

Female Representation in Leadership Positions in Irish Agriculture and Specifically on Dairy Co-operative Boards

A report for



NUFFIELD IRELAND
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by **Maire McCarthy**

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Scholar Contact Details

Maire McCarthy
Ballyhandle,
Innishannon,
Co. Cork

Phone: +353-87-235 4353

Email: Ballyhandlefarm@gmail.com

In submitting this report, the Scholar has agreed to Nuffield Ireland publishing this material in its edited form.

NUFFIELD IRELAND Contact Details

John Tyrrell
Executive Secretary, Nuffield Ireland
Phone: +353-87-256 3501
Email: exec@nuffield.ie

Executive Summary

This report explores female representation in leadership positions in agriculture in Ireland with particular emphasis on women participation on dairy co-operative boards. Research shows that companies with gender balanced senior management teams have a higher return on investment (Strauss, 2016). This report confirms a lack of gender diversity on boards of dairy co-operatives in Ireland. In 2015 of the 405 dairy co-operative directors in Ireland, there were eight female directors, two of whom are on the board of Bandon Co-op. In 2018 there are 395 dairy co-operative directors seven of whom are female (Flanagan, 2018).

Broadening the composition of the board of a co-operative helps expand perspective at the top and ultimately leads to more successful outcomes for shareholders.

Key Findings

- In key Irish agricultural organisation there has been strong female representation in executive positions in recent years. Despite this, there is a lack of female representation on Irish Dairy Co-operative boards (less than 3% in 2018). The figure neither reflects the number of women involved in the wider agricultural sector in any capacity nor even the smaller number of female farmers;
- Female representation on dairy co-operative boards in the UK, Netherlands and New Zealand is higher than in Ireland, but remains low. These countries have started to successfully implement policies that encourage female representation on their dairy co-operative boards;
- Among potential female dairy co-operative board members there is a clear lack of understanding around board membership. They do not understand the requirements, the board activities or the benefits of membership which inhibits their involvement. These author's interviews have shown that potential candidates require education on these points, as well as receiving mentoring, and increasing the number of female role models and trailblazers;
- There were mixed views on the value of quotas with many in favour as they force women to be promoted and appointed to board and executive positions while some thought that it would lead to the promotion of people who are not best suited for a given role.

Recommendations

- ICOS and Co-operative boards need to address the issue of gender imbalance to maximise profit for shareholders and to better reflect their shareholder base by identifying and implementing policies that will effectively promote female representation on boards.
- Each co-operative board could set up a subcommittee to address the issue of gender imbalance on its board.
- Co-operatives should consider introducing gender quotas. While this runs the risk of promoting candidates who are not best suited to the role, it seems likely that the most qualified female candidates should be able to reach a 30% quota and improve, not impair the quality of board members. They should also consider lack of diversity across a range of criteria including age, gender, cultural background, as it is important to reflect the member base of the co-operative as FrieslandCampina strive to do;
- Efforts should be made to inform women what is involved and required from dairy co-operative board membership and the benefits that are involved. This could be done at events such as the FBD Women and Agriculture Conference, Teagasc workshops, and events run by Macra na Feirme or the National Dairy Council. This activity could be coordinated by ICOS, a government agency, or another independent organisation;
- The Irish Government also needs to enforce change through policy, legislation & implementation. Funding is available through EU initiatives e.g. local enterprise boards setting up women in business training.
- They should also commission a report with the depth and scope of the Scottish Government's Women in Farming and the Agriculture Sector report to examine the role of women in the Irish agricultural sector.

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Foreword

I have loved farming from a very young age. As far back as I can remember, I loved going with my Dad to the farm. After leaving secondary school at the age of 17, my ambition was to pursue a career in farming. We discussed my interest with our accountant and our farm adviser and the recommendation was “to go to college and get an education, farming was a difficult life for a woman”. I went to college and ended up in the financial services industry. However, my love for agriculture and more specifically people in the agricultural industry never dimmed. So, inevitably I married a farmer and was very happy to continue working in financial services while maintaining a keen interest in agriculture.

I had my children and continued my banking career. Then, in 2011 I had an opportunity to represent our farm family on the board of our local co-operative. I was only the 4th ever female board member in the history of the co-operative. This was a turning point in my career, because through the co-operative I was exposed to the processing side of the industry and began to understand the intricacies of running a co-operative and always having the ‘greater good’ of the farmer shareholder as a priority.

In 2013 I was offered an opportunity to complete a Diploma in Corporate Direction (Food Business), in University College Cork. The course was sponsored by Bandon Co-op and the Irish Co-operative Organisation Society (ICOS). From 2014 to 2018 I worked with Capita as head of auditing conducting over 23,000 on farm audits per year on behalf of Bord Bia Origin Green. I now work for FBD as a financial adviser.

My Nuffield study sets out to examine female participation in leadership positions in Irish agriculture and specifically on dairy co-operative boards both in Ireland and abroad. The locations that I visited included:

- Australia;
- Indonesia;
- France;
- Japan;
- Israel;
- The Netherlands;
- Delaware, United States;
- United Kingdom;
- Germany;
- Poland; and
- Italy.

The overall mission or objective of the Golden Jubilee Trust, my Nuffield Scholarship sponsors, is to improve and develop all aspects of Irish agricultural and rural life. Through the trust’s sponsorship, I feel I have gained information which will help improve the female participation on Irish dairy co-operative boards. I would like to acknowledge and thank the Golden Jubilee Trust for the wonderful opportunity they have given me through their sponsorship of my Nuffield Scholarship.

Figure 1: Maire McCarthy, and her mother and inspiration, Teresa Ahern, West Cork. July 2017.



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At the outset I wish to thank Nuffield Ireland and the Golden Jubilee Trust for the life changing opportunity that a Nuffield Scholarship offers.

I wish to acknowledge the support of my husband and best friend Brian and my three wonderful children Ciara, Sarah and Brian. I would particularly like to thank my parents and family who provided all types of help and support.

My employer, Capita Customer Solutions and my work colleagues for allowing me to take this opportunity, and providing me with an iPad which helped me capture the amazing experience as I travelled.

I want to thank all the wonderful, passionate and driven people who contributed to my report. The farmers and business people around the world that were so open and welcoming - thank you. Finally, I want to acknowledge the great experience I have had, meeting the fabulous Nuffield scholars who visited our home, who have become my surrogate family. To-date I have had 31 Nuffield Scholars stay in my home, all brought great insight and understanding which was shared with my family.

I would like to thank the five wonderful people who shared my seven weeks of global focus programme, their companionship, insight and support were invaluable to me both personally and professionally. These people will be part of my life forever and for this I am very grateful.

Abbreviations Table

BIM – Bord Iascaigh Mhara

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

Co-op – Co-operative

ICOS – Irish Co-operative Organisation Society

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

NFU – National Farmers’ Union

Objectives

- To explore the role of women in leadership positions in Irish agriculture;
- To examine the issue of gender balance on conventional boards and on co-operative boards in Ireland and abroad;
- To identify the advantages and or disadvantages of gender balance on dairy co-operative boards;
- To identify and outline the factors that affect female representation on the boards of dairy co-operatives in Ireland and abroad;
- To identify strategies that have been effective in addressing the gender imbalance on dairy co-operative boards abroad;
- To make recommendations based on research to promote greater female participation on Irish dairy co-operative boards.

Methodology

This report was produced on the basis of interviews with women in leadership roles in agriculture nationally and internationally, as well as male dairy co-operative board members. It is also substantiated by extensive research into the role of women in leadership positions in conventional boards and in dairy co-operative boards. This included information retrieved from the OECD, previous Nuffield International reports relating to the topic, as well as reference to the study of women and their roles in rural areas adopted by the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee and Women's Committee in February 2017, and various other research pieces.

Introduction

Research by the Peterson Institute and EY has found that having at least 30% female leadership can increase margins by up to 6%, while OECD research (O'Neill & Nowacka, 2013) identifies gender equality as a foundation for sustainable economic development (Strauss, 2016). It further states that gender equality and women's rights are key to accelerating global development (O'Neill & Nowacka, 2013). Gender equality matters in its own right and as a prerequisite to the health and development of families and societies, and as a driver of economic growth. Clearly promoting gender balance is vital for progress across all economic sectors, nationally and internationally.

In Ireland there are 115,664 farmers, of which only 12% are women, while women own just 9% of farmland in Ireland (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2017). However, this figure does not take into account the number of women who are engaged in fulltime work outside the farm, who also work on farm either in a hands-on capacity or with administration and book keeping.

There are also a large number involved in the wider agricultural sector, while there has been increased female representation at executive level in many key agricultural organisations. However, there is a lack of female representation at co-operative board level. The author interviewed females who hold leadership positions in agricultural organisations in Ireland and abroad to identify the factors that contribute to their progression in the industry, to see if these can be applied to board membership.

There are many strategies for assisting women to develop leadership roles and skills. In this research the author will attempt to explore these strategies to identify approaches that will encourage greater female representation on Irish dairy co-operative boards.

Figure 2: Nuffield Scholars (from left to right): Robert Peffer – Australia, author; Bernadette Mortensen - Australia; Howard Webb – Milford, Lincoln, USA, beef/tillage farmer; Holly Beckett – United Kingdom; Wade Mann – Australia; and James Misfud – Australia, Delaware. USA, July 2015.



Section 1

Female representation on conventional and co-operative boards

Female representation on conventional boards

There is considerable research into the benefits of increased female representation on conventional company boards. Research released in 2018 by the Peterson Institute for International Economics and Ernst and Young, which looked at almost 22,000 companies in 91 countries, found that having at least 30% of women in leadership roles added 6% to net profit margins. Companies with gender balanced senior management teams have a higher return on investment (Strauss, 2016). Clearly broadening the composition of boards of companies is financially beneficial. According to researchers Byron and Post (2016) the reason for this is the differences women bring in terms of perspective, education and style of conduct. Post notes that there's extensive research that shows that men and women have different values and that women tend to be more holistic, think more broadly, be more attuned to environmental and social concerns (Strauss, 2016). Having more female board representative means that "when there's a discussion in the boardroom, those views – thinking about the implications for the communities we work in, what are the implications for employees – might be more likely to be voiced because you have those perspectives on the board" (Strauss, 2016). This clearly has implications for the composition of all boards in that broadening the composition of boards helps expand perspective at the top and ultimately leads to more successful outcomes for shareholders.

In recent years the number of females on company boards nationally and internationally has increased. In 2018, the National Association for Female Executives in USA lists 70 companies who have over 37% female senior managers up from 60 in 2017. This list includes Accenture, Deloitte, Diageo North America, KPMG, and Sodexo, all of whom have a female CEO (Working Mother, 2018). The number of female CEOs on the Fortune 500, while still low, increased by more than 50% from 21 in 2016 to 32 in 2017. This is the highest figure since the Fortune 500 first began. However, this is still only 6.7% and not representative of the population (Zarya, 2017).

Due to the increased profitability from increased female board representation stock market investors look at company board composition as part of their analysis to invest. A Morgan Stanley report indicates that including gender diversity as part of your investment strategy is profitable, and therefore to be encouraged. They note some of the benefits as including productivity, decision-making and innovation (Morgan Stanley, 2016).

In spite of extensive research and evidence showing that having more women in leadership positions improves company profitability progress has been slow in some sectors. This is especially true of Irish dairy co-operative boards.

Female representation on Irish dairy co-operative boards

There is a lack of gender diversity on the boards of dairy co-operatives in Ireland. In 2015 of the 405 dairy co-operative directors in Ireland, there were eight female directors, two of

whom are on the board of Bandon Co-op. In 2018 there are 395 dairy co-operative directors 10 of whom are female (Flanagan, 2018). What are the factors which have caused this lack of females on Irish co-operative boards?

Factors which influence female representation in leadership positions

A study carried out by IRC Global Executive Search Partners, where the CEOs from 40 plus countries were interviewed about the state of women CEOs in their countries reveals some interesting facts (Hora, 2015). While this research is not directly related to women in agriculture, it provides findings which can be applied to any sector, and help provide context for female representation across the board. The study found that while the causes of too few female CEOs vary from country to country the fundamental factors involved are almost universal:

- One quarter of respondents were of the opinion that females are forced to absorb greater responsibility for the nurture of their family. This pressure that women feel seems to grow as women progress in their professional lives and is described as ‘guilt’ for placing their career above family. Conflicting interests cause a drain on time and eventually reach a crisis point and impact on their desire to advance their profession
- 23% of respondents said that women themselves made the choice as they did not wish to live with the stress involved in leadership roles. As other personal responsibilities became more important, career progression, aggression, and ambition tend to lessen
- One fifth stated that cultural and historical factors were relevant in career progression for females, but that these factors are diminishing and numbers of women at the top is increasing
- 14% of chief executives mentioned that many women make softer career choices (50/60% of female respondents pursued HR), from which few CEOs emerge (Hora, 2015).

Having looked at the above research into female involvement on corporate and co-operative boards, the following section will deal with the report’s primary research and discussions with women in key leadership positions in Irish, male-dominated environments, and interviews conducted by the national press.

Section 2

Review of UK research and the current Irish context

In the UK in recent years, research has been conducted into the role of women in agriculture. This includes a survey of over 2,000 male and female respondents in the agricultural industry in England conducted by Barclays and Farmers Weekly in 2014 and a report commissioned by the Scottish Government entitled “Women in Farming and the Agricultural Sector”. These are explored below along with interview findings from Teagasc and Bord Bia and a review of some of the activity to promote and further the role of women in agriculture in Ireland.

Role of Women in Agriculture Survey

Research carried out by Barclays and Farmers Weekly in England investigated opinions of farmers of both genders on the role of women in agriculture. There were several key findings including:

- 59% of respondents across both genders believe agriculture equals or better other industries in terms of equal opportunities, and predicting the situation in 10 years this rose to 87%;
- More than 2/3 of women were involved in practical field work tending to focus on livestock and young stock work;
- Many female respondents believed that they were responsible for paperwork, administration and domestic duties;
- A large proportion of women see themselves as holding a supportive role, influencing rather than making final decisions. They were also more likely to take off-farm work and more likely to have higher general qualifications (1/3 have degrees); and
- Both genders reported parents as the biggest factor holding influence back from women, suggesting generational divide rather than a gender division. (McEntyre, Oliver; Relf, Tim, 2014).

This data suggests women play an important role in agriculture in England. If applied to an Irish context, this has several important implications. It appears that the sector will embrace equal opportunities in the future, at which stage older generation parents will also exert less influence. Women have greater external experience, greater general education, gain more administration experience while also remaining heavily involved in the hands-on farming business. This mix suggests that female candidates are well suited to dairy co-operative boards and their high-level view. In addition to these meta-data insights, insights were collected from various individuals such as Minette Batters (Section 4).

Scottish Government Research into Women in the Agriculture Sector

In June 2016, the Scottish Government's Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division commissioned a report into 'Women in Farming and the Agriculture Sector'. The purpose of this research was to provide a baseline position for female activity in the agricultural sector in Scotland and to influence policy decisions in that area. It looked at the topic through the lens of daily life, aspirations, career paths, leadership and comparative analysis with women in other family businesses. Primary research methods included surveys, focus groups, and interviews with over 1300 women participating (Hopkins, McKee, Shortall, & Sutherland, 2017).

One of the key messages to emerge from the research was around the barriers women face working in the sector. The largest of these, is the cultural practice of one son inheriting the family farm, with succession planning overall being poor, and daughters usually being overlooked entirely (Hopkins et al., 2017). The report also identified a lack of practical, vocational training as being a barrier to women joining the industry. Women in family businesses in other sectors face far fewer barriers to joining the business and attaining leadership roles (Hopkins et al., 2017). The research did show that when new entrants (a married couple, for example) established a farm together, there were far more equal relations (Hopkins et al., 2017). This finding suggests that many of the barriers and gender inequality are cultural hangovers and will lessen into the future. Despite all of these barriers, the report also showed that women play a major role in Scottish agriculture, and that they participate fully in activities across the farm (Hopkins et al., 2017).

Despite 1/3 of farm operators being female, women are extremely underrepresented at national level, with no female national office holders, regional board chairmen or committee chairmen in the National Farmers Union of Scotland (Hopkins et al., 2017). Interestingly, most respondents wanted to see more women involved at in farming leadership roles, and yet only 1/3 were personally interested in a role (Hopkins et al., 2017). Lack of time and lack of access to training appears to have played a key role in preventing women from reaching for these roles while also juggling farm work, family and household responsibilities, off-farm employment and other commitments. These issues appear to mirror issues which have been identified as affecting Irish women and suggests the Scottish example may be applicable in an Irish context.

Hopkins et al. found that women were also exposed to exclusionary practices in farming organisations with 18% of women listing 'Not welcome by existing male leaders' as a barrier to participating in a leadership role of farming organisations (2017). The authors make a number of recommendations including:

- Addressing the conscious and unconscious bias which exists in farming organisations
- Introducing a 30% quota system for farming organisation boards and committees
- Identifying women mentors to support male and female apprentices
- Establishing a 'talent bank' of women who are qualified for farming positions and helping women reach this pool and

- The report identified a youth farming organisation as having the highest female participation and recommends aiming to progress women from this organisation to the National Farmers Union of Scotland. (Hopkins et al., 2017).

These have led to direct government action with a taskforce having been set up to implement necessary changes. Many of these recommendations could also be applied in an Irish context, for example Macra na Feirme or similar groups could be used to funnel potential candidates towards leadership roles.

Figure 3: Nuffield Scholars: Brian Rushe, Joe Burke, Kevin Moran, Maire McCarthy, Aidan Gleeson, John Buckley, Dublin. October 2016.



Bord Bia Auditor Experience

An informal survey was conducted on three Bord Bia farm auditors over a six-month period from May until October 2017 covering approximately 1400 audits which they had carried out on various types of farms (dairy, beef, mixed, sheep, etc.). The questions asked were:

- Was the farmer female?
- What percentage of farms had a female actively involved in either manual work or supporting compliance and administration in the background?
- Was it your experience where there was female support that the farm was more compliant/ better prepared?

The common response from all was that there were few female ‘farmers’. However, they commented that 30-40% of farms visited either had female input in the paperwork or administration. They also said the majority of these women were working off farm and had often left notes on how to access information or had arranged a time off work to be there on the day of the audit. Generally, where there was female input in the administration the standard was considerably higher.

Teagasc Advisor Experience

“Teagasc – the Agriculture and Food Development Authority – is the national body providing integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities” (Teagasc, 2018). They offer a number of services including on farm advisors who are available to assist farmers with issues such as business and financial planning, herd management, breeding and nutrition covering the breadth of an entire farm business. (Teagasc, 2018) Two Teagasc advisors were interviewed, and asked the following questions:

- Is the farmer often female?
- Have you come across many female co-operative board directors?
- What percentage of farms had a female actively involved in either manual work or supporting compliance and administration in the background?

In response to these questions Grainne Hurley, Teagasc West Cork found that there were very few female farmers, with the exception being those who had inherited. She had come across three female board members in West Cork. She also believed that 30% of farms had a woman involved, most of whom also worked off farm.

She also discussed her experience within Teagasc finding it to be both diverse and lacking in diversity. She notes there are a lot of young female advisors in her area but “like other organisations, as you climb the managerial ladder there is a lower percentage of females but [she thinks] this is slowly improving. For example, there are 12 advisory regions with 10:2 male to female regional managers - the two female managers were appointed within the last 2 years which is encouraging to see. However, further up the ladder (outside HR) it’s mostly male dominated”. She says that she has never seen any reluctance from farmers to dealing her as a woman.

Similar to Grainne, Martina Gormley Teagasc North West has also has met very few female farmers. From working with Teagasc in Cavan and Galway she has not met any female board members. She believes that 30 to 40% of women would be working behind the scenes in terms of helping with farm paper work. Martina believes that females would add value to the farm and that it is a big loss that more females are not involved in farm planning and decision making. She says that “it’s not just the farmer or partner that is to blame for this; I have done this myself. Recently I worked with a group of farmers on cash flow management. I made the mistake of not insisting that each farmer brought his partner or son/daughter. I have found from the few farm visits that I have had where the wife was present and involved, was very beneficial. This dynamic added value to the discussion and therefore added value to the final decision.”

Irish Farmers' Association

Irish Farmer's Association are Ireland's largest farming representative who lobby and represent Ireland at both national and international level. The association is organised into 29 county executives who each elect a chairman (Irish Farmer's Association, 2018) There seems to be progressive change within the organisation with more women reaching leadership positions, as three women have been elected to the position of county chairman in recent times, with female chair people in North and South Tipperary and the North Cork Branch. This represents a significant advance for gender equality within the Irish agricultural community. (Finnerty, 2018)

Irish Initiatives

In Ireland, initiatives already exist which are encouraging female participation in agriculture and crucially, encouraging them to attain leadership roles. Ceres the 'Women in Agri Business Leadership Network', is a recently established group "which aims to develop and promote leadership and diverse thinking within the industry" (Ceres Network, 2017). They organised their "inaugural agri leadership conference to focus on vision for 2030" (Ceres Network, 2017). The network recently hosted a panel discussion, in which topics included an "unconscious bias" against women. Brid Horan founder of the 30% club Ireland said "inclusion for women brings diversity of thinking, better customer awareness and better performance by organisations and indeed by teams. Various factors impact on women in business – including unconscious bias and their caring roles" (Allen, 2018). While the panel acknowledged the recent success of women in CEO roles in agri-business, they discussed the lack of women at board and senior management level.

There is also the annual FBD Women and Agriculture Conference which provides a forum for the issues which women in agriculture are interested in hearing about (Hussey, 2015). These initiatives are similar to those being held in other countries, such as Canada where the Advancing Women Conference is held "for every woman who is passionate about agriculture and food", and offers opportunities for networking, and mentoring (Advancing Women Conference, 2018). If women can see other women coming forward and telling stories of their success this can inspire them to greater participation in the industry. The author had the opportunity to see this through the course of her travels at the University of Maryland, where the MidAtlantic Women in Agriculture host an annual conference and various other events. (MidAtlantic Women in Agriculture, 2018). While these initiatives offer a platform to improve female board representation and female participation in agriculture, further recommendations are dealt with at the end of the report.

Section 3

Women in leadership positions in Irish agriculture: Experiences

The author conducted interviews with a number of leading female figures in the Irish agricultural sector, as well as Tracey Kennedy, Cork GAA Chairperson who deals with a similarly male dominated environment, to discover their views on gender diversity in their own fields, and what can be done to promote it. This section presents the findings from those interviews.

Tara McCarthy – CEO Bord Bia, former CEO Bord Iascaigh Mhara

Tara McCarthy has been the CEO of Bord Bia since early 2017. Prior to this she spent over 20 years working with Bord Bia, including 16 years as a senior manager or director, both in Ireland and abroad, before being appointed CEO of BIM, during which time her interview was conducted (McCann, 2016). “In [her] family [she has] three brothers and one sister. [She] went to an all-girl convent national school and the local community college which in [her] year of circa 80 had five girls!” Her dad was the principal, so from an early age she has been very comfortable in an all-male environment.

As CEO of BIM, McCarthy indicated that she has felt her gender has neither impeded nor been of assistance in career progression. Slight differences were noted in the way she was dealt with in the seafood industry, which McCarthy ascribed to tradition, and faded quickly. She does believe that women are making progress in obtaining senior positions in the agribusiness and posits that this may be down to an increase in role models to aspire to, and an increase in female candidates with the relevant experience and qualifications. BIM’s CEO espoused the belief that gender was not relevant to her career success, but instead credits building a track record and network. She says that: “All the way through, I was brought up to believe that there was no difference between male and female. In fact, I think I was in my twenties before I had even heard of the concept of a ‘glass ceiling’. I have a strong work ethos and a strong ambition. I also have a very supportive husband, as with three young kids he takes a lot of the heavy lifting”. Tara stands on her own feet in the corporate world, but credits her support at home as helping her achieve her success.

Tracey Kennedy – Cork GAA Chairperson

In 2017 Tracey Kennedy, was elected as the first female chairperson of Cork GAA (Shannon, 2017). Like the agricultural industry, this is an overwhelmingly male dominated environment. In discussions with the author she notes that traditionally at a grassroots level in the GAA, just like with agriculture, there are far more women involved, but that at a senior level they have not progressed. Kennedy believes that family commitments in particular have held women back from more senior leadership positions. She believes that to encourage women to seek higher appointments efforts must be made by the incumbents to seek out suitable women and encourage them to progress. They require mentors who can make them “feel valued and not patronised”, who may by necessity, given the current situation, be male.

However, she also notes the requirement, when possible, to have female role models who can speak to potential female candidates about the direct, specific challenges they may face. Kennedy also points towards studies which indicate that women are less eager to apply for a position, unless they feel very well-qualified, something which may hamper men less frequently and to a lesser degree. She believes that women need to be educated on these requirements. This links to her belief that suitable candidates should be selected, encouraged and given mentors to ensure they feel ready and supported to progress to more senior levels.

Fiona Muldoon – CEO FBD & Non-Executive Director Bank of Ireland

Fiona Muldoon as CEO of FBD is one of only three female leaders of companies on the Irish Stock Exchange (Muldoon, 2018). Prior to joining FBD she spent three years at the Central Bank, served as Chief Financial Officer of Canada Life Ireland, and over seventeen at global insurer XL Group, having already qualified as a chartered accountant (Bloomberg, 2017). As head of Ireland's largest agricultural insurer, Muldoon is a key figure in both the agricultural and financial services sectors, both of which are male dominated environment.

The mother of two grew up in the west of Ireland, and credits her husband as being a great support throughout her career and with family life. She also relies on childcare which she considers an 'investment in her career'. Her parents were influential on her, with her father working for Coillte, and her mother following the marriage ban, returning to education to upskill and re-enter the workforce.

Although in a comment article which was published in the Irish Independent, Muldoon notes the focus of many is upon board gender diversity, she believes that the gender balance needs be dealt with first at executive and management levels (Muldoon, 2018). This, Muldoon suggests, will improve the pipeline of talent available for board appointments and remove the issue of no suitable women being available.

In fact, since Muldoon became CEO, the board has increased from one female director to three (FBD, 2018). She believes that the appointment of women based on gender is not enough, that such diversity "will not deepen the talent pool, improve decision-making or further the aims of good governance" in organisations. Instead such diversity must instead be earned through the individuals performance at work (Muldoon, 2018).

Muldoon also references research into financial services conducted by the 30% Club of which she is a member. Approximately 50% of entry-level employees were found to be female, and yet only 13% of CEOs were female, leaving vast amounts of talent unharnessed. Muldoon believes that targets are a start, they offer measurable markers and call for change, but believes more proactive focus is required. Flexible start and finish times were found to be the most valued policies and programmes. Simple changes such as this allow women the flexibility to further balance commitments, whether work, family or activities such as board involvement (Muldoon, 2018).

Siobhán Talbot – Managing Director Glanbia

Siobhán Talbot, a fellow of Chartered Accountants Ireland, has been the group managing director of Glanbia since 2013. Before taking up this position, she has acted as Finance Director and in other roles since joining the group in 1992. Prior to joining Glanbia she worked with PricewaterhouseCoopers in Dublin and Sydney (Glanbia, 2018). She is one of the

foremost business women in Ireland, having recently been named the Irish Times' Business Person of the Year, thanks to her successful spin off of Glanbia's dairy and agribusiness into a joint venture, allowing Glanbia to focus on its nutrition business (Hamilton, 2018). Despite her position of pre-eminence among Irish business women, Talbot tends to shy away from such a role.

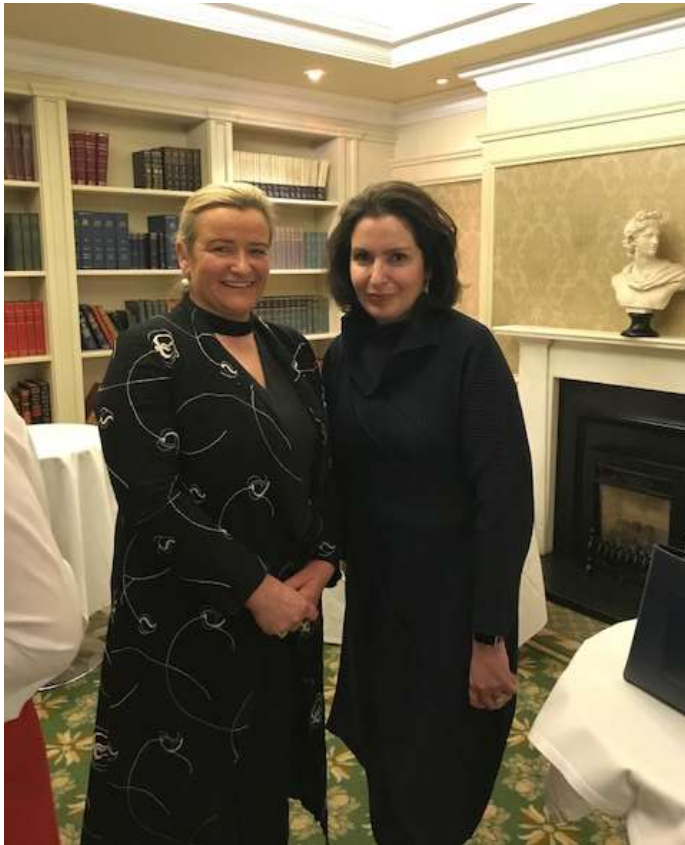
She is dismissive of concepts and ideas such as "the glass ceiling" and gender quotas. Instead, she believes in meritocracy; that ability not gender should secure someone a position. She believes that many women by choice do not pursue the top jobs, and positions on boards. Using her own circumstances as an example, Talbot discusses the difficulty of trying to juggle a career with a family. She suggests support networks are key to helping women. She references her own husband as a support in maintaining a balance between her home and professional lives. Her mother was an inspiration to her, raising Siobhan and her siblings on their family farm, while maintaining her position as a schoolteacher despite the death of Siobhan's father when she was just 15.

Francesca McDonagh – CEO Bank of Ireland

Francesca McDonagh took up the position of Chief Executive of the Bank of Ireland group in October 2017. Before this she had a 20-year career in HSBC spanning a variety of roles including: regional head of banking, group general manager and head of personal financial services in regions across the world. She is also a graduate of the University of Oxford (Bank of Ireland, 2018). During her time in HSBC, McDonagh was involved in a project to ensure a 50 / 50 split in senior management. This is a target she has brought to Bank of Ireland and aims to see introduced.

She discussed the fact that technology is rapidly advancing and cited the need to move with the times. She believes that in the agricultural sector that this presents an opportunity for women. As the need for manual labour dwindles, the barriers there are to female participation in all areas of the farming sector diminish.

Figure 4: Maire McCarthy and Francesca McDonagh, Cork. February 2018.



There were a number of findings coming from discussions with Irish women in leadership positions. Some believed that quotas are unnecessary and do not promote those with the best talents, while others held the opposing view.

Suggestions to improve the level of women membership on boards included mentoring, educating candidates on requirements, female role models, flexibility changes and improving the situation at executive level to improve the talent pool.

The following section explores the international context by examining farming organisations in New Zealand, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom along with women in leadership roles in each of these organisations.

Section 4

Women in leadership positions in agriculture; international interview findings.

This section examines the state of gender diversity in other countries through the lens of women in each country who hold key positions of leadership within agriculture, and their views on gender diversity within their own organisations, through a combination of first hand interviews and secondary research.

Fonterra – New Zealand

Fonterra is by a large margin New Zealand's largest co-op, with annual revenue of over NZ\$19bn (€11bn), making up 25% of New Zealand's exports and employing 22,000 people around the world (Cooperative Business New Zealand, 2017). It is a global dairy nutrition company which operates on a global scale (Fonterra, 2018a).

To qualify to be elected a director by shareholders, they must be either the shareholder of a sole trader, or if the shareholder is a company or partnership, they must be a shareholder or partner of that entity (Fonterra, 2016).

In New Zealand, it has becoming increasingly common for young farmers to set up a company to be the co-operative shareholder (Morrell, 2018). Both this structure and that of a partnership allow greater flexibility for women to run for board positions versus countries where only a single farm owner may run for a board position

Fonterra is making efforts to empower women, a positive step on the road to improving gender diversity, by taking part in initiatives such as those run by Women's Empowerment Principles New Zealand, with a recent event focussing on combating sexual harassment (Fonterra, 2018b).

Their workforce is made up of approximately 30% women, while they focus on diversity and inclusion. Dairy Women's Network encourage females to get involved in leadership roles in New Zealand dairy, while Fonterra also sponsor the Dairy Woman of the Year award (Singh, 2018).

Donna Smit – Fonterra Board

Donna Smit is one of two women on Fonterra's 11-person co-operative board. A chartered accountant with 24 years' experience in a kiwifruit co-operative, she is also in her own words, a "hands on farmer" while she also says: "I also do the accounting work for all our seven farms and three kiwifruit orchards, I have four adult children and a gorgeous husband who believes in me, and actually although he puts up with a lot, is a tower of strength".

She is a strong believer in the collective strength of co-operatives and given her experience she believed a governance role was a natural progression and in 2009/2010 completed the Fonterra Governance Development Programme.

Smit is of the belief that gender should not matter when selecting a director; that the intellect, skills, experience and ability to be a director are what matters, but she also says, "culture is very important to have a high functioning board". However, from her own research she is

aware that boards with a higher percentage of females are more likely to be successful. She posits that women may have an evolutionary advantage that makes them better at risk management and assessment.

As more women in New Zealand are completing university degrees than men, it is essential that more women are promoted to ensure that the most talented and qualified individuals are promoted to positions of leadership. The language at board meetings also improves with female board representation, according to Smit.

To improve the gender balance, Smit believes men need to advocate for it, and women must ensure they do not alienate men. Smit says: “My aim is to be an effective board member without being overly tough like a lot of women who have had to break the glass ceiling, I want to be myself and not a tough, steely street fighter!”, while she tries to demonstrate governance best practice and to lead by example.

FrieslandCampina – Netherlands

FrieslandCampina is a co-operative owned business which, with revenue of €12.1bn, claims to be one of the world’s largest dairy companies. It is owned by farmers across the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium. FrieslandCampina produces and sells dairy-based consumer products, ingredients, and half-finished products across the world, including cheese, butter, cream and nutrition products (FrieslandCampina, 2018a).

It is governed by a board of 13 members, nine of whom are farmers and also make up the board of the owner co-operative and four additional external members. This tally currently includes two female board members (FrieslandCampina, 2018b).

The company believes that diversity allows them to make better “business decisions and deliver more elaborate response to [their] consumers and community.”

They also say that: “Improving gender diversity is priority for the company. For this reason, the company has put forward various policies and initiatives including increasing the percentage of women in leadership position and the general workforce, and providing support for nursing mothers through increased paid maternity leave days and conducive nursing rooms while at work” (FrieslandCampina, 2017).

Figure 5: Maire McCarthy, Netherland. September 2017.



Angelique Huijben-Pijnenburg – FrieslandCampina

Angelique Huijben-Pijnenburg was appointed as the first female board member of FrieslandCampina, in 2010. She says that they strive to reflect the diversity of the co-operatives Member Council, where 25 out of 210 members are women, although they aim for a 30% female base.

In obtaining her position, Angelique benefited from her tertiary level agricultural education, experience working in an agricultural organisation and over 20 years running a farm in partnership with her husband. However, she was not a member of the co-operative's Member Council and struggled to be elected from outside this group.

She believes that to encourage female participation, activities must be coordinated to make the co-operative more accessible to women and advises starting with regional branches and building from the ground upwards. She stressed the need for female candidates of quality in board participation, not merely token representation.

National Farmers' Union – UK

The National Farmers' Union is the largest organisation in England and Wales representing farmers and growers with over 55,000 members. They are an employers' union who represent their members on a national level and conduct campaigns such as "Back British Farming" to build support for farmers and encourage the purchase of farming produce among the public (NFU, 2018a).

Minette Batters – National Farmers' Union President

Minette Batters has been President of the NFU since February 2018, having previously served as Deputy President and in other positions. She is the first female to hold the position.

She runs a diversified and mixed farm business in Wiltshire, and has founded campaigning initiatives 'Ladies in Beef' and the 'Great British Beef Week' (NFU, 2018b). Although she was raised on the farm, her father did not want her to take over and she had to struggle to convince the landlords to lease to her (Lee, 2018).

Barclays and Farmers Weekly conducted a survey of over 2000 respondents' views on women in agriculture in which 90% of people had an optimistic outlook on the role of women in agriculture (discussed further in Section 2).

Commenting on this, Batters said that many more women are entering the industry based on numbers in agricultural colleges and universities. She credits science and retailing as alternative routes into the industry without owning land (McEntyre, Oliver; Relf, Tim, 2014).

She believes that although the role of women has changed little in agriculture in the UK, society is much more encouraging of female workers now, which has led to an increased "number of women on their own at farming meetings and on industry boards" (McEntyre, Oliver; Relf, Tim, 2014).

She also lists some of the recent high profile and high-level positions gained by women such as Helen Woolley, CLA director general, Christine Tacon, the Groceries Code Adjudicator, and Caroline Drummond, LEAF's Chief Executive, who she credits with achieving their positions not through gender, but through their ability (McEntyre, Oliver; Relf, Tim, 2014).

Summary of Findings

This section has revealed a number of findings which are relevant in an Irish context. Both Fonterra and FrieslandCampina are making conscious efforts to improve their gender relations whether at a business or board level. The Dutch co-operative aims to have their board membership be representative of their base membership.

If Irish co-operatives were to adopt this approach, they would be forced to increase their female board membership drastically. Angelique makes the point that men, being the incumbents on boards of directors and other leadership positions must advocate for change. In the UK, the number of women entering the agricultural sector through routes such as science and retail also offers a possible pipeline of board candidates who need not be farmers. In both New Zealand and the United Kingdom female graduates in agriculture currently outnumber males.

In the following section, findings from interviews with board members in Irish dairy co-operatives are explored.

Section 5

Existing board members in dairy co-ops; interview findings

In this section, interviews conducted with various male and female Irish dairy co-operative board members are discussed, while an interview with a Dutch dairy co-operative director is also discussed. Female interviewees were questioned on their inspiration to apply for their position on their co-op's board, their enjoyment of the position, and the benefits of female and male participation on their board. Male interviewees were asked their opinions on gender diversity on co-operative boards.

Angela O'Donovan - Barryroe Co-op

Angela, runs a piggery along with her husband, and is a director on the Board of Barryroe Co-op. Prior to working full time in the agricultural sector, Angela worked in the insurance industry and has utilised her knowledge in her current role as a Board member. She wished to achieve the best possible return for their produce, while her husband was too busy with the running of the farm, leading to her applying for the position, with a view to influencing the return to shareholders.

Angela believes that she has learned a great deal from her position on the Board: she has learned about the co-op's operations, the importance of understanding and analysing audited accounts, she has attended training days around governance and finance. This has in turn assisted her in dealing with the financials of her own farm.

Angela discussed that the future of the co-operative requires diversity, in both gender and age. Additionally; a full time farmer may not have the time to commit to a Board position, making the participation of a farmer's wife, with a less hands on farm role, more practical.

Eileen Buckley - Boherbue Co-op

Eileen has been actively milking and running her dairy farm for the past ten years. She was approached three years ago to join the Board as there was only one other female Board member at the time. The Board recognised the importance of female participation.

Despite initially refusing, Eileen agreed when approached by another Board member. She has further experience of the co-operative having worked in a creamery before her time as a farmer.

Eileen has found that the Board allows members to discuss issues in relation to their own situation and that many shared problems exist. She enjoys her position and finds it of benefit on her own farm.

Eileen believes the key value in maintaining a gender balanced board is to foster and maintain a variety of ideas, opinions and viewpoints. She notes that when discussing Boherbue Co-op's Supervalu retail store, Eileen and her fellow female Board member are often questioned because many household purchases are made by women. She believes that there are areas in which one gender out performs the other and it is important to incorporate both views.

When asked how to get more women involved, Eileen notes that it can be difficult to find new Board members, male or female, and believes that it is necessary for incumbent members to

appeal to suitable candidates. She highlights the advantage of having a say in the price of milk, or cost of inputs as a means to encourage female members.

Anne Keohane - Bandon Co-op

Anne Keohane began farming in her own right when she left school having inherited her dairy farm at a young age. From the outset of her farming career she attended co-operative information meetings, leading her to believe she had something to offer the board.

She felt this would be an extension of her farm business, and would allow her to influence the price of milk and the cost of inputs. She saw it as a method to ensure management worked for the shareholders and not merely for bonuses.

Anne noted that she found great satisfaction through her work on the Board, when they achieved something for the shareholders. She believes that it is important to have gender balance for a Board to function to its best ability and that the different perspectives of men and women contribute to this.

Figure 6: Maire McCarthy and Anne Keohane, England. October 2016.



Donal Tobin - Former Chairman of Lisavaird Co-op and former Chairman of Carbery Group

Donal mentioned that over the course of 15 years on the Board of Lissavaird Co-op he has worked with three different female Board members. He believes that the reason there have not been more is due to historic and cultural reasons, with the perception that agriculture is a male dominated industry. He does not see it as a shareholder issue, noting that many shares are registered in both names or husbands and wives have separate holdings.

Donal noted that gender diversity brings a “new dynamic to Board decision making process”. To foster gender balance, he believes a 30% quota is necessary, to force the hand of co-operative boards. He references the large number of women involved in farm paperwork with fulltime jobs who can offer experience from this exposure to another career, and notes they offer a different insight into consumer needs.

TJ Sullivan - Chairman Drinagh Co-op and Vice Chairperson Carbery Group

TJ believes in gender balance as a means to enable co-ops to progress as women offer a different style of problem-solving to men. They also help to defuse “testosterone-fuelled politics”. From discussions with members of other Boards which contain women, he has heard that the atmosphere is usually better on the Board, due to gender diversity.

However, he believes that female members cannot be included on Boards merely because of their gender. A productive member who contributes to meetings is more beneficial than a poor contributor regardless of their gender, in Sullivan’s opinion.

Peter Fleming - Chairman of Barryroe Co-op and Chairman of Carbery Group

Peter notes and lists the number of women in senior executive positions in agriculture in Ireland, several of whom were discussed in Section 3, but believes there is an anomaly with female participation on dairy co-operative Boards.

He believes this may be due to perception; perception that agriculture is a male dominated industry and that Boards should reflect that, and the perception that they may not have the day to day farming knowledge to function on the Board.

However, Fleming believes this is a fallacy: Board discussions and decisions are at a much higher level, pricing, human resources, managing margin, external investment performance and so on”. He believes that the fact many farmers’ wives work off farm means that they have a different skillset which could be of great benefit to the co-operative and the Board.

Fleming appears to see the issue as being one of misinformation. He suggests holding presentations to educate potential female Board members on what is involved with Board membership, what is required, and the benefits it entails.

He sees milk quality awards and similar events as opportunities to hold these. In addition, diversity should not be restricted to gender alone, Fleming also argues that a greater effort

should be made to include younger members of both genders to add more diverse viewpoints.

Guus Mensink – DOC Kaas (Netherlands Co-op)

Guus is a dairy farmer and is director of DOC Kaas, a Dutch Co-operative who have gone into partnership with German Co-op, DMV. Guus advises that there is one female Board member and five male Board members in their co-operative.

The German partner co-operative does not have any female Board member; however, at management level within the co-operative one in eight are female. He acknowledges that there is not a huge level of female participation but at least there is some and it is going in the right direction.

There are conscious efforts being made at Board level and within the co-operative committees to actively encourage women to get involved.

Figure 7: Marije Kleever and Maire McCarthy, Netherlands. October 2016.



Summary of Findings

Having examined the findings from the various interviews, trends begin to emerge. It seems that almost all interviewees espouse the benefits of female participation at Board level. A key issue appears to be one of misinformation and misconception of potential female candidates, who wrongly believe that they are unqualified and do not see the benefits to joining a co-operative Board.

The solution appears to be to attempt to educate women, on what is involved, and required at Board level, and the benefits. This can be done through female networking events, Macra na Feirme events, Teagasc workshops, and the FBD Women and Agriculture Conference.

Other possible venues could include events run by the National Dairy Council such as their regional Health and Wellbeing events which are targeted at a female audience with an agricultural background. Two or three current Board members (ideally female) from the area could offer an overview of Board membership, discuss the benefits and field questions from interested listeners.

If such initiatives proved even moderately successful, they would increase the level of women at Board level, in turn creating additional role models, leading to additional change in turn.

Conclusions

In key Irish agricultural organisation including Glanbia PLC, Bord Bia, NDC, FBD and Ornuia there has been strong female representation in executive positions in recent years. Despite this, there is a lack of female representation on Irish Dairy Co-operative Boards (less than 3% in 2018). This number has not increased in recent years. The figure neither reflects the number of women involved in the wider agricultural sector in any capacity, nor even the smaller number of female farmers.

From an international point of view, female representation on dairy co-operative boards in the UK, Netherlands and New Zealand is higher than in Ireland, but remains low. These countries have started to successfully implement policies that encourage female representation on their dairy co-operative boards, from which Ireland can gain useful insights.

Clearly Irish dairy co-operative boards would benefit from the introduction of policies that promote gender balance and diversity. While efforts have been made to increase and promote the role of women in agriculture, more must be done in a wider sense, and particularly to increase the number of women who take up positions on the Boards of dairy cooperatives.

From discussions with some of these women in senior executive positions along with the interviews with existing male and female board members it is clear there is a lack of information among potential female dairy co-operative Board members. They do not understand the requirements, the Board activities or the benefits of membership inhibiting their involvement.

These author's interviews have shown that potential candidates should be educated on these points, as well as receiving mentoring, and increasing the number of female role models and trailblazers. Some interviewees hoped that as the level of prominent female executives increases, that this will trickle down to Board membership over the coming years. There were mixed views on the value of quotas with many believing they will force women to be promoted and appointed to Board and executive positions while some thought that it would lead to the promotion of people who are not best suited for a given role.

Recommendations

1. ICOS and Co-operative boards need to address the issue of gender imbalance to maximise profit for shareholders and to better reflect their shareholder base by identifying and implementing policies that will effectively promote female representation on boards.
2. Each co-operative Board could set up a subcommittee to address the issue of gender imbalance on its Board.
3. Co-operatives should consider introducing gender quotas. While this runs the risk of promoting candidates who are not best suited to the role, it seems likely that the most qualified female candidates should be able to reach a 30% quota and improve, not

impair the quality of Board members. They should also consider lack of diversity across a range of criteria including age, gender, cultural background, as it is important to reflect the member base of the co-operative as FrieslandCampina strive to do.

4. It is necessary for efforts to be made to inform women what is involved and required from dairy co-operative Board membership and the benefits that are involved. This could be done at events such as the FBD Women and Agriculture Conference, Teagasc workshops, and events run by Macra na Feirme or the National Dairy Council. This activity could be coordinated by ICOS, a government agency, or another independent organisation.
5. It is also necessary for the Irish Government to enforce change through policy, legislation and implementation. Funding is available through EU initiatives e.g. local enterprise board setting up women in business training.
6. They should also commission a report with the depth and scope of the Scottish Government's Women in Farming and the Agriculture Sector report to examine the role of women in the Irish agricultural sector.

Figure 8: 2018 Board Members of Bandon Co-op with the current chairman of the Board of Bord Bia Dan McSweeney & Mrs. McSweeney, 2018.



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