"Our mission is to create opportunities for WOMEN AGROPROFESSIONALS"

Gissele Falcón Haro, Director of Siete Agromarketing and President of the AGRO WOMAN Project, discusses the significance of the project, which champions work for real equality in the agri-food sector, as well as visibility, empowerment, and promotion of women who, although committed for centuries to working equally in the field.

By Sucheta Wadhwa, Global BioAg Linkages and Primary BioAg Innovations, BAW Digest

Is equality between men and women sufficiently apparent?

During the month of March, much of the attention of the media and society in general is focused on women, to make their achievements, the path they have travelled and the road that remains ahead to achieve real equality, visible on an international level.

I wonder, though, given we're women all year round, shouldn't we be showing the equality of conditions that is required 365 days a year? Women don't want to be "in" because of a lack of recognition or rights. To me, being a feminist means being in favour of men and women having equal rights.

This includes letting females into places previously reserved just for men. I'm in favour of gender equality, whether you're a man or a woman; that's what I stand for and that's why I am, and openly share that I am, a feminist.

When and why did the AGRO Woman project start?

In 2017, as an entrepreneurial woman with more than 20 years of experience in the agri-food sector,
I saw the need to promote a pioneering project like AGRO Woman, hand in hand with the company I
lead: Siete Agromarketing. Six years on, AGRO Woman works to create a professional network of women and men committed to empowering the agro-professional woman in the agri-food sector and the food industry, enhancing visibility, development, and equalised work. These women and men act as a voice for and support rural women, who remain one of the most underrepresented links in the agri-food chain.

Have you encountered support and collaboration from other organisations and companies?

Currently, AGRO Woman collaborates closely with other Spanish and international organisations such as Global Women Fresh, which brings together women in fresh food production worldwide to close
the gender gap in our industry.

Our mission is to create open and pluralistic communication, awareness, and actions to achieve equal opportunities for WOMEN AGROPROFESSIONALS, facilitate their social and labour INTEGRATION and promote DIVERSITY within the sector.

What aspects should be focused on to achieve real equality in the agri-food sector?

To achieve this, it’s necessary to promote social responsibility in general and equity policies in companies and institutions. This involves responsible management of the entire agri-food chain; as part of this task, the rural environment is essential for the proper functioning of our societies. We women are charting a path towards equality. It’s very important to understand, recognise and make visible the role of women in the agricultural world, so that this gap can continue to be overcome. Women are sufficiently prepared to take on management positions in the industry.

They say that the agricultural sector is a masculinised world, where many women are leaders in the shadows, taking on technical or minor management positions that seem to be below a directorate or presidency. However, it’s also true that many of these agroprofessional women are anchors, and they promote rural women and make them visible.

The representation of women in management positions is still low. Why is this? Is progress being made in this area?

It’s still a minority of women who are fully incorporated into management teams and boards of directors. There are fewer women at the head of farms and agri-food companies and, in the case of cooperatives, the percentage of women on boards of directors is just 4%. Therefore, we are still far from our goal of equality and parity. It is true that in recent years there has been greater visibility and
incorporation of women. It is progress, but I’d say we’re still taking small steps.

That’s why AGRO Woman works and raises awareness to create a point of meeting and reflection, to break down barriers that exist today, promoting the importance of communicating on equality and CSR
(corporate social responsibility), always aligned with the SDGs (sustainable development goals), because we believe that equality is a task for everyone, as reflected in the motto that’s constantly with us.

What role do women play in the rural world?

Women play important roles in the rural economy as farmers, managers, and entrepreneurs. But they
aren’t recognised in these roles. Not to mention that they work to ensure the welfare of their families,
taking care, among other things, of food supply and caring for children and the elderly, with no real balancing of workload within the family or recognition of this activity.

According to the UN, “on average, women account for just over 40% of the agricultural labour force in
developing countries, rising to over 50% in parts of Africa and Asia.” Currently, the Common

Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the changes in its application in Spain will mean a higher percentage of aid for the incorporation of young farmers and greater allocation in redistributive payments, in the hope that administrations will continue working along these lines.

Is AGRO Woman an inspiring tool for the agrifood sector?

AGRO Woman and the AGRO Woman awards exist to raise our voice to increase awareness and inspire many groups and institutions in Spain, because our aim is to gain traction by highlighting the value of female agri-food leadership and the role of companies in promoting it in the rural world.

For this reason, administrations must dedicate more resources to training in new technologies, professional opportunities and business initiatives, so that women in rural areas and agro-professionals
have the same opportunities.