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Leading During COVID-19: Women in the Agricultural Industry

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Leading During COVID-19: Women in the Agricultural Industry

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Undergraduate Honors Thesis
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Abstract

There is no doubt COVID-19 has forever shaped the way our organizations operate, and leaders emerge in times of crisis. However, women uniquely face challenges and obstacles in the workplace during non-pandemic circumstances that were amplified in the past year as the lines between work and life were blurred. Literature and historical evidence show that women face significant barriers and bias compared to their male counterparts when pursuing leadership roles. This study sought to identify how women in agriculture, a male dominated industry, have encountered circumstances of obstacles or bias in their careers as leaders, as well as how they have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A series of interviews were conducted with open-ended questions to gather insight into the experiences of participants, who were managers and leaders within food and agriculture organizations. The findings of this study are specific to the participants and cannot be generalized to the experiences of broader populations, however, they provide common themes shared amongst respondents that may resonate with certain audiences. These themes suggested that women in agriculture do face unique challenges their male counterparts do not and that COVID-19 presented a host of new obstacles. In summary, respondents agreed there is work to be done to achieve equality for female leaders in agriculture.

Chapter I: Introduction

Background of the Study

This project sought to identify, dissect, and challenge the obstacles women face in their professional leadership journeys to contribute to the agricultural leadership curriculum surrounding gender-based leadership studies. This study expanded on Vehige's 2020 study focused on identifying common themes for women in leadership. As recommended for future research, "Follow-up interviews with survey respondents from this study will focus on leadership styles and EQ. Additionally, more in-depth and detailed information about each respondent's journey as a leader in the agricultural industry will be collected" (Vehige, 2020). I conducted this study with these goals in mind to illustrate a more detailed picture of women's stories and particularly their experiences as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose of the Study

This study will further develop curriculum for agricultural leadership programs by outlining in greater detail leadership theories, styles, and experiences of women through real-life stories. The researcher developed interview guide expanded upon the previous survey conducted by Vehige (2020) with focus on how female leaders in agriculture have been affected by and led their teams during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through conversations with female professionals in agriculture who hold leadership positions and analysis, themes about the pathways of these professional women will be described. The goal was to contribute case studies for use by students studying gender leadership and varying leadership style dynamics. The research questions guiding this project included:

1. What are the perceptions of women in agricultural industry regarding the challenges and opportunities they face?
2. How have women in the agricultural industry led during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was the qualitative responses provide detailed insight and evidence of experiences women in agriculture have encountered throughout their careers, as well as during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was timely and relevant to the present global circumstances of COVID-19 and documented valuable conversations about gender equality in the workforce. Particularly within agriculture, this study highlights the experiences of female leaders during COVID-19 and. Above all, this study highlights how female leaders challenge expectations, stereotypes, barriers, and obstacles to succeed within their organizations.

Limitations to the Study

The study had the following limitations:

1. The results of this study cannot be generalized to populations outside of the participants in this study's interviews.
2. Because the interviews were conducted in a non-anonymous setting between the interviewer and participant, it is possible that dishonest answers were provided.
3. The size and demographics of the pool of interviewees was not diverse enough to provide generalized results for all women in agriculture, all women in the workforce, or the general experiences of women during COVID-19.

Basic Assumptions

The study had the following basic assumptions:

1. The participants answered interview questions honestly.
2. All participants were female leaders in agriculture industry.
3. Participants had a genuine interest in participating in this study and did not have any other motives.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Research surrounding women in leadership is an intricate area that requires an evaluation beyond surface level descriptions. For a true understanding of the challenges faced by women in daily work experiences, one must evaluate where women have been, where they are now, and where they are heading in the future (Gill, 2009). Often shaped primarily by male experiences, dated studies and models of leadership analysis do not represent the progressive issues at hand for females pursuing professional leadership roles (Gill, 2009). For women in agriculture, examples of obstacles experienced include personal financial and self-value, particularly when it comes to proving one's self is worthy of a pay raise, promotion, or recognition of capability (Vehige, 2020).

Each woman's story is unique and contributes to the greater understanding of the experiences female leaders face of which their male counterparts may never think. The significance of history happening before our eyes in this past year demonstrates just this. The centennial of the 19th Amendment, which allowed for some women to become participants in the political process, also represented the women of color who were left out in that achievement. In a long-awaited moment, 2021 saw the first woman, the first woman of color, the first Black woman, and the first South Asian woman defy 245 years of male leadership in politics to become Vice President of the United States, putting to rest the question of women's electability and ability to lead a nation (Rutgers, 2020). A recent piece of art illustrated the significance of Kamala Harris's accomplishment displayed at the base of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. A sheet of glass intricately and strategically shattered to show a portrait of Harris, symbolic of her breaking the metaphorical glass ceiling that has been long in place for women in leadership (Smithsonian, 2021).

This metaphorical glass ceiling was introduced in 1986 by Hymowitz and Schellhardt in the *Wall Street Journal* describing the reasoning for the lack of women in positions of power as, “Even those who rose steadily through the ranks eventually crashed into an invisible barrier. The executive suite seemed within their grasp, but they just couldn’t break through the glass ceiling.” Fast forward to 2021, the metaphor has evolved to reflect more contemporary pathways of female leaders. The glass ceiling metaphor has been challenged for depicting an absolute barrier in organizations, failing to take into account the complexity of challenges women face in their careers, and implying men and women have equal entry access into the workforce. A more modern metaphor that illustrates the complexity of the journeys of female leaders, while also presenting them in a non-discouraging way, is the labyrinth. This metaphor is not a linear pathway, but rather a puzzle or maze with intricacies and unexpected obstacles leading to a destination that is known to be achievable (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

The labyrinth acknowledges that women are capable of becoming leaders but is reflective of the difficulties they may face along the way (Eagly, 2020). Though women have defied these challenges to find themselves at the top of the ranks in their fields, progress is still needed. Women constitute 30% of college and university presidents (Gardner, 2019), 34% of the Senior Executive Service of the federal government (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2017), 45% of chief executive officers in nonprofit organizations (Henry, 2019), and 40% of managers and 28% of chief executives in all organizations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). However, out of all the chief executive officers in the S&P 500 only 6% are women (Catalyst, 2020) and the same goes for 24% of members of U.S. Congress (Center for American Women and Politics, 2020).

As for the obstacles women disproportionately face in comparison to their male counterparts, they encompass a wide range of topics that are systemically intertwined. Many of which stem from behavioral expectations for women in leadership roles. Meta-analyses on leadership styles found women to be more democratic and communal than male leaders, often inviting others to offer input and consensus in decision making processes (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; van Engen and Willemsen, 2004). Their male counterparts did less “leading from behind”, a phrase used to describe working with others to come to a decision, by having a more autocratic and direct approach. This long held expectation for women to be nice and kind and not overly dominant stems from societal preferences (Prentice & Carranze, 2002; Rudman et al., 2012). Women who act out of this character often face disapproval (Eagly & Carli, 2007). A meta-analysis of 63 studies of this found that when comparing men and women who displayed dominance, women were the only ones who received backlash for displaying strong behavior (Williams & Tiedens, 2016).

Female leaders are often expected to act a certain way in order to fit expectations of how women should lead, treat others, or interact interpersonally. These behaviors include attempting to boost likability and influence through a warm personality (Eagly, 2020), showing both communion and agency to be judged as effective (Johnson et al., 2008), or speaking in a certain tone in order to be taken seriously (Eagly, 2020). Because of this, women find themselves in a double bind, trying to be not too hot and not too cold balancing communal versus agentic leadership styles. Ninety-six percent of Fortune 1000 female executives rated developing “a style with which male managers are comfortable” as critical or fairly important (Catalyst, 2020). However, female leaders also struggle to be appreciated for the effort, compassion, or helpfulness they contribute to their teams because it is societally expected from them. A study

showed that male employees received promotions when coworkers praised their helpfulness while females did not have the same benefit (Eagly, 2020).

Female leaders often find themselves making fateful sacrifices on their journey through the labyrinth that come with family responsibilities. Compared to men, women are more likely to interrupt their careers, miss more days of work, and as a result have fewer years of work experience and less opportunity for advancement in rankings and earnings. Though there has been an increase in shared responsibilities, women still predominately take on the burden of both childcare and housekeeping. As a result, women face discrimination in promotions because of assumptions about these responsibilities being too time demanding. Additionally, women are often left out of professional networking due to gatherings and activities for such taking place outside of work hours, as well as events like company retreats that often are centered around masculine activities. This extracurricular activity proves to be necessary for employees to socialize, politic, and build social capital for advancement in managerial roles (Eagly, 2020).

Chapter III: Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative collection of the perspectives of female leaders in agriculture industry roles through virtual interviews. The interviewees fit the same criteria used to select respondents in Vehige's (2020) study. The faculty mentor (Dr. Jill Rucker) assisted with streamlining the continuation of Vehige's (2020) study to ensure differentiation and expansion from data previously gathered. The interview instrument included 12 open-ended questions that allowed respondents to reflect on their experiences during COVID-19 and as women leaders in agriculture. The instrument was reviewed by a panel of female faculty and agriculture industry professionals. A copy of the interview instrument is included in Appendix A.

Participants

Interviewees were selected based on the criteria of: 1. they worked for an organization in the food and agriculture industry, 2. they held a managerial position in their organization, and 3. they were women. A total of 15 women across various sectors of the food and agriculture industry in the United States were identified as potential participants and eight were interviewed for this study.

Institutional Review Board

In compliance with the University of Arkansas policies and federal regulations, research involving human subjects was required to be submitted, reviewed, and approved before research completion. Following this policy, the study was approved by the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board (IRB) office. Since this is a continuation of a previous study conducted within the past year, the approval number provided for this research is IRB #2002251078. Documentation of this protocol approval is included in Appendix B.

Data Collection and Analysis

The sample gathered to conduct this study was intended to provide insight into the larger target audience of the same criteria's experiences as women in agriculture during COVID-19. Participants received an email invitation explaining the study's purpose and soliciting their participation. If the participant agreed to participate, a follow-up email was sent to schedule a video meeting via Zoom, then they received a Zoom initiation for the specified interview time. The video calls were conducted and recorded with the consent of participants.

Upon completion of the eight interviews, the transcripts from the Zoom recordings were downloaded and edited for anonymity. The transcripts were preliminarily coded for common themes by the researchers then were uploaded to NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to undergo coding for common themes. The coding was peer reviewed upon completion.

Reflexivity Statement

The researchers strived to maintain neutrality while conducting interviews, but it is worth noting that members of the research team were women in agriculture who shared common interests, experiences, and backgrounds with interviewees. These factors may have created slight bias when discussing the experiences of interviewees as women in agriculture and during COVID-19. The researchers worked to be objective in analyzing responses and sought individuals outside of the sample criteria to peer review the interview instrument for potential bias in questions.

Chapter IV: Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews conducted for this study. The findings are reported according to the research questions which guided the study and the questions asked of participants.

Agricultural Background

To gain an accurate understanding of familiarity and connection to the agriculture industry, participants identified the factors that led them to their career in the industry, the longevity of their career up to this point, and shared insight on their current role and responsibilities.

Out of the eight participants, 100% (n = 8) reported a lifelong connection to the food and agriculture industry with 87.5% (n = 7) reporting they grew up on a family farm and 100% (n = 8) pursued an agricultural undergraduate or graduate degree. Though all participants had a lifelong connection to agriculture, their career lengths varied. Career lengths ranged from 3 to 24 years of experience, with an average of 10 years of experience, and median of 9 years of experience.

To protect the identity of interviewees, their full titles or places of employment will not be shared in this report. One hundred percent (n = 8) of participants were managers within their organizations and worked in the food and agriculture industry.

Experiences as Women in Agricultural Industry Leadership Positions

The first objective sought to explore various factors that impacted female leaders' experience as leaders within their career. Respondents, 100% (n = 8), noted that at some point in their career they felt they had been treated differently because they were women. Though some

instances varied due to the specific field within agriculture, a common theme was being tasked with or expected to fulfill hostess duties in office space and meeting settings.

When prompted with the question, “Have you ever been tasked with certain responsibilities at work because of your gender?”, one respondent referenced feeling obligated to take on responsibility when no one else would because she was the only female in the room:

“As coffee service comes in or it’s almost lunchtime, you kind of naturally feel like you should be the one to be like “okay lunch is here and here’s where you get drinks”... “if you need a restroom break”, you kind of play hostess. Things like note taking skills, you kind of naturally get those type of things a lot of times when you’re the only female in the room.”

Another interviewee shared similar experiences where she had been asked to take on responsibilities of the same nature, despite being a senior leader of her organization:

“In the past, whenever an event was going on, and there was a potential door prize event, it seemed like the girls always got to do the door prizes or the girls always got to plan the meals and stuff, and to me that’s almost by gender.”

Participants were also asked if they felt they had ever been interacted with differently in the workplace compared to their male counterparts. One hundred percent ($n = 8$) referenced at least one instance where they had been interacted with differently in some form compared to male colleagues. A common theme within these experiences were connected to their familial status or general assumptions based on gender.

One interviewee, who was a new mom, shared comments she had received targeted toward her ability to raise a family while also prioritizing her career:

“I am the only female salesperson... the other are eight males then myself, so some of those questions of “oh, she’s going to have her little girl at home. Is that going to create some

obstacles there for her to you know, be productive throughout the day?” It’s just one of those things where I’m curious if my male counterparts were asked the same questions that have children at home as well... Even recently I’ve been asked... “what do you see in your career in the future? Would you like to stay at home and have a family?” Those are just not questions that are asked to men. I have to remind them to not set my career back due to the fact that they’re questioning if I can handle a family at home because there’s so many women in the workplace, even outside of ag, that manage to raise a family, as well as be a great leader in their company.”

To look deeper at the experiences of women as leaders within their organizations, it is also important to consider outside factors. Participants were asked to share how their responsibilities outside of work differ from their male counterparts. The responses to this question often built upon the discussion from another question in the survey regarding obstacles and sacrifices participants have made in their careers, particularly during COVID-19, but this question sought to explore broader circumstances for their responsibilities both pre-pandemic and currently. The responses were commonly connected to familial responsibilities as household leaders for both respondents with and without children.

A interviewee referenced experiences she had as a working mom early in her career:

“My oldest daughter... was a tiny baby when I started... and I would take her and lay her in the floor in the evenings to go back over files that I didn’t have time to get through during the day, and I feel like that was just something that as a mom and as a female household leader that was what I did... So having smaller children does add a little bit more difficulty to the overall picture of those responsibilities.”

Another respondent, who did not have children, emphasized the importance of balancing responsibilities with her significant other. This was something several participants mentioned as an important element of their outside of work life:

“I’m really grateful that he is a man who grew up in a household of women so he doesn’t necessarily have any preconceived notions of responsibilities that should only be mine or only his. We are both pretty eager to help out, whatever the task is. I would say when it comes to these “wife duties” or “mom roles”, such as laundry, dishes, and cooking, I do feel that there’s some sort of pressure on me to at least be responsible for making sure that those things get done.”

Women Leaders in Ag During COVID-19

This objective sought to determine if female leaders in the agriculture industry had been uniquely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in professional and personal capacities, especially with regard to obstacles and growth.

Between March 2020 and April 2021, 100% (n = 8) of respondents experienced a shift to working in a virtual environment at some point but the longevity of the virtual setting varied depending on organization size, team needs, and function. Within this common theme of adaptation to virtual settings, many reported that the shift negatively impacted their team’s ability to progress or accomplish goals.

A senior leader in food promotion described the obstacles her organization encountered in hosting digital experiences:

“How do you convey how great a steak tastes on the computer?... We were stuck at home, so we couldn’t interact with people but that’s what we do. We’re with the public, we’re explaining and talking to them about beef, and we’re serving them food. We couldn’t even do that. We couldn’t

sample food out, we couldn't get out there in front of students, so we reverted to trying to do videos. We tried to do more digital advertising and social media as best we could."

Another respondent moved companies during the COVID-19 pandemic and acknowledged the struggles she experienced in the digital workplace, particularly with a team she had never physically met:

"Stepping into a new company midway through COVID was really interesting because this company has not been as proactive and maintaining of those personal relationships outside of work until the last month or so when our office presence has really increased. To be honest, I felt somewhat pretty lonely and helpless. There were a lot of people that I was working with day in and day out that we don't video chat, we just talked on the phone, so I haven't ever seen their faces or facial expressions. Learning to navigate through that was a bit wonky."

As travel was brought to a halt during periods of the pandemic, some respondents reflected on the impact this had on their teams and organizations. One participant shared the difficulties of maintaining client relationships in a sales role with limited interaction:

"We usually do a big conference in March every year, so obviously that's been cancelled. I haven't been able to meet my suppliers, so there's people that I talk to via email all day every day that are outside of my company. They are big suppliers and key to what I do but I don't even have a face to put with a name... It's kind of one of the cons or something that held me back in a way. I really enjoy putting a face to a name and getting to know someone on a personal level, which really helps with business and what I do."

Participants were asked how they describe their leadership styles in times of crisis, such as COVID-19, as well as how this compares to their leadership style under normal circumstances. Leadership styles pre-COVID-19 varied but it was evident that a majority of

respondents developed a stronger relationship-oriented approach with a greater desire for community and ensuring their team felt supported in times of uncertainty.

A respondent acknowledged her shift from being a strong task-oriented leader to developing relationship-oriented practices within her team:

“When COVID first hit and everything was so up in the air, nobody really knew what was going on there, it was like day by day. I probably became a little bit more relationship oriented than my normal mode. I did have to take some more time to check in on everyone like “hey, how are you doing”, “are things okay”, “how are you handling this”, “I know it’s been a shock to all of us, is there any extra support you need right now?” Whereas some people that’s their natural leadership style all the time, for me I probably had to pivot into doing more relationship leadership styles during COVID but that’s certainly not necessarily my default.”

In discussing both experiences during COVID-19 and as female leaders, the participants were presented with the question of, “During COVID-19, have you encountered obstacles or made sacrifices in regard to your professional work life that your male counterparts have not?”

A majority of respondents discussed the obstacles, sacrifices, and responsibilities they had as working mothers. Respondents also acknowledged a household system of shared responsibility with their significant others to maintain career and family balance, both those with and without children. The responses to this question were frequently referenced in the more general interview question regarding outside of work responsibilities.

One interviewee described her experience as a working mom with toddlers during the pandemic:

“As a working mom, it’s a whole other dynamic. I always say when you’re a working mom, not only are you worried and constantly thinking about what you have to get done from

eight to five but your other job... my second job kicked in every day at 4 pm until bedtime. That's always the first part of my day too, is to be a mom first and before I start my day. Certainly, when those first couple of months hit and we were not only using our house to raise our families but using our houses as our offices full time while our families were there, now that was a shock to the system and took some time getting used to... Even though my husband was in the house, he was the main caretaker of them during my work hours so that I could be in my office at home and get my work done."

Another respondent shared her internal conflict of balancing work and family:

"I did work from home with kids... I would say that's probably the biggest area, being a mom, and because my husband was still able to go into the office. So a lot of times that womanly instinct is that you need to be the one that takes care of the kids."

With all respondents having worked in a virtual setting at some point over the course of the pandemic, common themes emerged within their experiences. Participants were asked to discuss what this transition looked like for them personally and if they felt the circumstances impacted their ability to advance professionally within their organization. Though 100% (n = 8) of participants shared that they utilized methods of communication such as video calling and digital communication, there were not common themes in regard to positive or negative advancement within their organizations. The responses included the following: 25% (n = 2) received a promotion, 25% (n = 2) changed organizations, 12.5% (n = 1) stated they felt they experienced positive growth, referencing greater independence and less distractions, and 37.5% (n = 3) expressed they felt stagnant or negatively impacted in their growth. Within those that reported stagnant or negative impacts 66.6% (n = 2) stated they felt their organizations were not focused on promotions or team development during the pandemic and 33.3% (n = 1) shared a

personal goal she wished to achieve in the past year that was unable to be accomplished given pandemic safety measures.

Participants were asked to share how the COVID-19 pandemic changed how they lead in times of uncertainty and if there were any leadership practices they developed during that time they believe they will continue into the future. 100% of respondents (n = 8) shared they did in fact develop new leadership practices they will continue in a post-pandemic world. A common theme that emerged within these realizations and developments included a need for work-life balance.

A respondent shared how she found this need in her own experience and has empowered her team to adapt the same balance:

“A huge thing that I had to learn in this new role was really the separation between work and home, and I think I’m just now getting to a healthy place with that. This job was honestly pretty hard for a few months, and that was bleeding into my home life, it was bleeding into my attitude about a lot of things... That appreciation for work life balance and understanding people’s different views on it is something that I always want to keep at the forefront of my mind as a leader just making sure that I am empowering those that report to me or those that are on my team to really do what is best for them and their mind, body, and soul at the end of the day. Work is work... but there’s a lot of things outside of the 40-hour work week that we enjoy and take priority for a lot of us too.”

Team empowerment and communication in general was another common theme that emerged as practices leaders will continue in the future. A majority of respondents acknowledged they valued touch points, such as one-on-one meetings or calls to check in on each other, with their leaders and those who report to them.

When discussing her personal appreciation for empowerment from superiors, one respondent shared how she communicated that empowerment downstream to her own direct reports:

“It reinforced to me that employees need to know you have faith in them. Regardless of if you’re seeing them face to face or they’re remote for 60 days and you aren’t having any physical touch points... I’m making sure that I verbalize those things to my employees to say, “hey, I appreciate everything you’re doing. I know you’ve totally got this.” ... I’m making sure I’m more intentional about taking the time to do those types of things so that they know because they can’t read my mind... COVID taught me to be more intentional and to have those touch points.”

Another respondent shared similar thoughts on valuing communication with her team and how she has made that a priority during COVID-19:

“Just making sure [my direct report] has what I would expect from our leadership... being open and approachable, knowing it’s okay to make mistakes and as silly questions... the person that reports to me has only been with the company for a year so they’ve had to deal with just crazy circumstances in their career so far and just helping them understand what parts are normal.”

To provide an opportunity to summarize the participants thoughts and experiences expressed during the course of the interview, they were given the opportunity to add any final remarks or themes they felt emerged from the conversation. The most common theme, with nearly all respondent's acknowledgment, was that there was still work to be done in order for women to feel equal in the workforce, especially in agriculture. One participant shared:

“I feel like sometimes there is a little bit more of a box that they do try to put you in professionally as a female... I have twin girls and they are very much like me and going to rule

the world someday. I really hope that in 2035 when they're graduating high school, they know it's okay to speak their opinion on something and no one will say, "wow what an opinionated girl."

Another participant added encouragement from her personal experience:

"Sometimes we have to work harder to get where we want to be, but it does pay off in the long run... just prove them wrong, prove them that you're the right person for the job or for the situation, and don't give them any doubt."

To summarize with a statement of unity that reflects the rapidly changing landscape of demographics and issues in agriculture, one respondent provided:

"Being a female in agriculture is an evolving position and we just have to stick together and keep pushing forward to continue to learn and grow together."

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

With only eight participants, it must be acknowledged that the findings of this sample of female leaders in agriculture's interviews should not be assumed to be general experiences of those outside of the study. The findings are applicable only to the women that participated in this study.

From the findings of this study, it was found that women in agriculture had faced obstacles and challenges based on their gender in personal and professional capacities both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, all respondents noted at some point in their career they had been both treated and interacted with differently by their male counterparts because they were women. Though specific instances of these encounters varied, themes of being tasked with hostess duties or other responsibilities typically associated to be "womanly tasks" were often assigned to female employees. In interactions, themes of questioning a woman's ability to prioritize a career while balancing family life emerged.

Through discussing the responsibilities women have outside of their work that differ from their male counterparts, familial responsibilities for both women with and without children were commonly referenced. However, respondents acknowledged that though these obstacles and sacrifices were difficult, maintaining a balance of responsibility allowed them to fulfill their roles at both home and work. Particularly during COVID-19, these same sentiments remained true but were amplified as the line between work and home was blurred.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented new challenges for female leaders in agriculture in their personal and professional lives. All participants transitioned to virtual work and commonly reported this having an impact on their team's ability to move forward. Additionally, a theme of developing stronger relationship-oriented leadership styles was shared among respondents.

Looking at how the COVID-19 experiences shaped how participants led during times of uncertainty, all shared they learned or developed a practice they will continue in the future. Common themes within these realizations included a need for work-life balance, team empowerment, and communication.

In summarizing remarks, an overwhelming agreement of work remaining to achieve true equality for women in the workforce, particularly in agriculture. Respondents shared sentiments of hope, encouragement, and optimism for the evolving industry and their desire to empower the female leaders in it.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should follow-up with participants post-pandemic to assess long-term lessons and growth in the leadership practices they developed as a result of COVID-19, and to provide additional insight as pandemic circumstances continue to evolve. It would also be of value to conduct a study in parallel to this one with men as participants to compare responses. The mirrored approach could provide insight into how men's experiences compare to the leadership labyrinth. Additionally, the recommendations from Vehige's (2020) study remain relevant to be pursued to build upon the survey data collected regarding general leadership experiences of women in agriculture.

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Appendix A: Questioning Route

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview! You are contributing to valuable research on the impact of COVID-19 on women leaders in the agriculture industry that will be used to further studies on gender and leadership at the University of Arkansas.

If at any point you need to revisit a question, you may ask me to repeat the question.

All information collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and university policy. Your name will not be collected and your individual answers will not be linked with any identifying information in any data reports. Your participation is voluntary. If you come to a question you prefer not to answer, you may skip it and ask to proceed to the next question.

Should you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact a member of our research team: Dr. Jill Rucker, at kjrucker@uark.edu or Ms. Katie Gardner at klgardne@uark.edu. IRB approval has been granted for this project and you may contact Ro Windwalker at iwindwal@uark.edu.

If you agree to participate in this study by completing the 30 minutes or less interview, please state your verbal consent by stating yes. (Pause to collect participant's verbal answer)

Your help with this study is appreciated.

1. What led you to a career in the agricultural industry?
2. How many years have you spent in ag industry?
3. What is your position description?
 - a. Do you actively manage a team of people?
 - b. If so, how many?
 - c. What is your level of engagement with your team?
4. What has it looked like for you to lead during COVID-19?
 - a. Work environment?
 - b. Work culture?
 - c. Work/life balance?
5. How would you describe your leadership style in times of crisis, such as COVID-19?
 - a. How does this compare to your leadership style under "normal" circumstances?
6. During COVID, have you encountered obstacles or made sacrifices in regard to your professional work life that your male counterparts have not?
7. Have you ever been tasked with certain responsibilities at work because of your gender?
8. Have you ever been interacted with differently in the workplace than your male counterparts?
9. How do your responsibilities outside of work differ from your male counterparts?
10. Did you work virtually this year?
 - a. What did that look like?
 - b. Do you feel that working in a virtual environment impacted your ability to advance professionally in your organization?
11. How has COVID-19 changed how you lead in times of uncertainty?
 - a. What are some leadership practices developed during COVID you believe might continue into the future?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add that we did not discuss?

Thank you for participating!

Appendix B: Institutional Research Board Approval

This research was a continuation of a previous IRB approved within the past year and was granted permission to continue research under protocol #2002251078.

Grace Vehige



To:	Jill Rucker
	AGRI 228
From:	Douglas
	James
	Adams,
	Chair IRB
	Committee
Date:	05/07/2020
Action:	Expedited Approval
Action Date:	05/07/2020
Protocol #:	2002251078
Study Title:	Professional Women in Agricultural Industry
Expiration Date:	05/05/2021
Last Approval Date:	

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Grace Vehige, Investigator
