

CHILD CARE IN FARM FAMILIES

Implications and a Call for Support

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND APPLIED ECONOMICS
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HIGHLIGHTS

The accessibility, cost, and associated challenges of child care are factors in the success and wellbeing of farmers in the United States. Key findings of our research include:

- Child care influences farm business decisions, affecting divisions of farm labor, productivity, farm growth, and allocation of financial resources, often causing stress within farm families and diminishing quality of life.
- The majority of farm families surveyed report problems with child care related to affordability, availability, quality, or philosophy of caregiver.
- Farm business planning programming should include the topic of child care.
- Child care is particularly difficult for first-generation and women farmers. Targeted outreach efforts should focus on these populations.
- Providing child care resources and facilitating child care-focused community networks specifically for farm families would help farm families find appropriate, affordable care in their communities.
- Child care subsidies specifically for farmers, and evaluation of subsidy eligibility by farm viability specialists, would alleviate the financial burden of off-farm care costs.

BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

Child care has dual functions: it supports workforce and economic development by allowing parents to work, and also promotes early childhood development (Kimmel, 2006; Warner, 2008). Nationally, more than 11 million children under age 5 are in some type of child care every week (NACCRRRA, 2014). Child care is a community and economic development issue that directly affects farmer-parents yet has received relatively little policy attention or empirical examination (Reschke, 2012).

Child Care Policy in the U.S.

American families make child care arrangements through a system of formal, informal, and family care (Stoney, Mitchell, & Warner, 2009). Federal support for child care comes in the form of subsidies and tax deductions. The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) supports the purchase of private-market child care by subsidizing the costs for low-income parents and regulating approved care centers at the state level. The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit is available to all families to cover a portion of employment-related child care. Regardless of subsidy eligibility or tax credit claim, longstanding issues of supply and quality affect the choices of all families seeking child care.

Child Care and Farm Families

Federal policies and programs recognize the need to foster a young, vibrant farm economy in the face of an aging and “graying” farm sector (Gale, 1993), and are actively

engaged in economic policies and programs focused on access to markets, credit, capital and land to support multi-generation and first-generation farmers. Child care is a critical but often overlooked household level issue in whole farm planning.

Farm families have to negotiate child care needs and options for on-farm and off-farm working hours. Young children, especially at the infant, toddler and preschooler stage present unique constraints, they often require more time and attention and parents must decide how to allocate their time and energy, making choices between field work, marketing, book keeping, off-farm work, and family needs.

Farm families, typically run their own businesses and work non-traditional erratic hours and child care accommodations of some kind are necessary to ensure safety and to allow for productive time for farm business responsibilities. Formal day care providers are typically structured to accommodate a conventional work week schedule with hours ranging from 7:30am to 5:30pm, five days a week and closed on weekends, yet the rhythms of farming rarely correlate to this rigid schedule. The high cost of center-based care and low returns from farming, especially on small and medium farms, may make it difficult for farm families to afford off-farm care. Child care challenges impact both economic development in the agricultural sector and farm family quality of life.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research examines four questions:

- 1) Do farm families perceive child care to be an issue influencing their farm business?
- 2) Do farm families experience child care problems?
- 3) What aspects of child care do farm families perceive to be a problem?
- 4) Does community influence the degree to which child care is an issue in farm families?

DATA

Quantitative national survey of 186 small and medium farm families at the Rural-Urban Interface, the relatively rural and agriculturally dense space on the edge of urbanized areas. Respondents were located in the metro regions of Miami FL, Honolulu HI, Lewiston ME, Columbus OH, and Burlington VT.

Qualitative interviews and focus groups with 43 small and medium farmers in the Northeastern U.S., a geographic region chosen for its high concentration of female farmers

(NASS, 2012). Participants were located in CT, PA, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, RI, and VT.

In this study, respondents were classified into two separate groupings for analysis: men (M) or women (W) farmers; multi-generation (MG) farmer or first generation (FG) farmer. FG farmers are distinct from MG farmers, as they do not come from a farm family. USDA defines a beginning farmer as an individual who has farmed ten years or less, and may be a MG or FG. In this sample of women farmers were more likely to be FG farmers but the relationship was not statistically significant.

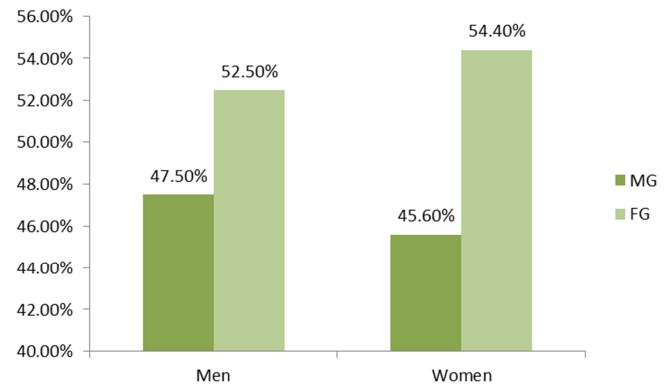


Figure 1. Gender of MG and FG Farmers

FINDINGS

Child care is an issue that influences farm business decisions, and also creates challenges for farm families.

- 60.8% of farmers surveyed report experiencing child care problems of some kind.
- Farmers who report having trouble with child care are more likely to be beginning, young, and have small farms (lower farm sales).
- 30% of farmers surveyed report that child care is an important factor in farm business decisions.
- FG and women farmers are more likely to report issues with child care, and child care challenges are connected to community embeddedness and lifecycle effects.
- Women (W) farmers are almost twice as likely to report that child care is an important factor in farm decisions, with 43.9% of women reporting the importance of child care in decision making compared to only 23.9% of men (M) (Figure 2).
- Women farmers with child care problems are more likely to also be young farmers (70.8 %) compared to 49.2% of men farmers with child care problems

A female participant, transitioning her family's farm to a growing schedule more conducive to spending time with the children in the summer highlighted the significant influence that children and their child care needs can have on a farm business:

[They are] shaping the farm business in pretty significant ways – what I'm planning to grow and how to sell it.

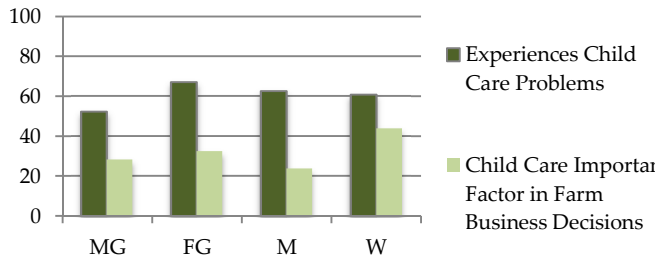


Figure 2. Child Care Problems & Importance in Farm Decision Making

- 35.0% of FG and 24.2% of MG farmers report child care problems.
- Compared to MG farmers, FG farmers are significantly more likely to report challenges with all four aspects of child care: affordability, availability, quality and philosophy (Figure 2).
- Community embeddedness and family support play a significant role in child care challenges especially for FG farmers. 42.2% of FG farmers with child care problems have no relatives nearby while only 14.0 % of MG farmers with child care problems have no relatives nearby. MG farmers have a denser set of community and family relationships and networks that alleviate some of the strain in finding child care.
- One FG farmer with a small farm explained the difficulties of child care when family care isn't an option and low returns make off-farm care unaffordable:

I'm completely by myself most days and it's really hard to juggle... There isn't that kind of strong support network of aunts and grandparents and sisters... you have to supplement that with money... farming just doesn't bring in a lot. Farmers make low minimum wage a lot of times, but then they have to pay above minimum wage [for child care].

Economic Effects

Farm families described the economic effects child care has on their enterprise, including impacts on: business decisions, productivity, farm growth, and financial stability.

Child care directly influences the most basic business decisions about when to work, one female participant explained that her daughter “determines the hours I can actually work on the farm.” Another participant explained, “Raising our kids... is included in my labor plan” despite the reality that “we could accomplish more without having to watch them all the time.” However, low returns, typical in the early years of farming, make formal child care difficult to financially afford for farm families who may want it.

Child care difficulties can arise because young farmers are often growing their farm business at the same time as they are growing their families. One female participant discussed the effects of this overlap in farm business and farm family life cycles, saying “I probably put in more hours ... when they were younger.” Without proper support, problems with child care during the growth and development of the farm have the potential to affect production and inhibit farm growth and persistence.

Social Effects

Farmers described the social effects child care has on their lives including: those involving changing gender roles and resulting stress, relationships between spouses and peers, and quality of life.

Social effects were evident in the way participating female farmers struggle with their changing roles on the farm and report resulting stress from trying to negotiate the divergence of historical expectations of women on the farm and the reality of women's farm roles today. One female participant explains:

There's always been kind of the farm wife who cooks and cleans and takes care of the kids while the farmer goes out and works in the fields. That is shifting. There's a lot more women farmers. But they're still responsible for the childcare and the cooking and the cleaning and they don't have a farm wife to take care of that. They're a wife and farmer and it's really challenging, kind of this new structure.

Quality of life can be compromised by child care decisions. Farmers, particularly those who are doing most of parental care, emphasized the need to work longer or later hours and added stress brought about by having a child with them while farming:

It definitely is stressful – hugely stressful. I think I'm constantly having to compromise with the attention that I want to give her or to the farm. And then I'm

doing things that are kind of off the wall, like going and working in the dark when my husband gets home [from his off-farm job].

Types of Care

Farm families report piecing child care together with many forms of care. All participants reported using at least two different types of care. Parental care, off farm formal care, and family care were the most commonly used types of care (Table 1). Farming presents unique challenges for each of these types of care: parental care limits productivity on the farm, off farm formal care burdens financially and can't accommodate the non-traditional hours that are typical of farming, and family care is simply unavailable for many.

Table 1. Types of Care and Frequency of Use

Type of Care	% of participants using
Parental Care <i>at home or on the farm with farming parents</i>	92.5%
Off Farm Formal <i>formal daycare centers</i>	52.5%
Family Care <i>care by a grandparent or other relative</i>	47.5%
On Farm Informal <i>babysitter or other caregiver on the farm</i>	25.0%
Nontraditional Care <i>nanny sharing and co-operative style child care</i>	20.0%
Off Farm Informal <i>home care or care by a neighbor or friend off farm</i>	15.0%

All participating farmers used on-farm parental care as a component in their overall care plan, with many citing children as motivation for farming. However, a FG female participant reported a commonly shared sentiment that the reality of caring for children on the farm as being much different from perceived expectations:

[I had] this naïve feeling that okay, well, you have a farm so your kids get to stay home with you but you still get to do your work. And I'm just finding that's not the case. [I]like to do the work, I can't really have my son with me at this age.

Child care is an issue that is challenging for farm families, affects farm businesses, and has economic and social implications for farm families. These findings establish that child care is an issue that influences farm business decisions, creates challenges for farm families, and plays a role in the wellbeing of both farm family and farm business.

Child Care in Farm Families

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Child care that meets the desired standards of affordability, availability, quality, and matching philosophy of farmers and their families is a necessity for child safety and parent-farmer productivity (Reschke, 2012). Child care generally is not considered in agricultural supports, and the needs of farm families are not specifically addressed in child care policy. This household-level issue is critical for supporting young farmers and in particular first-generation and women farmers.

Providing appropriate child care options and additional resources for farmers and their families would likely provide these working parents with an increased quality of life and a greater capacity to focus on the growth of the farm business, in turn contributing to a strong agricultural economy. Specific recommendations include:

- **Discuss child care as part of farm business planning.** Including family issues, like child care, in farm business planning curricula would allow new and beginning farmers, and even experienced farmers who are planning for children, an opportunity to consider the ways children and chosen care methods will influence the farm business.
- **Targeted Programming for Women farmers and First generation farmers.** Woman farmers are more likely than men to consider child care as a factor in farm business decisions, and are also more likely to report child care challenges. USDA and Extension programs can better address the multiple roles women negotiate as they are simultaneously farm operators, decision makers, farm laborer, off-farm income earner, housekeeper, cook and mother. Compared to MG farmers, FG farmers are more socially isolated in the communities they are embedded in, with fewer friends or family members which in turn exacerbate child care challenges. Targeted programming and outreach to women and FG farmers on the topic of child care can assist with better farm management, profitability and quality of life.
- **Provide child care resources and facilitate child care-focused community networks specifically for farm families.** Parents access the majority of their information about the location, supply, and quality of care options through community networks. Farmer-parent networking nights would allow for like-minded support, realistic peer advice, experience sharing, and

network building. The creation of these child care networks could allow for collaboration and use of already-existing networks of agricultural organizations, including Extension, food policy councils, producer groups, with state level departments of family and youth services and local child care organizations, who could tailor their resources specifically to farm families. These organizations could work with mobile software developers to create applications that can help parents in rural, agricultural communities connect with each other and with appropriate care providers.

- **Child care subsidies specifically for farmers.**

Targeted child care subsidies specifically for farmers that are not tied to income eligibility. These type of supports may encourage FG and beginning farmers to persist and grow their farm business while simultaneously raising young children. Allowing subsidies to cover informal and relative care would provide options appropriate to the values, income and work schedules of farmers. Additionally, child care subsidy evaluation for farm families could be conducted by Extension farm viability experts, who are familiar with the financials, practices, and cyclical trends of a farm business.

- **Address child care needs with a universal approach.**

This policy approach would alleviate child care pressures on all families, including farm families, and encourage maternal and self-employment. France and Sweden, offer benefits free or subsidized child care in addition to paid maternity and paternity leave, providing a model for the U.S.

Future research should continue to examine the issue of child care in farm families by exploring the role ethnicity and culture play in farm family child care decisions, expand the spatial component of this study nationally and to non-RUI areas. Future studies should also include farm workers as well as principal operators in order to provide a wider understanding of the effects of child care on the agriculture sector.

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