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THE NATIONAL OBSERVATORY FOR FEMALE ENTERPRISE AND LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE

V. Navarra*

* President, National Observatory for Enterprise and Women Work in Agriculture (ONILFA), Rome, Italy. Email: veronica.navarra@libero.it

I wish first of all to express my deep thanks to the Authorities of this wonderful country for their kind hospitality and to the CIHEAM-Bari for organizing this interesting workshop.

The *Osservatorio Nazionale per l'Imprenditoria ed il Lavoro Femminile in Agricoltura* (ONILFA) (National Observatory for Female Entrepreneurship and Employment in Agriculture) I have the pleasure to chair by delegation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Policies, M.P. Giovanni Alemanno, was established by Ministerial Decree in 1997 and operates within the Ministry of Agricultural Policies. It includes representatives of the major Ministries, of Trade Unions and research Institutes.

The Observatory is a body that has been set up to act as a driving force to promote synergies in the field of female employment in view of the fact that qualitative and quantitative information available on the activity of women in agriculture in Italy is scarce.

Here are some data about the situation in Italy:

ISTAT data from the 5th Census of Agriculture 2000 report that female labour in farms is, as a whole, slightly lower than men's: about 3.4 million women work in farms or are a member of the tenant's family. As a percentage, they represent 43% of the total number of persons working in farms or are a member of the tenant's family. Their percentage incidence in the three subdivisions is in line with the national average value, with slight predominance in central Italy (44.7%).

The number of women who effectively work in the farms has risen from 34.3% in 1990 to 37.2% in 2000. In 30.9% of the cases, women are the ones who play the role of the tenant, i.e., the juridical and economic person of the farm.

The working days of women in the course of the agricultural year 1999-2000 amount to 101.5 million and represent 30.5% of the actual total working days of the farm labour. Each woman worked on average 47.8 days during the agricultural year, whereas men worked on average 64.6 days each.

The continuously changing economic and organizational situations of the farm, as well as the technical and scientific progress achieved in the different production sectors, have led women to assume new responsibilities and continuously adapt to the changing conditions of the labour market and of society as a whole, and it's on these strategic lines that the Observatory intends to move focusing also on guidance and vocational training.

A one point female entrepreneurs stressed is the present operational context at the national and regional level in particular, that doesn't facilitate at all the settlement and the activities of female entrepreneurs. Though, in many areas of the countries, where the phenomena of cessation of farming by men and their exodus are more frequent, women continue to hold the farm activity and thus contribute solving a number of economic and social, as well as environmental and territorial situations. Refer, for instance, to the driving role women entrepreneurs may have for the application of the rural development measure managed by the Regional governments. In addition to the specific farming management measures, we refer, in particular, to the actions falling within multi-functionality of rural development plans that are quite suitable to the women ingenuity, such as: holidays on the farm, enhancement of production through the recovery of century-old food niches, the preservation of biodiversity, the set-up of information portal, etc. On the other hand, all this has to be sustained by effective training and, to this purpose, special periodic courses could be organised.

Moreover, in addition to its implicit function of investigation and analysis, the Observatory aims at becoming a “place” for exchanging experiences, disseminating information and coordinating initiatives and projects. In the light of the new international situation, ONILFA wishes to contribute to relaunch cooperation and dialogue both between the Mediterranean countries and within each country, contributing also to facilitate the institutional dialogue and making a detrimentally inactive reality more dynamic.

The opening of ONILFA to the Mediterranean countries has already started when the Observatory started cultural exchanges with Morocco. In fact, in May 2004, an Italian delegation of ONILFA went to Casablanca and Rabat and met the representatives of the Moroccan government; and they initiated cultural relationships for the promotion of women in Morocco. This first meeting originated the idea of setting up, in Morocco as well, a Woman Observatory following the Italian example.

For the future, it is planned to organization an information day on the topic of multi-functionality, to be held in Morocco, and promote the exchange of experiences about the situation in the two countries.

It is equally hoped we may start collaborating with the Egyptian government to the benefit of both countries. It would be interesting to organise a Conference to present the experiences conducted in the Mediterranean Basin countries that share some values like culture, agriculture, etc.

Many families of these countries live upon agriculture and it is then necessary to contribute to pave the way towards welfare prospects, to minimize any painful uprootedness and emigration towards places far from their place of origin.

Setting up a “reality” is fundamental and should be based on the value of solidarity between women though being of different cultures.

Solidarity is the only way to allow them to conquer a recognised role in the society.

I am sure this is a fruitful occasion to know each other and open a dialogue between the realities of women in our two countries.

Thanks