Women's Agricultural Leadership and Isolation:
How has isolation related to Covid-19 and climate events impacted women farmers' leadership practices in the BC organic sector?

By

Jen Gamble
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We acknowledge and respect the lək^{w}əŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Supervisory Committee

Supervisor: Dr. Astrid V. Pérez Piñán, Associate Professor
School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

Second Reader: Dr. Heather Castleden, Professor
School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

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In this project I have discussed and thought about relationships extensively. So, it is appropriate that I acknowledge the many relationships that have supported and enabled me to be here in this moment.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This project examines how women in the British Columbia organic agricultural sector demonstrate leadership during challenging climate events and pandemic situations and how social isolation influences their leadership practices. Through qualitative research, this project investigates the ways in which women in agriculture lead with their actions, their farming practices, and their focus on community especially in the context of a global pandemic or climate event.

The study explores the changing context that Covid-19 created, the strain of climate events and the impact of these on the leadership practices of women in organic agriculture. With the growing roles women are undertaking in the agriculture sector, exploring their experiences and fostering their participation in leadership is important. In providing space to share successes and challenges in the organic agriculture sector, this project aims to bring forward a better understanding of the experiences and needs of women in agricultural leadership.

The primary research question

- How do women in the BC organic farming sector display leadership in the face of challenges beyond their control such as climate change and a global pandemic?

The secondary research questions

- How does social isolation, created by these challenges, impact leadership?

Methodology and Methods

The project employed a qualitative approach to data collection through semi-structured interviews with seven participants, which facilitated an in-depth sharing of participants' experience. This study contains a review of the relevant literature from academic and non-academic sources. Feminist principles and intersectional perspectives enabled the analysis to centre the voices and lived experiences of women within the organic agriculture community. The interviews were conducted virtually and provided space for participants to share through open-ended questions as well as opportunities for storytelling. The interviews were then transcribed for data analysis. The data coding was conducted manually in two rounds using Excel. From the coded data, I identified the key findings of the project.

Key Findings

The interview participants, all from the organic agriculture sector, expressed a common belief that relationships were foundational to all aspects of their leadership. Participants felt that while the Covid-19 pandemic changed the way people worked together, it did not change the importance of relationships and community. Strong relationships were also identified as critical

during climate events which often challenge community capacity. The critical role of relationships was threaded through the themes that emerged under each research question.

Trusting relationships enabled robust collaboration, effective succession planning and a fluidity of leadership that was paramount in the leadership experiences shared by participants. The horizontal leadership style of collaboration was practiced by participants despite the challenges posed by the hierarchical structures within which they worked. Collaborative, relationship-based leadership was paired with a focus on succession planning to help empower other women and nurture the next generation of leaders. The prioritization of collaboration and succession planning meant participants invested time and energy to build supportive relationships, pass on knowledge, and encourage those with skills to move into leadership positions. By fostering other women into leadership, participants helped create a fluidity which enabled them to step in and out of positions as needed with confidence in the continuity of the work. These reliable relationships not only provided a sense of community but also became critical points of support in crisis situations.

Participants indicated that when established relationships were in place, isolation had less impact on their leadership. Women leaned on these relationships to help sustain them in their leadership positions and this was particularly true during times of crisis. By practicing collaboration, a feminist leadership style that inherently values relationships, the women in this study felt less social isolation in their work. Additionally, the structures and attitudes of the organic sector, where collaboration, community, and relationships are prioritized, was identified as another mitigating factor for isolation. Due to these values most participants stated they did not feel isolated during the Covid-19 pandemic and navigated the shift to virtual work with relative ease. In fact, the shift to online communications may have deepened some relationships, especially in organizations where trusting professional relationships already existed. Already established relationships were also critical for women during climate events, enabling them to effectively advocate for their communities. During these times of crisis, rather than isolation, women spoke most about feeling supported by colleagues and their communities.

The communities built by participants were often formed around the belief in organic farming principles and production methods. In this way, farm methods became entwined with their approach and leadership style. The interconnected principles of organic farming weave into the way participants value collaboration, cooperation and relationships. Because organic farm practices were also viewed as part of participants' identity, it deeply influenced leadership and served as a point of solidarity for women.

The intersectionality that shaped participant experience ranged from personal identity factors to structural factors. Participants all shared the intersecting identities of gender and work in organic farming, but many also identified age, race and geography as additional factors impacting their experiences. Their experiences often identify the traditional gender roles, and the structures perpetuating them, as challenging for women in agriculture. This is especially true

when participants discussed working outside of the organic farming community in the broader agricultural sector. The patriarchal style organizations present in the agriculture sector and the hierarchical concept of leadership are often not conducive to the collaborative values participants strive toward.

Recommendations

My recommendations focus on facilitating relationships because in the findings, participants underscored the importance of these connections in their leadership practices. Fostering enhanced relationships encourage women in leadership and promote their success. My recommendations target two groups, (1) women leaders in agriculture and organizations and (2) policy makers working alongside women leaders in agriculture. The three criteria for the recommendations were: ease of implementation, effective use of resources and alignment with the foundational value of relationships.

Recommendations for Women Leaders in Agriculture:

1. Integrate activities that foster new and strengthen existing networks, relationships, and sector connections into current events.

- By introducing activities such as collaborative games that promote cooperation and fun at already existing events, event participants can initiate and build personal connections outside of crisis periods to strengthen networks that help combat social isolation.
- While this recommendation may not reach beyond event attendees to women socially isolated on their farms, it could encourage tight knit networks to become more inclusive and open, which would expand resiliency.

2. Create new events specifically focused on building connections and networks for women in BC agricultural leadership, outside of crisis times in periods of calm.

- Intentionally creating time for relationship building expresses the importance of community and strong networks.
- These events could take the form of meetings, retreats or conferences, and could evolve from small gatherings to larger undertakings depending on capacity.
- This could provide an opportunity to identify underserved leader groups in agriculture, such as racialized women, and ensure events are inclusive.

Recommendations for organizations and policy makers working alongside women leaders in agriculture.

1. Create a position to coordinate and facilitate network building for women in the BC agriculture sector.

- A funded coordination position would help create stronger network opportunities for women leaders in agriculture.
- The creation of a position tasked with community building and relationship enhancement among women in agriculture would demonstrate value being placed on the leadership of women in the sector and the value of networks and community.

2. Conduct a regular review of policies and practices using an intersectional lens.

- Initiating a policy scan with an intersectional lens to determine the ways in which women leaders in agriculture are hindered or helped by current agriculture structures would help align policies with the goal of enhancing and expanding the leadership of women in agriculture.
- Strategically embedding values of feminist leadership in organizational policies and procedures would signal strong support for women in leadership and could provide a model for other sectors.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements i

Executive Summary ii

Introduction ii

Methodology and Methods ii

Key Findings ii

Recommendations iv

Table of Contents vi

List of Tables ..... ix~~xiv~~

Introduction 1

Defining the Problem 1

Project Objectives and Scope 3

Research Questions ..... 4~~3~~

Background 4

Positionality 5

Organization of Report 10

Chapter 2: Literature Review 11

Women's Roles in Agriculture 11

The Evolving Role of Women in Agriculture 11

Farm Methods and Practices 12

Leadership and Women 13

Leadership Theories 13

Leadership within Power Structures 15

Women's Leadership 16

Experiences of Isolation 18

Social Isolation in Farming 18

Social Isolation during Covid-19 19

Farm Women's Experience of Isolation 20

Summation of Knowledge Gaps 21

Conceptual Framework: Intersectional Feminist Research 21
Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods 23
Methodology 23
Methods 24
Recruitment 25
Semi-structured Interviews 26
Data Analysis 27
Strengths, Limitations, and Delimitations of the research 28
Strengths 28
Limitations 28
Delimitations 29
Chapter 4: Findings 31
Introduction 31
Main Findings 31
Reasons and motivations for farming 31
Leadership as a woman farmer 33
The impact of external events on leadership 35
Isolation and Leadership 3938
Collaborative and shared farm practices and leadership 40
Emphasis on cultivating communities and the next generations of leaders 42
Summary 43
Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis 4544
Introduction 4544
Answering the Research Questions 4544
Primary Research Question 4544
Secondary Research Question 4948
Additional Findings 5554
The Role of Intersecting Identities and Structures 5554
Strategic or Research Implications 5857
Revisiting the Conceptual/Analytical Framework 5857
Chapter 6: Recommendations 5958

Introduction ..... 59~~58~~
Assessment Criteria ..... 59~~58~~
Recommendations for Women Leaders in Agriculture ..... 59~~58~~
Recommendations for organizations and policy makers working alongside women leaders in agriculture ..... 60~~59~~
Areas for Further Research ..... 61~~60~~
Chapter 7: Conclusion ..... 63~~62~~
References ..... 64~~63~~
Appendix A: Interview Email Invitation ..... 75~~74~~
Appendix B: Interview Consent Form ..... 76~~75~~
Appendix C: Mental Health and Wellness Resource List ..... 79~~78~~
Appendix D: Interview Protocol and Questions ..... 80~~79~~
Appendix E: Ethics Certificate ..... 82~~81~~

List of Tables

Table 1 25

Introduction

Women play a pivotal yet shifting role as farmers within the Canadian agriculture sector. In Western agriculture, women have traditionally assumed supportive roles within farm operations, such as household and family care duties, these have often been undervalued compared to men's roles production roles (Wheeler & Nye, 2025). As social dynamics change and gender roles evolve so too do the ways in which women engage in farm activities. Women are emerging as agricultural leaders both with formal and informal roles (McCoy-Naperstkow, 2025; Rogers, 2019). This is particularly true in the organic agriculture sector where, from inception, women have played an important leadership role (Azima & Mundler, 2022). As more women become involved in leadership, there is an opportunity to explore how their agricultural experiences have been influenced by social isolation, especially in the context of Covid-19 and climate events. The ways in which women farm leaders approach these large-scale events that are out of their personal control provides insight to their leadership styles and values. Extending values to farm practices, such as organic production methods, also adds another layer to agricultural women's leadership experiences and stories.

Considering these aspects of women's agricultural experiences, the purpose of this project is to examine how women in the British Columbia (BC) organic sector demonstrate leadership in challenging situations and how social isolation and farming methods influence their leadership practices.This research investigates how leadership, gender, organic practices and social isolation are woven into the ways in which women in agriculture lead with their actions, their farming practices, and their focus on community. The project studies the unique ways in which experiences of isolation, based on social and physical location and agricultural roles impact the leadership voices of women working in agriculture, especially in the context of a global pandemic or climate event.

Defining the Problem

The number of women engaged in the Canadian agriculture sector is increasing (Statistics Canada, 2018, 2022b), as is the number of women on farms[1] reporting organic products, which has increased 30.4% from 2016 to 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022b).These growing numbers are also accompanied by an increase of women in leadership positions (Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, 2016). Though women are stepping into more agricultural leadership roles, they are still underrepresented in senior positions and face unequal gender expectations (Braun et al., 2024). Within agriculture formal leadership positions in government, farm businesses, commodity associations, and educational institutions are still male dominated (Braun et al., 2024). However, the landscape seems to be shifting slightly over recent years with women holding high profile positions such as Federal and Provincial Ministers of Agriculture and Farm

[1] Statistics Canada defines a farm as "a unit that produces agricultural products and reports revenues or expenses for tax purposes to the Canada Revenue Agency" (Statistics Canada, 2022b, p. 10)

Association Presidents. These formal positions are not the only way women demonstrate leadership, many women farmers engage informally, taking roles as community leaders and network builders (Sumner, 2005).

As the number of women in agricultural leadership grows, there is an increasing need for research to understand their unique experiences which could further the upward trend of women's participation (Braun et al., 2024). One aspect influencing women's farm leadership is isolation. Agriculture can be an isolating profession due to the many hours spent alone and the often, rural setting (Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, 2022). Historically in Western agriculture, isolation and loneliness have been common among women farmers, as the tasks women traditionally performed did not regularly take them off the farm (Riney-Kehrberg, 1993). While farm tasks may have changed with shifting gender roles in recent years, women are still prone to mental health concerns (Rudolphi et al., 2024; Wheeler & Nye, 2025). According to a study from the University of Guelph, women farmers are more prone to anxiety and depression caused by isolation than male farmers (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019). Understanding what enables and hinders women's participation in agriculture has the potential to help facilitate future leadership on both formal and informal levels within the sector.

Women occupy a range of roles within agriculture, from mainstream producers to small-scale sustainable operators, to farm labourers and migrant workers. Women from these diverse groups experience isolation differently than their male counterparts (Rudolphi et al., 2024) and their experiences inform their leadership approach, practices, and development (Daniels, 2019). The social location of the individual will also influence the isolation and leadership experiences of women in agriculture. In other words, the position people hold in society based on identities such as gender, race, education, and socioeconomic status frame their experiences and their sense of self (Dugan, 2017), which will impact their experience in the agricultural sector.

Isolation in agriculture has been recognized as an issue requiring further research (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019), especially now in the context of Covid-19. The prominence of isolation in farming, understandably influences other aspects of farm life, such as leadership (National Farmer Mental Health Alliance, 2024). The relationship between leadership and social isolation on farms has not been thoroughly explored. The global pandemic has exacerbated social isolation on a broad scale and the effects are being rigorously studied. Covid-19 created unprecedented levels of social isolation for many, including women farmers in BC.

Both Covid-19 and climate events shape the context within which women in agriculture operate. Covid-19 has shifted the way society functions, and so is a unique contextual factor in this research project. Climate events, such as wildfires and flooding, while not consistent across society like Covid-19, are also shifting the contextual reality. Individual circumstances influence the approach to the 'new normal' that Covid-19 and climate events have created, where many traditional ways of functioning are not available and new opportunities have opened. The extent to which Covid-19 and climate events have impacted the isolation of women farmers and what

types of changes they have made to their leadership practices as a result is unknown. The global pandemic and recent climate events have highlighted the importance of relationships and shown the creative, resilient spirit of humans. Depending on positionality, women in agriculture will have diverse experiences with isolation and leadership in the shifting context created by the global pandemic as well as the increasing number of climate events. Understanding the social isolation of women in agriculture and the ways in which isolation and leadership are connected, especially in the context of Covid-19 and climate events, has the potential to influence new support structures and social change.

This is an important topic of study for numerous reasons. First, in the changing context of the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been unprecedented restrictions, such as self-isolation, imposed on the general population and the impact of these restrictions on mental health and well-being is unknown (Kumar & Rajasekharan, 2021). Farmers, and specifically women farmers, could be at a higher risk of being negatively impacted. Second, there is a knowledge gap regarding the mental health of Canadian farmers as a group (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019) and given their critical importance in the food system their experience should be explored. Third, in Canada the proportion of women farmers has increased in the last 30 years to the point that women now represent 30.4% of all farm operators (Statistics Canada, 2022b). Exploring the experiences of women farmers regarding isolation and leadership will help understand the needs of this growing group. Finally, there is a general research and data gap for women and girls which makes tracking trends and monitoring progress challenging (Azcona & Duerto Valero, n.d.). This project will add to the growing pool of studies centred on the experience of women in farming.

Project Objectives and Scope

This project will identify ways in which isolation influences leadership practices of agricultural women in BC and offer recommendations to mitigate negative impacts and enhance positive ones. The objectives of this project will be two-fold. First the project will aim to establish patterns and trends in the experiences of agricultural women regarding isolation and leadership. Second, a set of recommendations will be developed for women leaders in organic agriculture as well as organizations and policy makers who work alongside women in agriculture.

The delimitations of this study include geography and mental health factors. The boundary for this study is women within the BC agriculture sector. While BC is set in the context of Canadian agriculture, this study will focus on BC as a unique subset. This subset will be further narrowed to women participating in the organic farm sector. Women in the organic farm sector will be asked to discuss social isolation, the lack of social contact or engagement (Taylor et al., 2023), and while this may cross into the realm of mental health, the focus will remain on social isolation as it relates to leadership practices rather than mental wellness.

Research Questions

The primary research question is:

- How do women in the BC organic farming sector display leadership in the face of challenges beyond their control such as climate change and a global pandemic?

The secondary question to support the primary research question is:

- How does social isolation, created by these challenges, impact leadership?

Background

Agriculture in Canada has been changing over the last three decades with the overall number of farmers declining 32.9% from 1991 to 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022b). Of this number though, the proportion of women farming has increased over the last 30 years (Statistics Canada, 2022b). In 1996, women farmers represented 25.3% of Canadian farmers, this number grew to 28.7% in 2016, (Statistics Canada, 2018) and increased again in 2021 to 30.4% (Statistics Canada, 2022b). The most recent numbers are significant because between 2016 and 2021, not only did the proportion of women farm operators grow, but the number also increased from 77,970 to 79,795 (Statistics Canada, 2022b). This 2.3% increase in the number of women farmers is even more compelling when compared to the 5.8% decrease in men farming over the same timeframe (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

While the number of men farming decreases, within the increasing number of women farmers, the growth of immigrant women operating farms exceeds that of non-immigrant women. Immigrant women farm operators account for 36.7% of Canada's immigrant farmers, much higher than the overall proportion of women in Canadian agriculture (Statistics Canada, 2023).. This indicates a shift away from the classed, raced, and gendered characteristics of modern agriculture (Sumner, 2005, p. 78). However, this number captures only immigrant women farm operators and does not reflect the total number of racialized women involved in the Canadian agriculture sector. Women involved in Canadian agriculture as labourers and migrant workers are unaccounted for in this number.

BC boasted the highest proportion of women famers in Canada in 2021, with women accounting for 39.7%of BC farmers (Statistics Canada, 2022b). This exceeds the national average by almost 10 percent, leading to an increased role for women in the BC agriculture sector, especially in non-traditional areas (Puri, 2017), such as sustainable, organic, and urban agriculture. BC has a strong organic community originating in the 1980s that was formalized with the creation of the Certified Organic Associations of BC (COABC) in 1993. The organization brought together multiple small certification bodies to create a consistent standard for the province. The grassroots beginning of the organization has ensured that community building has remained a high priority. Currently, COABC leads the sector under the name Organic BC. The strength of the organic farming community in BC is evident by the higher

proportion of BC farms that are organic (3.1%) than the national average (2.2%) (Statistics Canada, 2017).

The organic farming community functions within the broader context of BC agriculture, which is most often broken down in groups according to the type of commodity. These groups come together to participate in organizations that help connect farmers to the government, such as the BC Agriculture Council. Among these different groups, the organic sector is unique because it represents a type of production method rather than a certain crop or commodity. This diversity means the sector must encompass all areas of agriculture in its standards.

The Canada Organic Standard, which is reviewed regularly to ensure practices continuously improve, provides foundational principles and guidance on how to farm organically. Though the standard guides production of all certified organic operations, not everyone who engages in the organic community certifies their operation, which creates a sometimes-controversial divide. For the purpose of this study, the certified/non-certified divide will be put aside, so those engaged in the organic community and using some form of organic practices (certified or not) will be considered organic.

Beyond these sub-categories, the diversity of BC farm operations is also increased by the physical geography of the province. Mountainous terrain encourages small lot farming and BC has more than double the national average number of small farms (Statistics Canada, 2017). The number of small farms in BC has led to a high rate of off-farm income and direct sales (Statistics Canada, 2017). Alternately, flat valley bottom land, such as the Fraser Valley, facilitates large greenhouse operations enabling BC to have the second highest number of acres under glass of all Canadian provinces (Statistics Canada, 2017). The varied landscape also means that farmers operate under vastly different social conditions. Farms in BC range from urban and peri-urban to rural and remote. Together, all these factors contribute to BC's unique agriculture sector.

Positionality

The BC organic agriculture sector is familiar to me through my many years of work within it. Though I have not worked in the sector for the last five years, my experience creates a complex positionality to explore. Because I have extensive experience in the sector, I could be considered an insider, however the distance created by my departure from agriculture could also make me an outsider. This more fluid approach to the dichotomy of insider/outsider emphasizes that there are intersections and positionality can shift depending on the situation (Htong Kham, 2024). For clarity in this project, I will refer to myself as an insider/outsider, however I recognize this may not encompass all the nuances of my positionality. This makes examining the complexity of my positionality and the influence it has on me as a researcher critically important. Exploring my biases and recognizing the differentiation between research that looks 'at' and research that 'comes alongside' (Wiebe, 2015, p. 249) brings an acknowledgement of the value inherent in a non-neutral approach. My experiences have enabled deep conversations with participants and throughout this project storytelling has been emphasized as an impactful way to

convey meaning. Because participants were encouraged to share stories of their experiences and I shared mine with them as was appropriate in the interviews, I will use some of my stories to speak to my positionality as a woman in the masculinized industry of agriculture. While women are becoming increasingly involved in agriculture the mainstream sector and its leadership is still male dominated. My positionality and approach to this topic is a convergence of my personal, professional, and academic experience.

The importance of food production comes to me from both sides of my family. During the Great Depression, my maternal grandmother's family was able to add vegetables to their meager diet because her brother woke every morning before dawn to tend the garden. He would gently turn the arid Alberta soil to capture the morning dew and with this practice he was able to coax vegetables from the draught ridden earth. In the next decade, during the Second World War, my paternal grandfather worked two allotments in Southern Britain to augment the government sanctioned rationing. With the two plots, he was able to supply vegetables for the family throughout the war.

Growing vegetables kept both sides of my family alive in hard times but the enjoyment and passion of it was passed to me through my father. We spent much time planting, weeding, and harvesting the large garden we kept in the 'back, back' of our yard. I especially remember the care and time taken growing the beautiful, juicy tomatoes. We would cut old pairs of my mother's nylons into lengths and tie the tomato stems to the stakes driven into the soil, holding the plant upright. As we tied the plants up and pruned the suckers that shot out of the crook between the stem and the branch, our fingers would turn yellow and sticky with the resin from the plants. By the end of the row, our fingers would be black and crusty. I grew up with my fingers in the soil and at a young age had decided that farming was my dream. Though my life meandered away from this idea, I eventually found my way back to it when I moved to Vermont. In Vermont, I worked on a sixty-acre organic vegetable farm which was the inspiration for me to write the following for my CD 526 course, *The Broccoli Vignette*:

> The sleet comes in sideways, smacking my oversized raingear making a hollow thwap as it hits. Though our crew is mostly women, the supplied raingear is enormous, offering us a choice; roll the cuffs and invite the wetness in via the exposed lining or leave the length and struggle to keep our gloved hands accessible. I leave the length. I am clad in waterproof gear from head to toe, but the cold rain finds the cracks and rips on the poly surface, and I can feel the water spreading in patches as it soaks my clothes. The wet icy sleet collects on the broccoli heads and numbs my fingers into stiff and slow-moving appendages. A steady stream pours from the edge of the hood into my face if I look up so, head down, I move along the row from one plant to the next.
>
> At this point in the year, the broccoli plants are almost at my waist with large full leaves. There is a rhythm to cutting broccoli that is much easier without the sleet and the worry that the mini machete will slip from my frozen hand and take off a finger instead

> of a broccoli head. Swipe the leaves clear, hold the head, chop the stock, into the box and onto the next. Head down, swipe, hold, chop, look…still have all my numb fingers, swipe, hold, chop, look… still have my fingers…
>
> Playing in my head over and over as I cut each head is the comment I most often hear when someone finds out I'm a farmer… "Oh!! It must be soooo nice to work outside".

The Broccoli Vignette took place on the Vermont farm where I was part of an organic farm crew that ranged from 8-10 people, most of whom were women. Within the first few weeks of starting on the farm, I was driving the tractor. I loved the meditative satisfaction of discing a field, of watching the lines of freshly turned soil appear and eventually take over the whole field. I was hooked and once again, farming became my dream.

Upon returning home to BC, I discovered the challenges of farming with two children under five. My role shifted from full farm partner to caregiver and farm bookkeeper until the children started school. After two years of leasing land, my partner and I had a thriving organic business but to make a mortgage feasible, I had to work part-time off the farm. I began working at the Certified Organic Associations of BC (COABC) and quickly moved into leadership roles. As the lead staff member for COABC, I represented the organic sector to the public, to the provincial government and within the wider agriculture sector.

As I conducted the literature review for this project, I was surprised to discover that I had experienced many of the already reported findings. I identified with the comments about additional stress for farm women around childcare and other household/family duties (Hagen et al., 2021). I also recognized myself in the finding that women felt undervalued in the agricultural community, especially in commodity associations (Hagen et al., 2021). On multiple occasions, I was treated as an irritant or simply dismissed while I represented the organic sector at agricultural association meetings and on the board of the provincial agricultural council. From these experiences, I chose one experience for the basis of the following story *One More Item*:

> Every year, representatives from the BC Agriculture sector gather at the legislature for a lobbying day. The provincial agricultural council coordinates meetings and prepares policy 'asks' for delegates to convey to elected officials and civil servants. Delegates are briefed on the material and given a few ground rules to manage the meetings, these include allowing space for all in your group to speak, ensuring the meeting does not run overtime, and staying with topics that all agricultural commodities agree upon. Each team is assigned a lead who is responsible for the smooth running of the meeting. With this crash course, delegates are sent off to engage with Ministers, elected officials and government staff.

In my second year as an organic sector delegate, I was assigned to lead a meeting with two prominent elected officials. Our team of four included a man who had previously berated me about organic agriculture and how it was damaging his hog business. Seeing his name on my list made me pause. I took a breath, set my shoulders back and repeated in my head “I can do this”. Our team met outside the office, so I had time to quickly remind everyone of the rules before we entered. The legislature meeting room was stately with dark wood paneling along the walls and thick forest green carpet underfoot. Chairs were set around a long wooden table, a classic boardroom set up. The hog man and I sat side by side directly across from the officials while the other two members of our team sat down at the end of the table, giving the impression that they were peripheral to the meeting.

As the meeting lead, I welcomed the dignitaries and invited my team to introduce themselves. We presented the official ‘asks’ and the meeting progressed quickly until we were out of time. I began to breathe easier, no major hiccups and everyone had been respectful. I began thanking the MLAs for their time as we had come to the end of the allotted half hour, when the hog man interrupted to say he had “one more item”.

“I just want to tell you…” he began “we need GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms) if we are going to be successful! They are important…”

I could feel tingling pinpricks of anger all over my body as I listened to this man advocate for a practice that would effectively destroy the organic sector and realized he felt confident enough to do so with me sitting beside him. I don’t know why he felt justified speaking with such obvious disregard for other members of his delegation, but I was sure that had I been a man, he would not have done it. In that moment, I was also sure that he believed I would not have the courage to stop him and that he would deliver his rant uninterrupted. My mind reeled at the turn of events, but it was clear I had to cut him off. Because he had deviated from the agreed upon ‘asks’, I no longer felt bound by them either.

Steadying my voice, I quickly cut across him mid-sentence and spoke directly to the MLAs. “I’m sorry but this is not a pan-agricultural issue and was not one the topics that we agreed to discuss today. But to be clear, the organic sector adamantly opposes the development and use of GMOs because it fundamentally threatens our sector. However, out of respect for your time, we do need to wrap this meeting up, but I would be happy to follow up with either of you if you would like more information. Otherwise, I would like to Thank you for meeting with us today.”

I could feel the hog man's incredulous eyes trying to bore holes in the side of my head while I spoke, but I refused to give him any opening. As the meeting broke up, he stalked out of the room, and I rose to leave, shaking with adrenaline.

The hog man never mentioned the incident to me, however after the meeting, both MLAs did follow up with me to gather more information. Additionally, the other delegates heard about the incident and later at the reception multiple women approached me to commend me on standing my ground. They were appalled that the hog man had brought such a divisive topic up in the meeting and their words helped to mitigate feelings of isolation for me.

In broader agricultural circles, I often felt isolation resulting from the intersection of gender and "malestream" practices and ideology with respect to farming. Older men from the conventional sector often felt justified in dismissing me out of hand, but I drew strength from the supportive atmosphere of organic farming community, which included women and men of varying ages. Experiences such as the one above were counterbalanced by the support provided by the BC organic sector. The organic sector, growing out of a grassroots movement built and led in a large part by women, felt like home to me. At one point, the 17-person board of COABC had just 4 men and the entire Executive was women. Given that agriculture has long been a male dominated profession, this was unusual. In representing the organic sector, I discovered how unusual the prominence of women was in comparison to agriculture as a whole. I personally felt the masculinized nature of farming referred to by Preibisch & Grez (2010), and mentioned by participants during their interviews. The supportive climate that the organic sector in BC provided for women leaders was not echoed in agriculture generally and often direct challenges were issued even from those who were supposedly working with us. Knowing that the organic community was behind me helped me endure experiences and interactions such as this one above. Feeling supported by a community was extremely important for me during my leadership.

As an academic student researcher, I acknowledge the unique position I hold as an insider/outsider on this topic. With years of experience in the organic sector, I have a deep understanding that other researchers may not have, as well as extensive contacts and access to women in agricultural leadership. As I interviewed participants, I felt my own experiences surface and at times used these to prompt participants to further explore their comments, ask more targeted probing questions, or to build a feeling of mutual understanding between us. Having experienced many of the challenges faced by women in agricultural leadership, I was able to encourage in-depth conversations and open sharing. In this way my own knowledge has contributed to the analysis of the data collected for this project, making me in some sense a co-creator of data (McGrath et al., 2019). My lived experience fostered connection and has enriched the research material providing a personal perspective from which I engage in this project. My vantage point, inherent with an insider/outsider position, has brought a healthy, deep knowledge and understanding of participant experiences. Reflecting on positionality helps readers

understand my relationship to the research and to address any power imbalances that could impact participants (e.g., my formal and informal leadership roles in this field). I managed participant expectations with clear communication, informed consent and maintained transparency regarding my positionality to build trust.

My positionality, informed by my experiences of food and agriculture through my family, farming, and education, has allowed me a deep understanding of this subject matter which is integrated into my research. This common understanding has helped me come alongside participants in mutual discovery. Employing a non-neutral approach values the lived experiences of both participant and researcher. The melding of my insider/outsider position in conducting this research is an important aspect of the project.

Organization of Report

This report contains seven chapters, beginning with the Introduction which defines the issue, outlines project objectives, and provides a contextual background. The Literature review in chapter two delves into the conceptual themes used to frame this project through studying academic and grey resources. The Methodology and Methods is the third chapter, and it outlines the approach and tools used for data collection. It also indicates methods used for data analysis and project limitations. The collected data is presented in chapter four, Findings. The fifth chapter explores prominent themes emerging from the data which are discussed and analyzed in response to the research questions driving the study. The sixth chapter presents recommendations to consider. Finally, the seventh chapter concludes the report with some final reflections.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview and understanding of how research over the past two decades has portrayed the topics of women, agriculture, leadership, and social isolation. These broad elements were explored to identify relationships and provide context by examining related current literature.

To identify relevant literature, key search terms used included agriculture and isolation, women farmers, women in leadership, women in agriculture, social isolation, and migrant workers. The databases searched were UVic's library 'Summon', google scholar, UVic Space, and Theses Canada Portal. The literature considered was written after the year 2000, with a few exceptions for particularly relevant material. Reference lists of identified academic work were also considered to provide a fulsome review of the conversation in the topic areas. Both academic and grey sources, including news stories and agriculture sector reports, were explored to help inform the research questions within the topics. Though these are vast topics, this literature review explores where they overlap. No literature was found that discussed all the main elements in relation to each other, indicating that this is an area needing additional research. Even in areas where there was overlap between some of the research elements, gaps were still identified.

This chapter will discuss the three main themes that emerged through the literature examined, women's roles within agriculture, women's leadership, and experiences of social isolation. Each of these themes will be discussed as a section. Following the identified themes, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the conceptual framework for the project.

Women's Roles in Agriculture

Globally, women play a critical, yet widely varied, role in agricultural production (SOFA Team & Doss, 2011) and make up one third of the agricultural workforce (Giner et al., 2022, p. 8). This percentage consists of women's paid, unpaid and informal work in the agriculture sector, and is often performed alongside household responsibilities (Giner et al., 2022). The layering of roles mean that women often face diverse barriers in agriculture such as divisions of labour and access to human and financial capital based on gender roles (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, 2011). Cultural gender norms and internalized obstacles also challenge women especially when they lead to low self-confidence (Giner et al., 2022, p. 6). These barriers create diverse challenges and contexts for agricultural women around the world. For the Global North, two areas of interest emerging from the literature regarding women in agriculture are women's evolving roles, and their chosen farming methods and practices.

The Evolving Role of Women in Agriculture

In the Global North, farming is deeply patriarchal and gendered with masculine qualities being valued and feminine qualities being devalued in regards to farm activities (Preibisch & Grez, 2010, p. 292). Farm work has been divided along gender lines with men performing most

tasks associated directly with agriculture. Due to their bodily strength, traditional roles have valued men for most on-farm agricultural activities, while relegating women to household tasks (Preibisch & Grez, 2010, p. 292) and the on-farm role of 'farm wife'[2]. With an increasing number of women becoming farm operators rather than 'farm wives', these gender norms are beginning to shift, a change documented in recent census numbers. According to the 2021 Canadian census, while the overall number of farmers has continued to decline in Canada, the number of women farmers has increased. Women now represent 30.4% of all farmers in Canada, up from 28.7% in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

Women have unique experiences within the agriculture sector, differing from their male counterparts in aspects such as farm size, land tenure, commodity type, sales, and debt (Leckie, 1993). Women also experience gender differences in their on-farm labour participation where they are often responsible for household and childcare tasks. The assignment of women to these supporting roles in agriculture reflects the socioeconomic marginalization of rural women (Preibisch & Grez, 2010, p. 292). This marginalization has been shifting as more women become farm operators and the evolution of women's roles in agriculture can be seen in the variety of positions held by women in the Canadian agriculture sector. Women can be found holding formal leadership roles like the Miniter of Agriculture and Industry Association board positions, as well as informal roles such as farm owners, operators, and labourers. Though women in agricultural leadership has increased, they are still underrepresented at the senior, decision-making level (Braun et al., 2024). As women move into non-traditional roles though, they often bring a different view of farming practices and methods, such as the importance of environmental sustainability. While women participate in a diverse range of operations from large-scale industrial to small-scale farming methods, there has been a surge of women involved in alternate farm methods, such as organic agriculture, where they have held critical roles from the onset of the movement (Azima & Mundler, 2022).

Farm Methods and Practices

As the number of women farming in Canada increased, the number of organic farms also increased to 31.9% (Statistics Canada, 2022a, p. 4). While there is a broad range of non-conventional farm practices, such as permaculture, hydroponics and urban farming, organic farming has been the choice of many women agriculturalists because it acknowledges both ecological and social realities (Sumner, 2005). Women have been prominent in the sustainable farming, such as organic agriculture, from the onset of the movement (Azima & Mundler, 2022), running provincial and national associations. Over 70% of the Canadian organic leaders listed in the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (2021) Organic Guide are women. McMahon (2002, p. 203) asserts that one reason women are prevalent in organic farming is that it values community

[2] According to an Ag Women's Network blog post, the term 'farm wife' or 'farmer's wife' can have many definitions depending on the person. However, most commonly it indicates a role women play in supporting the success of the family farm. It can include farming responsibilities but also non-farm related responsibilities such as household or childcare responsibilities(Craig, 2017).

and building relationships which are culturally viewed as women's work. Sumner (2005) argues organic farming creates a more inclusive idea of a farmer and women bring a community-oriented view to their work. Women organic farmers view farming not just as their livelihood but also as a way of connecting with community and sharing values (Sumner, 2005, p. 78). Sumner (2005) considers women's activity in the organic sector from the perspective of not only benefiting the community but also benefiting the individual's well-being.

The academic literature on women farmers is growing but often women are a small part of a larger study. As a small portion of a study, women famers cannot be examined as thoroughly as they would be in research focused solely on their experiences. The few studies centering the lived experiences of women farmers are beginning to create a more fulsome literature picture; however, to close this gap, further research is needed.

Leadership and Women

As feminism has gained popularity, so too has the study of women in leadership; however, while there are common principles, there is no universal definition of feminist leadership (Wakefield, 2017). This lack of a uniform definition is also true of leadership theory which has evolved from an emphasis on the special traits possessed by individual leaders, such as style and behavior, to a focus on the interaction between leaders and followers (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Because leadership is socially constructed, it can be fluid, open to interpretation, and change with time and culture (Dugan, 2017). This fluidity extends to feminist leadership and means that, while the definitions may evolve, feminism plays an important role in the way women lead. Batliwala (2010, p. 14) gathered definitions to form a composite definition of feminist leadership which includes a vision of social justice, the creation of non-oppressive structures, and the use of held power to mobilize other women. The role of power is important to recognize when considering leadership, especially of women or any other marginalized group (Batliwala, n.d.). Understanding power is critical to understanding the leadership practices of women in various situations. This section will discuss leadership theory, the power structures within which leadership operates, and women's leadership within these contexts.

Leadership Theories

As an evolving field of study leadership theory has progressed through a number of perspective shifts over time. Leadership theories began with a highlight on leaders' traits (eg. 'the Great Men' theory), then moved to focus on their behaviour, which led to the recognition of situational and environment influences (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Most recently, new leadership theories focus on the complexity of leadership in a quickly changing world (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Within leadership theories, Dugan (2017) situates leadership within four core assumptions to enhance understanding. First, Dugan asserts that paradigms provide a lens through which to view leadership and frame what aspects are valued and what is not. Dugan goes on to describe the second assumption as the social construction of leadership which enables multiple interpretations and means it is bound by time, context, and culture. The third

assumption Dugan covers is that leadership is values-based and demonstrates which values, positive or negative, are important at any one time. The final assumption Dugan discusses is the interdisciplinary nature of leadership, and how numerous fields of study are drawn upon to explain its many facets. (Dugan, 2017, p. 32).

Early leadership theories focused on the characteristics of an individual leader but have now moved to a more complex description involving the overlap of individuals, relationships, and context (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Characteristics of this evolution include leadership as an activity rather than a position, a differentiation from management, multilateral, distributed rather than concentrated at the top, and contextual and situated (Bolman & Deal, 2017, pp. 335–337). As the study of leadership evolves, new schools of thought form, creating new theories such as transformative leadership theory, relational leadership theory, and sustainability leadership theory.

A critical shift from early leadership theories came with the introduction of the transformative leadership theory which framed leadership as a process dependent on the relationship between leaders and followers to leverage and motivate both toward change (Dugan, 2017). Transformational leadership is seen as more collaborative and moves toward a shared leadership model (Chin et al., 2007). This focus on relationships is also key in the relational theory of leadership. Relational theory centres the interconnectedness of all things as the critical element to understanding leadership (Dugan, 2017). The focus on interconnectedness places leaders and followers in a reciprocal relationship where leadership is a dynamic process (Clarke, 2018). This reciprocal process centres the nature of relationships, so leadership is viewed as multifaceted and emerging from the interaction between leaders and followers (Clarke, 2018). This centering of relationships cultivated by leaders provides a foundation for this research project.

In addition to the importance of relationships, sustainability leadership theory presents a grassroots approach by asserting that anyone can become a leader, that their role is to lead ‘with’ rather than ‘over’ others and that interconnection between people and natural systems is essential (Ferdig, 2007, p. 27). This perspective of sharing power to enact change is also commonly found in feminist leadership principles (Wakefield, 2017). These are echoed in the organic farm sector through continuously evolving practices, collaboration, and care for soil. Sustainability theory centres the emerging consciousness of people who are looking to improve their impact on global health through the sustainable choices they make for their lives and organizations (Ferdig, 2007, p. 26; Liao, 2022).

This focus on power relations and individual empowerment to make change coincides with the perspective of viewing leadership through a feminist lens which is inherently intersectional (Wakefield, 2017) and attends to community involvement broadening the scope of what it means to lead and accounting for the experience of racialized women (Hill Collins, 2019). For example the community work of Black women demonstrates a form of political

engagement (Hill Collins, 2019, p. 189). Communities provide a framework where individuals, in their everyday lives, organize social structures, exercise power, and act politically (Hill Collins, 2019, p. 178). This makes communities an important location where intersecting power relations are enacted, but also where these relations are challenged (Hill Collins, 2019, p. 178).

Within agriculture, leading through community involvement speaks to the wide array of informal leadership. Experiences of both racialized and non-racialized agricultural women can be informal leadership from the theoretical lens of community involvement. For example, participating in a farmers' market or a food bank donation program can be a political act that challenges the dominant practices of food distribution. The theories of sustainability and community involvement function on an individual rather than an organizational level by integrating beliefs and leadership into everyday life. Individual perspectives determine what is seen as normal and can skew what is and is not considered leadership (Dugan, 2017). Regardless of the theory considered, leadership does not function in isolation; it shifts and changes not only with the times and culture but also in response to the power structures within which it operates.

Leadership within Power Structures

Power is "at the heart of human relationships and of how societies are organized" (Batliwala, n.d., p. 10) and so, it must be examined to understand how leadership functions within these power structures. To navigate power, an understanding must be established that unequal power flows through all interactions (Dugan, 2017). Power operates in the public, private and intimate realms (Batliwala, 2010, p. 16) and within these spheres, social power determines "who gets what, who does what, who decides what, and who sets the agenda." (Batliwala, n.d., p. 13).

In the dominant culture, those with power shape knowledge, and knowledge reinforces power (Dugan, 2017, p. 58) creating a self-perpetuating system of privilege where those on top stay on top. This structural inequality and flow of power contribute to social stratification (Dugan, 2017). The interaction of an individual's stock of knowledge and ideology helps determine their social location, which in turn frames their experiences and how they navigate power structures (Dugan, 2017).

Social power is not only present in the public power structures but is also active in the private and intimate spheres of power. The private realm includes individual interactions with family or friends. For many women the power structures governing these interactions directly impact their everyday lives (Batliwala, 2010) and constitute the arena where regular discrimination is practiced (Batliwala, n.d.). Social norms and expectations of what it means to be a good wife and daughter enact limitations and make participation in activities like international migration more challenging for women (Kanaiaupuni as cited by Preibisch & Grez, 2010, p. 298). A further extension of the private realm is the intimate realm where the inner workings of women reside. Feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem are critically important to women's leadership but are often left unexamined (Batliwala, 2010). Through a feminist lens,

this self-power located within every individual (Batliwala, n.d.) means that even those who seem powerless and marginalized have agency (Batliwala, 2010). Because power is present in all aspects of a woman's life, leadership also has a role in all these spaces, from public to private and intimate.

Women both face and are a part of a wide variety of power structures, from family expectations to community norms to gender ideologies, many of which aim to remove rights and freedoms with the purpose of creating vulnerability (Batliwala, n.d.). While women and men may be a part of some of the same power structures, women have the added challenge of gendered power structures. This highlights the social power which exists between individuals, social groups, political regions and even within one's self (Batliwala, n.d.). Women navigate social power daily as it "operates in all the places in which people live their lives" (Batliwala, n.d., p. 25). The way women in agriculture choose to address power structures impacts their general approach and creates diverse leadership styles.

Women's Leadership

Women's leadership in and of itself is a challenge to the patriarchal system, and while gender equality has advanced there remain gross inequities. Women are scarce in elite leadership and top executive positions. The higher the level of power considered, the fewer the number of women present (Son Hing et al., 2023; Chin, 2011; Eagly, 2004). As leaders, women face many challenges and are often placed in situations where traditional gender roles create behavioral expectations that hinder the perception of their leadership (Chin et al., 2007). Often 'feminine' qualities such as empathy are viewed negatively in a leadership context, while 'masculine' qualities, like aggression or desire for power, are viewed as unwelcome behaviors for women leaders. This creates a lose-lose scenario for women where they are challenged to balance power and femininity (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Chin et al., 2007). This balancing of dualities is evident in the agricultural leadership of women, who feel pressure to ensure they have the masculine credibility of on-farm experience, while also feeling the expectation to present a feminine appearance (Braun et al., 2024). For many women leaders, transformational leadership has been an effective leadership style (Chin et al., 2007), as it aims to empower participants through leadership and change the context of leadership (Chin et al., 2007). A distinction is also made between so-called feminine and feminist leadership. The feminine style centers on traditionally accepted gender roles for women, while feminist leadership places focus on gendered power and advocating for social change (Lott, 2007).

Feminine Leadership. Mainstream research engages most with feminine leadership as its attributes, such as friendliness, sensitivity and unselfishness, are within accepted gender roles for women (Lott, 2007, p. 24). Within a masculinized organizational culture women often find the accepted gender roles limiting, resulting in behavioral changes on the part of women leaders (Chin et al., 2007). There is a pull felt between the expectations of bringing 'feminine qualities' to leadership, such as collaboration and empathy, and fitting into the more masculine model of being a decisive, 'take charge' leader (Vetter, 2010). While scholars like Rosener (1990) claim

that women are being recognized for creating a more interactive style of leadership, Bolman and Deal (2017) disagree stating that the research does not support the stereotype that women lead differently than men. Bolman and Deal (2017, p. 343) claim that, to subordinates, there is little difference between men and women in similar positions. This raises the question of whether women think of themselves as leading differently than men and if women believe emphasis on elements, such as collaborative practices, enhance their leadership beyond being labelled as a 'feminine' quality. Bolman and Deal (2017) do go on to acknowledge the existence of a glass ceiling for women and list conflicting gender expectations as a contributing factor, which supports the argument that women in leadership positions are challenged by traditional stereotypes. In the masculinized Canadian agriculture sector, feminine gender expectations mean women struggle to 'earn' their place in associations and in the sector, while often also shouldering a workload intensified by household and care responsibilities (Hagen et al., 2021). A feminine leadership style conforms to behaviour norms for women and is distinct from a feminist approach (Lott, 2007, p. 25).

Feminist Leadership. A feminist leadership style engages with gendered power inequities, recognizes intersectionality and aims to achieve social change (Lott, 2007). Common threads of feminist leadership definitions include a set of attributes, values, and practices, such as collaboration and inclusivity, a recognition of power and politics, and an acknowledgment of the current use of power by feminists (Batliwala, 2010, p. 14). Principles such as inclusion, collaboration, empowerment, and consensus building are considered essential in creating a feminist and more egalitarian leadership model, often referred to as "shared leadership"(Chin et al., 2007, p. 10). While feminist leadership is diverse, it is also contested by marginalized groups as privileged and heavily influenced by the Global North, which is partly due to the inaccessibility online of the historical work of the Global South (Batliwala, 2010, p. 13).

The shared governance principles of feminist leadership fit well with the grassroots beginnings and values of the organic sector. The centering of these values has meant a greater opportunity for women to lead in the organic sector as is evident by the high number of women holding executive positions in the movement's associations, from local, and provincial, to national (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2021; Sumner, 2005, p. 80)[3]. Organic farm women also participate informally in community leadership by taking part in network-focused activities such as roundtables and panels (Sumner, 2005, p. 81).

This focus on collaborative and relational leadership, which integrates many of the principles essential to feminism such as using power to mobilize other women, is seen as an avenue for elevating women in leadership. Adding to the complexity of women's leadership is the important role of interconnected systems of oppression that create social inequities, unequal

[3] This will be further discussed in the Additional Findings section as a comparison of the organic and conventional sector opportunities and attitudes impacting women in leadership.

power relations and divergent viewpoints (Hill Collins, 2019), this intersectionality impacts the diverse ways individual women lead (Breslin et al., 2017, p. 172). The theory of intersectionality highlights unique leadership barriers, challenges, and opportunities among women of different social groupings (Breslin et al., 2017, p. 172). The interlocking systems of oppression, such as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation have been highlighted as intersectionality by the emergence of Black feminism (Breslin et al., 2017, p. 162).

Viewing leadership through a feminist intersectional lens is especially important in the masculinized agricultural sector as it helps illuminate the barriers and opportunities that exists for some but not others. In this context, leadership can create complex and contradictory situations for women to navigate, and their perception of the events may hinge on their individual positionality. For example, women within the organic sector may view leadership as a point of community connection (Sumner, 2005). At the same time, isolation may be created when women feel overlooked by colleagues within more traditional agricultural communities such as industry associations (Hagen et al., 2021). These are diverse experiences of leadership and while some create connection, such as in the organic sector, others lead to varying levels of isolation. This indicates that another important element to explore in relation to leadership practices is isolation.

Experiences of Isolation

Social isolation can occur in any segment of society and is measured by indicators such as "living alone, having few social network ties, and having infrequent social contact"(Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015, p. 227). Closely related to social isolation is the more subjective measure of loneliness. Social isolation and loneliness can influence each other and shape an individual's perception and reality of their mental health (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). The critical impact social isolation has on mental health and well-being is becoming more recognized with links between social isolation and adverse health outcomes such as depression, physical impairments, and mortality (Hawkley & Capitanio, 2015; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015) being identified. This section will discuss social isolation in farming, social isolation in the context of Covid-19, and farm women's experience of isolation.

Social Isolation in Farming

Worldwide, farmers tend to exhibit higher rates of mental illness, ranging from stress and anxiety to depression and suicide, than the general population (Daghagh Yazd et al., 2019; Hagen et al., 2019). Initial studies indicate that Canadian farmers have higher negative mental health outcomes than farmers in countries such as Australia and the UK (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019). Given the critical role of agriculture in society, attention to the mental wellness of farmers is an essential area for further research (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019). Social isolation is identified as a contributing factor to mental health outcomes for farmers (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019) and can be viewed as having two main elements, first the size of the individual's network or the potential

social support, and second, the quality of the network in terms of subjective well-being (Parent, 2012, p. 3).

Prior to industrial agriculture, social networks were strong within agriculture because many cultures, such as the crofters in Scotland, approached farming communally, naturally building social connections (McIntosh, 2001). With the advent of the industrial agricultural system though, farm practices became heavily masculinized (Preibisch & Grez, 2010) and the 'lone farmer' model emerged. This model is beginning to be challenged by organic farmers who, according to studies in the United Kingdom and the United States, identify contentment with both environmental and social connections (Brigance et al., 2018) of their farming practices. Overall the mental health of organic farmers was found to be much better than conventional farmers (Daghagh Yazd et al., 2019, p. 12). While organic farmers identified some of the same risk factors as conventional farmers, they also identified contentment with positive mental health aspects (Brigance et al., 2018). Most farmer studies focus on the negative aspects of mental health, however, there are also positive aspects, such as quality of life, that contribute to resiliency and are important to understand when aiming to improve farmers' well-being (Hagen et al., 2019, p. 17). Production methods and geographic location have, for many years, impacted social isolation in agriculture but more recently, the unprecedented experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has brought the importance of mental health to the forefront.

Social Isolation during Covid-19

Social isolation and mental health became a more prominent public concern during the Covid-19 pandemic. The restrictions implemented across the world and in Canada were unprecedented. The impact of the extraordinary Covid-19 regulations on mental health and well-being is unknown (Kumar & Rajasekharan, 2021). Some studies are starting to emerge, but much research is required to understand the lasting impact of the social isolation imposed over the pandemic. One review found that the perceived decrease in social interactions was stronger for men than women which could be due to their differing perceptions of social relations (Buecker & Horstmann, 2021).

During the pandemic, Canadian agriculture faced labour shortages, and the public experienced disruption in the food supply chain, and rising prices (Statistics Canada, 2022a). For farmers, this added to their regular stress. With new pandemic-related health measures being introduced and changed regularly, farmers required adaptability to shift practices. Farmers met quarantine and limits on in-person contact with the solution of direct delivery. This resulted in consumer direct product delivery becoming the second-highest direct sales method for farms (Statistics Canada, 2022a, p. 9). This shift in sales method maintained or enhanced direct contact with consumers and may have helped farmers reduce social isolation and build connection despite the pandemic restrictions.

Farm Women's Experience of Isolation

The experiences of Canadian agricultural women with social isolation have been examined as a part of broader studies on famers, however Jones-Bitton (2019) identified gender differences and mental health as a possible priority area for future research. Though there are numerous worldwide studies on farmer mental health, few are Canadian based and within those, women are included as a small sample. These studies recognize the limitation and call for further research on the experience of Canadian farm women with mental health and social isolation (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019; Sumner, 2005). Agricultural women face unique farming, family and mental health challenges that can negatively impact their wellness (Hagen et al., 2021; Jones-Bitton et al., 2019). Daghagh et al. (2019) reviewed multiple studies worldwide and identified a common finding that women farmers experienced more negative mental health and psychological distress than male farmers. In Canada, a study utilizing mental health scales found that Canadian women farmers scored worse than their male counterparts in stress, anxiety and depression and compounding the impact of those results, the women also scored lower in their resilience (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019). On the positive side, women were more willing to seek help for mental health concerns than men, however a key component of their willingness was "whether or not the mental health service provider had a knowledge base of farming and agriculture." (Hagen et al., 2019, p. 17). Though women are more likely to ask for help, they are also more likely to prioritize their partners mental health over their own (Daghagh Yazd et al., 2019).

The role of relationships, both with individuals and with community, is critical for influencing feelings of isolation in rural women (Geissinger et al., 1993). On an individual level, women in the Western agricultural tradition, have faced varying challenges regarding isolation often related to the assigned gender roles (Riney-Kehrberg, 1993). Over the intervening years since these studies, gender roles have been slowly shifting with power imbalances being more recognized and acknowledged (Braun et al., 2024). Women are increasingly taking on the management of farms, becoming farm operators (Statistics Canada, 2022b) and participating in movements addressing food system concerns (Azima & Mundler, 2022). However, despite these advancements, the gender inequity remains strong in the male-dominated agricultural industry (Braun et al., 2024). Women indicated traditional gender tasks of household duties, childcare and the feeling of responsibility for the emotional well-being of all family members add to the already stressful occupation of farming (Hagen et al., 2021). Farm role conflict, unhappy relationships, and long work hours also tend to increase women's negative mental health (Daghagh Yazd et al., 2019). Community engagement also plays an important role in mental health. Canadian farm women indicate that integrating into traditional agricultural communities such as industry associations can be frustrating as they often feel dismissed or undervalued by other agricultural sector members and these experiences add to their stress (Hagen et al., 2021). More positively, organic farm women identified satisfaction in farming as a means of connecting to the local community and sharing values (Sumner, 2005). Additionally, women are finding ways to use their experiences with mental health and social isolation to implement creative

solutions such as the efforts of a group of women on the prairies using social media to help each other through social isolation and build community networks (Campbell, 2021). For example, Lesley Kelly, a Canadian woman, responded to her own and her family's experiences of isolation, by co-founding a foundation that focuses on awareness of isolation in farming and provides supports (CTV News, 2021).

Summation of Knowledge Gaps

Overall, there are knowledge gaps regarding the mental health of farmers in Canada (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019) and women farmers' experiences, specifically, should be further researched. Though women engage in farm labour and management, they remain less studied than male farmers (Daghagh Yazd et al., 2019), making them a critical group for research. Additionally, building resilience is emerging as critical to improving farmers resistance to stress and suggestions of engaging in and "valuing other social roles like community leaders" (Jones-Bitton et al., 2019, p. 233) provides a linkage between social isolation and leadership that underscores the importance of this research. While there are extensive discussions within each of the main topic areas and even research that connects across a couple of the themes, there is little academic research linking the three areas of agricultural women, leadership, and social isolation. By positioning social isolation, especially in the context of Covid-19 and climate events, as an influencing factor on the leadership practices of women in agriculture, this research project adds to the academic knowledge base and surfaces new information. As the country, and the world, emerges from the pandemic, this research is timely and vital in assessing not only the difficulties but also the opportunities created for farming women by the Covid-19 measures.

Conceptual Framework: Intersectional Feminist Research

This project utilizes an Intersectional Feminist framework, so identities such as gender, race, and age that overlap to shape unique experiences will be centred as a lens through which to examine the data collected from participants. By aligning the lenses of feminist theory and intersectionality, this study aims to examine and surface the experiences of women in the BC organic sector by centering their voices in this research.

Integrating feminist theory and recognizing the gendered power dynamic is a critical element in women's experience (Mcdiarmid et al., 2021). As a conceptual framework, an intersectional feminist lens centres women's experiences while considering the role of power. Gendered power is included by Reid and Frisby (2008) in the six key dimensions of Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR). Though this project did not have the capacity to employ FPAR, many of these principles informed the project's intersectional feminist framework, especially "centering gender and women's experiences while challenging patriarchy… accounting for intersectionality…[and] reflexivity" (Reid & Frisby, 2008, p. 93). Applying these dimensions to women in agriculture brings a feminist lens for inclusion and equality that may be lacking in the masculinized northern agricultural system.

Of particular importance is the need to employ an intersectional lens as a critical component in this project's conceptual framework. Acknowledging power and the ways it shapes intersectionality is critical to understanding the diverse experiences of women and to create possibilities for social change (Reid & Frisby, 2008, p. 98). Intersectionality recognizes that "social identities such as race, class, gender, ability, geography, and age interact to form unique meanings and complex experiences within and between groups in society" (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011, p. 217). Black feminism gave rise to intersectionality and shed light on these interlocking systems of oppression and how they are not only inextricably linked but also exacerbate each other (Breslin et al., 2017, pp. 162–165). Intersectionality examines domains of power and the different impacts of policy on diverse populations (Hankivsky & Jordan-Zachery, 2019). Power relations influence perspectives on social issues and the intersection of oppressions creates distinct viewpoints (Hill Collins, 2019, p. 167). While my framework will recognize the commonalities of women in agriculture, the inclusion of an intersectional lens will highlight the diversity of experiences and positionalities women hold within the sector. The feminist intersectional approach in this project helps discern the unique experiences of women in the BC organic sector. As a study focused on women, utilizing a feminist lens better enables the experience of participants to be identified and shared. Additionally, intersectionality will help surface the nuanced experiences of women in agriculture, which is critical to creating a more in-depth understanding. The lens of intersectionality allows this project to probe the complexities that shape differing experiences. Through semi-structured and elite interviews, this exploratory study has gathered experiences and reflections of women in the BC agriculture sector. The interpretation of this rich data has been informed by the concepts of feminism and intersectionality.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

This chapter describes the methodology and methods used in this study to explore the experiences of BC farm women with leadership and isolation.

The chapter begins by outlining the methodology informing the project then moves to the methods utilized for gathering data. Elements discussed within the methods section are the semi-structured and elite interviews. Following the Methods section, the chapter will conclude with the Data Analysis, and Strengths, Limitations, and Delimitations sections. As the methods involved engagement with women farmers in BC, HREB approval was required and obtained (Certificate #21-0621) to ensure ethical research guidelines were followed.

Methodology

A case study methodology was used for this project. As a research methodology, a case study enables an in-depth understanding of a current issue within a bounded group (Coombs, 2022). Of the three case study types, (single) instrumental, (multiple) collective and intrinsic (Coombs, 2022), this project employs the (single) instrumental model. As a case study, this research investigates the bounded group of women in the BC organic sector through the contemporary phenomenon of Covid-19 and climates events. Specifically, the bounded group is studied to generate an in-depth understanding regarding the impact of their organic practices and social isolation, due to Covid-19 and climate events, on their leadership. To achieve this, I utilized the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews to collect data from members of the bounded population. In analyzing the collected data, I used a feminist intersectional lens to ensure participants voices were centred in the research.

By centering participant voices, this projects seeks to connect knowledge, empowerment, and social change through valuing the local and lived experiences of communities (Hall & Tandon, 2017). To do this, a high value was placed on the lived experience of the participants. The open-ended interview questions were designed with the intent of enabling project participants to direct the exploration of factors they felt were important in the relationship between leadership and isolation. They grounded the research in the lived experiences and practices of the participants themselves. The semi-structured interviews not only gave participants space to articulate the value of their relationships through open-ended questions but also through the opportunity to tell stories. This focus meant the emerging themes and theories came directly from the local and lived experiences of BC women in Agriculture. Because the experiences of women were central to this project, feminist concerns inspired the approach and choice of research method as they acknowledge the presence of gendered power dynamics and the role gender plays in determining identity (Mcdiarmid et al., 2021). Recognizing the uniqueness of gendered experiences is a key element in understanding the data collected.

Feminist and intersectional perspectives were layered into the methodology to centre the voices and lived experiences of women within the broader community of agriculture. All the participants live within power structures that impact their everyday lives so, acknowledging and

centering this experience was important for creating an accurate understanding of their varying situations. Adopting a collaborative mindset and approach helped create scenarios where both researcher and participants were able to contribute expertise and learn from each other (O'Fallon & Dearry, 2002).

As the principal researcher, I hold an insider/outsider position in relation to the community of women in the BC organic sector, so much of the research was grounded in trusting relationships. Recognizing my non-neutral position and the potential benefits for gaining more in-depth information from participants, is an important element within the methodology. These methodologies consider power dynamics and require reflection on positionality (Kantamneni et al., 2019, p. 71), so I followed this example by including a positionality statement on page 5.

Methods

The project research relied on conducting semi-structured interviews with two different groups of participants. The first group was comprised of women who held no formal leadership position within the BC organic sector. The second group were women who held formal leadership positions within the sector. Because the timeframe and resources were limited, I relied upon already established relationships with individuals within the community of women in the BC agriculture sector.

As a research project engaging women farmers in BC, gender and occupation were key criterion for the selection process. The sample selection began with an initial group of women farmers in BC who had already established relationships with the researcher. Snowball sampling, the process of asking already identified participants to suggest other participants (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2022), was utilized to broaden the reach of the project. To put snowball sampling into action, the initial group was asked to identify other community members who would be interested in participating and to share the principal researchers' contact information with them. By engaging early participants in identifying other participants, the project aimed to promote broad and diverse participation within the sector.

Women farmers in BC are a difficult group to quantify because of the ever-shifting nature of the workforce. The 2021 census indicated that the number of women owning or operating farms in BC at the time was 9390 (Statistics Canada, 2022b), but the number of women involved in BC agriculture increases substantially when the everchanging number of casual labourers and migrant farmworkers is considered.

While relationships enhance the depth of participation and data collected in a research project, they may also influence power. So, the possible influence of previous power relations on the behaviour of participants or on their willingness to share openly had to be considered. To mitigate this risk, the project consent form clearly indicated that participants were able to stop or withdraw their participation at any time with no negative personal or professional consequences.

Recruitment

Participants were identified through my own personal contact lists and were contacted via email with the interview invitation to participate (See Appendix A). Included with the interview invitation was the Interview Consent Form (See Appendix B).

The ethic of care is an important aspect in feminist research which values relationships between people and their responsibilities to each other (Banks & Brydon-Miller, 2018) and applies to this study. Considering responsibilities to each other was especially important in this project where the research questions explored the impact of social isolation on leadership practices. In asking participants to discuss their experiences, feelings could surface that needed further action beyond the scope of this project. For this reason, a list of further mental health and wellness resources was sent to all participants as part of the initial email (See Appendix C).

Due to the vulnerable position of and safety concerns for women who are migrant farmworkers in BC, this population was not targeted nor actively recruited for participation in this study. In the context of this Master's project, the potential risk outweighed the possible benefits for migrant farm women of participating in this study.

The participants of this study all engage in the organic sector. Although all participants may not certify their operation, for the purpose of this study they are considered organic as they participate in the BC organic community. The sometimes-controversial divide between certified and non-certified operations will not be considered as a division for this study. Table 1 provides more background information about the individual participants such as farm type and size, leadership types and if they self-identified as a leader.

TABLE1:
PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Participant	Farm Type	Farm size	Geographic Location	Type of leadership	Self-identified leader	Years in Leadership	Gender	Ethnicity	Age Range
1	Certified Organic vegetables	Over 15 acres	Rural	Local, Provincial association creation and leadership, municipal government, mentorship	yes	Over 10 years	Woman	Asian	50 and over

2	Certified Organic vegetable	Over 15 acres	Rural	Mentorship	no	Over 10 years	Woman	White	50 and over (retired)
3	Certified Organic vegetable	Under 15 acres	Rural	Local, Provincial, National, and International Association creation and leadership, and mentorship	yes	Over 10 years	Woman	White	50 and over
4	Certified Organic vegetables	Over 15 acres	Rural	Co-op creation, Local, and Provincial Association creation and leadership, mentorship	yes	Over 10 years	Woman	White	50 and over (retired)
5	Certified Organic vegetables and processing	Over 15 acres	Rural	Local, Provincial and National Association leadership, mentorship	no (not comfortable with the traditional leadership terms)	Over 10 years	Woman	White	50 and over
6	Not Applicable	N/A	Urban	National Association coordination	no	Under 10 years	Woman	White	Under 50
7	Sustainable livestock	Over 15 acres	Rural	Provincial and National Associations creation and leadership	yes (but not good at it)	Under 10 years	Woman	White	Under 50

Semi-structured Interviews

The overarching purpose for the interviews was to gain new insights about the individual and social complexity (Saldana et al., 2011, p. 4) of the relationship between isolation and leadership practices of women during challenging events such as the pandemic. The interview protocol and questions (See Appendix D) were structured to provide a venue for exploring the perspectives of women in agricultural on leadership. While social isolation was of particular

interest in this study, the open-ended research questions encouraged participants to discuss other factors that they deemed important to their leadership practices. The semi-structured interviews were formatted as conversations to provide a 'site' to jointly create meaning (Gudmundsdottir, 1996, p. 295)and a sense of comfort. As a qualitative research tool, semi-structured interviews rely not only on collecting participant data verbatim but also upon the perceptions of the interviewer (Saldana, 2011, p.32). Throughout the interview process my thoughts and feelings were noted and incorporated into the analysis. Women farmers and women farmers in formal positions of leadership in the BC agriculture sector, such as farm industry association board members, were invited to participate in semi-structure interviews. The latter interviews were consistent in the aim of surfacing the perspectives of women in formal agricultural leadership roles regarding the impact of isolation on their practices. All of the interviews' semi-structured format allowed participants to exercise power in directing the content of the interview and ensured information they viewed as critical to the topic was captured in the process. The sample size was small but aimed to include a cross-section of women farmers in BC. The semi-structured interviews were conducted over Zoom, recorded with the participants' consent, and then transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

This project utilized thematic analysis and inductive coding to interpret the data collected through the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis is a flexible process commonly used in qualitative research to help the researcher organize data, identify themes, and interpret results with a 'bottom-up' approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A thematic analysis approach grounds the project themes in the data collected rather than fitting the data into pre-existing themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To support this approach, inductive coding was used to ensure themes were rooted in the data. Inductive coding means that the data was coded without trying to fit it into preconceived themes or coding frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While inductive coding aims to enable the emergence of data themes free of preconception, the researcher naturally plays a role in the interpretation of the data. As an insider/outsider of the target group, I engaged in reflection throughout the project to limit the influence of preset biases. A feminist and intersectional lens was also employed in creating codes and analyzing the data. Reflection on the roles of class, gender and race was part of my process in choosing codes. Because this research project collected a small data set, I was able to use a manual coding process within Microsoft Excel.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted over zoom and recorded with the participants' consent. The recordings were transcribed using the Microsoft transcription feature. and I reviewed them to ensure clarity. I conducted a close read of each transcript to identify possible themes. An Excel spreadsheet was created with one tab per interview question and columns for the participant's ID number, the question response, potential quotes, themes identified during data input. Each respondent was assigned a row in the table along with a colour making them easily identifiable if answers are moved to more relevant questions and allowing

easy assessment if any one respondent's answers are being too heavily relied upon or if one was absent. Theme columns totaled at the bottom to help inform the analysis. Relevant information outside the identified themes was captured in the note column.

Starting with the first question, the answers of each respondent were pasted from the cleaned transcript into the excel row corresponding to the respondent's assigned number. The text was then coloured with the assigned colour. In reading through the answer, new themes were identified or agreement/disagreement with previously identified themes were noted in the theme columns. Agreement with an identified theme was denoted by a 1 in that column while disagreement with an identified theme was recorded in the notes section. As the individual respondent answers were reread, possible quotes supporting the identified themes were pulled into the quote column.

After completing the first round of coding, the commonalities were identified across participants and questions. These commonalities were then grouped into three broad themes with variations showing up as sub-themes. For example, relationships were discussed by every participant and so was identified as a theme, however the ways in which participants discussed relationships varied and so the sub themes emerged including relationship to self, to family, friends and community, to the land, food and climate, as well as gendered relations. Using this more refined coding, the second round was conducted.

Strengths, Limitations, and Delimitations of the research

The strengths, limitations, and delimitations of this study are outlined below.

Strengths

My insider/outsider position facilitated a participatory feel in this study that otherwise would not have been possible within the time and capacity limitations of a graduate program. The pre-existing relationships with many of the participants that were established over a decade of working within the BC agriculture sector, allowed this project to echo the type of engagement that Community Engaged Research aims to practice. I was able to leverage the trust I had built by being an active member of the community for many years to gain in-depth access to participants' expressions about their feelings and views on the research topic. The understanding of the community culture, the social networks, and the power structures, is a critical aspect that enabled quick uptake from community champions (Kantamneni et al., 2019, p. 72).

Limitations

Covid-19 Pandemic. Covid-19 continued to impact our society over the timeframe of this study. Though restrictions eased part way through this project, barriers to meeting in-person were still in place when I applied and received HREB approval. In accordance with that approval, all the interviews were conducted online. While virtual interviews meant a consistent environment and the ability to connect with participants around the province, it also meant the loss of face-to-face intimacy that can often prompt deep sharing. A virtual platform also limits

the ability of the interviewer and participant to read visual cues. The pandemic has also increased stress levels which may have impacted the availability and willingness of individuals to participate.

Absent Voices. Early in this project, women migrant farmworkers were identified as holding a unique perspective on the research questions. However, the vulnerability created by government programs such as the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) meant that gaining their perspective while maintaining their safety would be challenging. For this reason, women migrant farmworkers were not included in this study and while this choice helped to mitigate risk for vulnerable women, it also created a limitation on the study.

Being an Insider/outsider. While being an insider/outsider can provide benefits such as knowledge of the subject, it can also present limitations. There is potential for an insider/outsider to be more prone to biases due to possible emotional closeness to the research topic (Htong Kham, 2024) and so reflexivity is a key to mitigating this risk. Additionally, there are ethical considerations that arise from an insider/outsider positionality such as role conflict and confidentiality (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018). In this study, pre-existing and ongoing relationships with participants were managed through clear communication of my research role and the participants ability to leave the study if desired. The consent form outlined precautions taken for confidentiality and helped set participant expectations.

Sample Size. The sample for this project was initially drawn from my already established contacts. This approach limited the broad reach of the project. Asking initial participants to identify others helped to mitigate this limitation but the sample size for this study remained small. Despite the small sample size, the analysis and conclusions are transferable and can inform further research on the topic which would then broaden the reach of this project's conclusions and recommendations.

Intersectional Analysis: Conducting intersectional analysis has limitations that should also be considered. The complexity of intersectionality creates intricacies that can be difficult to navigate in analysis. The methodological complexity of processes, categories, and social differentiation create challenges when applying intersectional analysis (Christensen & Jensen, 2012). For this project intersectional categories considered were limited to those brought forward by participants, such as gender, race and age.

Project Capacity. Time and capacity were limitations in this study. As a graduate project, the timeline and resources available created parameters and shifted project elements. For example, while the aim was to interview 6-10 women, it ultimately reached 7 participants. Additionally, the time constraints meant this project was unable to engage in the participatory research practices.

Delimitations

Because this is a graduate research project, the available time and capacity also limited the study scope. This meant not only a small sample size but also that some related topics were too large for examination within this study. A main component of the project was a discussion of social isolation with women farmers. This topic could potentially cross into the realm of mental health, however, the study remained focused on social isolation as it related to leadership practices. The impact of social isolation on the mental health of Canadian farmers is an area worthy of further research but is outside scope of this project. The focus of this study on women in the BC organic sector, which is a small sub-sector of Canadian agriculture, is another delimitation. By extension this means that the complex and broad ramifications of the migrant worker programs in Canada is also beyond the scope of this project. The far-reaching implications of these programs on the lives of women may be outside of this project but are important in any consideration of these programs.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research findings from the seven interviews conducted with women involved in the BC agriculture sector. All interviewees come from or work with small to mid-scale agricultural operations in the organic farming sector. The interviews aimed to centre women's leadership experiences within agriculture and how their farm practices and events associated with isolation impacted their leadership. The interviewees were encouraged to tell stories highlighting their experiences. Through the semi-structured format, valuable insights to the experiences and feelings of women leaders in the BC agriculture sector have surfaced. The responses of the seven interviewees have been anonymized and will be referred to by an assigned number from one to seven.

Main Findings

Reasons and motivations for farming

The first two questions of the interview aimed to create a familiar environment where interviewees felt comfortable sharing their experiences. These questions also provided a backdrop for their thoughts and feelings around leadership and isolation. Interviewees were first invited to share how they became farmers and then how being a farmer is important to them. Six out of seven women spoke of childhood experiences, family influences, and community connections that brought them into farming. Four explained that their interest in healthy food and concern for the climate helped propel them into farming. The following quotes illustrate some of these points.

> My first introduction was when I was three when my parents bought a farm... and I put on my first pair of proper rubber boots. (Participant 5)

> It skipped a generation both my grandparents were farmers. For one thing, I was always really interested in food and growing food. (Participant 4)

> I realized that it was pretty cool to grow food that could nourish people. (Participant 3*)*

> Climate change and peak oil were … kind of top of my mind…(Participant 1)

Though not specifically asked, five of the seven women volunteered that they had not set out to become farmers, that it was unexpected. Even though some had agricultural education, they still had not expected to farm. As can be seen by the quotes below, farming was not set out as a career goal.

> I thought of it [farming] as something you did as a part time job in the middle of the summer when you're 16. (Participant 3)

> I just kind of got carried along by this wave of public support and momentum [for local food]. And yeah, before I knew it, I'd accidentally dropped out of university. (Participant 7)

As a follow-up to how they came to farming, participants were asked to talk about the ways in which being a farmer was important to them. Their answers fell mainly into three categories: 1) creating positive change through their actions, 2) building positive internal feelings such as enjoyment, and 3) feeling a relationship to the land, climate and food.

Having an impact and creating positive change in the world and their communities was stated by six women as being an important aspect of farming to them. The types of positive change described ranged from feeding their families and communities to caring for ecosystems to contributing to system change as demonstrated by the following quotes:

> I guess like overall, it just feels like it's something that enables me to make a positive concrete step towards all of the chaos and negative things that are happening in the world and in the community … it allows me to feel like I'm doing something positive. Yeah, feeding my community in a way that is environmentally sensitive. (Participant 1)

> I'm really interested in, kind of, this potential for farming to be revolutionary and to really challenge some of these really big issues we're facing, like climate change, like corporate control, like inequality, like land access. Like all these things, biodiversity, conservation, reconciliation, like a lot of these things can be tied into farms and farming. (Participant 6)

The relationships women had to land, climate, and food was cited by six interviewees as part of why farming was important to them. The passionate relationship women had to land was conveyed as a deep seeded connection. The importance of growing food was also discussed as empowering and a way to gain a measure of control in a chaotic world.

> There's just an intrinsic value to it. It is, I think even more, it’s a relationship. And that, I think, was what I learned when I was little. Was that it's a relationship with the land. (Participant 5)

> I have a really long-term relationship with this land, yeah. And I have a very strong sense I don't need to own it. It’s not an ownership thing, it's a relationship thing. So, and no one can take that away from me. (Participant 4)

> Just the importance of being able to grow our food. My kids, I've worn them out with telling them every dinner that we sit down to, ‘by the way, this came from this person down the road, and we grew this’. You know, the whole story of their dinner. (Participant 3)

> [Farming] was something I could control. And it was a big thing, right? Like, look what we saw with the pandemic and the fires and floods and everything. Being able to grow

> some food is substantial and it's empowering. And yeah, I can't control Covid and I can't control the weather, although that's another conversation, but I can grow some food. (Participant 7)

Positive internal feelings were featured by five interviewees who spoke about the enjoyment and satisfaction they derive from farming as well as the refuge it provides for them. The way they speak of farming also demonstrates the important role it plays in their mental health whether it grounds them or acts a place to reset or provides a spark of inspiration. Additionally, two claimed farming was part of their identity, how they related to others and how they gain credibility within their leadership roles.

> I feel it's important to me because it's something I feel I've I spent a long time learning about … I think part of the satisfaction is, it's come with a lot of ... blood, sweat and tears. (Participant 2)

> It is, the thing that feeds my soul. It is, the thing that both literally and figuratively grounds me. (Participant 5)

> Farming has a really direct result. You know, sometimes not always what you want, but always direct. So, I think that that to me is really appealing. It's just a really hands on way of being connected to the land. (Participant 4*)*

> It's been a real struggle lately, but I can't seem to stop farming because it's how I identify. And it's at least one of the reasons why I am successful in my other job, because, like literally, almost without fail, if I'm meeting with a politician or somebody, one of the first things they say is 'ohh and you farm too'… So, it gives me so much credibility… (Participant 7)

> It's identity. It's the way that I interact with my community (Participant 1)

Leadership as a woman farmer

In question three, participants were asked if, as a woman farmer, they could talk about any areas where they saw themselves as leading or taking a leadership role. Interviewees discussed collaboration and relationship building, succession planning and the role of gender in relation to their leadership. All seven interviewees indicated that a key aspect of their leadership was collaboration, networking and relationship building both through formal and informal roles. This was expanded to moving away from traditional organizational structures by one participant who touched on the challenges created by initiating a more collaborative model in a society built for hierarchy.

> I don't know that I have done enough to restructure organizations that I'm involved in ... I think that's a big piece of the problem, if I can state it as a problem, is that we're not used to that and generally as a society, we're not working in collectivist ways. And so, it does

become really easy for individuals to take things on. And run them until they're exhausted and then drop them, without having made sure that there's somebody there to take it on. (Participant 5)

I am trying to build networks, that's definitely part of it. I'm trying to connect with people and bring together the different pieces of the farming landscape in BC. (Participant 6)

Four women expressed the importance of succession planning in their leadership practice and how they nurture and prepare others to enter leadership. Related to succession planning, two out of seven participants mentioned mentorship as part of their leadership and one, though viewed by others as a mentor, did not see herself as one.

So, for me, leadership has to do with succession too. And it's fluid. You know, I can step forward because I have the time and the space and the interest right now, I can withdraw a bit and somebody else steps forward, and then they take on part of the work too, just it's kind of like a movement. (Participant 4)

Making sure that there's succession planning because leadership's not always about you being in the front, right. It's also about creating space, finding people who have those leadership skills and moving them into positions (Participant 1)

I always think of myself as that bridge … And trying to build webs for people, to support them to find the information they need, to figure out what they're trying to do. I mean, I've had some really interesting times in some mentorship roles. (Participant 3)

I've always been reluctant, I've never seen myself as a mentor, and it's only if somebody else said 'this is my mentor' and I think, 'oh, that's interesting'. (Participant 4)

The role of gender in women's agricultural leadership was mentioned in relation to four participants' leadership experiences. All four conveyed experiencing negative behavior by men but two balanced this by also sharing their positive experiences of men, specifically in the organic sector. One participant did not want to accept that gender was even relevant in the question but conceded that the agricultural industry was one of the few spaces where she had been made to feel being a woman was a hinderance.

I hate being identified as a woman farmer. I cringe every time I have to, like select that on a drop down of deserving equity groups or whatever it's called. On one hand. On the other hand, I have never in my whole life, felt like being a woman was an impediment, until now. This is the ultimate old boys club. (Participant 7)

On the topic of gender relations, one participant shared the following story:

And so, I ended up finding like our local farmers institute, which had been around for like eight years and came to one of the meetings and was like immediately ignored and no one

said hello, no one welcomed. It was just, it was horrific like it was just not something. And I hope one of them reads this one day or find like sees like what assholes they were. And how they are perceived like by other people like maybe amongst themselves, they can be grumpy and jerky, but like they that this group really gives off bad vibes to women, non, or farmers who don't have animals with hooves, you know, people of color, like they, it's a really, it was not a very welcoming community. So, I didn't feel welcome, and you know, after a few meetings and a few more tries, just like 'OK, not my space'. And a few years later, you know, put it out to the community, 'Is a different farmers institute, would that be of help?', and you know immediately got 80 people saying, 'yeah'. So, starting a new farmers institute was, you know, a place where I stepped up and immediately, you know, got some backlash from this group, writing the Minister of Ag telling her that, you know, I was splitting apart the very fabric of the community here, you know, like these guys had done it themselves already, so whatever. But you know, right away saw that we were getting 30-40 people to our monthly meetings, and it was obviously filling a need, like a need from the more diverse small-scale farmers who didn't have a voice and didn't know where to go to get questions answered. …

Walking into the Farmers Institute and just seeing like the only woman in the room was in the kitchen making coffee and I was like, 'Oh my God. What has happened here?'. It was weird and but also knowing like in the organic sector, it was so different…

[Someone] gave me this piece of advice…you have two options, you can try and like if the system is not working for you, you can try and blow it up. It's just a lot of energy. Or you can build a new system and go around it right? And so that's what I kind of see where my path is, like I could have just butted my head up against this old farmers institute and just constantly gone, been there, in their faces, and railing about how much they didn't serve the small-scale, you know, farming community or just creating like a better space, right, which is more fun. (Participant 1)

This gendered story demonstrates the non-traditional thinking many participants employ when working within mainstream agriculture. The way participants react and work within situations such as the one described above also provides an indication of how they respond in a crisis situation such as Covid-19 and climate events.

The impact of external events on leadership

Question four delved into the impact of external circumstances on participants' leadership roles and practices. The interviewees were invited to talk about a time when circumstances outside of their control, such as Covid-19 or a climate event, had affected, either positively or negatively, their leadership. Six women discussed the importance of collaboration, already established relationships and community when faced with large scale events such as the pandemic or the recent wildfires. They spoke about how those relationships were maintained and

adapted through these challenging situations. Three interviewees mentioned there was pressure and negative impacts on their established relationships during these stressful times.

> We were forced to confront, things that were happening today, right, and really be reactive. For me, I like to be more proactive. … now suddenly it's thrown in like this, throwing us into a bit of disarray so now, 'OK, we have to react'. So, you know, what we were able to do in the beginning, it was just hear like, what was happening on the ground. And again, it was, it's mostly women who are part of the Food Policy Council. So, we were not, like people were not afraid of sharing stories, … I was really grateful that we set up this community of people who were comfortable enough with each other. We had had some time (to) develop those relationships that we could be vulnerable in and share those stories in. And then we were able to say, 'Oh my God, you've got food that's wasting, these people are hungry and don't have water'. Like, you know right away we figured out who's got the vans and the vehicles that can transport this food, transform it in a kitchen, you know, provide it here… It was pretty cool the things that we were able to do when given the latitude that an emergency requires of you. (Participant 1)

> At one point, we could see three fires, smoke from three different fires like, North, South and East. So yeah, but if we do need to evacuate, where should we go?... I was so concentrated on … doing all that fireproofing, fire smarting that I had not got done yet, or preparing or thinking about evacuation. I was not offering any assistance to anybody else... it really brought home to me how when you have crisis like that and it's affecting so many people how it just takes the air out of everything because people are so busy looking after their own stuff. (Participant 2)

> I've had to sacrifice some relationships for the good of my community, and that makes me sound like a whiny martyr. I'm not trying to be. It's just it's just a frustration that I see has occurred. Yeah, and then the fallout from that… has left me really, really burned out. And it has…, I am no longer engaged with my community. Yeah, I've just found it took a lot out of me, I think. There's another word I learned compassion fatigue. (Participant 7)

During the pandemic, while one participant did express feelings of isolation, four out of seven stated they did not feel isolated, that the nature of their work meant they were able to maintain regular face-to-face connection even through the lockdowns. One participant claimed that more than isolation, being in a constant state of reacting during the pandemic was challenging. For another participant, though the isolation of not working in-person began during the pandemic, it continued to impact her leadership practices due to geographic separation from colleagues. Four also spoke about the importance of being able to step out of leadership when personal crisis hit.

> I didn't feel as isolated as a lot of people did, because as soon as we could physically, as soon as we were permitted, …we were doing farmers markets. So, I still got to see people

> or parts of people at any rate and, you know, have communication with people and a little bit of face-to-face human interaction where I could see more than just faces on the screen. Which, you know, does make a really big difference. (Participant 5)

> for me, who thrives on interaction and connection, found myself really isolated. (Participant 4)

> the impacts of COVID are obviously not over, but the constant reactive, reactive, reactive, that has thankfully stopped…. that was hard for me, for sure. (Participant 1)

> in the times that [family mental illness] happens and I'm in a leadership position in an organization or something, I just really have to, kind of, step out for a while and just do the processing that I need to do to be able to come through that and support my … [family] and find our feet again. (Participant 3)

> I would say… that major personal emergencies like fire, being evacuated, just the stress of that, knocked me flat on my ass, like I was an absolute wreck. As far as my ability to actually, I mean, I functioned, sort of, but zero emotional resilience to anything. (Participant 5)

Three of the seven participants indicated that the increased use of technology influenced leadership in both positive and negative ways. Technology was viewed as beneficial especially for saving travel time and for leveling the speaking time of meeting participants, but the challenges of organizational trust and building community virtually were also voiced.

> Because it [zoom] cuts out the feed and it forced people to just mute, listen, raise your hand, take your turn. And for some people, and I would say, it was mostly men who tend to dominate conversations, it may have leveled the playing field a little bit more (Participant 1)

> Facilitating a meeting on zoom is 100% different than a group of actual people. There's no body language, there's no way to really read the room and go 'OK, something's going on. We're missing something'. So, in anything where I've been facilitating or chairing a meeting, you have to work 20 times harder to try to pull responses out of people and make sure that people are being heard. There is one way in which things move really smoothly cause people just zone out and they go off and they make dinner and they go to the bathroom and they do whatever and you get a lot of decisions made. Yeah, but as far as, you know, actual functional meetings and especially the community building part of those meetings was really very negatively impacted by that. (Participant 5)

> People were spending a lot more time on social media. And that certainly impacted when there were controversial issues in the community. The negativity, as the algorithms tend to do, rose to the top and sort of fed itself a lot more. So yeah, there were certain

> controversial… issues… when folks heard … I was leaning [one way on an issue], social media… started becoming really amplified and it revved up to the effect of, like, people starting to threaten me and putting up… photos someone had just grabbed off of like social my social media feed… I think the only reason that could have happened is because we weren't meeting in person, like this thing enabled people to feel like that was an appropriate way of behaving. So, you know the isolation can lead to some really extreme situations… and people don't realize I think what they're doing. (Participant 1)
>
> We learned how to do zoom and I think that was great… But when it was that severe. That we didn't even feel on the farm, that we could meet in person. You know then that, it felt personal. It wasn't. It clearly wasn't personal, but it felt that way. (Participant 4)
>
> I think it's taken some organizations quite a long time to rebuild some of that kind of base level of interpersonal trust and relationships. And they only succeeded because they had very strong relationships already. And could weather it, but it's really hard. (Participant 5)

One participant shared the following gendered story:

> My community was hit really, really hard by fires and floods and when that happened, I found myself kind of catapulted into a leadership role because my community was being forgotten ... I found myself very quickly advocating for the whole community. We needed an Agri recovery program yesterday. Literally people's properties were continuing to disappear into the river because there was nothing done to prevent it. Yeah, it was really bad. It was extremely expensive. Dealing with floods is a whole different ball game, fire goes through, and it's done, the water just keeps going. So, it was really critical that we got some funding flowing and the government was just dragging their feet…
>
> I found myself stepping up into a leadership role for my community there and because of my role with our nonprofit, I was positioned, I already had relationships with the people that needed to be poked and prodded in the government. And so, I used my position to get a lot of attention here … now I'm on the list of 'What a Pain in the Ass' people. You know, like I pay for that now because I pushed so hard. I was a good leader for my community, and I got stuff done here. But like there's relationships that I don't know if I'm ever going to recover them because of how hard I had to push. And people who I can work with them now, but I know they're always going to kind of hold me at arm's length because, you know, I'm a bit of a troublemaker… I've had to sacrifice some relationships for the good of my community. …
>
> I guess … my overall frustration with the experience [of leadership] has been that I end up feeling resentful that I have to use the tactics that I have to use to get anything done. And then I get punished for it. And I think that a lot of that has to do with the fact that I'm a woman. And that pisses me off. So, I guess that would be my takeaway observation about strong women in leadership roles. (Participant 7)

Isolation and Leadership

Participants were asked to provide examples of how they felt isolation did, or did not, affect their work as a leader in question five. The impact of isolation on relationships, both maintaining them and the negative impact was discussed by six of the interviewees. Of those, three felt a distance from their community was identified as a negative impact.

> The other thing about the whole COVID isolation experience was that it makes you value things differently. And valuing the relationships that you have within an organization differently, which I think is really helpful. Like there's less of that I'll just go do the thing because you actually really want to be in communication with people. You know, it's that like the sort of forced over communication that can sometimes happen. It was more the other way around. So, I think in some ways there was more reaching out to people, more trying to make connections because a lot of stuff was missing in people's daily lives. So, in some senses … there were ways in which it improved some of the bonds within organizations. …what I would say is it personalized what were more professional relationships before. (Participant 5)

> The only thing that's coming up for me, specifically around the isolation is that I did purposely connect with other, especially other women, who I was able to bounce ideas off of, right. So, like we would go for a safe walks in the park together or you know, we would, we'd be outside. So, I still maintained a circle of support even while I was here on the farm during COVID. So, I think that's it's really important for, especially women who are in leadership, to have those support circles around them. (Participant 1)

> It's [isolation] made me, yeah, less confident, less ambitious, less… And so … whenever we went outside to conferences or something, I was meeting other farmers and that was it was like super helpful and important. (Participant 2)

> The isolation makes everything move slower...sometimes I just feel lost in like, 'where are we headed?' and 'what should I be doing' and 'what's the best way to use this time?' (Participant 6)

> During that two years where, like the world was living in fear and chaos. And some people were, like, literally, and some of my staff would have been, locked in their house, petrified of the world… I think we became a tighter family during that time. (Participant 3)

In the case of isolation related to the pandemic, five mentioned the need to adapt to the increased role of technology in their leadership practice, with both positive and negative results.

> Trying to learn to adapt to a technology. So as far as just like meetings, relearning how to try to run a meeting so that you actually, so that it is inclusive, which I find extraordinarily difficult over zoom. (Participant 5)

> It [isolation] enabled me to do a lot more because I like, I didn't have to leave the farm like, the lack of driving … and commuting into town and back… (Participant 1)

> I probably was least isolated than almost anybody else I know, because I had to go to work every day. (Participant 3)

> We're organizing online, so it's been hard to be there for people and be supportive in the way that would be really, community building… I think if we were in person and those closer ties then we could be like, 'I'm going to be part of your network of resilience' and be there for each other, but it's mostly just been hard…. I think that a lot of these like positive impacts happen more when you have that chance already to build the stronger ties and be like physically there for each other. So, I think the online aspect has made that a bit challenging. (Participant 6)

> The community building part of those [zoom] meetings was really very negatively impacted... And I think it's taken some organizations quite a long time to rebuild some of that kind of base level of interpersonal trust and relationships. (Participant 5)

Collaborative and shared farm practices and leadership

Over the course of the interview, participants discussed their views and definitions of leadership. So where possible, these comments were considered together. Five of the six women who provided definitions, stated that a key factor in leadership is showing up and stepping up to do the work. Collaborative and shared leadership was mentioned by four interviewees as main components in their views on leadership. One also discussed her changing viewpoint of leadership and the struggle to move away from the hierarchical structures that seem to encompass it.

> You show up, you make a difference … I think that's pretty cool. Like, you can actually make change through being a leader or through being engaging in organizational work. (Participant 3)

> If you care about something, you show up and you do the work. And you keep showing up and you keep doing the work. And that's just what you do. And so, for me, I feel like that is more just participation in community than leadership. (Participant 5)

> Leadership isn't about me doing it alone. (Participant 4)

> For me it [leadership] implies someone stepping up to be either a guide or to create the space that's needed. And like I'll explain what I mean so. So, there is a stepping up and the ability to take on some responsibility that currently is either not being met or is not being met in a satisfactory way. So that is, that for me, that does imply a person shouldering some responsibility But, I have also found in my experience that one can only do that for so long and that if you are trying to create positive change and permanent

> change that it does require, creating and bringing people along with you and creating the spaces that enable a more collective sustained response (Participant 1)

> That hierarchical concept of leadership, …the one that we're all familiar with, doesn't sit too well with me anymore. (Participant 5)

Throughout the interviews, each participant made comments at various times about whether they saw themselves as leaders. As an additional finding, these numbers were calculated. Three of seven participants claimed that they felt they were leaders, one agreed she was a leader, but she was not very good at it, while the final three claimed they were not leaders. The reasons the three gave for not feeling as though they were leaders ranged from feeling behind the scenes rather than out front, to not having thought of herself in that light before, to not believing in the hierarchical construct of leadership.

> Talking about inclusion and trying to find out how to live in a non-hierarchical community, trying to figure out what that looks like. I guess it kind of integrated into me as a way of saying 'no, I'm not a leader', I'm just one of the people that shows up and gets shit done. (Participant 5)

Following this line, the sixth question asked interviewees to reflect on how their farm practices influenced the way they led. Three participants discussed relationships as an element connecting their farming and leadership practices. They talked about the ways in which their relationship with the land and how they farmed crossed into their leadership relationships and methods. Two specifically mentioned collective or cooperative farming translating into collaborative leadership. Three indicated that they use their farm practice to identify gaps and inform what's important in their leadership. Another identified an aspirational approach as a common thread between farming and leadership.

> I would say there's a big difference that I notice in like, there's farmers who are farming in community and there's farmers who are farming kind of in isolation... And the ones who are farming in community, they have more capacity. I feel like they're more used to building those connections and working in teams. Also, there's a bit of openness. It's like, 'I have people I can rely on' and so are able to share the hard parts … whereas I find that the ones farming in isolation it's like 'I just got to get it done'. It's like 'the whole world's on my shoulders and it comes down to me and I'm just going to put my head down and get it done'. …I think it's quite impactful having the community to rely on, then you bring more capacity to the work. (Participant 6)

> They [farm practices and leadership] would be aligned, and the alignment is that I lead with cooperation. (Participant 4)

> Often I can use like my own experiences on the farm to underline certain situations and truths that are happening in community. (Participant 1)

> All the work that I do, whether it's in a conventional forum or in an organic forum, is based on my belief that building healthy soil and growing healthy food is going to create healthy communities. … so I think that it is a lot about how I lead because I'm not going to enter into a deep conversation, -well, I might enter into a deep conversation- with somebody from that Syngenta, but I'm still going to hold those principles close to my heart. (Participant 3)

> Just actually trying to run the farm successfully is, … I do feel it is a bit of an act of leadership." (Participant 2)

> Because it's all very aspirational, isn't it? They say, farmers are just inherently optimist, or you wouldn't keep trying, right? And so, I have a vision for how I want to farm that's quite aspirational, and I may never achieve it, to my standards, and I guess that tracks pretty well with my work, with the organization in that what we've visioned and our goals, can seem quite unattainable and unrealistic, but for some reason we just keep trying because it's the right thing to do. (Participant 7)

Emphasis on cultivating communities and the next generations of leaders

The interviews concluded with an open-ended opportunity for participants to add anything else they felt was important or stress elements of their leadership work and/or experience. Four interviewees stressed the critical role that succession planning and cultivating the next generation of leaders plays in their leadership practice. Three discussed the central role of knowledge sharing and the need for continuous learning. Two of the seven participants commented on the role of gender, both the difficulty being a woman in agriculture and in convincing other women they are leaders. One talked about the personal bravery needed in leadership.

> A really important part of leadership is looking now, planning … your way out. Like who then can take over from me? (Participant 1)

> I really want the next generation of folks to see the value in both the organizations because they're super important (Participant 3)

> What I keep in mind is that I build to last. So, the build to last is the guiding principle. (Participant 4)

> I never really campaigned on the fact that I was a woman of colour, and I was the first woman of colour …[as a] director. But now it's happened and so like, the next woman of colour,… or the next person of colour or the next woman… should not be as hard, like we've done it already. (Participant 1)

> A lot of people have shared their experience with us. Experience and knowledge and trying to … kind of past that … we've benefited from a lot of other people, leading and helping us out and so trying to carry on that process (Participant 2)

> I think that's pretty amazing that you can collaborate with a group of people that you don't really know. You can find a common ground and you can build something out of nothing… then you create these dynamic webs of interactivity where everybody can learn something from everybody else. (Participant 3)

> I know a lot of women, they need to be tapped multiple times before sometimes they even agree to a, like a lesser position... sometimes people don't see themselves in positions of leadership and they need others to see them. (Participant 1)

> Leadership sometimes just looks very personal. And can be about someone just taking a risk on a personal level, saying something emotional or something true that might put them at risk of being attacked. That is certainly a very important form of leadership, that is something that I think people are appreciating more. (Participant 5)

> I just really believe deeply that if you engage in the world, you'll learn, it'll give back, you'll make new friends, you create new communities, and you can make something from nothing. (Participant 3)

Summary

The semi-structured interviews opened a space for interviewees to share their experiences of leadership, isolation and the connection to their farm practices. The women were encouraged to share stories throughout providing a rich picture of the experiences of women leaders engaged in small to medium scale organic production. Participants represented various commodities, but experiences shared demonstrated many similarities which have contributed to the emerging themes.

The findings surfaced the important themes of relationships, succession and gendered experiences that were woven through the semi-structured interviews. Relationships with each other and the land were prominent sentiments. The emphasis on relationships was seen through the importance placed on collaboration, networking, and sharing leadership, but also through the sense of responsibility to the land and climate that was conveyed. This responsibility to the land was also demonstrated in the importance place on succession planning so sustainable leadership would continue into the future. Interviewees emphasized leadership succession and bringing the next generation of leaders in and mentioned this as a key aspect of their leadership practice. Finally, gender relations emerged at different points within the semi-structured interviews as can be seen by the stories included in the findings. The role of gender was referenced in the challenges faced operating within a gendered system and dealing with gendered behavior of both

men and women. These findings are thoughtfully examined in the following chapter Discussion and Analysis.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter will discuss and analyze the findings of the semi-structured interviews relating to the research questions set out in the introduction and the research conducted as part of the literature review. The discussion and analysis will highlight the ways in which the findings converge and diverge from the literature and previous studies. Using a feminist intersectional lens, intersecting identities and structures will be explored to deepen the understanding of participants' experiences in the BC agriculture sector. Together the analysis of these elements will form the basis for Chapter 6 which offers recommendations and suggestions for women in organic agriculture and policy makers who wish to enhance the voices of women in the sector.

Answering the Research Questions

Primary Research Question

The primary question for this project is: how do women in the BC organic sector approach leadership in times of crisis beyond their control such as climate change or global pandemics? The centering of relationships emerged as deeply linked to the ways in which women participating in this study led and met challenges. While the women adapted to changing circumstances, the foundation of relational elements within their leadership practices such as prioritizing collaboration and succession planning remained strong, enabling them to shift with the uncertain times. Building trusting relationships enabled robust collaboration and effective succession planning, which in turn enabled an ebb and flow within women's leadership experiences. The ability to step up or step out as necessary enabled women in leadership to be confident in their roles partly because they felt supported if they needed to leave for personal or family reasons. With relationships and community as a foundation, the feminist elements that emerged as key practices for women leaders to participate and adapt in crisis or changing environments were collaboration, succession planning, and an ebb and flow of leadership.

Collaborative Leadership. Collaboration was identified as a key leadership aspect by participants. Aiming to create collaborative, non-oppressive structures emerged as a strong priority, which also supports the transformational theory of leadership (Chin et al., 2007). Leading collaboratively and being motivated by transformative change is a defining aspect of feminist leadership and demonstrates gendered power. This horizontal leadership style is consistent with feminist values and can be challenging to practice in hierarchical structures such as those present in agriculture. Women in this study not only prioritized and practiced collaboration, but they also relied on the relationships created to provide support when adapting their leadership in crisis situations. The relationships created through collaborative leadership practices helped leaders support each other and their communities in crisis situations. The focus on collaboration and community is consistent with Sumner's (2005) findings that women in the organic sector bring a community viewpoint to their work. Multiple participants stressed the importance of collaborative leadership in establishing relationships, especially prior to a crisis.

With relationships already in place, leaders are better able to listen deeply, be vulnerable and identify appropriate actions. This is demonstrated by the following story shared by Participant 1 about the importance of trusting relationships during Covid-19:

> I was really grateful that we set up this community of people who were comfortable enough with each other. We had had some time (to) develop those relationships that we could be vulnerable in and share those stories in. And then we were able to say, 'Oh my God, you've got food that's wasting, these people are hungry and don't have water'. Like, you know right away we figured out who's got the vans and the vehicles that can transport this food, transform it in a kitchen, you know, provide it here… It was pretty cool the things that we were able to do when given the latitude that an emergency requires of you (Participant 1, December 30, 2023).

While Covid-19 changed the way people worked together, participants felt it did not change the importance of relationships and community. In cases where trust was pre-established, participants indicated that throughout the pandemic, those relationships deepened, enabling the farm organizations in which they were involved to shift as required. Though the farm organizations were able to adapt and even thrive, functioning in the reactionary mode required during the pandemic where continual shifts in thinking were necessary, was stressful (Participant 1, December 30, 2023). The fear-based environment created throughout Covid was also identified as a challenge to the inclusive principle within collaboration. The fear and isolation created during Covid increased the challenges for organizations without established trusting relationships, such as new entities or those amid a leadership change. These points of comparison serve to demonstrate the strength that lasting relationships provide organizations. The mutual support found within relationships strengthens not only leaders but entire organizations.

Already established relationships are important in crisis situations not only for maintaining leaders and their organizations but also in advocating for needed support, whether that is within the community, or within government. Collaborative, relationship-based leadership meant many participants had established relationships prior to facing crisis situations. These relationships enabled them to feel supported, enhancing their ability to adapt and meet the challenges of an emergency.

Succession Planning. From a collaborative mindset, succession planning flows naturally. Succession planning was mentioned as a key element for participants leadership and was valued because it facilitates the empowerment other women. Of the participants, five indicated a purposeful focus on succession planning. For these women, succession planning was viewed as a means to empower other women and nurture the next generation of leaders. Prioritizing empowerment of other women is an element of feminist leadership (Batliwala, 2010), which firmly establishes these women as displaying characteristics of feminist leaders. Partnering collaboration with succession planning, means women not only empower the next generation of leaders but also build safety nets to accommodate the need to step in and out of leadership as

necessary. Succession planning serves as a tool to manage the multiple demands of being a woman leader with other aspect of life. Like collaboration, succession planning is rooted in relationship building and as a result, it is a priority for women in this study.

While participants were at various levels of integrating connections into their practices, there was general agreement that sharing experiences with other women in similar situations is valuable. Sharing is a way for women to acknowledge the importance of the work they are doing and to support each other in continuing. Participants who had been in leadership for many years were excited to encourage the next generation of women leaders and felt strongly about conveying the value of organic farm practices and organizational work. For one participant, who has "seen a lot more women step into these [leadership] roles in the last 10 years" (Participant 3, January 9, 2024), the importance of creating a bridge between differing sides, be it across generations or farming methods has become a critical role in building networks. Participants invest time and energy in building supportive relationships, passing on knowledge, and encouraging those with skills to move into leadership positions. This investment is necessary to provide opportunities and build the confidence of women who may not yet see themselves as leaders. One participant revealed that women often need to be approached multiple times before they begin to see themselves in leadership (Participant 1, December 30, 2023). As an example of this sentiment, another participant felt she was not a leader because she worked behind the scenes rather than in a 'front and center' position. She did not consider herself a leader despite her work in bringing together networks and connecting them to others on a national level (Participant 6, March 7, 2024). This may be an example of the internalized gender experiences that Batliwala (2010) identifies as a factor in women's leadership. It also demonstrates the need to shift women's self-perception, so they see themselves as leaders and in leadership roles. Creating positive experiences for women through mentorship and succession planning can play an important role in offsetting these internalized perceptions.

For participants, building succession created a sense of longevity for their work, especially around core values such as care for the land. This was particularly true of older participants. Women in an older demographic demonstrated a slightly different perspective than younger participants in the greater importance placed on shared leadership and succession. With the perspective of age, shared leadership and succession planning was viewed as a way not only to engage the community but also as a means to ensure long-term value and continuation of the work as age reduced capacity. By helping others to see themselves in a vision, a shared passion is created that supports young people in leadership. One participant felt working to ensure foundational values continued across generational differences was a way to create longevity for her life's work (Participant 4, February 6, 2024). A willingness to listen and be open to change can help bridge the generation gap. While this may mean traditions shift, the foundational value will continue in a new tradition. As elders and experienced leaders these women are considering the sustainability and longevity of their life work. The intersection of age adds to why values such as shared leadership, collaboration and succession planning are important. With age comes

a desire to not only share passions, engage the next generation and build community but to also ensure the longevity of these foundational values.

Participants saw themselves as breaking ground for others so they will have an easier path into leadership. By engaging with traditional institutions, one participant gained the knowledge and experience that laid the groundwork for making change and creating an easier pathway for the next generation, especially for racialized women (Participant 1, December 30, 2023). This shows, succession planning can be not only about helping organic farm women but also about carving space for those with intersecting identities such as race. Forging a path for other women can sometimes mean standing alone, but this makes the journey easier and increases the chances of their success.

Considering these factors, some driven by intersecting identities such as age and race, succession can be seen as a primary motivation for women in leadership. By encouraging more women into leadership roles, the participants also demonstrate a feeling of responsibility to their work. The sentiment that one must plan to replace oneself before quitting was strong among participants. This provides the added benefit of an environment where an ebb and flow in leadership are possible allowing women to step out and back in when needed.

Ebb and Flow of Leadership. Practicing collaboration and succession planning together builds an environment where women are in relationship with each other and feel able to step forward or back depending on each other's capacity. Creating a supportive network allows women to pull back if their personal or family life requires more attention. Participants focused on building and maintaining these relationships which helps them feel more secure in taking on leadership roles. Participants, especially those who are long term leaders, have stepped out and back into leadership multiple times. They see that fluidity as critical for personal wellbeing but also for organizational and sector growth.

Establishing a fluidity for leaders lays a foundation for leadership to ebb and flow, which better serves mental health and wellness. For example, one participant felt the ability to step back from leadership and decision-making responsibilities, especially during a personal crisis, was an important aspect to leadership involvement (Participant 3, January 9, 2024). In an extreme personal crisis, when the immediate safety of a leader is threatened such as in a climate event like wildfires, the security of being able to step out of leadership is critical. In these times, shared values and leadership enhance the support women feel within their communities. This valuing of relationships and community is in line with both transformational (Chin et al., 2007) and relational theories of leadership (Clarke, 2018). Participants also use the language of 'community' rather than traditional references to leaders and followers which is an important distinction because within community, a natural ebb and flow is created where anyone may lead depending on circumstances. Sustainability theory also fits with the ebb and flow of people in leadership (Ferdig, 2007) as it focuses on modelling and living one's beliefs, so anyone can be leading at any point.

Dedication to community is embedded in this flexibility of leadership and the attitude of 'showing up and getting the work done' was prevalent amongst the women interviewed. The fluidity of leadership did not present a contradiction to this commitment. The commitment of participants was evident through their belief that hard work and being useful helped them gain respect and that showing up to 'do the work' was critical to community participation. One participant observed that the journey would have been easier as a man, but that she felt she was accepted because she was useful and persistent in pushing for inclusion, not because the community of men 'welcomed' her (Participant 7, April 4, 2024). Despite negative experiences, this participant demonstrated optimism in her commitment to continually showing up in male dominated rooms where she was repeatedly surprised by the lack of listening. She offered that women must continue to take on leadership roles if this dynamic is going to change in the future.

Women in this study viewed leadership as an activity that entails learning from others and supporting each other to move the 'whole' forward. Participants felt leadership was not about any one person always being at the 'front' but more about creating a situation where different women could step forward when needed. This sentiment emphasizes the importance of succession in creating fluidity which enables leaders to step forward or back as necessary. Because leadership is mobile, it often follows passion and skills. For example, during Covid-19 individuals with experience in virtual meetings were able to step forward to share their skills and help the group adapt to the new online reality. This type of mentorship helped move the whole group forward. Stepping out of leadership, however, can also create isolation from former colleges who are still involved.

Secondary Research Question

The aim of the secondary research question was twofold. The first was to determine if and how isolation created by crisis events impacted leadership. Participants spoke of social isolation and leadership generally as well as in a time of crisis. The second aim was to identify how farming methods influenced the type or nature of leadership practices. Because farm practices were viewed as part of identity, they were strongly linked with women's leadership.

Social Isolation and Leadership in Times of Crisis. Research by Jones-Bitton (2019) indicates that social isolation and mental health are concerns that have not been sufficiently explored for Canadian farmers and by extension women in the BC organic farming sector. In considering Jones-Bitton's research, the women of this study seem less impacted by isolation than the general farm population she discussed. A key factor may be the presence of strong networks and relationships created by their focus on collaboration and succession planning. Parent (2012, p. 3), identifies an individual's network, specifically its size and quality, as an indicator for social isolation and mental health. Because the women in my study were practicing feminist leadership styles that inherently value relationships, there was less social isolation identified among the participants. The study participants focused on the quality of the relationships within their networks. For example, one of the participants asserted that a

community of practice, encompassing trusted relationships with those who hold similar values has helped her mitigate rural isolation.

In terms of leadership, general isolation can be a barrier to effective advocacy as it often delays timely feedback, creating additional stress for leaders. One participant indicated feelings of isolation slowed all processes, making achieving goals more challenging (Participant 6, March 7, 2024). For women representing the organic sector in the broader agricultural sector, leadership itself can be isolating as their views and beliefs often differ and sometimes contradict mainstream agricultural thinking. This feeling was captured by one participant who commented that leadership at times requires being the 'lone voice' for what's right (Participant 1, December 30, 2023). This place of isolation within the mainstream agricultural sector is created by the intersecting identity of farm practices and can also become more intense when additional identities such as gender, race, and age are layered in. Being comfortable with the tension and isolation in these leadership spaces takes confidence and conviction.

Participants generally focused on the positive aspects of their farming practices and leadership, which according to Brigance et al. (2018), leads to satisfaction and improved mental health. Daghagh Yazd et al. (2019), also reported a tendency for organic farmers to have more positive mental health than conventional farmers and, while this project did not include conventional farmers, the organic farming participants did express positive perspectives on the impact of their farm practices. Additionally, the structures and attitudes of the organic sector may mitigate isolation through the focus on collaboration, community, and relationships. One participant sees the benefit of expanding these practices to other organizations, such as government, and has been focused on shifting the thinking of these groups towards a more collaborative model of sharing information and working together (Participant 3, January 9, 2024). The level of satisfaction participants felt in their practices and leadership placed them in a strong position to navigate the challenges of unexpected crises, such as Covid-19 and climate events.

In Times of Crisis. Though many participants did not feel isolated during the pandemic, the mandated isolation did impact their leadership methods as their organizations were forced to move to virtual forums. During Covid-19 the use of technology increased to facilitate the new 'working from home' circumstances. The use of technology impacted the ability of participants to connect with others to build community and relationships, which is the cornerstone of collaborative leadership. Six of the seven participants discussed moving to online platforms during the pandemic to continue organizational work. There were both positive and negative experiences with the spike in technology use.

On the positive side, moving to virtual workspace meant participants were able to engage in more work. With the elimination of travel time to and from meetings, participants found they were able to do more while providing better availability to their families simply by being at home. Household and care responsibilities were still present yet managing them became easier

during the pandemic because the family was all home. This increased capacity, enabling participants to attend more meetings and take on more work. Another positive impact found in this study involved the opportunity to ensure more equal speaking time at meetings. The virtual meeting space helped level the playing field with features such as the raise hand function, where the first person to raise their hand is first in line to speak and the inability of speakers to talk over one another, forcing them to take turns and share speaking power.

Despite these positive aspects, exclusive online communication presented issues especially for these participants as they highly value relationships and building relationships through online platforms is difficult. Virtual meetings, with their lack of body language, make reading the room a challenge and require a different type of facilitation than in-person meetings. A virtual environment makes building new relationships difficult and so previously established relationships became an indicator for success in shifting to an online environment. Participants who spoke of organizations where individuals had already established relationships found the transition to virtual platforms easier. While participants involved with new organizations or initiatives without previously established relationships found the shift to online communication a struggle as deep bonds had not been developed, which limited the trust and support among members.

The lack of in-person connection during Covid-19 led to some community polarization. The online environment allowed people to distance themselves from others and act in ways they may not have contemplated if they were in-person (Participant 1, December 30, 2023; Participant 7, April 4, 2024) Without face-to-face contact, some individuals lost touch with the repercussions of their online actions, and so without that general check of being in community negative online actions became more pronounced. The disconnection from others in an online forum made shutting people down and dominating conversations easier. Overall, participants spoke of virtual meetings as a good, albeit often problematic tool but in no way a replacement for face-to-face interactions.

Participants conveyed that in the organizations where established, trusting professional relationships were already present, they felt the shift to online was smooth and may have deepened some relationships during the pandemic. One participant felt this may have been due to the elimination of other sources of social interaction, making colleagues want to connect more and place more value on established relationships. Though these were professional connections, they became more personal over the pandemic (Participant 5, February 13, 2024). These strengthened bonds enhanced communication and increased teamwork. The work family became a critical support and purposely connecting with other women to maintain relationships became more important (Participant 1, December 30, 2023). Grounding leadership in connections empowered participants to not only use their relationships to the benefit of their community during times of crisis but also to replenish their own strength and ability to adapt. During these crisis times, many did not feel isolated but rather supported by colleagues and their communities.

Though participants spoke extensively about their resilience in facing the pandemic and climate events, there was recognition of the emotional cost by one participant who felt she was suffering from compassion fatigue after her deep community commitment during a climate event (Participant 7, April 4, 2024). Prolonged anxiety in a crisis can mean a reduction in a leaders resilience and ability to address adversity (Vito et al., 2023). In addition, in extreme crises, such as multiple simultaneous fires can reduce community capacity because all are under threat. Extended time under threat, as is common when facing fires, floods, or a pandemic, can lead to reduced mental health, fatigue and burnout. Because the small number of participants in this study focused on the positive aspects of their leadership and mentioned only a few negative aspects, further research is recommended.

Leadership and Farming Practices. Participants indicated several ways their farm practices influenced their leadership style. Organic farming practices are rooted in four key principles which emphasize health, ecology, fairness, and care. These interconnected principles are evident in the way participants value collaboration, cooperation, and relationships. Organic farm practices and leadership are grounded in a healthy relationship with the land, which is more co-operative and less hierarchical. For participants, the key farm practices influencing their leadership are co-operation and relationships.

Cooperative farming is popular in the organic sector and enacts the principle of fairness. This farm practice is related to co-operative and collaborative leadership. It is a farming style that brings everyone to the table to make decisions, which is reflected in the prominence of collaborative leadership. The link between co-operative farming and leadership was clearly articulated by one participant claiming that for her "They [farm practices and leadership] would be aligned, and the alignment is that I lead with cooperation." (Participant 4, February 6, 2024). Another participant observed that when farmers work in a co-operative setting and have the support of an on-farm community, they tend to have more capacity to participate in advocacy and leadership (Participant 6, March 7, 2024). In this sense, alternative farm models further leadership opportunities for women. In addition to co-operative farming, mentorship and providing a co-operative learning environment can create supportive networks for women farmers, enhancing the possibility of leadership involvement. Bringing new and young farmers into a supportive farming operation helps build experience and confidence. Mentorship and modelling are forms of collaborative leadership that align with the prioritization of relationship building for women leaders.

Parallel to the importance of relational connections identified by participants is the role of their relationship to the land. This relationship with the land speaks to the interconnectedness of all things. Organic farm practices are one way to navigate and build a healthy relationship with the land. One participant described trying to ‘hear’ what the land was saying and then later trying

to ‘hear’ what a non-organic farmer was saying. In both cases she was trying to build a deeper connection, placing relationships in a priority position. Applying the practice of nurturing the land to nurturing human relationships is a key aspect of leadership for participants.

Farm practices also influenced leadership through the connection they built within the organic sector and the respect they garnered outside the sector in the public eye. This enabled participants to use their farm experiences in highlighting agricultural issues in a more public forum (Participant 1, December 30, 2023). When advocating for agriculture in the broader community, farming practices can provide an opportunity to identify issues such as a lack of local storage through the telling of on-farm stories to policy makers (Participant 1, December 30, 2023). Identifying needs and gaps for the wider farm community through on-farm experiences creates understanding and credibility. The alignment of farm methods and leadership practices is consistent with Sustainability theory in that the leaders practice daily, their beliefs to move sustainability forward. Through the utilization of organic farming practices, the participants model their sustainability beliefs.

Another parallel between farm practices and leadership is in continuous learning and shifting to improve practices. Through learning from mistakes, resolving issues quickly and sharing learnings with others, one participant feels slow-moving organizations can constantly progress which also mirrors her production style of continuous improvement (Participant 3, January 9, 2024). Organic principles inform approaches and act as a foundation for leadership practices and engagement. In this manner, organic principles (i.e. health, ecology, fairness, and care) guide leadership work of women in the sector.

Organic Farming and Collaborative Practices Integral to Identity. Farm practices were viewed by participants as a part of their identity and so deeply influenced leadership. As noted in the Findings section, the participants connected farming and their organic practices with their sense of identity as well as their belief system. Being a farmer provided women a measure of control over their food system and their climate impact. It also creates a different way to interact within their communities by offering a perspective on issues underscored by on-farm experience. Using the reality of the farm to underline situations of concern for the greater community, such as draught, deepens the broad understanding of climate implications and helps initiate action. The leadership credibility gained through being a farmer increases respect and opens a unique space for women to lead change within their communities. While actively farming builds leadership credibility, the respect it generates increases the pressure to continue hands-on farming which also taxes the limited time resources of many women leaders. Despite the potential of added stress to their already limited capacity and competing time demands, most participants maintain active farming roles.

Farm practices also served as a point of solidarity and the most important factor for inclusion in the organic sector. Differences between the organic sector and the traditional agriculture sector in its treatment and valuing of women in leadership were highlighted throughout the interviews, with one participant indicating that gender was less important than farming practices in the organic sector (Participant 3, January 9, 2024). The high number of women leaders in the Canadian organic sector (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2021) and the comments from participants, support Sumners (2005) findings that the organic sector not only welcomes women in leadership but actively fosters it.

Though the organic sector was seen by participants as more gender equal than the broader agricultural industry, some traditional gender role impacts were still identified, such as meetings being usurped by male counterparts. This indicates that the organic sector also has gender inequities that need to be addressed (Sumner & Llewelyn, 2011). However, more frustration was expressed when the broader agriculture sector was discussed, and more entrenched traditional gender expectations were identified. The gendered stories presented in the findings section provide examples of participant experiences. The feeling of being punished for utilizing tactics that would be respected or even celebrated if employed by a man, is seen in these examples. This presents the lose-lose scenario women face where so-called masculine qualities, like assertiveness or desire for power, are viewed as unwelcome behaviors for women leaders and so balancing power and femininity is a challenge (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Chin et al., 2007). These stories also confirm the Hagen et al. (2019) assertion that women often face challenges in being accepted to agricultural associations and can feel undervalued. In the broader agriculture sector, women leaders from the organic sector met resistance stemming from both gender and farm practices.

Comparing the treatment of women in the organic sector to the broader Agricultural sector or the Ministry of Agriculture is a comparison of intersecting structures. Participants were drawn to organic agriculture for many reasons, but one common thread is the desire for social change. There is a belief that the organic farming sector is building a new structure. While the organic sector employs alternate attitudes and structures, it must still function within the more traditional agricultural framework to influence policy or regulations. Government and mainstream Agricultural organizations usually adhere to a traditional, patriarchal structure. Under this structure, one participant noted that traditional agriculture associations often employ an Executive Director and office staff who are women because this where the work is done behind the scenes, but then the President, a man, is out front (Participant 7, April 4, 2024). The organic sector straddles this line between traditional structure and innovative approaches. The willingness to try new structures is resulting in models such as Sociocracy becoming popular. Sociocracy is a consent-based decision-making governance model that builds in shared leadership and feedback for continuous improvement. The less hierarchical structure makes space for leadership to be very personal

and shift away from the 'single knowledge keeper' style to a shared process (Participant 5, February13, 2024). This type of organizational restructuring can be a challenge within a society that generally endorses traditional, patriarchal and colonial systems. Collaborative and shared leadership models, such as those discussed by participants, can struggle to operate effectively within patriarchal systems and are often found on the margins. The organic sector also operates on the margins of the agriculture sector. Perhaps this draws women to the organic sector as it parallels their leadership experience and reflects their efforts to change a system that was not made by or for them.

Additional Findings

The Role of Intersecting Identities and Structures

All the participants in this study shared the intersecting identities of gender and farm practices. Some also identified age, race and geography as additional intersections present in their experiences. These individual identities were then situated in the structures of the agriculture sector, first within the organic farming sector and second with the broader agriculture sector. The structure of the organic farm sector provided a high level of support to women leaders, which is evident by the high number of women leaders in the sector. Women from this relatively supportive environment, then find themselves representing the sector in the traditional patriarchal structure of the mainstream agriculture. The personal identity factors of the women in this study intersect with the structures of the agricultural sector to create unique experiences. Experiences of leadership within the structure of the organic sector was mostly positive, while the mainstream agriculture structures posed more challenges. The women in this study have diverse experiences depending on which context they are discussing. The organic sector, imbedded in the mainstream sector, often provides a positive experience which helps women feel supported to challenge the mainstream patriarchal agriculture structures. This support may account for less feelings of isolation and better mental health indicated by participants.

Intersecting Identities: Gender, still a Barrier. Participants all shared gender and organic farm practices as identities. Women in this sector are challenged by traditional gender roles, especially outside of the organic farming sector. In part because the organic sector is marginalized within the broader agricultural sector, it seems more welcoming to women who are also marginalized in mainstream agriculture. Some participants also discussed the additional identities of race, age and geographical location as playing a role in their leadership experiences.

This juxtaposition of traditional gender expectations and feminist leadership impacted the experiences of agricultural women leaders in this study. Even though some women wanted to discount the role of gender to not be held back or defined by it, participants still identified areas where gender impacted leadership practices. The experiences of participants supported the literature indicating that gender roles are still a barrier. Traditional gender roles and conventional farm practices were a prevalent barrier for women from the organic community working in the

broader agricultural sector. All the study participants were part of the organic farming sector and confirm Sumner's (2005) finding that the organic sector generally supports women in leadership. Two participants indicated that the organic sector functioned differently, especially in its encouragement of women leaders. These identity intersections may create complexity but also offer points of connection for women. Most significantly, similar farm practices and passionate beliefs about organic principles connect women, increasing their support network. Beyond gender and farm practices, participants also spoke of identity factors such as race, age and geographical location as impacting their leadership experiences.

As an intersecting identity, age was important in the perspective brought to leadership and the purpose of succession planning. The shift in perspective that age brings increases the focus on the longevity of the work and the depth of the relationship with the land. Two participants who farmed for many years expressed how their relationship with the land has deepened with age. There was a sense of the land as a guide in their long-standing relationship. The importance of Indigenous plants, wild edibles and medicinal plants that will likely survive climate change have also increased in personal value (Participant 4, February 6, 2024).

The rural/urban divide was also indicated as an intersecting identity that impacted women in leadership roles. Women who moved from the city to a rural area found a bias against 'city dwellers'. The assumption that a person from an urban background could not succeed in agriculture was discussed by two participants. Being from the city as well as being a woman made becoming a part of the agricultural community extremely difficult. There was a feeling that worth had to be proven on both fronts to be accepted. Once established, however, the rural experience may have been one of the factors helping agricultural women face the pandemic without feeling an increased sense of isolation. Geographical isolation is common, and the nature of agriculture is often isolating, so perhaps the mandated isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic was not much more than their everyday isolation and their sources of connection, such as markets and deliveries, were not cut off.

Intersecting Structures. An individual's social location, created by factors such as gender, age, race and class, frames how they experience and navigate power. For the participants in this study, gendered power structures were identified in traditional agricultural associations and in government. The reactions and approaches employed in dealing with these systems varied. However, participants refused to simply conform when faced with organizational structures that hindered the effectiveness of their leadership. The findings section highlights examples of women circumventing traditional structure to create their own more collaborative structures, of women refusing to participate in fear-based policies, and of women aggressively challenging the slow governmental emergency aid. By using their agency, these women have been able to create conditions where their leadership is able to thrive. The varied reactions to functioning within gendered structures demonstrate that though women share a gender identity,

their individual characteristics and personalities also play a role in the intersection of identities and structure.

Prioritizing the combination of collaboration and succession planning is also a way to address a structural system that was not built by or for women. While some of the structures, such as government, are starting to use terminology associated with feminist leadership, the integration of the type of collaboration women leaders employ is challenging because the structures themselves need to shift. Additionally, the attitudes of those within the structures also play a role in maintaining the structures, so thought patterns must change as well.

Current government and organizational structures do not lend themselves to the type of systematic change necessary to effectively integrate collective methods. Government policies, the Department of Agriculture and the Agriculture associations all employ a traditional, patriarchal structure which is rooted in colonialism. Colonialism, the structures and systems put in place to oppress Indigenous populations and benefit the settler population, has lasting impacts in agriculture. These patriarchal and colonial structures also pose a challenge for women leaders utilizing collective approaches, as it amounts to a clash of operational modes. Within these structures, the organic sector functions and tends to provide opportunities that are less entrenched in the patriarchal attitudes of other associations, but even here the structures still require women to fit into a patriarchal system. The hierarchical concept of leadership is also not conducive to the values participants strive towards. Being inclusive and non-hierarchical means that, at times, simply showing up and participating in community is leadership. The concept of traditional leadership feeds into the problematic structure and requires redefinition. Participants expressed a need to shift thinking about leadership, to unlearn traditional understandings and make community the central point (Participant 5, February 13, 2024; Participant 4, February 6, 2024). Shifting the concept of leadership is complex which can be challenging for creating lasting change. However, one participant framed this shift as moving leadership away from ‘either/or’ to an ‘and also’ approach. The ‘either/or’ scenario is a societal construct that forces people into contrary and binary positions when we actually “need to hold a bigger picture of things… because when we take positions, we are no longer informed by science and we're no longer creative, there's no room for creativity because we already know what's right and what's wrong.” (Participant 4, February 6, 2024).

The exploration of alternative organizing structures such as co-operatives and Sociocracy demonstrates participants belief in changing the system under which they operate. Alternate structures that centre a more circular structure, such as Sociocracy where multiple leaders create a flat leadership model has enabled groups to move away from traditional colonial structures to a shared power model. Additionally, one participant found that small local organizations have been easier to restructure into alternate models than National organizations (Participant 5, February 13, 2024).

Strategic or Research Implications

Despite the small sample size of participants, this section of the study considers both strategic and research implications for policy and practices within the agricultural sector. As agriculture in North America is traditionally masculinized, (Azima & Mundler, 2022; Preibisch & Grez, 2010) the sector may not value the types of activities that engage women leaders and enhance their success. The participants in this study centre relationships within their leadership practices, this highlights an opportunity for the agricultural sector to better enable women leaders through supporting the strategic creation networks. Utilizing a focused approach could strengthen current leadership and foster more women from the next generation into leadership. Not only would succession planning benefit from a strategic focus on relationships, but the ability of women leaders to 'step up' in a crisis would also be enhanced. Participants indicated that previously established relationships were key to helping them through challenging times. So, to ensure this critical support is available in crisis, a focus on relationships could be prioritized in times of relative calm. Fostering resilient relationships will mean women leaders are better equipped to manage challenges.

Revisiting the Conceptual/Analytical Framework

This chapter brought together the literature and the findings to answer the research questions through an intersectional feminist framework. This framework helped highlight the multiple intersecting identities of participants that impacted their leadership experience. Additionally, this framework helped surface the ways in which individual identities intersected with the structures of power within which participants operate. All seven participants referred to the importance of making change. Their approaches differed and ranged from wanting to build a new system, to creating lasting change, to refusing the status quo, but all engaged in leadership with the purpose of creating change. Wanting to make change is a motivating factor for participants when entering the leadership realm and demonstrates feminist leadership. Because the participants were feminist leaders, utilizing a feminist framework was appropriate. This framework underpinned the research methods and centered the experiences of participants as women with complex and intersecting identities. The intersecting feminist framework helped synthesize and contextualize the experiences of participants.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

Introduction

This study explored the leadership experience of women in BC's organic agriculture industry in relation to social isolation, especially during Covid-19 and climate events. Data was gathered in semi-structured interviews and the literature review, which was then analyzed and discussed. Based on the findings and in recognition of the current work of women in organic agriculture, the below recommendations have been developed. These recommendations are meant to enhance the current leadership experience of women in agriculture generally, help build resilient networks to address social isolation, and facilitate the expansion of leadership opportunities for women not yet involved in leadership. Because the number of women in agriculture is increasing, their role in leadership is a critical aspect for the success of the sector. In recognition of the burgeoning role women play in agriculture, these recommendations would acknowledge current achievements, reinforce critical values for women's leadership participation and assist in expanding current roles for women.

The first set of recommendations are framed for women leaders in organic agriculture, as they are the central figures of this study but with more research and a larger sample size the recommendations can inform future approaches to include all women in agriculture. The second set of recommendations are aimed at organizations and policy makers who work alongside women in agriculture. Ideally, women leaders would bring these recommendations forward to their organizations and be supported in the implementation by colleagues. By including recommendations on both levels, the number of entry points to leverage systems change is increased. Because women in this study spoke of their networks and communities extensively, these recommendations are intended for implementation in alignment with community collaboration. The timing of the recommendations may overlap but are listed from short to long term actions. While women leaders can act on these recommendations individually, organizations and policy makers who convene women leaders in agriculture should also consider shouldering responsibility for enhancing the leadership experience of women, as it benefits the entire sector as well as society in general.

Assessment Criteria

Each recommendation has been assessed with the following criteria:

- Ease of implementation (actions are easily embedded in current activities)
- Effective utilization of limited resources (time and funding)
- Alignment with the foundational principle of relationship building and collaboration.

Recommendations for Women Leaders in Agriculture

Recommendation 1: Integrate activities that foster new and strengthen existing networks, relationships, and sector connections into current events.

Women agriculture leaders are well place to act on this recommendation as it builds on the already established importance of relationship building. By introducing activities such as collaborative games that promote cooperation and fun at already existing events, event participants can initiate and build personal connections outside of crisis periods to strengthen networks that help combat social isolation. Cooperative games can demonstrate the benefit of collaboration across silos and encourage system change (Fusco et al., 2024). Building trust through fun activities would provide a low-pressure way to help launch and enhance the quality of relationships. This is a short-term, easy to implement recommendation. While this recommendation may not reach beyond event attendees to women socially isolated on their farms, it could encourage tight knit networks to become more inclusive and open, which would expand resiliency. By strategically promoting relationship building as a practice, the broader understanding and value of it within leadership will increase.

Recommendation 2: Create new events specifically focused on building connections and networks for women in BC agricultural leadership, outside of crisis times in periods of calm.

Intentionally creating time for relationship building expresses the importance of community and strong networks. These events could take the form of meetings, retreats or conferences, and could evolve from small gatherings to larger undertakings depending on capacity. This could provide an opportunity to identify underserved leader groups in agriculture, such as racialized women, and ensure events are inclusive. These events could broaden personal networks along with offering learning opportunities. Coupling networking and high value learning could incentivize women agricultural leaders to block time in their busy schedules to participate. Encouraging women leaders to make time for building relationships in periods of calm, will help ensure established relationships are in place for women when times of crisis, such as climate events, occur. Designating time and resources to enhance networks and relationships will help legitimize these activities in a sector that often values a more patriarchal approach. This is a short-term goal that can be implemented by the women leaders.

Recommendations for organizations and policy makers working alongside women leaders in agriculture.

Recommendation 1: Create a position to coordinate and facilitate network building for women in the BC agriculture sector.

A funded coordination position would help create stronger network opportunities for women leaders in agriculture. Creation of this position would require collaboration across organizations which would also help increase connections within the sector. The position priority would be creating space for women to build networks and relationships with each other. One of the first tasks of this position would be surveying women in leadership to discover the best ways to support and enhance their leadership experience. Once identified this position could initiate the suggested activities without further taxing the capacity of women in leadership. This recognizes that expecting women leaders to organize initiatives ‘off the side of their desks’ is not

feasible. The creation of a position tasked with community building and relationship enhancement among women in agriculture would demonstrate value being placed on the leadership of women in the sector and the value of networks and community. An increased focus on expanding relationships and building strong networks will enhance the resilience of the entire agriculture sector. This is a medium to long term recommendation because it requires funding and collaboration between organizations, which can take time.

Recommendation 2: Conduct a regular review of policies and practices using an intersectional lens

Initiating a policy scan with an intersectional lens to determine the ways in which women leaders in agriculture are hindered or helped by current agriculture structures would help align policies with the goal of enhancing and expanding the leadership of women in agriculture. An increased understanding of changes needed to enhance the experience of women in leadership could foster systemic change. Shifting viewpoints may be required and asking targeted questions such as 'does this activity build connections between the participants?' or 'does this policy recognize and prioritize relationships?' or 'does this policy recognize and encourage the participation of women in agricultural leadership?', could help. Once completed, the policy scan recommendations could be assessed for feasibility and implemented a strategy for relationship building, collaboration and succession planning which would begin to address structural issues by women in agriculture. Strategically embedding values of feminist leadership in organizational policies and procedures would signal strong support for women in leadership and could provide a model for other sectors. While work on a policy scan could begin in the short term, the implementation of results and the introduction of new policies would require time, therefore this is a long-term recommendation.

Areas for Further Research

Areas for additional research were identified throughout the process of analyzing the data generated. Some of these areas relate to limitations of this study, while others emerged as natural next questions from the findings.

The literature review discusses Jones-Bitton's (2019) assertion regarding the importance of studying the mental health and well-being of Canadian farmers and specifically women farmers. As the number of women engaged in farming increases, additional research into their wellbeing is important to ensure the health of the Canadian agriculture sector as a whole. As stated previously, the 2021 Census indicates that number of women farm operators has increased to 30.4% (Statistics Canada, 2022b). Further study into the mental health of women farm leaders will help provide a better understanding of ways to enhance and encourage their work in agriculture.

Alongside the increase of women farmers is the recognition that they hold additional responsibilities for household and family care. Further research would help identify trends

that may be detrimental to the mental health of women in agriculture. For example, one participant identified a trend where farm men are taking high paying jobs that are not only off-farm but are also away from the farm, so they may be home a small percentage of the time. As this was offered from the participants' perspective, it may or may not reflect the reality for couples outside a traditional 'husband and wife' paradigm. For couples in the presented scenario though, there would be an increase of burden on women who must assume the additional operational responsibilities along with their regular work to maintain the farm. If women are fulfilling the role of farm operator on top of previous gender expectations such as household and family care, this double burden of work could have a significant impact on their mental health. It also opens the debate about the gendered role of farm wife vs. farm operator. So, while the literature reviewed delineates a division of on-farm gender roles (Preibisch & Grez, 2010) these may be changing and possibly in a manner that means women in agriculture are assuming greater responsibility for overall operations (Azima & Mundler, 2022). An increased burden could be detrimental to the mental health of women in agriculture, but more research is needed to uncover the stories behind the increase in women farm operators.

The importance of relationships emerged as a critical element for success to the participants, which opens more questions about the role of relationships for women leaders in the organic agriculture sector. Future research focused on the impact of relationships for the next generation of women leaders would add to the knowledge for fostering women in leadership. In addition, this type of research would illuminate the value of focusing on building those connections.

While established relationships emerged as one of the most important factors for women of this study in times of crisis, only one spoke about the 'cost' of leading during a crisis. The increased stress at times of crisis is likely to take a toll on women leaders who prioritize relationships and collaboration. Further research is needed to gauge the impact of stepping up to leadership in times of crisis on the mental health and well-being of women on a long-term basis. More research will help determine if the increased stress leads to fatigue and burn out.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Women play an important and increasing role in agriculture and the production of food in Canada. As the number of women in Canadian agriculture grows so does the need to conduct research into their experiences. This study set out to better understand how experiences of isolation, in the context of Covid-19 and climate events, and farm practices influenced the leadership of women in the BC organic sector.

In the findings, relationships emerged as the foundational element for all the aspects of leadership for the participants. Leadership in crisis, the importance of community, succession planning, mitigating isolation, and the role of farm practices are all rooted in relationships. By prioritizing family and community, the women in this study felt better able to fully participate in leadership. Sumner (2005) asserts that women from the organic sector bring a community viewpoint to their work. The participants in this study demonstrated this with the centering of relationships in their leadership. They also used farming and farm practices as a way to connect. Furthering Sumner's (2005) claim, the participants in this study felt the role and importance of their relationships and community enabled their organizations and by extension their leadership to shift and adapt in the constant fluctuations that occurred through Covid-19. Their strong established relationships helped them navigate climate events and Covid-19 regulations while avoiding isolation.

The focus on relationships, collaboration, and succession planning demonstrate that participants are bringing a feminist leadership style to their work. Relationships are the foundation of leadership for these women and so, also become the cornerstone of resilience in times of crisis, such as a pandemic or climate events. Women in this study felt empowered to be successful leaders and mitigate social isolation through the strength of their relationships. Valuing and fostering these connections will enhance the scale and breadth of women's leadership in agriculture.

For the women in this study, the intersection of organic farm practices and gender place them in a unique position. With the organic sector providing a supportive base, where they are sought-after leaders, these women have built confidence in their collaborative leadership styles and have fearlessly challenged the male-dominated mainstream agriculture industry. As the women who participated in this study continue to passionately push to expand the use of organic agriculture practices, they are also challenging traditional gender expectations about leadership and moving gender equity forward.

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Appendix A:
Interview Email Invitation

Hi (Name),
Hope all is well with you as we move into winter. Hopefully you'll be able to relax after a busy farm season! I am also hoping that you will have some time to help me with my research project.

As you may know, I am enrolled in the Community Development Master's program at the University of Victoria. My research project is entitled 'Women's Agricultural Leadership: How has isolation related to global events such as Covid-19 impacted women farmers' leadership practices?'. The project's purpose is to study the unique ways in which these experiences impact the leadership of women working in agriculture.

Currently, I am at the research stage so, I'm hoping that, as a woman engaged in agricultural activities within BC, you will agree to an interview to talk about your experience with leadership and isolation. The interview would be virtual in accordance with my approval from the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) at the University of Victoria, Certificate #21-0621 (See below) and there is no obligation to join the study.

If you decide to participate, the one-to-one virtual interview will be approximately 1-1.5 hours in duration and be a semi-structured format. Then, if necessary, I might request a follow-up for clarification, probably up to 20 minutes.

I have attached the Interview Consent form with further details as well as a list of mental health resources that may be useful. Women involved in any aspect of farming or ranching in BC are welcome to participate, so if you know other agricultural women who would be interested, please ask them to contact me at the email below.

If you are willing to participate, please respond to this email no later than December 1, 2023, indicating your interest. With your email please included your signed consent letter so we can move into scheduling your interview.

Thank you for your time and willingness to help me by participating.

Jen Gamble
Principal Researcher

jgamble@uvic.ca

Please note: This study is part of the requirements for my Master's degree through the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) at the University of Victoria (Certificate #21-0621). You may verify the ethical approval of this study, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Appendix B:
Interview Consent Form

University of Victoria

Participant Interview Consent Form

How has isolation related to Covid-19 impacted women farmers' leadership practices?

You are invited to participate in a study entitled 'How has isolation related to Covid-19 impacted women farmers' leadership practices?' that is being conducted by Jen Gamble.

Jen Gamble is a graduate student of Dr. Astrid Pérez-Piñán, Assistant Professor in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email at je2gamble@gmail.com.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Community Development. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Astrid Pérez-Piñán. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-6116. This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Standard Board at the University of Victoria and the principal researcher has obtained the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethics Certificate.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this project is to study the unique ways in which experiences of isolation impact the leadership voices of women working in agriculture, especially in the context of challenging events such as a global pandemic. Covid-19 created unprecedented levels of social isolation that female farmers had to navigate. The extent to which this event and others have impacted the isolation of female farmers and what types of changes they have made to their leadership styles as a result is unknown. The project will gather information, input, and practices of women in agriculture regarding isolation and leadership. Then will analyze the data to identify common themes. Finally, the project will utilize the data analysis to inform the development of recommendations and to create a resource aimed to enhance the leadership experiences of female farmers in their communities.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important for a number of reasons.

1. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented restrictions on the general population, such as self-isolation. While these restrictions have been challenging, they may pose higher risk for female farmers.
2. There is a knowledge gap regarding the mental health of Canadian farmers generally and Canadian female farmers specifically. Given their critical importance in the food system their experience should be explored.
3. The proportion of female farmers in Canada is increasing, so exploring the experiences of female farmers regarding isolation and leadership will help understand the needs of this growing group.

4. There is a general research and data gap for women and girls. This project will add to the pool of studies centred on the female experience.

Participants Selection
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a woman involved with the BC agriculture sector or are an outreach worker to women involved in the BC agriculture sector.

What is involved
If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a one-to-one virtual interview (approximately 1-1.5 hour) and possible follow-up for clarifications of up to 20 minutes. The interview will be recorded with your permission to aid with the creation of a transcript following the interview. Written notes may also be taken during the interview.

Please Note: Virtual Interviews will be conducted using the University of Victoria Zoom platform. Zoom servers are located outside of Canada and Zoom stores users' names and usage data outside of Canada. No other information is stored outside of Canada, and recordings of Zoom meetings are not stored on Zoom servers.

Inconvenience
Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, as it will take time. I recognize that farmers and outreach workers are busy and hope to alleviate this inconvenience by clearly conveying and respecting time commitments.

Risks
Participating in this research could include emotional and social risks.
Emotional risks: discussing or thinking about isolation could increase sadness, anxiety, fear, or depression.
Social risks: participating in a study dealing with isolation could bring social stigma often associated with mental health.
To prevent or to deal with these risks the following steps will be taken:

1. Measures such as data encryption will be employed to ensure participant confidentiality.
2. Interview questions will be provided in advance of the interview, so participants are prepared and are aware of the questions to be discussed.
3. Participants will be offered a break at any point if they become upset and the opportunity to stop the interview altogether.
4. A list of mental health resources for further assistance is included with this letter.

Benefits
Possible benefits of this research include:

1. The potential to create a better understanding of female farmers' leadership practices.
2. The potential to expand the current knowledge base regarding the situation female farmers face regarding isolation.
3. The potential to participate in the creation of a community resource that could benefit others in the community as well as participants.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study interview data will only be used with permission.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants
The principal researcher acknowledges there may be a relationship with potential participants as a friend or as an employee/manager. Because this study is small in scope and third-party recruitment is not feasible, participants are assured that participation in this research is voluntary and will not have any repercussions on relationship status, employment status or current work. As a participant, you are free to withdraw from the study and remove your data at any point.

Anonymity
In terms of protecting your anonymity, identifiable characteristics such as name and address will not be collected as part of the data. If pseudonyms are necessary for the final report an identity key will be created and stored separately from the data set.

Confidentiality
Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by employing password protected and encrypted data storage.

Dissemination of Results
It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways

1. As a Capstone project requiring university defense
2. Directly with participants who request the final report
3. Directly with interested organizations

Disposal of Data
Data from this study will be disposed of when it is no longer needed by erasing electric copies.

Contacts
Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Jen Gamble and Dr. Astrid Pérez-Piñán (please see contact information at the beginning of this form.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix C:
Mental Health and Wellness Resource List

Mental Health and Wellness Resources

If you are experiencing a crisis and are in immediate danger, please call 911.

If you are thinking of suicide, please call 1-833-456-4566 toll free, 24/7 or visit www.crisisservicescanada.ca.

For non-emergency medical and mental health information please call 811.

Agricultural Resources:

For agricultural mental health support please visit https://agsafebc.ca/mental-wellness/ .

For resource toolkits and videos, visit https://agsafebc.ca/tag/mental-health/ .

Canadian Mental Health Association:

For general information about mental health in Canada, visit https://cmha.bc.ca/

For resources on loneliness, anger, stress, and more, visit https://cmha.ca/find-info/mental-health/

Indigenous Resources:

Wise Practices for Life Promotion; Indigenous Leadership for Living Well https://wisepractices.ca/

To find a counsellor in your area of the province use the search function at, https://bc-counsellors.org/

Appendix D:
Interview Protocol and Questions

Interview Protocol

Introduction

Hello, (Participant), I'm Jen Gamble and I'm conducting this research interview as part of my Community Development Master's degree at UVic.
The purpose of this project is to study the unique ways in which experiences of isolation impact the leadership voices and practices of women working in agriculture, especially during challenging events such as the Covid-19 pandemic.
I am interested in this topic because I have been involved in food systems and farming for over 15 years and I currently work for a non-profit organization that offers supports for migrant farm workers.

Before we start the interview, I have a few 'housekeeping' notes and information to share.

- I want to reiterate that you can stop this interview at any point or withdraw from the project without any repercussions. I know this was covered in the consent form that you signed but I want to be sure it is clear.
- I expect the interview today to be approximately 1-1.5 hrs in length depending on how much you want to share.
- I want to confirm that I have permission to record this interview? The recording will be used only by me as an aid for transcription and not shared.
- For the interview format, I have a few open-ended questions for you, but we can use them as a starting point for the conversation. Please feel free to take the discussion wherever is most relevant for you within this topic. Please feel free to ground your answers in a story, anecdote, or experience that speaks to your feelings on the topic. Storytelling is a powerful communication tool, so if you feel comfortable sharing in this manner, please do. Your stories are extremely valuable, and I appreciate your willingness to include them.

What questions do you have before we start?

Interview questions

One-on-one Interview Questions for Women in Agriculture

How did you come to be a farmer?

How is being a farmer important to you?

- In my studies, I have found a wide range of academic leadership definitions.
- Some focus on a central person being the champion of causes and rallying others to accomplish goals, while other understandings are less hierarchical.
- These involve more of a collective approach to accomplishing goals and centre values of inclusion, collaboration, and equity.

As a women farmer, can you tell me about any areas where you see yourself as leading/ taking leadership?

Tell me about a time when circumstances outside your control (for example, Covid-19 or a climate event) impacted, either positively or negatively, your leadership?

How has isolation affected your work as a leader? Can you provide some examples?

Tell me about how your farming practices influence the way you lead?

Is there anything more you would like to add about your leadership work?

Appendix E:
Ethics Certificate

University of Victoria

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval - Annual Renewal

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	**Astrid Perez Pinan** (Supervisor)	**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER:** Expedited review - delegated	**21-0621**
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT:	**Jen Gamble** **Master's student**	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	30-Mar-2022
UVIC DEPARTMENT:	**Public Administration PADM**	APPROVED ON:	26-Feb-2025
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	29-Mar-2026

PROJECT TITLE: **How has isolation related to Covid-19 impacted women farmers' leadership practices?**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: **None**

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: **None**

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
Gamble_tcps2_core_certificate.pdf - 01-Dec-2021
Mental Health Resources.docx - 17-Dec-2021
Interview Invitation Email V3.docx - 03-Dec-2023
MACD Project_Interview Questions_Revision.docx - 03-Dec-2023
Interview_Consent_Form_Revised_3.doc - 07-Dec-2023

Conditions of approval

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Amendments
To make changes to the approved research procedure in your study, please submit "Amendments" or "Annual renewal with amendments" form. You must receive research ethics approval before proceeding with your amended protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria's policies for research involving human participants.

Dr. Sandra Gibbons
Chair, Human Research Ethics Board

Dr. Cindy Holder
Vice-chair, Human Research Ethics Board

Certificate Issued On: 26-Feb-2025