"For Equality in Agrifood Cooperativism"

By Carmen Vallejo Garcelán. Women Cooperatives of Castilla-La Mancha

Before the celebration on the 8th of International Women's Day, Cooperativist Women of Castilla-La Mancha joins the demands and mobilizations called by various organizations and groups to demand real gender equality, also in rural areas and specifically in the field of agri-food cooperativism. The International Women's Day should be a day of reflection on the important role that rural women play in each area of ??life, as well as commemorating the struggle of women for their participation in society.

For us, March 8th will also be a day of protest for gender equality and, at the same time, it will be a strong call for attention to men, institutions, companies, and society so that equality be real, in salaries, in schedules, so that there really are conciliation policies and effective commitments to assume co-responsibility.

> Our sector is still very "masculinized", although the figures often say the opposite. We must make those numbers, which speak of more than 38,000 members in the agri-food

> cooperatives of Castilla-La Mancha, translate into real visibility

It is not enough to say *"women, take the step, stop hiding, make yourself visible", because this argument is a half-truth and hides a glimmer of guilt, by making us responsible for not being, not showing, and reality, almost it's always another, why are not we? Why do not we show ourselves? Why do not we go to the assemblies? Why do we delegate to our husbands, partners, brothers, parents? Could it be that the conciliation and co-responsibility are still a chimera ?, maybe we are taking care of our parents, of the house ?, simply and plainly, could it be that we can not go ?, is it not that we should open new debates that affect the society of the rural environment in which we live and also in the cooperative field*?

This is where we all have to listen, to pitch in and do an exercise of responsibility and mutual commitment. If women in Castilla-La Mancha represent the fourth part of the agro-alimentary cooperativism of the region, if they are 50% of society and without them there is no sense in the rural environment in which we live, it is necessary to take steps so that in the first place we feel able not to delegate our decision, our attendance at the assemblies, our visibility in the decision-making bodies, but for that we have to work, men and women, in a joint way, to foster the co-responsibility of the obligations, not only labor, agricultural ..., but also family, social ...

Each time we take more steps towards reconciliation, between fathers and mothers, but there is still a way to go in stewardship. We are making progress in the distribution of tasks, and more importantly, in family involvement and allowing women to continue developing their professional careers with real support from family, business and institutions.

In our area, the cooperative, it has taken a long time to wake up to this reality, that's why we still see few women in decision-making bodies. We are encouraged -however- the steps we have taken so far, offering training and promoting discussion groups where women who have not yet taken the step see others who are already visible, who work in this sector, who hold positions of responsibility , who have made cooperativism their way of life and their raison d'être, to transmit the message that it is not only possible, but totally necessary.

> A sector that is in continuous progress like ours, which has risen to the trolley of new technologies, of internationalization, of an increasingly competitive and globalized market, can not afford the luxury of not incorporating or wasting half of the talent of the population

Let us not forget that the rural environment, where they settle and from which the cooperatives are structured, needs to retain talent, and this ... has no gender.

We must be vindicative with equality throughout the year, so we demand greater presence in the media, being perceptible in the press, television and radio, social networks and continue to show

cases of women who already assume responsibilities and also what means, what helps , what procedures must a woman perform to be actively integrated into the cooperative movement.

We want to continue betting on policies and measures that allow equality to be real and effective, that we continue prioritizing the participation of women in agriculture, that we continue to bet on the realization of plans and measures in favor of equality, just like that, we will move towards a cooperativism and a more sustainable, more just and more egalitarian rural environment.

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We want a day to come when we do not have to talk about ourselves, that Equality is something that is taken for granted, that it is not news that a woman is in charge of a large cooperative enterprise, that she is not asked how she does her work and take care of your children, because that, to this day, a man is not even questioned

We want real equality ... and, between women and men, we will achieve it.