

Power, Privilege, and Identity: A Call for an Intersectional Approach to Farmer Well-Being

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INTRODUCTION

- Sustainable farming is a solution to mitigating climate change and a pathway to community food security, yet reports indicate increased prevalence of depression, anxiety, and suicide among U.S. farmers, and gaps in academic literature concerning the well-being of sustainably-oriented farmers.
- Few studies have focused on the unique stressors of beginning farmers, a group that includes more women, LGBTQ+, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) (USDA, 2017) who face intersecting stressors of oppression. It is critical to support this new generation of farmers.
- Approaches to understanding farmer well-being have lacked an intersectional perspective; therefore, we embrace an intersectional approach to examine the systemic stressors of sustainably-oriented beginning farmers.

Intersectionality refers to overlapping social identities that contribute to systemic oppression (Carastathis, 2014).

AIM

We utilized a community-engaged research framework in collaboration with a non-profit organization that supports sustainable farmers in the U.S. Midwest region. Together, we designed a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design to understand beginning farmers:

- systemic stressors
- stress coping strategies
- differences in stress and mental health experiences by social identities.

This abstract focuses on the quantitative data.

Beginning farmers are defined as individuals who have been farming for ten years or less; they are categorized as “historically underserved producers” by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2019).

METHODS

Data & Sample

Online survey questionnaire (Administered Oct 2020)

- Purposive sampling through our community partner’s email list of 632 contacts
- Inclusion criteria: Beginning farmers in Midwest region, 18 years or older, able to read and understand basic English
- 64 respondents, two did not complete the survey and were excluded (n=62)

Measures

Farm Stress Survey

- Modified from Eberhardt and Pooyan’s (1990) and Rudolphi et al.’s (2019) Farm Stress Surveys. With input from our community partner, language was revised to be inclusive of the diversity of farmers (i.e., women or BIPOC) and type of farm operations (i.e., small farms or ecologically-oriented farms).
- 52 items in seven subcategories: working conditions, social and geographical factors, personal finances, time pressure, environmental conditions, current events and policy, and employee relations.
- Likert-scale responses (0 = None, 1 = Very little, 2 = Some, 3 = Quite a bit, and 4 = A great deal). Mean calculated for each of the 52 items.

Mental Health Support

- Dichotomous measure of eight types of mental health support accessed in the past 12 months: in-person counseling or therapy, telecounseling, crisis hotline or text-line, inpatient psychiatric services, web-based resources, prayer or faith-based services, alternative or body-based therapy, or other.

Sociodemographic Measures

- Gender identity (male, female, non-binary, prefer to self-describe [where respondents could write in their preference]).
- Race/ethnicity (White, Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origin, Black/African American, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Middle Eastern/ North African, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or Other).

Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics to examine mean, frequencies, and percentages of variables

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic Information

Characteristic	Percentage (N)	Ohio USDA Census (%)
Gender identity (n= 62)		
Male	38.7% (24)	61.2%
Female	51.6% (32)	38.8%
Non-binary or Transgender	9.7% (6)	N/A
Race/ethnicity (n= 62)		
White	91.9% (57)	98.8%
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish	1.6% (1)	1.1%
Black, African American	3.2% (2)	0.17%
Asian	1.6% (1)	0.24%
American Indian	0% (0)	0.16%
Middle Eastern/ N. African	0% (0)	N/A
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0% (0)	0.04%
Other	1.6% (1)	N/A

Table 2. Top Five Systemic Stressors

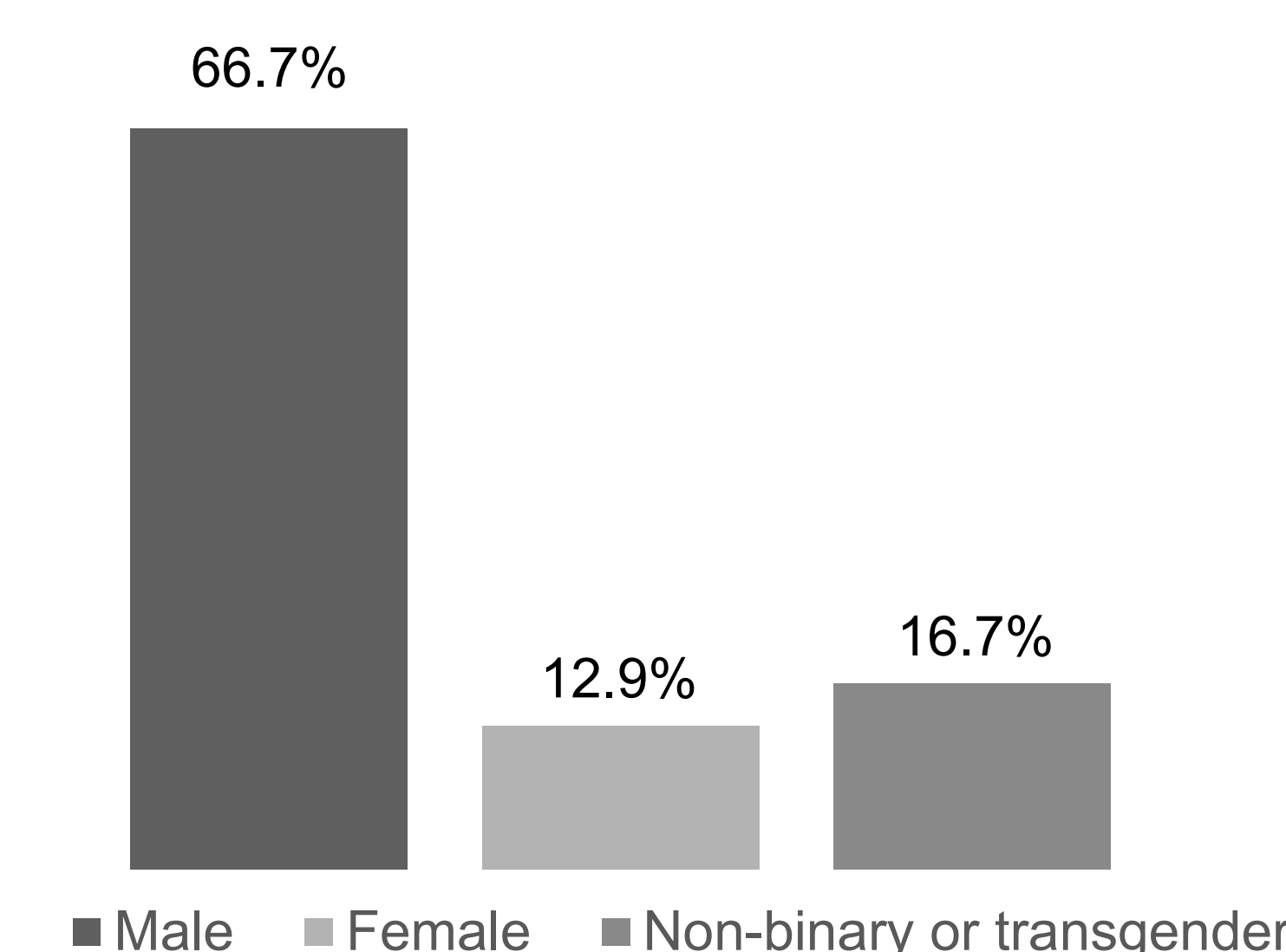
Stressor (n= 62)	Mean	Percentage (N)
Too much to do; little time	3	88.7% (55)
Covid-19	2.6	83.8% (52)
Not enough person-power	2.5	79% (49)
Climate change	2.3	79% (49)
Social justice	2.2	72.6% (45)

- 100% of non-binary & transgender and 100% of BIPOC respondents noted **social justice** as a source of stress.
- 60% of BIPOC and 33% of non-binary & transgender participants noted **discrimination in the agricultural community** as a source of stress.

Table 3. Stress Coping Strategies

Characteristic	Percentage (N)
Mental health support (n= 61)	
Alternative or body-based therapy	36.1% (22)
No mental health support	34.4% (21)
Web-based resources	29.5% (18)
Faith-based services	29.5% (18)
In-person therapy	26.2% (16)
Telecounseling	21.3% (13)
Crisis hotline or text line	1.6% (1)
Inpatient psychiatric services	0% (0)
Other	8.2% (5)

Figure 1. No Mental Health Support by Gender Identity



IMPLICATIONS

- United States agriculture is built on generations of systemic oppression and exploitation of women, BIPOC, and people who identify as LGBTQ+. Power, privilege, and identity are important factors in designing effective supports to promote beginning farmer well-being.
- The stressors of farmers are multi-layered; interventions must be approached at multiple system levels, including 1) amplifying diverse voices and local perspectives in decision-making, 2) funding anti-oppressive and trauma-informed approaches, and 3) educating health professions to understand the unique needs of farmers, especially farmers from marginalized identities.
- \$95 million is appropriated for the USDA’s beginning farmer development program (USDA, 2020), yet little to none of the funds support efforts to address mental health, current discrimination, and impacts of historical exclusionary practices (e.g., financial capital, labor, land access).
- Our sample includes underrepresented transgender or non-binary farmers, and farmers of color. We worked with our community partner to re-word measurements and include more options for gender identity to amplify the voices often excluded from food systems research.

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