

Study finds women farm owners more apt to binge drink

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A study from the University of Georgia reveals a concerning pattern of binge drinking among women who own or manage farms.

The study, which was [published](#) in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, surveyed 987 [farmers](#) across the U.S. about their perceived levels of [stress](#) and coping behaviors, including alcohol use.

Farmers experience higher levels of work-related [stress](#) compared to other industries and the public, and recent studies have found that many turn to alcohol to handle that stress. But not all farmers used alcohol in the same way.

"Female farmers were less likely to report drinking, but then we had these points in the data that we weren't expecting where there was something going on with binge drinking within our female farmers," said lead author Christina Proctor, a clinical assistant professor at UGA's College of Public Health.

Proctor and her co-authors dug into existing research on stress and females who work in male-dominated fields and found that women tend to experience added stress that could affect alcohol use.

For example, said Proctor, women in male-dominated industries like firefighting and [commercial fishing](#) reported being held to a higher performance standard and having their authority routinely questioned. And outside of work, these women still bore the brunt of responsibility of housework and as caregivers.

"We thought maybe this is what's going on with our data," said Proctor. "Maybe there's questioning authority. Somebody comes into your farm, and they ask where the boss man is. You own the farm, but people don't see you as that owner."

So, they broke down reported stress and drinking behaviors in relationship to gender and the level of responsibility the farmers held.

Compared to their [male counterparts](#), they found that female farmers reported significantly higher [levels of stress](#). And, while [female participants](#) were less likely to drink overall, when they did drink, they were more likely to binge drink. This pattern was most pronounced among female farmers who owned or managed [farms](#).

"I think there are moments where the stress associated with farm work and these extra duties are just too hard to handle, where you have to cope with it in some way, and there's just this explosiveness when they do drink," said Proctor.

This study is part of a larger effort Proctor is leading to understand farmer stress and deliver interventions that help farmers deal with stress in healthy ways. Understanding the range of coping mechanisms farmers are using, and how those may look different across genders and farm roles, is critical to forming tailored mental health and well-being programs.

Proctor is currently interviewing female farmers to better understand the factors that trigger binge drinking.

Two-thirds of female farmers surveyed were farm owners or farm managers, and more women are entering the industry every year.

"We have to figure out a way to support our female [farmers](#), because they are a part of the future," said Proctor.

Co-authors include Noah Hopkins and Chase Reece with UGA's College of Public Health.

More information: Christina Proctor et al, The Intersection of Gender and Occupational Roles in Agriculture: Stress, Resilience, and Alcohol Behaviors of US Farmers, *Journal of Occupational & Environmental*

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