



WOMEN FOR THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE



Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

My name is Rose O'Donovan & I come from a mixed farm on the Southwest coast of Ireland overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Incidentally, it was my grandmother Mary Coughlan, who purchased the 100 acre holding from her older brother Tim, following a stint working in New York. Her eldest son Frank – my father – inherited the land & farmed it until his passing in November 2007. So I grew up milking cows, driving tractors & tending to sheep & lambs, in a vibrant local community in West Cork. I would say it was my upbringing that sparked my interest in the sector.

What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

A major challenge was competing with well-funded media players entering the agri-food policy space. Once dominant in Brussels, Agra Facts faced a 'David vs. Goliath' battle but maintained credibility by staying true to our strengths & building trust among our readers. Plus business has never been better !



Rose O'Donovan
Editor-in-Chief, Agra Facts

What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

I moved to Brussels exactly 21 years ago for an internship with the then EP President Pat Cox. After completing my 'stage,' I unexpectedly landed the role of Deputy Editor of Agra Facts in 2007. With no journalistic experience, Roger Waite, the then Editor, took a chance on me. When he left to become the spokesperson for ex-Commissioner Dacian Cioloş in 2010, overnight I became the boss.

That was a defining moment, as Agra Facts had been regarded as the 'Bible' of agricultural policy reporting since 1996. It was a challenge, but I like to think I rose to the occasion. My former colleague Ed Bray, who served as Deputy Editor from 2010-2017, & Chris Lyddon, Deputy Editor since then, have been instrumental in keeping the whole show on the road.

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

Since I started working in this field in May 2007, I cannot get over the change that has occurred. Back in 2012, I established 'Agri Ladies' - a Brussels-based network for women in agri-food. What began as small gatherings in my apartment has grown to 400 members, with 50-60 attending monthly meetups. My advice is quite simple: go for it.

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

My key responsibilities include reporting on evolving EU agricultural, trade & environmental policy and keeping Agra Facts subscribers up to date with the latest happenings when it comes to the CAP & the relevant legislative initiatives in the agri-food space.

As for how our work contributes to the future of agriculture, we would like to think that it provides an accurate & timely overview of happenings in Brussels.

Can you share a moment when you felt particularly supported or uplifted by other women in your field?

The beauty about being the Editor of Agra Facts is that I know most of the subscribers personally. I send out the bi-weekly newsletter, handle the administrative side of things & I have built up quite a good relationship with readers in Brussels & beyond. On February 12, Agra Facts 'broke' the story about the 'Vision on Agriculture & Food'. Quite the coup for a small outfit. The positive feedback was immediate. So whether it's small wins, or big wins, generally speaking, there is support from other women in my field. They've got my back. And I've got theirs.

Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

I am a public and regulatory affairs professional, a proud mom, and passionate about driving agricultural innovation for a more sustainable future. With 23 years in regulatory and policy work, I've learned that success isn't just about science - political decision - making and societal values matter. Effective policies require diverse voices, and I believe in fostering multi-stakeholder dialogue to find common ground and drive progress.

What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

My biggest career challenges were often self-imposed - setting high expectations and worrying about meeting them, especially with increasing responsibilities. Fortunately, supportive mentors, colleagues, and loved ones encouraged me to leverage my strengths and take on new challenges, giving me the confidence to grow professionally.

What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

I studied Bioengineering at the University of Leuven, Belgium, specializing in Crop Protection. Fascinated by glyphosate's impact on agriculture, I initially sought a role at the company that invented it. While I didn't secure a position at its manufacturing plant, I was offered a role in regulatory affairs - an ideal fit that combined my passion for science, agriculture, law, and policy.

Over the years, I held various regulatory roles across crop protection, seeds, biotechnology, and stewardship, covering Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. More recently, I transitioned to public affairs, first in global policy advocacy and later focusing on Europe, the Middle East, and Africa during the launch of the European Green Deal.



Annick Pleysier
Head of EMEA Public Affairs,
Science and Sustainability at
Bayer Crop Science

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

I encourage others to embrace traits often seen as feminine, like empathy, doubt, and collaboration. Balancing and leveraging these qualities fosters curiosity, active listening, and finding common ground, leading to better solutions that benefit everyone involved.

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

As Head of Agricultural Affairs at Bayer Crop Science EMEA, I lead a fantastic team that engages with stakeholders across the agricultural value chain. We collaborate to create a science - and evidence-based regulatory and policy environment, ensuring farmers' access to innovations and defending a broad portfolio of solutions for sustainable agriculture.

We focus on understanding our innovation pipeline and how our solutions meet customer needs, identifying opportunities and challenges in policies, and engaging in dialogue with key stakeholders. As a team leader, I also work to remove obstacles and help people excel in their roles.

Can you share a moment when you felt particularly supported or uplifted by other women in your field?

Small moments of recognition from female peers, like feedback on my contributions in meetings or projects, are incredibly uplifting. These simple acknowledgments provide meaningful support and encouragement in my professional journey.

Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

My name is Ellen Rydbeck, and I'm 34 years old. Five years ago, I took over our family farm, Suontaka, from my mother, becoming the fifth generation to run it. Working with nature and animals, and being part of something bigger, brings me great joy. This is such a meaningful job.

What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

This job comes with enormous responsibilities; you not only bear the responsibility for your employees, your animals, and all the bureaucratic and financial aspects, but you also feel a deep responsibility to the generations before you, to manage and improve the farm that has been in your family for over a hundred years. When I transitioned from a corporate job to farming, I really missed the sense of community I had from working in teams at a large company, surrounded by many colleagues. Farming is often a lonely job, and being the sole owner of a farm—or any company—can be isolating. You alone make the decisions and bear the consequences.

What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

I've always known I would take over the farm after my mother, but after high school, she encouraged me to study something other than agriculture, just in case I changed my mind and needed a 'backup plan.' I studied business, and after completing my Master's degree, I worked in logistics and consulting for a few years. After about three years in consulting,

I felt ready for a change, so I moved back to the family farm and worked with my mother for a year. We both agreed it would be a good way for me to try farming before fully committing to it. In 2020, I officially took over and now own 100% of the farm. It's the best decision I've ever made.



Ellen Rydbeck
Farmer at Suontaka

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

Be blind to the gender roles which still exist in some parts of this field. Learn everything you can; if animals are your passion, do that but also learn about cultivation and machinery. You will benefit from having experience and knowledge of all areas in farming. Find people who you can ask for help, they may be your senior or your own age, men or women, it does not matter, but you need good people you can ask for help and with whom you can talk about your ideas and problems.

What are your key responsibilities, and how does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

As owner I am CEO, CFO, CMO and all the other managerial roles. My two amazing employees have worked at the farm for over 20 years and together we manage all the operational tasks, which differ according to the seasons. Striving to continuously improve our animal welfare,

cultivation practices and environmental impact we try to preserve all the hard work previous generations have done for the farm, and to leave it in an even better state for the generations to come. Hopefully we might also inspire others to do things better and more sustainably.

Can you share a moment when you felt particularly supported or uplifted by other women in your field?

I am so grateful for my mother who passed on the world's greatest job to me, and who for over 30 years worked hard to make the farm better and more successful in every way.

Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

My name is Maura Farrell, Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Galway and Coordinator of the FLIARA (Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas) Horizon Europe project. This project explores the innovative practices of women in agriculture and rural areas, the challenges they face, and the valuable contributions they bring to farms and communities across the European Union.

What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

Balancing a demanding career with raising a family has been a significant challenge. However, as my children grew, they became proud of my work, making the effort incredibly rewarding. Perseverance and a strong sense of purpose have guided me through this journey, helping me overcome obstacles. Their support and recognition have strengthened my resolve and deepened my commitment to driving meaningful change in my field.

What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

Historically, women have been the backbone of family farming, yet their contributions have often gone unrecognised and overshadowed by their male counterparts. My research is deeply motivated by the desire to highlight and celebrate the invaluable, often unseen work women perform daily on farms across the EU, ensuring their efforts are acknowledged for their true worth and significance.



Maura Farrell

Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Galway and Coordinator of the FLIARA project

A common misconception is that women are not as involved or capable in farming and agriculture as men. I've challenged this by highlighting and spotlighting over 200 innovative projects across the EU, led by women, which show that women are central to driving change and sustainability in the sector.

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

I would highlight the dynamic and fulfilling nature of agriculture and rural development, where women can make a meaningful impact on communities and the environment. Embrace lifelong learning, look for mentorship, and use your unique distinct viewpoint to drive innovation and lasting solutions.

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

As Coordinator of the FLIARA project, my main role is to explore the challenges faced by women innovating in farming and rural areas. Beyond highlighting their achievements, our findings must drive policy change, ensuring women in agriculture can reach their full potential.

Addressing agricultural challenges requires input from all of society, including women. The FLIARA project aims to support their journey and contribute to the future sustainability of agriculture.

Can you share a moment when you felt particularly supported or uplifted by other women in your field?

Through my work in the FLIARA EU Horizon Project, I have had the privilege of interviewing numerous women engaged in farming. Their passion, innovative ideas, and unwavering commitment not only uplifted me but also reinforced the power of collaboration and shared purpose among women in this field.

Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

My name is Simona Hrochová, and my greatest motivation in agriculture is the opportunity to help restore ecosystems through soil regeneration, biodiversity conservation, and agroforestry practices.

What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

One of the biggest challenges is the growing lack of rainfall. However, the greatest challenge has always been balancing the demands of being a mother and wife with the intense physical, mental, and time commitments that agriculture requires. Also, people often assume that my husband is behind everything we have achieved. This reflects a broader tendency to underestimate the vital and challenging role of women in agriculture.

What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

Over a decade ago, I chose to change my life, leaving the family business to start farming. Initially, my goal was to provide healthy food for my family and children. However, over time, my focus shifted to caring for the soil and the landscape, with the vegetables, fruits, and herbs produced for our CSA becoming a valuable bonus.



Simona Hrochová
Farmer at Rodinná Farna Částkov

A pivotal moment was when many of our customers experienced improved health from consuming our produce. The greatest gift of my journey in agriculture is the continuous opportunity to learn and witness, despite many mistakes, how my care and attention contribute to the healing of our ecosystem.

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

I am responsible for the entire operation of the farm, including crop rotation, harvesting, and communication with customers. Over the past 11 years, a wonderful community has formed around our farm - not only made up of customers, but also of people eager to contribute to sustainable farming. Of course, there are also those who seek inspiration and want to see firsthand what farming without traditional dogmas looks like in practice. We follow no-till practices, use cover crops, and place a strong emphasis on nature.

Can you share a moment when you felt particularly supported or uplifted by other women in your field?

“The first and most significant moment of support from other women came when I met the women from AMPI upon officially joining the CSA network. This support was further strengthened by my nomination for the Laskavec Award, once again, by several women. That was when I truly realized the importance of women’s roles in agriculture.”



Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

I'm Bella Murfin, the Director General at the Country Land and Business Association. I grew up in the countryside and now live in rural England, and I've spent most of my career focused on how we can make the very best use of our land. It's the lifeblood of the planet, and the foundation of our economy, so we must treat it well.

What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

My greatest challenge was having children and trying to balance a demanding career with raising a family. For me, it was a game-changer when I moved from solo part-time working to forming a job-share, allowing me to make an impact at work whilst having enough energy to try and do a good job at home as well. I've not always got it right, but having a second brain, cheerleader and confidante through that partnership was career-defining for me.

What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

The CLA supports people to make the most of their land, providing vital advice and guidance to our members, and advocating for policies that will help them make environmentally and financially sustainable choices. There's so much untapped potential in the rural economy and I want to be part of helping to unlock it.



Bella Murfin

Director General at the Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

I've got to give a special shout-out to my former job-share partner. She lifted me up through tough times and through good ones, and I'll be ever-grateful for her support.

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

“ Our farm businesses are feeding millions of people every day, helping to restore nature, growing trees, providing places for people to visit, and adopting cutting edge tech to do all of that better. Reach out and talk to people in different parts of the industry and learn about the many ways to be a part of that. ”

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

Around 80% of the CLA's 26000 members are involved in agriculture in some way. I lead the CLA team across England and Wales, full of experts that are advising them as they make decisions about how to manage their land.

There are big challenges facing agriculture right now, including difficult changes announced in the last

budget that are making it hard for agricultural businesses to plan and grow. And there is change on the horizon, with live government consultation on a national Land Use Framework, a 25 year Farming Roadmap, and Planning reform, to name just a few. We are pushing for the policies that will help agriculture to thrive.

What is the biggest misconception about women in your sector that you have personally experienced or challenged?

“ That showing emotion is a sign of weakness. At times during my career, I've cried tears of frustration and been met with many different responses from sympathy to disdain. I worked for an inspiring female leader – Claire Moriarty – who encouraged her team to bring their whole selves to work, and I've learned to share more of myself as I've developed my career. Showing and sharing my highs and lows is a part of being trusted and understood by my colleagues, and creating a safe space where people can be themselves and perform at their best. ”

Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

I am a 32-year-old Italian woman with a genuine passion for nature and science. My curiosity about the natural world led me to study chemistry, eventually specialising in soil and agricultural chemistry. I focus on phosphorus – an essential nutrient for plant growth that poses significant environmental risks if not managed properly. Phosphorus also has geopolitical implications, as its supply and management are critical to EU and global food security. In my everyday job, I'm driven by a desire to find sustainable solutions that balance agricultural needs with environmental protection.

What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

My biggest challenge was leaving academia to start my current job. Many tried to convince me that I wasn't the right fit for the role at ESPP or that I wasn't good enough, but in reality, they were projecting their own ideas of what was best for me. That experience taught me an important lesson: I need to make choices for myself, not to meet others' expectations. Trusting my instincts and following my own path was key to overcoming that challenge.



What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

I always look for new challenges and inspiration. After a few years in academia, I felt something was missing. Around that time, I became increasingly interested in EU-level work on agriculture and sustainability so I started following the European Sustainable Phosphorus Platform, a non-profit organization

Veronica Santoro
PhD, European Sustainable Phosphorus Platform (ESPP)

working with industry, researchers, cities, and regions across Europe to promote phosphorus sustainability and recycling. When they were looking for someone to represent them in Brussels, I saw the opportunity, applied, and here I am.

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

“ Don't be afraid of not being 'good enough' – skills can be learned, networks can be built, and being a woman in a male-dominated field shouldn't make you doubt your path. Confidence grows with experience, so trust yourself and keep pushing forward. Another key piece of advice is to support and uplift other women. Building a strong network where we empower each other makes a real difference, not just for us individually, but for the future of the sector as a whole. ”

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

I cover multiple roles in the organization, which is small in size but highly impactful! As its representative in Brussels, I attend meetings, conferences, and workshops on circular economy and sustainability, engaging with the European Commission and key stakeholders.

My work focuses on promoting phosphorus recycling for EU food security and ensuring the sector's needs are reflected in future policies. I also manage communication – social media, website, newsletters, and events – to raise awareness about this central topic that is often overlooked.

Can you share a moment when you felt particularly supported or uplifted by other women in your field?

“ I have been fortunate to work with inspiring women in academia, research, industry, and institutions. Their success gives me hope for change. Being part of this progress motivates me, and I hope my journey inspires younger women to believe in their potential, just as I was once inspired. ”

Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

After earning a degree in Economics from the University of Zagreb, I initially pursued a career in finance. However, an internship at a Belgian agricultural consultancy changed my path. Three weeks after my interview, I moved to Belgium. During the six-month internship, I explored Flemish agriculture's key challenges, worked on EU projects, and secured a PhD position at Ghent University's Faculty of Bioscience Engineering. My research focused on using manure-derived fertilisers as alternatives to mineral fertilisers. After completing my PhD in 2017, I continued managing EU projects on nutrient recycling. What drives my passion for agriculture is the opportunity to serve as a bridge between farmers and policymakers, helping to develop innovative solutions that support farmers while ensuring compliance with regulations designed to protect our water resources and public health.



What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

One of the biggest challenges I faced was transitioning into agricultural research, which required me to learn everything from scratch since my previous education was not directly relevant to my new career path. I overcame this knowledge gap through commitment, continuous learning, hard work, and by building a strong support network of mentors and peers I could rely on.

Dr. Ivona Sigurnjak
Researcher and Manager of EU
projects oriented towards
nutrient recycling Ghent
University

What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

The defining moment in my journey was accepting an internship and moving to Belgium. During my studies, I did not have the opportunity to gain international work experience. However, accepting this internship - focused on agriculture rather than my initial interest in finance - allowed me to fully shift my career focus and ultimately pursue a path in the agricultural sector.

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

Go for it! Agriculture is currently facing numerous challenges, including food security, climate change, environmental protection, and biodiversity loss. Making agriculture more efficient and environmentally sustainable is a long journey, and we need as many hands as possible to make it happen. So, find mentors, build your skills, and don't be afraid to take on these challenges!

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

In my role as a researcher and project manager, I am actively involved in the daily investigation and assessment of practices that can make agriculture more productive and environmentally sustainable. This is done through laboratory and field assessments, where, for example, we evaluate different types of fertilisers. Once research results are available, we focus on developing communication materials (e.g. reports and factsheets) and presenting our findings at conferences and farmer-oriented workshops.



Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

I am a farmer in the Tarn region, in the South-West of France, managing a family-run cereal farm that has been passed down through generations. My career path was not initially set in stone: after studying for a career in the corporate world, I felt a deep connection with this land and to the work my family had accomplished. I ultimately decided to take over the farm. This was a very personal and almost philosophical decision: I could not accept the idea that our farm might disappear or fall into other hands. Beyond the fields, I quickly engaged in farmers' unions and later in politics, convinced that European agriculture deserves better than disconnected technocratic decisions.

What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

Like all young farmers, I have encountered the common challenges of the profession: administrative burdens, income uncertainty, and natural disasters. But perhaps the greatest challenge was finding my place in a sector still largely dominated by men. I had to prove that competence is not a matter of gender but rather a question of hard work and determination.

What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

The defining moment was when I decided to take over the family farm. This choice went against the career path I was following and was a true turning point. Because beyond the economic activity, being a farmer is a lifelong commitment, a way of life, and a responsibility to those who came before us and those who will come after.



Céline Imart
Farmer, French politician

This realisation also led me into politics: over the years, I witnessed increasing constraints, more regulations piling up, and I felt the need to bring our voice beyond the fields, into the places where decisions are made.

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

I would encourage her to believe in herself and not be intimidated. Agriculture is a challenging field that requires dedication, discipline, and passion to succeed. Hard work and perseverance will help her establish herself.

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

I have a dual role: I am both a farmer and a MEP, in the Agriculture Committee. On my farm, I ensure the profitability and sustainability of my business. But my political commitment allows me to go further: I want to bring the voice of farmers to European institutions to influence the decisions that shape the future of

agriculture. My goal is to defend a vision where innovation, productivity, and respect for farmers' work are not pitted against environmental imperatives that are often dictated without consulting those who actually feed Europe.

Can you share a moment when you felt particularly supported or uplifted by other women in your field?

I can think of no one but my mother, who always watched over my children day, night and weekends, whenever I had to be on my tractor.

What is the biggest misconception about women in your sector that you have personally experienced or challenged?

The stereotype that agriculture is a man's profession still lingers. However, more and more women are now running farms in many sectors. It is still rarer in the cereal sector where it is still seen as unusual for a woman to drive a combine harvester or to take care of phytosanitary treatments.

Unfortunately, many tools and machines are still not adapted for women, considering that we are generally smaller than men. Production tools must be better designed and accessible for everyone.

Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

I am Ené Leppik, a scientist and entrepreneur passionate about developing sustainable pest management solutions using semiochemicals. Growing up in a small village of 2,000 people in Estonia, my family's farm and nature's resilience fascinated me. I spent my childhood observing ecosystems, intrigued by how life constantly struggles yet finds inventive ways to survive. This curiosity led me to a career dedicated to harnessing biological mechanisms for more sustainable agriculture.

What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

Bridging the gap between scientific innovation and commercial application has been one of my biggest challenges. Regulatory hurdles, market adoption barriers, and funding constraints are constant obstacles. However, I have an incredible team that doesn't take "no" for an answer. A team of fighters with whom anything is possible. Our strength lies in our diversity; we challenge each other, complement one another's skills, and push boundaries. With them, the sky is the limit.

What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

My high school biology teacher, a passionate and energetic woman, sparked my interest in science. Through the school's biology club - birdwatching, research institute visits, and science competitions - I developed a deep passion for biology and ecology, leading me to study at the University of Tartu in Estonia. The turning point in my career came in the summer of 2018 when I met Alain Thibault. At the time, I was a post-doc at



Ené Leppik
CTO & Founder - Agriodor

INRAE (France), and we met in a cafeteria at an incubation hub. I shared my vision of founding a company that uses plant odors to influence insect behavior instead of pesticides. Alain found the idea crazy but potentially genius. A few months later, on January 7, 2019, we co-founded Agriodor, bringing that vision to life.

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

Believe in your expertise and don't shy away from leadership. Speak your mind, stand your ground, and never apologize for taking up space. Do not fear failure - it is part of the process. Surround yourself with a strong team and hire smart, talented people. In fact, hire people smarter than yourself. A great team will challenge you and push ideas forward.

A common misconception is that women in agriculture, especially in leadership roles, are less technically proficient or capable of driving innovation. I've challenged this by leading complex R&D projects, securing funding, and proving that deep scientific expertise combined with business acumen can create impactful change.

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

As CTO of Agriodor, I oversee research and development, ensuring our solutions are scientifically sound and practically viable. I also lead collaborations with industry and academia to bring cutting-edge semiochemical technologies from the lab to the field.

By providing farmers with sustainable alternatives to traditional pesticides, we help reduce environmental impact while improving pest control efficiency.

Can you share a moment when you felt particularly supported or uplifted by other women in your field?

Women in science often approach ideas with intellectual openness, not being personally attached to hypotheses. This allows for constructive discussions, adaptability, and real innovation. I've experienced this firsthand while working with brilliant female scientists who support one another, prioritize progress over ego, and push boundaries together. This collective strength continues to inspire me in my work.

Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

I'm Barbu Andra, a 25-year-old agronomist engineer from Romania, proudly representing the third generation of female farmers in my family. I manage our 1500-hectare family vegetable farm. My dedication to agriculture was cultivated from a young age by my grandparents, who instilled in me a deep appreciation for this essential work and nurtured my love and respect for the natural world.

What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

Driven by a desire to maintain complete oversight of farm operations and employee management, I initially stretched myself too thin, leading to physical and mental exhaustion. Realizing the need to delegate tasks and embrace technology, I invested in fleet-monitoring applications, direct work-recording systems, high-performance equipment, and drones. These tools keep me informed about field activities, ensuring tasks are completed accurately, wherever and whenever they occur.



What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

I always knew farming was my calling, but two pivotal moments solidified my path. The first was the passing of my grandfather when I was just five years old. Later, at thirteen, my parents divorced, and I realized I needed to support my mother and grandmother even more. What had once been a childhood pastime transformed into a significant responsibility and eventually became a way of life. Growing up immersed in farm life provided invaluable experience, preparing me for the realities - and challenges - of being a farmer.

Andra Barbu
Agronomist Engineer
SC Iancom SRL

I've often faced condescension in male-dominated business circles due to my youth and gender. However, once I confidently demonstrate my beliefs, knowledge, and capabilities, perceptions begin to shift. Through social media, I aim to reshape the narrative of agriculture into a women's world.

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

“ My advice is to always trust your instincts. Women in agriculture are not solely farmers; we are business leaders, engineers, mothers, and wives. This entails significant responsibilities and concerns. Prioritize self-care and nurture your feminine energy, as it's easy to lean too far into masculine traits. Strive for balance to maintain a healthy mind and harmonious relationships, both personally and professionally. ”

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

I manage agronomic practices, crop technology, and marketing while overseeing operations, supervising teams, and organizing activities. I also step in as a mechanic and machinery operator - an essential farm skill. My 76-year-old grandmother, an accomplished engineer, remains active and an invaluable advisor. With my mother handling finances, I focus on implementing cutting-edge technologies and sustainable practices, reducing fertilizer and pesticide use to minimize our environmental impact—especially vital as soil drought worsens each year.

Can you share a moment when you felt particularly supported or uplifted by other women in your field?

“ My biggest supporters are my mother and grandmother, who have unwavering faith in my ability to overcome any challenge in agriculture. I'm also part of a nationwide young farmers' community, inspired by like-minded young women. It's rewarding to share a common language and mutual encouragement in such a supportive network. I love being a woman, especially in agriculture! ”

Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

I am Samira Maskan, 28 years old, representing the interests of Romanian farmers in Brussels within decision-making institutions. I discovered my passion when I realized my generation has the power to drive change. Instead of blaming others, I chose to get involved. I am a realist—I know change is difficult and often feels in vain, but not trying means losing by default. My goal is to leave a mark and be among those who can say they did everything they could, even if change isn't always possible.

What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

The biggest challenge I faced was my age. Early in my career, I often encountered skepticism, with some assuming that I was either too young or lacked the expertise to contribute meaningfully. Instead of letting this discourage me, I focused on consistently proving my capabilities through in-depth research, well-prepared arguments, and persistence. Over time, I earned the respect and trust needed to have a seat at the negotiation table and for my voice to be heard and listened to.

What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

I started as a volunteer at the Romanian Farmers' Club in 2018. It was a challenging journey, with many moments of doubt when I felt like giving up because I wasn't seeing the results I had hoped for. I looked around and felt like everyone else had progressed much further in their careers than I had. But then I took a step back to reflect on what success meant to me. That's when I realized my biggest motivation was to leave something meaningful behind.



Samira Maskan

Communication Director and
Coordinator of EU Relations

My turning point came when I won an internship at the European Commission at 22 years old, competing against 20,000 applicants for 600 spots. It's hard to describe the feeling—it was the first time I truly felt proud of myself. It was also the moment I realized that failure is no longer a disappointment but rather an additional source of motivation.

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

“ Don't be afraid to dream big, no matter how many obstacles come your way. Stay persistent, even when the journey gets tough. You will face more failures than successes, and that's completely normal. Avoid comparing your progress to anyone else's, everyone has their own path, and you will reach your destination in your own way. And if you don't, perhaps that wasn't truly your destination. People see the good things that you do, but criticism often comes easier than recognition—stay focused on your goals. ”

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

My work is very extensive, but on a brief, general level, it involves analyzing issues in the agricultural sector, conducting studies, identifying solutions, and then presenting and negotiating them with decision-makers. . My work is closely connected with farmers

ministries, the European Commission, and the European Parliament. It contributes to the future of agriculture by promoting sustainable policies, ensuring a more competitive and resilient agricultural sector that is adapted to current and future challenges.

Can you share a moment when you felt particularly supported or uplifted by other women in your field?

“ I can't pinpoint just one exact moment because I've been fortunate to always have strong, supportive women around me. Whether through mentorship, collaboration, or simple words of encouragement, I've felt the presence of women who uplift rather than compete. Their resilience, ambition, and ability to navigate challenges motivate me every day. Seeing women break barriers, lead with confidence, and support each other in a field that is not always welcoming drives me to do the same. ”

Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

My name is Popa Cristina-Maria. I'm 34 years old and work alongside my family on a crop farm in southern Romania. I also work at the Romanian Senate, where I'm involved in agricultural legislation. My passion for agriculture stems from practical experience and my commitment to aligning Romanian legislation with European standards. I'm open-minded and enjoy exploring innovative methods that improve results and support sustainable agricultural development.

What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

One of my biggest challenges was modernizing our farm and integrating new technologies. Adapting to rapid agricultural advancements required investment and learning. Implementing farm management software and precision agriculture tools, like sensors and satellite imagery, optimized operations. Though the transition was difficult, perseverance led to increased productivity and efficiency. This experience reinforced my belief in the importance of technology for the future of agriculture and motivated me to promote modern and sustainable solutions that help farmers enhance their performance.



Popa Cristina-Maria
General Farm Manager

What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

I've always aimed for an integrated vision of agriculture, combining practical farming knowledge with economic and legislative insights. I have encountered numerous legislative challenges that hinder farmers' activities, motivating me to seek concrete solutions. Through my dual roles - as a farmer and a member of the Romanian Senate - I strive to align legislation with real-world agricultural needs, guided by constant dialogue with fellow farmers.

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

For women pursuing a career in agriculture, my advice is to embrace innovation and see technology as an ally. Modern agriculture is about efficiency, sustainability, and smart resource use, with precision farming, automation, drones, and AI creating new opportunities. I encourage determination and strategic use of knowledge and skills.

One of the biggest misconceptions I have encountered in the agricultural sector is the idea that women are not as capable as men when it comes to operating agricultural machinery. The reality is that modern technology has made operating farming equipment less about physical strength and more about skill, attention to detail, and adaptability.

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

On our farm, I manage crop planning, resource allocation, and production optimization. I believe the future of agriculture lies in combining tradition with innovation, which is why I continuously explore new methods to enhance productivity and sustainability.

Through my work on the farm, I aim not only to achieve better results at an individual level but also to contribute to developing an efficient agricultural model that can inspire other farmers.

Can you share a moment when you felt particularly supported or uplifted by other women in your field?

At the Club of Romanian Farmers, I found strong support from women in agriculture. Meeting passionate professionals with shared goals broadened my perspective on innovation. The Club fosters collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and community. This experience reinforced my belief that teamwork drives a more efficient and sustainable future for agriculture.