

The Greek farm woman

A first-class citizen

In support of Greek farm women and in recognition of their work and contributions, the government has granted them a self-sufficient, independent and complete pension plan. Prior to this, farm women had no rights to their own pensions or health insurance benefits, being totally reliant on those of their husbands.

Now these women are also granted allowances for childbirth — 20,000 drs. before delivery and 20,000 drs. afterward. It is also no longer necessary for farm women to bring their children along when they go to work in the fields: more day-care centers have been established which operate during the summer.

Striving to achieve economic independence for women, especially those living in rural areas, the Council of Equality Between the Sexes is continuing to promote women in cooperatives. The council is also responsible for formation of a stock-farming co-op in the Prefect of Arkadia, using natural products.

In addition, the council is responsible for having formed the very first agro-tourist enterprise in Greece, located in the village of Petra on the island of Lesbos. This step has been taken to help the women of Petra achieve economic independence. The Institute of Mediterranean Studies, located in Athens, is conducting a study on the changing role of the Greek

farm woman. Data is being collected and questionnaires are being prepared for this purpose.

According to some of its data, in 1971 almost half a million women were working in the agricultural sector — or rather more than half the total number of economically active women in Greece.

Omitting those in the Athens area, nearly 70% of the remaining economically active women were engaged in agriculture, a figure much higher than that for the male labor force.

Turning to the contribution made by women to agricultural production, 1971 figures show that more than a third (36%) of the total agricultural labor force was female. Women played a particularly important role in family holdings, where they worked as unpaid "helpers." In 1971, 70% of workers in this category were women, and by 1981 the proportion had risen to 83%.

These figures show the importance of women in agriculture and stress the need for a detailed analysis of their role if one is to understand the mechanisms of family holdings and how they are productively governed.

The welfare of male and female workers in the farm sector depends on state bodies which are largely responsible for moderniza-



With her skilled hands, a young girl from Macedonia puts tobacco leaves on a string with the use of a long needle

tion of agriculture and the commercial movement of agricultural products.

Few farmers can thrive without wives, and the same can be said for farm households without a woman. Indeed, there are hardly any such households. The farmer himself may be the driving

force, but it is his wife who is the wellspring of the family.

A marriage between a farmer and a woman who works on the land is not just a union between two people: it is the beginning of a small cooperative with common economic goals and interests.

Tradition tells every woman who marries a farmer (however much mentalities may alter) that unless she stands by her husband and supports him in work both inside and outside the house, her family has little chance of flourishing.

The farmer's wife is responsible for the way in which the household functions. This is not something limited to the few square meters of floor space in a city apartment. Women in farm communities are responsible for the courtyard in which the house stands, for the flowers, the household animals, the trees and the storerooms.

On most days of the year, the farmer's wife must cook not only for members of her family, but also for others who help work in the field and orchard, pruning, planting and harvesting.

Further, a farm woman keeps to traditional ways, including the old methods of preserving fruit and even making drinks from various products of the land. In her free time, the farmer's wife knits or sews, not just for the pleasure she gets from creative activity, but also to prepare for the day on which her daughters — or even her sons — will set out on their own, requiring everything that makes a house a home.

The dowry system may have been abolished by law, but a farmer's wife still provides a "bottom drawer"

for her daughter, even if she is a university student.

Yet the modern farmer's wife is catching up with her husband — swiftly, too — in areas such as progress of the children and the well-being of the household. Educational levels have improved, and indeed today's lessons are proving more useful than in older times. Freedom of movement is also more evident. The farm family of today has come a long way from the isolated unit, far from the cities, which was the rule in the past.

Marriage in farming communities continues to be a stronger institution than it is in the cities. One does not often come across children of divorced parents, as one can expect in the city.

Farmers' wives and other women who live in the country have begun to participate in social action groups, or groups they've established on their own. Their political awareness is increasing day by day. The farm wife of today realizes that her freedom is a matter of politics, as are the administration, the economy, the educational system and in fact the very future of her children.

She knows that her right to vote gives her strength. But there is still a long way to go — as indeed there is for men in such communities — to attain full recognition of her communal, national and international responsibilities.