific differences (e.g., regarding milking), ‘traditional family farming’ is characterised by specific male and female spheres and tasks. Like in the non-farming population (e.g., Folbre and Nelson 2000, p. 123), the male sphere is traditionally the public-productive, while the female sphere is the private-reproductive. This means that the man is the owner and operator of the farm and responsible for the main tasks related to the farm business. Furthermore, he holds greater decision-making power than the female (Bokemeier and Garkovich 1987; Berlan Darqué 1988), a fact which is not unique to farming (e.g., Bartley et al. 2005). The farming woman is responsible for the household, the family and social relationships including fulfilling the role as the emotional care taker. On the farm, she is the helping hand of her husband, the farmer. With other relatives, she assumes this helping role, often without a specific legal status (Barthez 1982; Koller 1965). In addition, due to the tradition of patrilineal inheritance, it is most often the man who is the owner of the farm, perpetuating his privileged position in decision-making. These phenomena have contributed to a male dominance in agriculture (Contzen 2004; Bjorkhaug and Blekesaune 2007). The importance of the female contribution to the success of the family farm has been hidden behind the more prominent male image of an individual and independent farmer. Women in agriculture have been presented as farmers’ wives and turned into ‘super-housewives’ (Forney 2012), sharing the fate of all housewives: invisibility, lack of recognition, and unpaid labour. Thus, family farming is related to a set of gender inequalities: unequal access to professional status, land ownership and individual income, as well as unequal decision-making, power and autonomy.

A key characteristic of family farming is its specific organisation of farm labour. In a context in which family farms worldwide are under pressure, attention has been paid to the survival and adaptation of family farming (e.g., Reinhardt and Barlett 1989; van der Ploeg 2008). Here, the organisation of farm labour comes into play: family farming is a very adaptive way of organising labour that might integrate deep transformations while keeping its essential family-farm dimension of business ownership, capitalisation and work through family members, and intergenerational farm succession. Following Chayanov’s (1986 [1925]) theory of the peasant farm, these remarkable adaptive capacities are related to the flexibility in the usage of family labour (Francis 1994, p. 28). As Koller (1965, p. 106) stated in the mid-1960s, the family farm provides the possibility to use, at short notice, the female labour force or even child labour to deal with peak work needs, without depending on hired wage labour. In a more contemporary context, several

studies in Western Europe have underlined the crucial role played by women in farm adaptation strategies, mainly through off-farm labour and on-farm diversification (such as tourism), suggesting that these developments might change gender relations (e.g., Contzen 2013; Heggem 2014). Hence, pressure on farm structures obviously impacts the organisation of farm labour and the interdependency between the farm as a production unit and the family. Yet, the consequences for equality are unclear. Haugen and Blekesaune (2005) found that combining an off-farm job while still helping on the farm might result in overwhelming hours of female work. Moreover, the money earned off-farm does not always result in more autonomy for women, but is rather a way to strengthen or save the farm business (Barthez 1982; Contzen 2008). Furthermore, the women’s role in tourism and direct selling generally relates to the traditional feminine sphere of care work: cooking, serving and cleaning. These activities are likely to make their contribution visible, following Giraud (2004), to let women play a leading role. However, there is little evidence that this will lead to female empowerment (Sachs et al. 2014).

We argue that scholars studying the role of women in family farming have not provided satisfactory explanations of what makes women accept or reject objective inequalities on the farm. Scholars studying gender and household labour, as a typically feminine sphere, offer some insights to understand unequal, but uncontested gender relationships. Studying housework in the US in the 1990s, Greenstein (1996) found the paradoxical situation that despite unquestionable gender-based inequalities, relatively few women perceived the division of labour in their household as unfair. Dealing with similar issues in Australia, Baxter (2000) concludes that the perception of fairness primarily depends on the general division of tasks between women and men, and less on effective calculation of the global amount of work each partner actually accomplishes. In their study on dual-earner marriages, Bartley et al. (2005, p. 87) found that women perceived unequal labour division as fair, as long as they did not spend too much time in low-control tasks. The study additionally called for further research on the formation of perception of fairness (Bartley et al. 2005, p. 89). According to Taylor et al. (2010, p. 12), the mismatch between objective inequality and perception of fairness can be explained in two ways: internalised norms—an objective inequality is socially and culturally accepted as ‘normal’—and adaptive preferences—in order to avoid cognitive dissonance, dominated people adapt their expectations to what they can reasonably hope for. In fact, the two explanations are complementary in the understanding of acceptance of inequality and are fundamentally similar to the explanations developed by rural scientists.

The above overview allows two crucial aspects of the production of gender (in-)equality within the family farm to be identified: the organisation of farm labour and decision-making. On one hand, the flexible involvement of family members in farm labour is essential for the adaptive strategies of family farms, although often linked to invisibility, lack of recognition, unequal status and even internal exploitation (e.g., Delphy 1983). On the other hand, decision-making, as Rosenfeld (1986) writes, “is, in many respects, a more fundamental and important aspect of operating a farm than is the performance of physical labour”. The fact that decision-making in farming families has been identified as a male stronghold obviously impacts gender equality and might additionally influence the feeling of fairness (Bartley et al. 2005).

### Farming families conceptualised as configurations

In this paper, we look at the farming family as a configuration of relations and interdependencies. Such a conceptual framework draws on the sociological work of Elias (1978) and its recent development in the sociology of family by Widmer (2010). According to Elias, human societies are based upon relations of interdependencies articulated in more or less stable configurations. These configurations are filled with tensions between the diverging aspirations and interests of the actors involved. These tensions might reach some kind of equilibrium and stability, otherwise the balance is lost or never found, leading to changes in social organisation (Déchaux 1995). Elias uses the metaphor of a game to illustrate this set of tensions and the competitive nature of social life, where the moves of an actor lead to cascading consequences (Elias 1978). His use of this metaphor reframes the classical debate between structural determinism and individual agency: when a chess player makes a move, it is impossible to say if she/he made a free choice or was forced to do it. Following Elias, this can be rephrased as: social action and organisation is the result of the negotiation of interests within a set of interdependencies, through individual actions and reactions.

Applying Elias’s general conceptual framing, we define farming families as a set of interdependencies between the family members. This implies both reciprocal dependency and tensions between diverging points of view, interests and aspirations that may or may not find a relative point of equilibrium and stability. The present evolution of farming families’ organisation can then be understood as adaptations resulting from disturbances within more or less stable configurations, caused by an accumulation of factors, among them economic pressures and growing legitimisation of gender equality. However, applying a theory

of configurations created for global social analysis to smaller configurations such as farming family requires additional framing.

This can be found in the work of Eric Widmer, who offers an application of the sociology of configurations to the family, which “focuses on the interdependencies between key family dyads, such as parent-child dyads or conjugal partnerships, and larger sets of family ties” (Widmer 2014, p. 236). In other words, a configurational perspective on families places key family dyads in a larger set of interdependencies to understand on one hand how key dyads are influenced by wider interdependencies and, on the other hand, how these key dyads contribute to shaping the family configuration (Widmer 2010, p. 5). According to Widmer (2010, pp. 6–7), a configurational approach to families is based on the following four pillars: (1) families should be understood through the actual set of relationships that constitute them, and not from an institutional point of view; (2) dyads should be looked at through their embeddedness in a wider network of relations; (3) the individuals and the group are closely united, and structural dimensions, individual identities, perceptions and projects are integrated; (4) the historical dimension is crucial, as time and change are the main features of configurations. Widmer’s theory of family configurations provides interesting application for the purpose of this paper, as it aims to provide a better account of the present diversity among modern families resulting from “the decline of the nuclear family and the pluralization of life trajectories” (Widmer 2014, p. 236). This fits well with one of the objectives of this paper, which is to understand the diversity of farming family configurations.

Looking at farming families requires a reinterpretation of the four elements of Widmer’s configurational perspective. Firstly, the farming family is defined by a set of actual relationships, which go across two interpenetrating spheres, the family and the farm business. These two spheres are therefore fully interdependent. Secondly, while wider networks of interdependencies clearly determine the farming family configuration, it appears that the main logic in the organisation of labour and responsibility, i.e. decision-making, is based on one main dyad: husband-wife, father-son, etc. We therefore focus primarily on this central dyad, often conjugal, looking at how (in-)equalities in this relationship influence the farming family as a configuration. Thirdly, in farming families, individual projects and aspirations are confronted with business priorities and imperative technical or economic requirements. Fourthly, while family-farm configurations are partly defined by a stable element related to place, they are constantly evolving in time, both on the family and business side.

Coming back to the question of gender inequalities among farming families, this conceptual framework helps

us to reframe the two crucial aspects identified in the literature, the organisation of labour and decision-making, in terms of interdependencies and tensions. Operating a family farm requires the simultaneous balance of accomplishing numerous and diverse tasks, while members must take ownership of various responsibilities, all within both the business and family spheres. This creates a more or less stable configuration of relations of interdependencies. The organisation of labour is the expression and observable dimension of these relations. In this sense, our configurational perspective focuses primarily on these ‘actual relations’—as formulated in the first pillar of Widmer’s model—developed through the division and organisation of labour, to which decision-making is linked. The distribution of power and legitimacy to decide on specific matters is then an important element in a farming-family configuration, and plays a crucial role in the determination of the relations of interdependencies. Furthermore, decision-making power is specific in that it has the capacity to directly influence the configuration and the balance between individual interests and aspirations. This power is a central dimension of equal relations, being a manifestation of individual autonomy, empowerment and self-determination.

## Background and methods

### Family farming in Switzerland

This paper is based on a research project exploring the evolution of gender relations in Swiss farming. In Switzerland, family farms are still conceived as the cornerstone of the agriculture industry. As formulated by Johann Schneider-Amman, Minister of Economy: “Family farming is the backbone of a multifunctional and sustainable agriculture.”<sup>3</sup> This political narrative has strong echoes in the farming population where the family dimension of the farm is deeply rooted in farmers’ self-representations (e.g., Droz and Miéville-Ott 2001; Forney 2012).

The importance of family farming in Switzerland is reflected statistically as well: 78 % of the agricultural workforce comes from farm owners and their family members (SwissStatistics 2014). Farm structures are small in international comparison, but far from backward; they utilize a high level of technology and mechanisation. This small-sized structure is related to clear protectionist policies in the twentieth century, which partly sheltered Swiss

farmers from the large restructuring that occurred in European agriculture. At the family level, a long-lasting conservative model of the female position can be observed (e.g., Rossier 2005). This intriguing mix of technical modernism and moral conservatism characterized twentieth century Swiss agriculture (Forney 2011). This conservative tendency is not limited to agriculture: statistics show that in Swiss families, the majority of household and care work is still done by women, and that the evolution of this matter is very slow (SwissStatistics 2009, 2013a). Furthermore, women are still paid less for similar jobs than men, and are largely underrepresented in the political sphere (Bühler 2001).

Although this general Swiss conservative tendency might have reduced the speed of transformation for women’s role in farming, research shows that Swiss family farming followed a model very similar to that found across all of twentieth century Western Europe (see literature review above). In Switzerland, the gendered division of labour has been reproduced or even amplified through gender specific curricula for young farming men and women (Droz et al. 2014). Thus, through formal education, men become farmers, while women are trained as house managers, care takers, and farm helpers. This gendered distribution of tasks and positions influences legal status, income, property and social security, especially regarding retirement. While the farm operator has self-employed status, and therefore must have his or her own pension account, farming women remain mostly unpaid family labour without an individual income and pension account.

A recent time-use survey produced by Rossier and Reissig (2014) shows that farming women involvement in off-farm work has dramatically increased (from 1.38 h per week in 1974 to 8.6 h in 2014), while on-farm work decreased (from 20.31 h per week to 15.34). This shift is also reflected in a clear decline in farm gardens and on-farm consumption in Switzerland (SwissStatistics 2013b).<sup>4</sup> These statistics reflect challenges to the division of traditional forms of labour and responsibility that have characterised small-scale family farming. With societal changes such as individualisation, modernisation and the evolution of farming structures, the gendered division of labour in agriculture has begun to dissolve, although later than in other societal spaces. Women have begun to take over responsibility for farm businesses as female farmers (Contzen 2004; Rossier 2009), have started to develop their own sector on the farm or have continued working off-farm in their own profession.

<sup>3</sup> Interview published on the Swiss website of the International Year of Family Farming, <http://familyfarming.ch/de/internationales-jahr/hintergrund>, accessed 24 March 2014.

<sup>4</sup> The global value of on-farm consumption in Switzerland dropped from CHF 250,633,000 in 1990 to CHF 75,624,000 in 2013 (Swiss Statistics 2013b).

## Methods and sample

The analysis on which this paper is based draws on 55 semi-structured topic-guide interviews carried out between August 2012 and May 2013 in the German- (30) and French- (25) speaking parts of Switzerland. About two-thirds (35) of the interviews were conducted with farming women, one-third with farming men (20) and in some cases with two or more people at once (both sexes and/or different generations). In total, our sample includes 43 farming households, generally composed of two or more generations. Fifteen farms were run by women, the rest by men. The farms of those interviewed represent typical Swiss agricultural sectors: livestock farming (dairy, beef and sheep), crop or arable farming, vegetable production, and grape production for winemaking. The farm sizes range from 2.75 to 70 ha. The sampling process looked not only for diversity in farm aspects but also in household types. We interviewed single farmers and couples, married and unmarried, both with and without children. Similarly, we covered a broad range of individual profiles. The age of the interviewees ranges from 25 to 81. Education level varies, with a few interviewees having no other education than compulsory school and others having completed a university-level degree. The objective of the sampling process was to cover the largest diversity of configurations among Swiss farming families. Thus, the sample is not representative in a statistical sense and does not allow generalisation in the numeric distribution of each type in the Swiss farming population. The main objective was to provide information on changes and diversification in gender and generational labour division.

Most of the interviewed women had already participated in the previously mentioned time-use survey carried out in 2011 by Rossier and Reissig (2014). They were contacted by the team from the first survey, and answered positively to our request for an interview. This provided a database for sample selection and allowed utilisation of the selective sampling method proposed by Schatzmann and Strauss (1973). Additionally, this permitted the interviews to start with a retrospect on the survey's individual results and then dive into the main aspects of the interview (see below). The remaining female and male interview partners were contacted via snowball sampling—some were relatives of the previous interviewees (spouses, parents or parents-in-law), others were identified through contacts in existing networks.

Interview questions were focused around labour division in the family and its evolution: who does what and why? How are daily and strategic decisions taken? How has this changed over time? Interviews lasted between 1 and 4 h and were fully transcribed in German or French. Afterwards they were coded in NVivo, using a deductively constructed coding guide based on the interview topic-

guide, which allowed for new, inductively constructed codes to be produced.

We developed a typology based on contrasting cases in order to overcome descriptions of unique cases with the purpose of explaining changing social structures in a methodologically sound manner (e.g., Kelle and Kluge 2010). The cases are described through the systematic analysis of the coded interviews. The typology is based on two crucial aspects of gender (in-)equality production identified in the literature and linked to the theoretical concept of configurations: the organisation of labour and decision-making. In order to assign a specific case to one ideal type (see Table 1 in the following section), we draw on the narratives and subjective perspectives of the interviewees. However, subjective elements were not used as decisive criteria for the typology nor to characterise specific types of configurations. Rather, they enrich the discussion of the typology. Subjective arguments become central when discussing issues of equality and, above all, perceived fairness. To illustrate the typology and discussion, we use quotations, which were translated by the authors from German or French into English.

The conceptual framework presented in the previous section allowed an innovative typology to be built. First, the concept of configurations leads to understanding the individual positions within the family farm as always being related and interdependent. Consequently, we do not deal with categories of men or women, but with relational sets. This is particularly important for our purpose, as inequalities and domination always take place in social relations. Second, the positions within the configurations and dyads are sex-neutral. Gender obviously impacts configurations, but being identified as man or woman does not definitively determine one's position within the configuration. As a consequence, the proposed typology is more adaptable to the diversity of social life than other typologies based on male/female categories of professional identities, and could be applied to any farming family (including gay or lesbian households), and probably to other types of small-scale family businesses as well as. Thirdly, configurations fluctuate and change over time, as does the organisation of labour. Because the ideal types illustrate organisational principles for farming-family configurations, and not types of individuals, they offer a flexible and dynamic analytical framework, appropriate to deal with this evolving nature of family configurations often related to the life cycles on the farm.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The limit to the use of a typology based on dyads, organisation of labour, and decision-making to describe all kind of farm households is in the case of a single person being present on the farm and in the farm household. In total, we interviewed three persons belonging to single-person households. Consequently, they are not included in the present analysis.

**Table 1** Ideal types and main dimensions

Type of family configuration	Main dimensions of typology	
	Organisation of labour	Decision-making/responsibility
'Traditional' complementarity	Clear separation of spheres of activity according to gender and age	Strategic decisions together, daily decisions each person for his/her sphere
Collaboration	No division of spheres of activity; participation according to interests and skills	Strategic decisions and daily decisions together
On-farm individualisation	Clear separation of spheres of activity according to responsibilities, interests and skills	Strategic decisions together, daily decisions each person for his/her sphere
Professional individualism	Clear separation of on-farm and off-farm activities based on profession	Strategic and daily decisions separated for each professional activity, household decisions together

### Typology: four ideal types of family-farm configurations

The analysis revealed four ideal types of family farm configurations which are articulated around a main dyad and which are defined by the two central aspects identified and described above: the organisation of labour and decision-making (see Table 1). Other elements are also at stake, however, they determine only to a minor extent the logic of the type. Although other dyads and positions than husband as farm operator and wife as farming woman are possible, we base our description on this model because it occurs the most frequently.

#### 'Traditional' complementarity

The '*traditional complementarity type*' can be considered as the traditional type described by Francis (1994, p. 2) and others. The *organisation of labour* is defined by the clear separation of spheres of activity according to the classic gendered division between production and reproduction, including the helping hands of the wife or of the older generation to the farm operator. The family farm is considered as one unit, without separation between the farm business and the household. Each person participates according to his or her gender, age, position and skill to the smooth functioning of the farm-household unit, without taking into account individual interests or preferences. The sharp separation of spheres implies unequal statuses of the household members: the man is the farm operator, while the woman is the helping hand and the housewife, normally without own legal status. Despite the separation of spheres, strategic *decisions* are normally taken by both husband and wife, while the daily *decisions* are taken individually based on the respective responsible sphere of activity. Off-farm employment, if existing, has the function of complementing the family farm's income (household and farm business). The income of both on-farm and off-farm activities are combined into a single account.

#### Collaboration

The *collaboration type* is based on the principle of common participation in the spheres of activity. The farm business and household are seen as a unit, to which the household members contribute. In this sense, this type resembles the '*traditional complementarity type*'. However, the spheres of activity and responsibility, i.e. the *organisation of labour*, are less clearly defined and less strongly separated. People are more interchangeable, working 'hand in hand', rather than being 'helping hands'. Furthermore, the spheres of activity concerning the farm business are more likely to be separated according to interests and skills instead of gender and age, with the exception of the housework, which mostly remains a female task. Daily as well as strategic *decisions* are generally taken together. Although in most cases only one person holds the position of farm operator, the partner frequently has a legal status. Off-farm employment, if part of the activity portfolio, has the function of complementing the family farm's income. The income deriving from farm and off-farm activities are combined into a single account, as is the case of the '*traditional complementarity type*'.

#### On-farm individualisation

The *on-farm individualisation type* is in many ways similar to the *collaboration type*. Both persons of the main dyad are involved in the farm business and the partner of the farm operator also tends to have a legal status on the farm. What makes this type unique with regard to the *organisation of labour* and *decision-making* is that the partner is responsible for one or several autonomous and independent sectors of the various farm activities. This includes autonomy and responsibility for certain sectors and joint coordination and decision-making for the farm business as a whole. Such autonomous sectors often consist of a specific line of production, such as pig or poultry breeding

as part of a dairy farm, or a para-agricultural activity,<sup>6</sup> such as agri-tourism. Despite their differences, all these activities use the assets and infrastructures of the farm. Strong connections exist between them and the other farm activities. The income generated by each autonomous sector is sometimes differentiated, but not systematically. The more embedded the sector is in the main farm activity, the harder it is to separate the individual income. Hence, in this family configuration type, the income of all sectors is also often combined into a single account.

### Professional individualism

The *professional individualism* type is characterised by a clear separation of professional activities of the couple or the main dyad. Each person conducts his or her professional activity autonomously on- and off-farm, while care and household work is shared. Helping hands are possible on the farm; however, they are occasional. Consequently, *decisions* in relation to each professional sphere are taken independently, as long as they do not concern the family as a whole. According to this separation of professional spheres, the person working on-farm is the farm operator and head of the farm, while the partner, having no legal status on the farm, works in an independent professional activity providing legal status (e.g., regarding pension system and other social security) and income on their own. Accordingly, on-farm and off-farm incomes are administered and accounted separately. Hence, in this type, the farm business and family household no longer form one unit, at least at the level of the *organisation of labour* and *decision-making*. Instead, they are clearly separated and off-farm employment is inherent. As each person exercises their will independently, following his/her interests in a professional activity, this type is similar to a non-agricultural double-earner couple configuration.

### Trajectories and mobility from one type to another

The ideal types described above refer to concrete ways of organising labour and distributing decision-making power in farming families at a given moment. However, as Widmer (2010, p. 7) underlines in the fourth pillar of his model, the temporal nature of configurations is essential and stresses both stability and change. Obviously, over time, families might move from one type to another, resulting from changes in their specific situation or from personal choices. From a configurational perspective, these

<sup>6</sup> Para-agriculture refers to agricultural-related activities which cannot be conceived as agricultural production in the common sense. Examples are direct selling, agri-tourism, gastronomy on the farm, or catering services. Para-agriculture is often a female activity.

evolutions can be understood as a disturbance of the balance in the set of interdependencies. Because of the strength of the relationships within farming families, the whole set of interdependencies might need to be redefined because of a change in one point of the configuration. Typically, the ‘inclusion’ or ‘exclusion’ of a member of the configuration will result in a cascade of adaptations in the organisation of labour and in decision-making power. Three examples will be used to illustrate such changes in the configuration and resulting mobility from one to another type.

#### Brigitte

Brigitte<sup>7</sup> is a 60-year-old widow operating the farm that her husband took over from his parents. She has four grown-up children who have children of their own. Before marrying at the age of 20, she started her professional training as a psychiatric nurse, which she finished after her marriage. Soon after, the first child was born, and she gave up her professional career to stay at home and to assume responsibility for the children and household, and to help her husband in the farm business. They were living the ‘*traditional*’ *complementarity* type. At that time, her father-in-law, who had been the farm operator before his son had taken over the farm, was employed full-time outside the farm. Before his retirement, Brigitte started to question her future on the farm: “I asked myself, when he [father-in-law] is here again, what am I going to do then?” She decided to develop her own productive sector and was supported by her husband. Hence, through her farm activity, the configuration changed, inducing a transition from the ‘*traditional*’ *complementarity* to the *on-farm individualisation* type. However, this did not provide her with a legal status, income or social security of her own. At the age of 50, when the children had already moved out, she suffered the sudden death of her husband. She decided to continue farming, maintaining her sector, while giving up her husband’s sector (dairy farming). Hence, the death of her husband and the absence of successors forced her to live alone on her farm and thus to ‘step out’ of the typology. The triggering factors for this trajectory were the retirement of her father-in-law and the death of her husband.

#### Florence and Christian

When we met Florence and Christian, they were planning their wedding. These two young farmers had both completed apprenticeships in agriculture. For some time, each

<sup>7</sup> Like every individual’s name used in this paper, this is a pseudonym.

of them managed their own farm. When they became a couple, they started to collaborate, but still managed their farms independently, hence, living the *professional individualism type*. A major change occurred when their first child was born. Christian took over most of the mechanical farm work, and Florence continued milking her cow herd, while also being responsible for most of the house and care work. Currently, they are planning to build a new cowshed to merge their cows into one herd. According to them, Christian will then be able to milk all of the cows, relieving Florence from this daily burden, which from their point of view is hard to combine with childcare. As their family life is developing and the two farm businesses merge, they are moving to the *'traditional' complementarity type*. For Florence, this trajectory means a radical change in her role and status, from being head of her own farm to being a farmer's wife and housewife. Obviously, setting up a home and having a child were the triggering factors leading to changes in the farming-family configuration and thus to a move from one type to another.

#### *Natalia and Roman*

Natalia is a 34-year-old married woman with two children under the age of six. She is a trained mason, and worked in this field and others before meeting and marrying Roman. Roman's father had already died and his mother had moved into a separate building next to the farmhouse before Natalia moved in. Shortly after their marriage, their first child was born and Natalia stayed at home, caring for the child and household, and helping Roman on the farm. Hence, they lived the *'traditional' complementarity type*. Because of tensions between Natalia and her mother-in-law, at first, Natalia's involvement on the farm remained marginal. With the need to manage debts resulting from recent farm investments, Roman started working full-time off-farm, while his mother, due to her age, had to reduce her farm working activity. Gradually, Natalia started to work more in the farm's main sector of pig breeding. Her interests in the sector grew and she began to take on more responsibility during Roman's absence. After a while, he proposed dividing the farm into two autonomous farm sectors. Now, Natalia manages the pig breeding and has self-employed status, yielding an income and social security of her own, while Roman is responsible for the crop production. Hence, they moved from the *'traditional' complementarity type* to the *on-farm individualisation type*. The triggering factors for this trajectory were the increased off-farm employment of Roman, the reduced activity of his mother on the farm, Natalia's growing interest in the sector, and Roman's proposition of providing her with a legal status on the farm, including income and social security.

#### *Factors of mobility*

Our study shows that people mostly adapt and change their position and role around the head of the farm who has the most stable position, even if his/her situation is also impacted by changes in the set of interdependencies within the farming family. In the majority of the cases, the farm operator is male, thus women are the one who tend to change positions in a changing family configuration. However, as the example of Natalia and Roman shows, the moves of the woman can also occur because of previous moves of the man or, as the example of Brigitte shows, the first change in the configuration was due to her father-in-law's professional change. What is similar in all the observed cases is that often external factors provoke these changes rather than individual aspirations. External factors might include the need for off-farm employment, the death of the older generation or the partner or, very often, the birth of the first child. The family cycle seems to have the strongest influence on the family configurations and thus on mobility from one type to another (see also Carriero 2011). Hence, the arrival of children is often the triggering factor for the change of the *professional individualism* towards the *'traditional' complementarity type* or, to a minor extent, to the *collaboration* or the *on-farm individualisation type*. Notably, this can be explained by women stepping back from their off-farm professional activities at the time they give birth to their first child, confirming Carriero's statement that parenthood represents "an event that creates major asymmetries and gender inequalities in the household division of paid and unpaid labour" (2011, p. 8).

#### **Understanding the strength of the 'traditional' complementarity type**

Our typology refers to ideal types, implying that their fit with real cases is not perfect. Nevertheless, we have tried to allocate every case to one type, as displayed in Table 2. This shows a clear majority in our sample of farming-family configurations following the *'traditional' complementarity type*, with men being farm operators in almost all the cases. As stated before, the sample was not designed to be representative, but to illustrate the diversity of existing situations in Swiss agriculture. This should logically induce an over-representation of minority types and, reversely, an under-representation of the dominant type. Therefore, our results suggest that the *'traditional' complementarity type* is still generally dominant, despite the existence of different family configurations in today's Swiss agriculture. Our hypothesis that the *'traditional' complementarity type* is the dominant type is confirmed by some interviewees talking about the general situation in Swiss agriculture, by

**Table 2** Types and distribution of the interviewed households

Type of family configuration	No. of households in French-speaking region	No. of households in German-speaking region	Total no. of households per type
'Traditional' complementarity	6	10	16
Collaboration	4	4	8
On-farm individualisation	5	3	8
Professional individualism	6	2	8
Total households	21	19	40

the persisting gendered professional education and training in the agriculture industry (Droz et al. 2014), and by the gendered separation of rural organisations (farmers' organisation vs. farmer's wives and rural women's organisations). The strength of the '*traditional complementarity type*' raises the question of the permanence of inequalities among Swiss family farming.

As indicated in the description of the typology, inequalities in family farming are related to the legal status on the farm, property rights, independent income and the possibility for individual savings and social security. Obviously, these factors greatly influence the relations of reciprocal dependencies in the farming-family configuration. Some of these inequalities might have dramatic consequences and, notably in the case of divorce, might result in impoverishment of the farming woman. Indeed, our observations clearly confirm that the unequal division of labour and inequality in legal status affects women more than men, the main reason being that the majority of farm operators are men and therefore have legal status, social insurance, etc. linked to their occupation. Still, we insist on the fact that this situation is the result of a specific position in the set of interdependencies defining the farming-family configuration, rather than of gender identity. In the few cases in which the farm operator is a woman, the male partner seems to experience similar inequalities, always in accordance with the family configuration type—unpaid labour, absence of employment status, etc. The story of Peter provides a good illustration. Having a professional and family background outside of agriculture, Peter married Seraina, a farmer's daughter. At this time, she was about to succeed her father in his farm business. She has the relevant professional background and the legal status of farm operator. At first, their case fit the *professional individualism type*: she worked on-farm, he worked off-farm. Soon after their marriage, he started to work part-time on the farm while continuing to work part-time in his off-farm job. Their case then fit the *collaboration type*, with Peter being the unpaid family labourer without official employment status on the farm. His income and social security is from his part-time, off-farm employment, not from his involvement in farm labour.

Inequalities in Swiss agriculture seem to be related to the position in the farming-family configuration and to the status on the farm rather than to gender identity per se. This tendency might also be at stake in cases where the central dyad of the farming-family configuration is not between spouses. For example, we met with single farmers, both male and female, whose mothers assume the 'traditional' tasks of the 'farmer's wife', such as cooking, cleaning and looking after small animals. In other words, these mothers had a position in terms of organisation of labour and decision-making similar to the wives in the '*traditional complementary type*', resulting in similar relations of interdependency. These specific situations reveal similar inequalities that are observed among married couples, but instead of gender inequalities, they represent generational inequalities. Due to lacking empirical data, in the frame of this paper we could not elaborate on dyads other than that of spouses. However, we propose that questions and challenges of equality and equity are the same regardless of the dyad type, and that they result from the specific type of configuration.

This suggests that inequalities in family farming can be related to several causes and not only to gender identity. The multiplicity of causes might partly explain their persistence, despite societal and contextual changes within and outside agriculture. In the following section, we question this issue of inequality persistence in Swiss family farming. First, we explore the paradoxical coexistence of objectified inequalities and perceived fairness in the four types of family configuration and then we try to evaluate the equality potential of each ideal type of farming family configuration.

### **Objectified inequalities, perceived fairness and reciprocity**

The interviewees seldom brought up equality or inequality on their own initiative. When they did, it was mostly to express inequalities between the farming and non-farming population (in workload, earnings, etc.), and almost never to point out gender inequalities within their family or the farming population. This might be related to perception of

fairness and reciprocity, which we will delineate within this section.

While lack of employment status or individual social security might easily be described as unequal, the issue becomes more complex when discussing inequality in terms of the daily organisation of labour and distribution of decision-making power or the absence of women's labour recognition. From an objective point of view, the division of labour on family farms is hardly equal. Unsurprisingly, inequality exists in the context of care and household work, the so-called reproductive sphere. While in almost a quarter of the studied cases, independent of the configuration type, men regularly help or are responsible for some household and care tasks, others clearly designate household and care work as female tasks. The majority of our interviewees, male and female, perceive the objectified unequal division of labour and its consequences as 'natural' and fair, or at least fair enough not to complain about. The naturalisation of labour division and its perception as fair is confirmed by scholars studying household work in wider society. They observe that social norms regarding the gendered division of labour have largely been internalised (Taylor et al. 2010). This naturalisation is clearly summarised by one farming woman: "It's like this, I can't tell you anything else other than that I think it's normal. Finally, I don't know if this shocks you... [...] But I don't want to ask him to do more... He already does the machinery, so I don't want to ask him to do the housework as well..." Translated into a language of configurations, the balance between individual interdependencies was based on unequal distribution of tasks and decision-making power, but was perceived as acceptable and fair and in accordance with her expectations.

In relation to this process of naturalisation, it is interesting to underline that, in the case of farming families, the definition of 'housework' expands to include some of the farm activities often executed by women. As stated by one farming woman: "In farming, the problem is that the wife has no recognition because she does the cleaning, takes care of the kids, the young calves..." This expansion of tasks has resulted in a handful of farming women naming themselves 'housewives' despite an objective involvement in the farm work; it is as if helping their husbands with the farm work, feeding the calves or growing vegetables in the garden is also part of the housework. This self-definition is extreme in the case of a female farm operator who manages a small farm, with the occasional help of her husband:

Interviewer: If you had to define yourself professionally, what name would you use?  
 Female farmer: Jobless... [Laugh] No... I don't know...  
 Generally I say I don't work. That's it.  
 Housewife...

Interviewer: You wouldn't say 'farmer'?  
 Female farmer: I don't feel like a farmer, no... compared to colleagues... they [male farmers] have worries I don't. [...] I've got a husband who earns a monthly salary. [...] I don't know how to define myself. I don't want to claim I'm a farmer because I can't be it fully anyway.

This conflation of women's farm work and housework helps explain why the interviewed women often described the gendered division of labour on the farm as normal, even 'natural' and fair. However, the case of a farmer's wife who decided to leave her husband and the farm shows the fragility of a farming-family configuration when it starts to be considered unfair. As she spoke about her past and the overburden of work she had to face every day, she said: "It was normal, this seemed normal to me..." One day, however, it stopped seeming 'normal' and she left.

Introducing the idea of reciprocity—which is central in a configurational perspective, as configurations are made of interdependencies—contributes to understanding why the interviewed women perceive their situations very differently. Folbre and Goodin (2004) suggest that selflessness and dedication require reciprocity, even if only symbolic or incomplete. Drawing on this argument and on our interviews, we suggest that reciprocity, understood as an equivalent, although different, involvement in the global workload on the farm and in the household, and mutual recognition, play a central role in the acceptance of inequalities in Swiss farming households. This reciprocity is partly expressed in an equal dedication of both men and women to the family farm, and partly in the recognition by the other members of the farming family of each contribution to the common good. The importance of reciprocal recognition is clearly mentioned in the interviews, as illustrated by this farming woman: "My husband does nothing, almost nothing in the housework. But he's very grateful for what I do. He gives me self-esteem... (...) I get the impression, he sees what I do... and I see what he does!" In contrast, when there is no recognition, resentment grows bitterly: "You always want to do well... always well, always better... to do always more, hoping for a smile, once... something saying that he's satisfied, that he's glad... And it never came."

### Family-farm configurations and inequalities

The relation between objectified inequality and perceived fairness varies from case to case and from one ideal type to another. The '*traditional*' complementarity type can hardly be considered as egalitarian: status difference and unpaid family labour are inherent. Consequently, the spouse has

no individual social security, which means no entitlement to maternity or unemployment insurance, and entitlement to the pension system only via the farm operator. However, the experiences regarding a sense of fairness, justice, and equality vary enormously, from ‘injustice’ to ‘harmony’. Situations are perceived as less fair where an unpaid spouse, who gave up her professional activity to dedicate herself fully to the family farm, does not have enough room for manoeuvre to co-decide. In such a situation, the decision-making power is held by one person, normally the male farm operator, who makes daily and, to a certain extent, strategic decisions for the farm business, which also impact the family-household sphere. The lack of individual social security renders the spouse administratively dependent on the farm operator. Finally, the lack of recognition and appreciation for the spouse’s contribution to the farm become additional factors contributing to resentment and a feeling of unfairness; this lack might be perceived to negate the reciprocal nature inherent within the interdependencies of farming-family configurations. Consequently, the narratives reveal clear signs of frustration or resignation on account of the spouse.

The *collaboration type* does not per se differ from the ‘traditional’ *complementarity type* regarding legal status, salary and social security of the farm operator’s partner, and therefore this type cannot be considered as strictly egalitarian. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed that in some cases the partner receives a salary and thus has individual social security. Furthermore, a major difference to the ‘traditional’ *complementary type* is that both persons of the central dyad collaborate equally and interchangeably in farm activities. This different organisation of labour and decision-making power balances the interdependencies in favour of the partner of the farm operator, as her/his contribution to the farm work becomes more visible. There exists a sort of complementarity. However, in contrast to the ‘traditional’ complementarity type, this complementarity is not between separate spheres, like the classical opposition between production and reproduction, but complementary in the sense of working hand-in-hand on equal terms. Finally, decisions on daily affairs as well as on strategic issues are normally taken together, enhancing the satisfaction and well-being of both partners.

Even more egalitarian is the *on-farm individualisation type*. Creating an individual and autonomous sector within the farm allows both persons of the dyad the legal status of co-operators, implying that both are self-employed having an income and social security of their own. Hence, this farming-family configuration leads to a nearly egalitarian partnership based on similar status, decision-making power and social security, which all together enhance the sense of justice, fairness, and satisfaction for both partners.

The *professional individualism type* is the one which corresponds most to the idea of formal equality, where the professional spheres are clearly separated, providing legal status and social security for both partners individually. Often household-family tasks are shared more equally than in the other types. Farm business and household-family are detached, not only regarding the organisation of labour, decision-making (although decisions influencing the family life are made together), and income, but also in terms of accountability. From a configuration perspective, the interdependencies between the partners are limited, maybe temporarily, to the household-family sphere, as for a non-farming double-income couple. However, the two spheres might reconnect, for example when the question of farm succession emerges or when one of the above-mentioned factors leads to a move to another configuration type. With this, questions of (in-)equality might reappear anew.

## Conclusion

Despite the existence of the Swiss law on gender equality (Gender Equality Act) and despite certain changes due to the continuous struggle of Swiss farming women (especially through their association), Swiss agriculture still presents a number of issues regarding gender inequality. Even if the agricultural legal framework does not explicitly include gender discrimination, it seems that objective inequalities are reproduced through structures of the modern state, such as land laws [Bäuerliches Bodenrecht] or farming-related education and training (Droz et al. 2014). Moreover, as described in our typology, most farming-family configurations rely on an unequal (but complementary) organisation of labour and distribution of decision-making power. Thus, an unequal, generally gendered, division of labour is structurally rooted in Swiss family farming and presents an obstacle for equal opportunities.

The four farming-family configurations described in our typology reflect real-life arrangements of family, labour and gender relations in a context of economic and structural changes in agriculture. These types are not related to precise criteria of equality, but to an overall principle of organisation of labour and decision-making. Consequently, there are no straightforward connections between a specific type and a specific issue of gender inequality. Living a particular type can lead to very diverse situations and experiences of equality and fairness. The quality of gender relations on the farm depends on elements that are transversal to the typology: the legal status of the women on the farm and all members’ mutual recognition of each other’s contribution. A woman’s status determines how equality is achieved in terms of her professional

recognition and social insurance. Mutual recognition, as a token of reciprocal dependencies between family members, results in more satisfaction with pragmatic arrangements, despite potential objectified inequalities. Given the importance of the family dimension in farming, it might be argued that situations that are experienced as fair by all family members result in a better long-term perspective for the farm business.

Our typology offers the possibility to look at farming-family configuration and gender inequality in agriculture in a new way as it deals with relational sets instead of categories of men and women, thus claiming to be gender-neutral. As a result, our findings indicate that inequalities are related to status on the farm and position in the farming-family configuration rather than to gender identity per se. Furthermore, the typology proposes ways to overcome inequalities, as two of the four types show opportunities for more egalitarian organisations of family farms, namely the *collaboration* and *on-farm individualisation types*, and transitions from one type to another are possible. This greater opportunity for equality is due to a larger openness and readiness to provide legal status on the farm to women, or as an exception, to the female farm operator's partner. Moreover, this offers women better opportunities for participation in decision-making (see also Berlan Darqué 1988, p. 288), professional achievement and recognition in agricultural work. The other types are, according to our empirical data, less likely to provide the same possibilities for equality. The *professional individualism type* might offer similar opportunities for the partner of the farm operator to reach professional status and recognition. However, because this occurs by splitting the farm and the family-household spheres, it might be argued that this type solves the issue of status and recognition by erasing the connection between family and profession as much as possible. However, as in non-agricultural settings, inequalities might still exist, typically in the matter of house and care work.

To conclude, the *collaboration* and the *on-farm individualisation types* enable potential solutions for inequality, both in professional agricultural and family contexts, and so offer the potential for more sound egalitarian arrangements. Because family and professional dimensions are inextricably intertwined, these two types provide possibilities for comprehensively addressing equality issues. Consequently, while family farming has been presented as a source of challenges to gender equality, we argue that these types of farming-family configurations actually offer new pathways toward gender equality, under the condition that women have a legal status on their own and that mutual recognition exists.

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