

TITLE The Journey from Farmer's Wife to Small Business Owner

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the experiences of women providers of commercial hospitality on working farms in North East England and more specifically their start up motives. An interpretative approach was undertaken to understand the lived experiences of 16 women providing accommodation on their family farm. Thematic analysis was used to elicit the key themes which emerged from personal narratives provided by the women exploring their motives for engaging in farm hospitality and the challenges faced during their journey. Findings from the research suggest complex motives for women providers of commercial hospitality on farms, with a mixture of personal, economic, family and farm business reasons for starting the business. This is relevant for policy makers through identification and understanding of the challenges and barriers experienced by women providers of rural commercial hospitality and the value to them of formal and informal networks of support and guidance during that journey.

KEY WORDS: Farm tourism, commercial hospitality, start-up motives, North East England.

Introduction

Many rural economies in recent years have experienced increasing unemployment and declining incomes from traditional farm-based industries (Capriello and Rotherham, 2008) and tourism in many rural areas has been promoted to counterbalance rural social and economic problems. According to Sharpley (2002), within rural areas, tourism is considered an effective catalyst for socio-economic development and regeneration and within rural regions, tourism is now seen as a natural part of the socio-economic fabric, juxtaposed with agriculture (Fleisher and Tchetchik, 2005). In Western societies, rural areas 'have become increasingly multifunctional' (Markantoni, Strijker and Koster, 2014:724) and increasingly used for leisure and other types of economic activities (Blekesaune, Haugen and Villa, 2010).

Tourism in rural areas provides many opportunities for the development of small business and, hence, tourism may appeal to farm families diversifying from their traditional business. Related research within this context, has examined motives for agritourism entrepreneurship (Nickerson, Black and McCool, 2001; McGehee and Kim, 2004; Haugen and Vik, 2008), from both the perspective of the farmer (Barbieri, 2010), and farm women (Caballe, 1999;

Anthopoulou, 2010). With McGehee, Kim and Jennings, (2007) finding farm women have a higher but not dissimilar motives from men for agritourism development, but women viewing the role of hosting as providing satisfaction and economic independence (Sharpley and Vass, 2006). The understanding of the motives for establishing farm tourism can be an important element in the provision of the farm tourism 'product' particularly within rural areas and issues such as sustainability of the business (Tzschentke, Kirk and Lynch, 2008) and the quality of the rural product and 'experience' (Albacete-Saez et al., 2006) have been recognised. As noted by Markantoni et al., (2014) the motives for farm tourism start up can reveal if the decision to diversify is a reaction to economic circumstances or from a more positive perspective 'an internal drive' to embark upon a new enterprise.

Women and Farm Tourism

The purpose of this study is to focus upon the women's role in the provision of commercial farm hospitality. Moore (1996) as cited in Warren-Smith and Jackson (2002) stated that women historically have played a substantial role within farming economies. Research by Gasson and Winter (1992) examined the means by which the division of labour in farm households was structured by gender, with "an unequal division of labour in the sphere of farm production...matched by women's greater responsibility in the domestic sphere" (1992:387).

Diversification would appear to provide 'new opportunities for farm women to establish independent economic roles within the farm business (Gasson and Winter, 1992: 388). The farmer's wife role has traditionally ranged from the selling of farm produce to supplementing income with Bed and Breakfast accommodating and paying guests.

Declining rural economies and difficulties of finding suitable women employment, together with issues of transport access and child care in rural regions, have coincided with this growth in the service sector which in turn has provided opportunities for women to create a new role for themselves within rural economies. There is a wealth of literature which focuses upon women creating wealth through entrepreneurship in rural areas (Warren-Smith, 2004), women and rural tourist trade (Velasco, 1999), rural women and local food production (Anthopoulou, 2010), women entrepreneurship in tourism and hospitality (Morrison, 2006) and gender and rurality (Bryant and Pini, 2009). Di Domenico (2008:317) argue that reconciling work responsibilities with family life may also prove a double edged sword, providing social and financial independence for women but bringing the commercial into the home environment. Within the home those involved in the commercial aspect 'must

negotiate the dual processes of household production and consumption, involving overlapping paid and unpaid work'. As discussed by Getz, Carlson & Morrison (2004) in some cultures, the nature of hospitality is perceived to be merely an extension of housework and therefore only females participate in 'women's work'.

In many countries, farm tourism is run by women (Garcia-Ramon et al., 1995); Sharpley and Vass, 2006; Jennings and Stehlik, 2009). Further research undertaken within this area has examined a range of issues, exploring farm tourism and gender perspectives in other parts of Europe; Spain (Caballe, 1999; Garcia-Ramón et al., 1995) Cyprus and diversification (Sharpley, 2002), Norway (Bjorkhaug & Blekesaune, 2008); farm diversification and social identity (Brandth & Haugen, 2010); motivation & farm tourism diversification (Nickerson, Black and McCool, 2001; McGehee & Kim, 2004; McGehee, Kim & Jennings, 2007); entrepreneurs motivation and hospitality (Getz and Carlsen, 2000; Lynch, 1998; Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007).

Geographical Setting: North East England

In 2011, the Government announced as part of the Rural Economy Growth Review, that it would support the promotion and development of rural tourism in England through a £25 million package of measures, part of which provided for investment by DEFRA in a new sustainable rural tourism initiative in North East England (DEFRA, March 2012).

Tourism was worth £3.9 billion to the North East regional economy in 2007, with the tourism industry, according to the North East Regional Committee (2010), built around 7,300 mostly small or medium sized businesses. As stated by the Regional Committee, tourism has presented itself as an opportunity as other sectors have contracted, with rural diversification specifically defined as; "the trend to convert farm buildings to accommodation, retail and food service continues [within the north east rural economy]" (2010; 45). According to Visit England (2012), farm accommodation makes up approximately 3% of total accommodation stock across the North East region (compared to 34% Bed & Breakfast, 29% hotels, 22% guest houses, 1% country house, 5% Inn, 3% other)(Visit Britain, 2012).

Statistics provided by DEFRA state that approximately 25% of farms within the North East Region were carrying out diversified activities in 2010, with tourism the second highest activity percentage (34%) after contracting and haulage (48%), (DEFRA, 2010). Research undertaken by the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University on rural businesses in the North East of England, found that for many rural businesses, the main motivation for starting the business was the need to generate a main or secondary income, with

'pluriactivity' and diversification amongst rural business owners in North East England high (Atterton and Affleck, 2010).

With the exception of Sharpley and Vass's paper, an attitudinal study of farming, tourism and diversification in North-eastern England, (Sharpley and Vass, 2006), little research has been conducted in Northern England on the attitudes and motives of those involved in farm diversification, and the implications of starting a second business on a family farm. More qualitative research has been undertaken within the broader context of owners of small tourism firms and the implications of entrepreneurship in the rural Northumbrian economy, by Bosworth and Farrell, (2011), but formed part of a study on rural tourism microbusinesses, not specifically farm tourism accommodation providers. The rural economy at the broader level has been well researched (Phillipson, Gorton, Lashewski, 2006), but the geographical region of the North of England remains relatively unexplored with regards the tourism and hospitality literature.

Motives and Farm Tourism

Within the existing literature examining farm diversification, an area which has received considerable attention is the exploration of motives behind farm diversification (Nickerson, Black and McCool, 2001; Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007; Schuckert, Peters and Fessler, 2008) and the linkage between motives and entrepreneurial behaviour (Alos et al., 2003; Vik and McElwee, 2011). A number of authors have also linked farm diversification to entrepreneurial activity in relation to the farmer (Morgan et al., 2010; Vesala and Vesala, 2010; Haugen and Vik, 2008; Vesala et al., 2007; Phelan and Sharpley, 2010) and a growing volume of literature emerging linking diversification as a livelihood strategy for farmers (Hildenbrand and Hennon, 2008, Vesala and Vesala, 2010, Morgan et al., 2010; Vik and McElwee, 2011), with authors recently engaging in discussion regarding the concept of entrepreneurship in agriculture and farmers' skills (Morgan et al., 2010;) and the development and support of farmers' entrepreneurial skills (Vik and McElwee, 2011).

Authors have found a range of motives in evidence and, as noted by Barbieri, (2010:1), previous research examining farmers motivation for agritourism enterprises suggests " a complex set of personal and economic goals drive the creation and maintenance of agritourism and other on-farm diversification ventures". For example, Nickerson, Black and McCool (2001), in their examination of North American farm/ ranch diversification, outlined eleven motivations for diversification; fluctuations in agricultural income, employment for family members, additional income, loss of government agricultural programs, meeting a

need in the recreation market, tax incentives, companionship with guests, interest or hobby, better use of farm resources, success of other farm businesses and commitment to educating the consumer.

The situation appears to be similar in other geographic locations as North America, with a number of motives for diversification being cited. For example, a study by Sharpley and Vass (2006) of farmstays in the North East of England found that 60% of respondents when asked the principal reason for diversification, had identified extra income as the main reason, with 62% of respondents surveyed, citing tourism as offering the best opportunity for generating extra income (Sharpley and Vass, 2006). Getz and Carlsen (2000) in their study in Western Australia, found more socially based reasons for family farm tourism development, together with family-related goals. Another study in Australia by Ollenburg and Buckley (2007) using both quantitative and qualitative data collection for farm tourism operators finding neither income nor social motivations were uniformly dominant, with different landowners having different motives and many individual operators having multiple motives. As concluded by Ollenburg and Buckley (2007:444) “different motivations are dominant for different types of farm landholders and at different stages in farm, family and business cycle”, with social motivations marginally more important than economic motivations.

A large proportion of the research within the existing literature has focused on understanding the motive of the ‘farmer’ in diversifying from the main farm business but there is growing research focusing upon the motives of women involved in farm tourism. McGhee, Kim and Jennings (2007) found that women had higher motives for agritourism business start up than men, and gained personal satisfaction and improved status from the agritourism business. Economic, social and personal motives were found to be important for women working in farm tourism in Spain,(Caballe, 1999) and further Spanish studies undertaken by Garcia-Ramon et al., (1995) and Velasco, (1999) discovered women’s motives for farm tourism businesses, were initiated by childcare demands and as a result of the limited employment opportunities available to the rural women.

Women and Farm Tourism

Tourism is not a new activity on farms, and the provision of hospitality for guests has been seen as an element of rural hospitality, hosting guests from the city taking part in recreation and holidays. Traditionally it may not have been seen as a ‘business’ and the commercial aspect has been instigated more recently, together with ‘increased demands on the hosting

role' (Brandth & Haugen, 2010:1). As observed by Nilsson (2002: 11) "farm tourism is also distinguished by its very distinct gender focus, being normally run by the farm wife". However Brandth and Haugen (2010: 427) comment that "there has been relatively little research on the gendered consequences of farm tourism". As pointed out by Bouquet (1982), the women's role in agritourism mirrors the domestic role, with a transformation of women's role from mainly working within agriculture to mainly working within the domestic environment. "Women's contemporary domestic labour on the farm is of two sorts: on behalf of the family (reproductive labour) and for tourists (productive labour) accommodation within the house" (Bouquet, 1982: 227).

The motives for taking guests into your own home on a commercial basis may be complex but Lynch (1998) identified various reasons, from women working at home feeling isolated, to financial motivations, to self-fulfilment and achieving independence. Stringer (1981) outlines the importance of understanding such motivations as they will be brought by the host into any interaction with the guest and ultimately impact upon the guest's 'experience' of rural hospitality. The nature of hospitality businesses in farm tourism often embodies direct host-guest interactions in the farm / family home or property. These interactions are often vital in terms of the customer experience and satisfaction, and can have subsequent impacts with regard to destination development (Getz & Carlsen, 2000) and the long term viability of the rural business.

Nilsson (2002: 12) examines the difference between genders in terms of the perception of the farm tourism enterprise, observing that "What is happening in a farm tourism enterprise (reception of tourists, serving meals, offering excursions, and activities) is not perceived in the same way by husband and wife" If motives differ between roles, so too will there be differences in the perception of resulting impacts on their positions. Within their study, Garcia-Ramon et al., (1995) concluded that the tourist enterprise may maintain or reinforce the traditional division of work by gender as women integrate the tourist work into their everyday domestic role, while "many studies have shown the similarity between women's work in farming and farm tourism" (Brandth and Haugen, 2010:427). Moreover, a study conducted by Harris, McIntosh and Lewis (2007:400) concluded that, "the personal life stage of mature women was potentially found to be a strong motivator for embarking on the establishment and operation of a commercial home enterprise".

As discussed by Lynch & MacWhannell (2000:106) "it does seem that the providers of commercialized hospitality within the private home are overwhelmingly female". Without the intention of reinforcing gender differences, hosting in the home is still perceived as a

gendered occupation, and many host-guest relationships are overlain by social relations of gender (Aitchison, 1999). Research has been undertaken on female-based tourism in Spain (Garcia-Ramon et al., 1995; Caballe, 1999; Velasco, 1999). These studies discovered that all such businesses were initiated and operated by women, mostly married with children still at home. According to the research many Spanish women in this situation had limited job opportunities and frequently poor accessibility. The main advantage of farm tourism work is flexibility, meaning they could also undertake their domestic role or allocate the farm tourism role to others when the farm work demanded more of their time (Caballe 1999). The study undertaken in Spain by Caballe (1999) started from the premise that tourism activities reflect gender relations within a social context and during preliminary field work found 'that all farm tourism activities were managed by women' (1999:245). This research was undertaken in rural Spain and earlier studies (Garcia-Ramon and Canoves, 1988) concluded that the survival of family-based agriculture in Spain relied upon the active participation of women, in the 'production' work and also domestic work, both of which clearly connected to aspects of farm tourism.

Danes (1998), cited in Getz, Carlson & Morrison (2004), concluded that farm tourism can be motivated by increased status on the part of rural women. McGibbon (2000), in a detailed study of family-operated hotels in St Anton, Austria found most were run by women and, for them the distinction between public and private space (employment and housework) was unclear. From Caballe's (1999) research, women explained their motivation to work in farm tourism in terms of the economic, social and personal motivations. For Jennings and Stehlik (1999) research (cited in Getz, Carlson & Morrison, 2004) interviewing women involved in farm tourism in Queensland determined the main motivation for the women was to earn extra income for families, with some also enjoyed the socialising aspect of the work, and 'feeling more worthwhile' (2004:1).

Data Collection and Methodology

This research forms part of a broader doctoral study to investigate the experiences of women hosts providing commercial hospitality on working farms in North East England and the paper has focused upon the start up motives for the women participants. In terms of research methodology, the focus was to undertake qualitative research, "that locates the observer in the world... [and allows the researcher to] study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them"(Denzin and Lincoln, 2003:3). Conducting qualitative interviewing thus allowing people to 'share their experiences and understandings' (King and Horrocks, 2010:11).

The research has been situated within the North East of England, with working farms offering Bed and Breakfast accommodation and self-catering properties, forming the basis for the sample. The Farm Stay UK website provided the basis for the initial participant selection, with working farms listed, offering Bed & Breakfast or providing self-catering properties in the North East England. In total sixteen women providers of home-based commercial hospitality on farms have been interviewed 'in-depth' to gain insight into their motives for diversification, and the journey they have taken with the challenges and barriers they have faced throughout the process.

In the context of this study the term motives has been used, the primary focus of which is the motives which have instigated diversification into providing commercial hospitality on the family farm by the women business owners. For the women, many actively participate in day to day or seasonal farm work, some are partners in the farm business, others have little involvement with the farm itself, but all have numerous roles and responsibilities within the family, the farm and the hospitality business. The motives have been explored also within the broader agricultural economic context of the farming industry and from a personal perspective of the women in relation to the farm and their personal reasons for starting the hospitality business.

The researcher adopted a social constructionist approach and interpretive stance, "to understand the subjective nature of the 'lived experience' from the perspective of those who experience it, by exploring the meanings and explanations that individuals attribute to their experiences" (Cope, 2005:168). Within tourism, qualitative research can offer the potential for understanding the 'human dimensions within society', added relevance within tourism as it includes social and cultural implications (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004:4). The methods of data gathering involved in-depth interviews, conversational in style to elicit personal narratives of respondents; with a focus seeking "to describe specific situations and action sequences in the world of the interviewee" (Kvale, 1983:176).

Hosts were asked open-ended questions relating to the establishment of the hospitality enterprise, their motives, experience of operating the commercial home, challenges, benefits, management of private /public zones within the home, work life balance and intentions for the future. The interviews were tape-recorded, enabling ease of conversation and allowing accurate recording of the respondent's narrative. Interviews lasted between 1 hour and 2 ½ hours, with often additional time being spent in a guided tour of the home.

Summary - Motives

The focus of this paper has been to explore the motives of women providers of commercial hospitality on the working family farm, and it is quite difficult to separate the motives for the women from that of that of the farm and the farm family. Many of the respondents are partners in the farm and actively engaged in the day to day management of the farm itself, 2 out of 16 of the study participants undertaking sole responsibility for the farm due to personal circumstances.

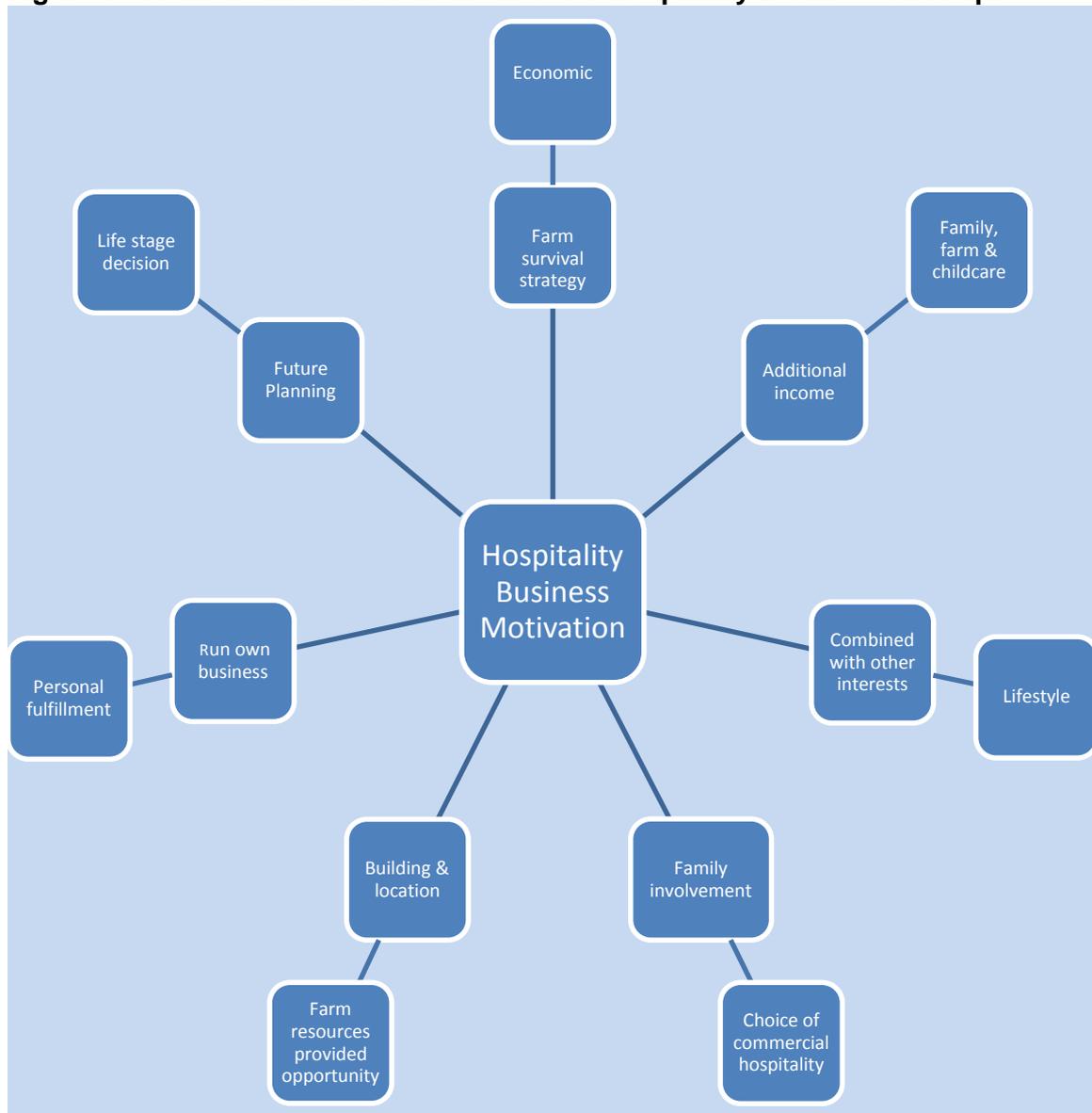
Within this study, the women participants described a number of motives for starting their hospitality business with personal and family circumstances often combined with an economic motive, as illustrated by Barbara, (providing Bed & Breakfast on a 2nd generation family farm for 20 yrs.), "I'd had my second child ...but couldn't get childcare...I could stay at home and look after the children and have some form of income". For other participants the additional income supported the existing family lifestyle, the main income from the farm business, but supplementary income needed for school fees, or holidays, clothes and 'treats'. The availability of suitable farm resources or available funding to improve the existing farm buildings by providing an alternative use also provided a motive for a number of the women participants.

Insecurity in the farming environment was highlighted by many of the women participants, and the increasing vulnerability of the farm business has placed for many of the women a greater reliance on developing and extending the original hospitality business. For Anne (24 yrs. providing Bed & Breakfast on 3rd generation farm), income from an additional business was needed to provide a 'safety' net for the farm, with fluctuations in price and living off a constant overdraft due to the nature of farming. A number of the respondents mentioned a motive of 'additional income', with the farm the primary income provider but the need for some means of economic support due to the vulnerability of the farming industry. The need to ensure survival of the family farm was also described, which supports existing research within the literature, of the need to ensure family succession of the farm business, with many of the participants living on 3rd or 4th generation family farms or tenancies.

From the analysis of the participants' motives for starting their hospitality business, a spider diagram, **Figure 1**, has been constructed. This illustrates the primary and secondary motives as described by the women participants in the study. The first radial of boxes illustrates the main motives provided by the women respondents: farm survival, additional income, business combined with other interests, family involvement, building resources, to run a

business and future planning. The second radial provides the secondary motive and further explanation linking with the primary motive. The weighting or value placed upon the primary motives did vary with each respondent, with many describing a combination of reasons for establishing the hospitality business. This illustrates that for the women it was often a series of interlinking factors that combined to provide the initiative to diversify from farming. There were also linkages between the boxes for individual respondents i.e. without suitable building resources and a desire to run their own business, or provide childcare for young children, alternative employment off farm may have met the needs for additional income, so it is not possible to generalise on a set of motives for diversifying into hospitality as lifecycle, opportunity, personal and family priorities also contributed.

Figure 1 - Framework to illustrate Motives for Hospitality Business start up.



The women participants have started their hospitality business often as part of a farm family survival strategy. For some this may have coincided with a desire to become self-employed but for others it appears to have been a choice based upon the needs of the family, the farm and the availability of suitable resources in terms of the farmhouse or outbuildings. Two of the participants' main motive was primarily economic with childcare secondary (as opposed to the majority of women who listed children first, income second). The financial aspect for the majority was implied as somewhat incidental in merely providing for holiday, clothing additional extras, and was mentioned as 'pocket money' or 'pin money' by some. This supports the current literature focusing on entrepreneurial behaviour within farm diversification, (Barbieri and Mahoney, 2009; McGehee and Kim, 2004; Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007) "that a complex set of economic...and internal goals drive the development of enterprises within the farm business" (Barbieri, 2010: 4). Some attention within the literature has been focused on the non-economic benefits, the personal, family and social benefits (Sharpley and Vass, 2006; Nickerson et al., 2001), however as noted by Tew and Barbieri, "there is a lack of research on the role of agritourism in providing non-economic benefits to the farm household" (2012:217).

Conclusion

The research findings extend the current literature examining the motives for farm tourism diversification from the perspective of the women involved in family farming. Sharpley and Phelan (2010) comment that the literature on motivation has grown over recent years and previous studies have primarily explored the farmer's motives for farm diversification. The findings from this study contribute to a fuller understanding of the women involved in farm tourism diversification and the journey that they take, often hand in hand with their role within the farm business and balancing childcare and family responsibilities. Many of the women interviewed did not perceive themselves as 'business women' and even less so as an 'entrepreneur', however from an economic perspective their hospitality business significantly contributed to the sustainability of the farm and as the income from hospitality grew so did the focus and time allocation for many for the business for the women and a greater recognition of their role as small business owners.

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