

Children needs and childcare: An illustration of how underappreciated social and economic needs shape the farm enterprise ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Abstract

Despite 40-year-old evidence of childcare challenges limiting women's participation in agriculture in the United States, it was not until a major societal crisis, COVID-19, that farm organizations and policy makers began to recognize that these challenges negatively impact the farm enterprise. Among farm persistence and farm transition scholars, farm households' social and economic needs, including childcare, have also been underappreciated despite the constant exchange of time, money, and energy between the farm household and the enterprise. We use survey responses from 729 U.S. farm families to understand how children and their childcare needs shape the farm enterprise and the extent to which childcare arrangements, farm individuals and households, and farm enterprise characteristics interact with these decisions. A high proportion of respondents made changes to adapt to the needs of children with the greatest impact on farm productivity, followed by impact on the structure of labor on- and off- the farm, and impact on the farm enterprise structure. These impacts likely have short- and long-term consequences on the trajectory of the farm enterprise and well-being of the household. Different decisions required a different calculus and the trade-offs that respondents considered were shaped by access to a support system, access to financial resources, and specific needs of the children. Last, the limited variations across the four decisions for a number of farm individual and household characteristics hint both at the universality of being a farm parent needing to constantly adapt amid high rates of childcare challenges and inadequate social safety nets. We conclude our article by discussing the implications of our findings along with future research avenues.

Related link: Farm families' childcare challenges impacting farm businesses, research suggests ^[3]

Region: United States ^[4]

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