



Gender, Place & Culture

A Journal of Feminist Geography

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgpc20>

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To cite this article: Katarina Pettersson & Malin Tillmar (2022) Working from the heart – cultivating feminist care ethics through care farming in Sweden, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 29:10, 1446-1466, DOI: [10.1080/0966369X.2022.2071847](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2022.2071847)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2022.2071847>



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Published online: 09 May 2022.



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Working from the heart – cultivating feminist care ethics through care farming in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we explore why and how women and men farmers carry out care farming, paying attention to farming being gendered. We engage in geographical research on feminist care ethics to understand care farming by considering the people-place relationships cultivated. We draw on post-structural feminist understandings of gendered farm subjectivities, thereby exploring the emergence of new gender subjectivities. The paper fills research gaps on farmers providing care, and on the gendered nature of care farming. To the feminist geographic theorisations on feminist care ethics, we contribute a post-structural feminist approach. Empirically, the study builds on farm visits and 20 semi-structured interviews with women and men engaged in care farming on 12 farms in rural Sweden. We conclude that care farmers cultivate feminist care ethics as an ontology of connections, by *working from the heart*. This has meant care farmers are developing *people-place* and *people-people connections*. Feminist care ethics is, on the one hand a way of expressing criticism of current societal developments such as productivist agriculture and efficiency orientated welfare provisioning and, on the other, a way of making a difference. Feminist care ethics also includes the development of new gender subjectivities for both women and men farmers. We suggest that care farming implies farming otherwise, which shifts the farms to places of care, instead of food production. Altogether, we argue that care farmers nurturing feminist care ethics challenge the very conceptualisation of agriculture – from cultivating animals and plants to cultivating connections.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 2 March 2021
Accepted 15 March 2022

KEYWORDS

Care farming;
feminist care ethics;
gender;
post-structural feminist
approach;
subjectivities;
Sweden

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Introduction

The benefits to human health of contact with nature are well-known and lately there has been a growing interest among scholars and planners in investigating and enhancing the development of relations between people and natural environments (Hartig et al. 2014). Being in nature has been found to enhance well-being and physical, mental and spiritual health, inspiration, stress-reduction, physical activity and social cohesion (Nilsson, Sangster, and Konijnendijk 2011; Russell et al. 2013). Different concepts have been used to connote the dedicated practices of connecting humans to natural environments, including care farming, animal-assisted interventions, social and therapeutic horticulture, and healing landscapes (Annerstedt and Währborg 2011; Hassink and Van Dijk 2006; Hassink, Hulsink, and Grin 2014; Hine, Peacock, and Pretty 2008). In this paper we are interested in women and men farmers practising care farming. This essentially involves farmers welcoming ill, unhealthy or socially challenged people to their farms and caring for them by engaging them in various activities (taking care of animals, being in nature etc.), to nurture their well-being, mental and physical health (Hassink, Hulsink, and Grin 2014; Leck, Evans, and Upton 2014).

While the literature on care farming has examined the range of health and well-being benefits for service users (de Bruin et al. 2017; Ferwerda-van Zonneveld, Oosting, and Kijlstra 2012; Hassink and Van Dijk 2006; Kaley, Hatton, and Milligan 2019; Sempik, Hine, and Wilcox 2010; Steigen, Kogstad, and Hummelvoll 2016) only a few studies have investigated care farming by paying attention to the people giving the care, their inspirations and practices. In extant studies, care farming has been viewed as part of developing farming as a response to the challenges of competition and volatile prices on the global food market and the concomitant neoliberalisation of trade and agricultural policies (Hassink et al. 2007; Hassink, Hulsink, and Grin 2016). Conceptualisations have centred on multi-functionality (Hassink et al. 2007), entrepreneurial strategising (Hassink, Hulsink, and Grin 2016) and social entrepreneurship Morrigi et al. 2020, which tends to position farmers as somewhat limited to taking an economic approach when developing their farming. By viewing care activities as an 'add-on' to productivist farming, alternative transformations of how farming is conceptualised and conducted thereby risk going unnoticed. A different approach is taken by Leck, Evans, and Upton (2014) who found that, while often dismissed as marginal to 'core' agricultural operations, care farming transforms agriculture and how farmers live their lives through the development of 'connective agriculture'. Care farming was thereby found to coproduce an 'ethical landscape of care' enabling farmers to connect with people, and people to connect with agriculture, including the development of symbiotic human-animal relations between service users and animals (Leck, Evans, and Upton 2014).

The few care farming studies, focused on farmers, do not recognise the gendered nature of farms and farming despite extensive research having found that they are deeply gendered, including the construction of care work as feminine and therefore largely done by women (Andersson 2014; Brandth and Haugen 2016; Herron and Skinner 2012; Javefors Grauers 2003; Little 2002).

This paper will fill in these gaps by exploring why and how women and men farmers carry out care farming, paying attention to farming being gendered. We engage in geographical research on feminist care ethics to understand care farming by considering the people-place and people-people relationships cultivated. We also draw on post-structural feminist understandings of gendered farm subjectivities, thereby exploring the emergence of new subjectivities. To the literature on feminist care ethics, we thus contribute a development of thinking around post-structural feminism, called for by Raghuram (2016).

Empirically, the study builds on farm visits, where we were observers-as-participants, and 20 semi-structured interviews with women and men engaged in care farming on 12 care farms in Sweden.

We begin the paper by reviewing theorisations on feminist care ethics and the few studies that have linked feminist care ethics to gendered farming, which we seek to develop through stressing the people-place relationships and by adding a post-structural feminist approach. Thereafter we describe our methods and material. In the subsequent sections we outline how the care farmers cultivate feminist care ethics by developing people-place and people-people connections and argue that this implies farmers both criticising societal developments, such as productivist agriculture and efficiency orientated welfare provisioning, as well as them making a difference. Nurturing feminist care ethics includes the development of new gender subjectivities for both women and men farmers. The paper ends with a concluding discussion where, we argue that care farmers cultivating feminist care ethics alters the very conceptualisation of agriculture – from cultivating animals and plants to cultivating connections.

Theorising feminist care ethics

A useful concept for exploring why and how women and men farmers carry out care farming is *feminist care ethics*. Conceptualising care as ethics deepens our understanding beyond care as practice, or work, and stresses that care makes up a basis for an alternative ethical standpoint through developing relations and connections (Popke 2006). Feminist care ethics can thus denote an 'ontology of connection':

Care ethics begins with a social ontology of connection: foregrounding social relationships of mutuality and trust (rather than dependence). Care ethics understands

all social relations as contextual, partial, attentive, responsive, and responsible (Lawson 2007, 3).

It is also suggested that: 'an ethics of care could be a framework not just for understanding who gives care, where and why [...] but also for understanding how an approach informed by care might enlighten our entire way of collective and individual being' (Milligan and Wiles 2010, 743).

For a long time, research has found that women are undertaking the bulk of care work, and that care practices are viewed as feminine (Jarosz 2011; Lawson 2007; Milligan and Wiles 2010). This is also the case when it comes to farms, as farmwomen have been found to have a moral responsibility to take care of children, husbands, parents and in-laws (Herron and Skinner 2012). In addition, care work on family farms, both paid and unpaid, has been found to be marked as feminine and largely performed by women, whose bodies are simultaneously constructed as caring (Brandth and Haugen 2016; Little 2002). At the same time, hegemonic gender notions associate men's bodies to 'hard' work outdoors, controlling nature (Brandth and Haugen 2016; Little 2002). This is also evident in the Swedish context, where women have been assigned care work, including caring for children, smaller animals and housework, while men have mainly performed outdoor labour including tilling, sowing, fertilising, harvesting, threshing and felling forests (Andersson 2014; Javefors Grauers 2003).

Nonetheless, new gendered notions are developing, as women farmers in Sweden have been found to pursue goals extending beyond caring for their families (Stenbacka 2017). Elsewhere in Europe, new masculine subjectivities have emerged in the form of an entrepreneurial identity (Bryant 1999), and, in contrast, of younger men stressing their roles as caring fathers of both families and nature (Bye 2009; Coldwell 2007).

Only a few studies have used feminist care ethics as a theoretical lens to understand gendered farming. One such is Jarosz (2011), who found that women farmers engaged in community-supported agriculture in the US were motivated by nourishing themselves and others. They were thereby emphasising an ethics of care, placing relations and 'making a life' at the centre of farming, rather than 'making a living'. Finding that women farmers in the US expand what it means to be a farmer by practising care work led Shisler and Sbicca (2019) to conclude that care work includes a development of feminist care ethics by establishing connections to other beings and things: 'This ethic includes nonhuman entities, such as the environment, animals, and agricultural land' (Shisler and Sbicca 2019, 879). Importantly, the women farmers do not see these connections as an essential feature of being a woman. Rather, feminist care ethics have evolved because of gendered constructions, whereby care has become associated with femininity and motherhood (Shisler and Sbicca 2019). In their study of care ethics in green

care, Moriggi et al. (2020) go beyond humans' health and well-being and include more-than-human subjects and non-human objects. Whilst Moriggi et al. (2020) do not expand on the feminist dimension of care ethics, they underline that feminist care ethicists: 'have criticized the dominant production oriented framing of care and nature, which assesses (and undervalues) them in utilitarian terms' (p. 3).

Viewed from the perspective of feminist care ethics, analyses of who performs (care) work on farms, and that care is positioned as feminine, are fruitful. Further, a *feminist* care ethical approach emphasises that the association between care values and women could be challenged, inspired by feminist theory (Milligan and Wiles 2010). We thus interpret the feminist element in feminist care ethics as positioning caring at the centre of discussions on ethics (Jarosz 2011) and as foregrounding a social theory informed by care, whereby feminist (gender transformative) 'care-ful geographies' (Milligan and Wiles 2010) and 'alternative ethical standpoints' (Popke 2006) are developed and researched.

While gender has been at the centre of feminist care ethics, differences between feminisms and how they relate to care ethics are yet to be explored (Raghuram 2016). We contribute to such an exploration by applying a post-structural feminist approach, which understands power as productive of people and places (cf. Little 2002). Gender is thus distanced from an individual's personal experiences, and gender subjectivities are viewed as produced in relations imbued with power. We suggest that post-structural theorisations go hand in hand with feminist care ethics' conceptualisations of care as a shared accomplishment, premised on a relational conception of subjectivity (cf. Popke 2006). The feminist element in feminist care ethics thus contributes an understanding of *gender subjectivities* – women's and men's senses of self.

To summarise, the literature reviewed concludes that the creation of connections, responsibility and relationships are at the centre of feminist care ethics (Lawson 2007; Milligan and Wiles 2010; Popke 2006). The studies centred on farming (Leck, Evans, and Upton 2014; Shisler and Sbicca 2019) stress the consideration of farms as particular places for care ethics. Thus, exploring why and how women and men farmers carry out care farming, we find it necessary to consider the people-place connections and the people-people relationships established by the care farmers on the farms. While we analytically separate the different connections we also understand them to be intertwined. We are also exploring women and men care farmers' emerging new gender subjectivities. Our analysis will also pay attention to the feminist element of care ethics by discussing the farmers' cultivation of feminist care ethics and its implications for the concept of farming.

Methods and material

This paper draws upon farm visits and 20 semi-structured interviews with 11 women and 8 men farmers engaged in care farming on 12 care farms in rural Sweden, performed 2016–2017. Through our engagement in feminist care ethics we have sought to do care-ful geography by caring for and about socially and spatially distant others (Lawson 2007; Milligan and Wiles 2010) by making visible small farms in Sweden working towards more just ends, caring for service users, animals and farms. One aspect of our ambition to highlight feminist care ethics is that our research was inductively prompted: We were approached by a woman care farmer who suggested Swedish care farmers would be a suitable topic for research – and we made a connection with her, listened, and took her idea seriously. We then managed to obtain a research grant and the woman is one of the respondents in our study. In addition, we found respondents through chain-referral sampling (cf. Shisler and Sbicca 2019) from key persons at the Association of Swedish Farmers and the Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies. We also identified respondents on these organisations' listings of care farmers (cf. Jarosz 2011) and searched the internet for care farms' own home pages.

We visited ten (out of the 12) care farms (two farms were visited twice), and stayed for one day (6–8 hours). Some farm visits enabled a more participant observation-orientated approach, inspired by what has been termed rapid ethnography (Ranabahu 2017). This meant we participated fully in the day's activities. Another aspect of doing care-ful geography was that we sought to connect with farmers and participants, by working alongside them, talking to them, caring for them and being cared for by them, when cooking, having meals, going for walks, and taking care of animals. We were 'observers-as-participants' (cf. Gold 1958), meaning that our role as researchers and 'outsiders' – not particularly knowledgeable about farm or care work – was obvious to everyone. However, we engaged in care-ful geography (Lawson 2007; Milligan and Wiles 2010) and developed 'connective competence' and used ourselves as 'instruments' (Gherardi 2012; Murchison 2010), as our participation involved both tears and laughter as well as other embodied and emotional experiences. Reflecting on this, we realised that the fact that we, the researchers, were non-knowledgeable about farm and care work facilitated an 'estrangement' (Gobo 2008) which made us ask probing questions and also reduced the social distance and the potential unequal power relations between us as researchers, the care farmers and the participants. Systematic field notes were taken from the observations and the informal dialogues during the days. Other farm visits were, due to the larger number or particular needs of participants, or the availability of staff, more in the nature of farm visits, in which the care farmers showed us around.

Interviews were conducted variously with one person on the farm and sometimes with two (where the care farming engaged two people, either as spouses or in another relationship) in a joint interview. The interviews were based on an open-ended interview schedule, including questions about the farms, inspirations and care farming activities, and lasted 1–3 hours. In a few cases, interviews or follow-up interviews were conducted by telephone. In the majority of cases, we recorded the interviews as audio files and they have then been transcribed verbatim.

We performed interviews and visits jointly on two farms, and individually on others. Joint interviews and visits at the beginning of the research proved a good way to gain common experiences to reflect upon. However, joint farm visits required more time and proved impractical. The individual interviews sometimes made it easier to establish connections with care farmers and participants, which meant deeper conversations.

During the visits to the farms we took photographs, where possible. In total, the empirical material consisted of 335 pages of transcribed text, around 30 pages of field notes and around 230 photographs. We chose an analytical approach that was largely inductive. Each of us read all the transcripts and field notes, studied photographs, and made a preliminary thematic analysis, coding the material manually. The photos were especially helpful in re-connecting with embodied and emotional experiences gained during the farm visits, as well as generating an understanding of the care farming at farms visited by the other author.

We have chosen to use pseudonyms for the interviewees in order to treat them confidentially. We have, like some of the farmers and the legal frameworks (LSS 1993, 387; SOL 2001, 453), chosen to call the people coming to the farms participants, rather than service users or clients in order to do care-ful geography.

The care farms

While the number of care farms is increasing in Europe, in particular in Norway thanks to the political platform and a quality assurance system (Berget, Kroger, and Thorod 2018), it is limited in Sweden. However, there are no official records of care farms. The Association of Swedish Farmers identified 280 care farms (LRF 2014), and the Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies have pursued a project called 'Green Arena' that includes around 70 care farms (Hushållningssällskapet 2021). Yet we found fewer care farms than expected when performing our research, as many of the care farms listed did not, in practice, pursue any care farming activities, and obtaining municipal contracts was a challenge for farmers.

In this study, the care farmers' farms vary in size, from crofts or houses with gardens and a few animals (five farms) to farms of around 500 hectares

of agricultural land (three farms). Four farms comprise less than 500 hectares. Seven of the farms also contained forest (50–500 hectares). On ten of the farms, one or both spouses (where applicable) were engaged in off-farm work. The care farming activities varied in terms of the number of participants, ranging from none to over forty. Some of the farms have paid employees, although the majority of farmers work alone or together with their spouse. One care farmer has over ten employees.

Most of the care farms in this study take on people to perform ‘daily activities’ on their farms. These are activities provided for people with functional diversity – known as participants – according to the Swedish Act Concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (LSS 1993, 387), and the Swedish Social Services Act (SOL 2001, 453). Briefly, daily activities offer participants (who are not gainfully employed or studying elsewhere) work under supervision at caring facilities. These are part of the welfare provisioning in Sweden, which has been characterised as a social democratic welfare model, in which the state takes responsibility for the wellbeing of its citizens (Esping-Andersen 1990). Swedish municipalities generally run daily activities. Following the deregulation of the public sector, which made it possible for municipalities to outsource care service provisioning to private companies, care farms and other organisations can take on participants for daily activities – and 25% of the daily activities are offered by private companies (The Association of Private Care Providers 2021). The daily activities performed on the care farms in this study involve many different things: feeding and grooming animals – including rabbits, cats, dogs, chickens, horses, sheep, pigs, cows – cleaning cages and stables, collecting eggs, driving tractors, and sometimes cooking. Various forms of crafts including weaving and wood work are also practised. Farmers and participants have meals together, and sometimes do yoga, have a massage, play games and take walks.

Cultivating feminist care ethics

An overarching finding of our study is that the care farmers highlight feminist care ethics through cultivating an ontology of connections in and through relationships of mutuality (cf. Lawson 2007; Milligan and Wiles 2010; Popke 2006) between people and place as well as people-people (cf. Leck, Evans, and Upton 2014; Shisler and Sbicca 2019). We also find emerging altered gender subjectivities amongst the women and men care farmers (cf. Raghuram 2016).

We therefore argue that care farmers’ feminist care ethics can be interpreted as a critique of ‘disconnections’ of both productivist agriculture and how welfare is provided. Feminist care ethics is thus a way of care farmers expressing criticism of current societal developments and on the other hand

a way of them making a difference. The care farmers are thus demonstrating a feminist dimension of care ethics by challenging the conceptualisation of agriculture through building mutual relationships and shifting the positioning of land, animals and forests as places for caring rather than production.

People-place connections

Farmers connecting participants to farms and animals

Central to the farmers is that they care for the participants in ways that express a feminist care ethics in terms of an ontology of connection (Lawson 2007; Popke 2006). The reasons for pursuing care farming are grounded in a strong conviction that engaging participants in farming nurtures their health and well-being. The farmers therefore seek to create connections between the participants, other humans, the farms and non-human animals (Shisler and Sbicca 2019). Care farmer Lotta is clear about the impetus of believing in the benefits of being on a farm and in nature, when she says: 'More people should experience... I myself feel good when I'm with animals and in the forest... There are more and more people who need this'. Felicia summarises her reasons as 'working from the heart for these people' (which has inspired the title of this paper), which clearly echoes an ontology of connections (Lawson 2007). Some of the interviewed farmers also have children who have been diagnosed with conditions, which has inspired them to start care farming. Johanna gave up her job and started care farming partly because her own child was neurodiverse. The animals on her farm and living in the countryside meant a lot to the child: 'Then I thought: imagine being able to offer this to someone else's child, or to adults. Having such an activity, that I know means so much'.

Participants working on the farms

One aspect of farmers connecting participants to farms is that many of them use the term participants, to denote that participants are there to engage and participate in the work on the farms on equal terms with farmers and other persons. These connections are enhanced by care farmers positioning people as 'participants'; that is to say, people who work on and care for farms and animals, rather than being cared for. Care farmers are thus developing people-people connections by performing 're-subjectification' around people with functional diversity. Also, in their stories, the farmers contrast their caring with the way other care facilities (municipal daily activities and schools) position the participants (for example, prior to them coming to the care farms). We therefore argue that care farmers have a critical stance towards other (municipal) providers of daily activities.

The participants are on the farms to care for the farm, including the animals, and not primarily to be cared for. The concept of 'work' seems key, as it stresses the importance of the participants' activities and participation on the farms. For example, Carl says about the participants: 'They want to do real jobs. The alternative would not have been real jobs, when they were sitting in some room ... packing screws into bags, or whatever they do'. He thereby stresses that the participants are doing proper work by being on farms. He compares the 'real' farm work with 'artificial' work, which he believes that other (municipal) care facilities offer as daily activities.

In particular, work related to caring for animals is viewed as a central, because, according to the farmers, it is essential for the animals' survival and well-being. Caring for animals creates meaningfulness through being important and thus a responsibility, which in turn connects participants with animals. Care farmer Eva talks about the importance of participants feeling their work is meaningful:

What that is ultimately about is that the participants feel that they are able to do a meaningful job, one which has a meaning. The animals are very important. Because the animals are completely undemanding really, but they have to be taken care of. And you have to do that every day.

Helga also talks about the importance of the participants having responsibilities. There are many different kinds of animals (horses, dogs, cats, mini pigs, guinea pigs, chickens and fish) on her farm to allow her to provide suitable responsibilities for every participant. She says: 'It is very important for those who are here to have a responsibility. These people have never been given responsibility for anything, but have always felt that others take care of them. They grow a lot with this'. This extract highlights the farmer's care ethics in terms of an ontology of connection and creation of relationships of mutuality and trust, rather than dependence (cf. Lawson 2007). Similarly, Dagmar and David say it is important that the participants understand that they are doing a job, and thereby feel that they are needed. They say: 'The animals must have food. So, someone cares about them coming here... and they feel they are needed'. Later during the interview, Dagmar and David stress that one of the ideas in their care farming is that the participants: 'should care, instead of being cared for'. The care farmers are thereby found to approach care in terms of feminist care ethics being a social ontology of connection (Lawson 2007).

Not all of the interviewed farmers express a more-than-human care ethic (cf. Moriggi et al. 2020). Yet we suggest that some of the farmers seem to be negotiating a more-than-human care ethic through expressing emotions of anguish when sending cattle to slaughter, being vegetarian and, instead of keeping animals for food production, engage them as non-human subjects that contribute to the caring for participants.

Caring for the farm place

Another aspect of the people-place connections established through care farming is caring for the farm. Care farming has become a way of keeping the farm viable and/or making better use of it through being and working there. This echoes the feminist care ethics Shisler and Sbicca (2019) identified among farmers caring for non-human subjects. It also resembles the care ethics Jarosz (2011) found, where women farmers placed relations and 'making a life' at the centre of farming, rather than 'making a living'. The care farmers in our study seem to make a living and a life in tandem, by caring for the farm place. For some of the care farmers, this has included a re-connection with the farm and farming, after being detached by off-farm work. Care farming is in part about sustaining the farm itself – for the farmers themselves, their families and future generations. We therefore argue that caring for the farm forms reciprocal people-place connections by positioning the farms almost as subjects. Whilst sustaining the farm itself might perhaps be criticised as a way of retaining private ownership of property and land, excluding others, the farmers simultaneously open them to participants. The majority of the care farmers interviewed have developed care farming on farms that are, or were previously, active, involved in the production of food and fodder. They tell stories of a changing agriculture that include themes like falling prices for agricultural products, rising prices of input products, or more acute crises such as disease in animal herds and fires on farms. In these cases, keeping the farm 'alive', as well as caring for people, is what motivates them to engage in care farming.

One example is the farmer who lost the cowshed where the family kept dairy cows in a fire. He and his wife had to borrow money to rebuild it, which resulted in a large debt. At the same time, the tractor broke down, and required expensive repairs. The farmer relates that these events made him 'speed-blind'; the total amount of the bills coming in each month was something of an absurd reality. Eventually, his wife had to give up her job outside the farm and, together, they started care farming in order to keep the farm in the family and generate an income.

Another care farmer is the ninth generation on his family farm. When he took over the farm from his parents he reorganised the production to make it more rational and efficient. After some years, this included borrowing money to build a new pig barn, thereby going heavily into debt. The investment was unsuccessful as prices for pork fell. The family was on the verge of having to leave the farm as they made a large financial loss each year. They did manage to stay on, but had to deal with the debt for years. The farmer describes the emotional process of taking up care farming and turning parts of the farm into a conference venue, and thereby being able to keep the farm in the family:

It felt like being on a stormy ocean and just keeping on rowing, and water poured in, and somebody threw a bucket of ice over you, every now and again. But all we could do was continue to the other side. That is where we are now. And it is damn good.

People-people connections

Another central aspect of the care farmers' feminist care ethics that we find is the development of people-people connections. An important part of these connections for many of the care farmers is striving for social justice for people with functional diversity. In terms of feminist care ethics, this can indeed be viewed as an ontology of connection, seeking to create relationships of mutuality between farmers, participants and society, rather than the participants being dependent service users (cf. Lawson 2007).

Some of the care farmers have 'made a thing' out of not knowing, and not paying any attention to, the participants' conditions. Instead, they stress that they view the participants as individuals beyond any characterisation in terms of a diagnosis. For example, care farmer Isak describes how he and his wife had to take a course run by the municipality before they opened their farm to participants. During the course, an educator described various diagnoses and how they can make a person act in certain ways. Isak describes it as a representation of what people with functional diversity are like: 'like they could not learn anything, but had stopped'. He contrasts this with his own view: 'But they are individuals and they have learnt lots of things'. Isak describes the participants on his care farm as happy, self-sufficient and communicative, despite their diagnoses suggesting otherwise. Similarly, Dagmar and David express their intention to make the participants visible beyond their diagnoses, as those tend to characterise and position the participants as malfunctioning 'Others'. They say:

For everyone who has come [to the farm]... we have been given papers... They say what the diagnosis is... So we have read it... but it is not what is important. What is important is to see the person who comes. They should also get a chance to start over again, because... everyone has been given a label... of not functioning properly.

David underlines that he has not been too concerned about the participants' diagnoses or documentation, but instead has treated them as he treats everyone visiting the farm: 'I treat them the same way I treat you when you come'. Care farming is thus centred on creating connections between people.

We thus find that care farms constitute a position from where care farmers seek to rest dominant developments, including the 'othering' of people with functional diversity through the practising of feminist care

ethics as an ontology of relationships of mutuality between farmers, participants and society, rather than the participants being dependent service users (cf. Lawson 2007). We therefore suggest that care farmers are thus sometimes critical towards the welfare provisioning in Swedish municipalities, which seems somewhat paradoxical as care farmers are able to offer care on their farms, through municipalities' outsourcing of the provision of daily activities.

Drawing on notions of home and family

One aspect of the care farmers' feminist care ethics – in terms of the people-place connections – is the strong element of creating relationships between the participants and the farm places as homes. To connect participants, farmers draw on the notion of the farm, home and family being strongly rooted in one another. The farm as a home is key here, as it creates particular emotional bonds between the farmers and the farm that they want to share with participants.

A few of the care farmers literally open up their living space to the participants. Eva and Erik use the kitchen in their home for the participants, in addition to the stables and outdoor spaces. Eva says it works, but that their house is showing signs of wear and tear. Eva and Erik have plans to convert a spare building on the farm into premises for the care farm participants. At the same time, they recognise that they have had participants who very much appreciate being in someone's home. Eva says: 'They value this, that they can come home to someone. That someone has opened their door to them'. This extract, in addition to showing how the care farmers cultivate connections with the participants and between them and the farm as home, indicates that the participants are excluded from other homes. This makes the connections the farmers seek to create with participants by reducing their perceived isolation seem even more important.

For some of the farmers, caring involves developing what they view as familial bonds between them and participants. As Bengt, who works on the farm with his daughter, explains: 'We want to be like a big family... That's our concept really. They [the participants] hear our everyday chitchat and they live with this... It is fun with this familial atmosphere'. We ask: 'And do you get to hear about their families?' As Bengt replies, he talks about how much the caring as developing family connections seems to have meant, especially for one participant, through connecting him to themselves and other participants, thereby reducing his loneliness:

I know that for one of the guys, we are his family. He has no one. He is completely alone. And when we say goodbye the day before Christmas Eve, and ask: 'What are you going to do now?' Nothing. He stays at home. He has no one to go to. So he has a miserable everyday life.

Bengt talks about the big change, for the better, in the participant since he came to the care farm to work when he describes a municipal officer's reaction on visiting the participant and checking on him at the farm:

The officer came here after a month, to check on him. He just stared... 'It is not true' he said. 'This is not the same person'. Because he [the participant] sits at the table, and he is the one leading the conversation and he comes to life.

The development of familial ties at the farm also includes Bengt viewing himself as a father and grandfather figure for the participants. We also found that some of the care farmers open their farms to other visitors. We noted neighbours visiting the farms for coffee or lunch. Sometimes the care farmers also told stories of being an 'open farm'.

Emerging new gendered farm subjectivities

We find that for some of the farmers (both women and men), transforming the farm into a care farm has meant the emergence of new gender subjectivities (cf. Little 2002; Popke 2006; Raghuram 2016).

One example is a woman who, after completing her higher education and working in a profession, returned to her parents' farm after a life crisis and engaged in care farming. She describes her re-connecting with the farm, which was a major transformation. She says: 'I did not feel bad... I think there have been more advantages'. She describes how she feels proud to have become a care farmer and that the care farm is not: 'only a dream on paper, but a reality'. Another woman farmer describes how she had wanted to work from home, longing to leave her uninspiring employment: 'I have always wanted to work from home since we bought the small farm. Imagined having animals and working with them in some way'. She is happy working from home with her care farm, yet she sometimes feels the burden of taking full responsibility for her participants and of dealing with the paper work.

Another woman still identifies strongly with her profession, even though she has gradually stopped working outside the farm. The process has not been painless: 'So I gave up my job, but still with some sadness, because I have very much liked being a [profession]'. For another woman, leaving her job outside the farm meant losing colleagues and having only her husband as a co-worker. She feels somewhat lonely at the farm, and says:

Moving from being employed and having co-workers... and now I have no one. Well, I have my husband as a colleague. It is not always easy... I have not suffered. But sometimes you get... rather lonely and you miss the social contact.

We find that these women have, through the transition processes, re-connected with the farm places by working there and engaging in decision-making and control over their economy, which they appreciate. The

women thereby develop feminine subjectivities that, whilst centred on some aspects of traditional feminine care work, allow them to develop a connection with the farm, animals and nature, a professional identity on the farm as well as an income off the farm.

Some of the men have also had to negotiate their masculine subjectivities linked to the farm and farming, through disassociating themselves from the farm work traditionally marked as masculine in order to be able to retain and remain on the farm. We thereby find that new masculine subjectivities emerge, which seem centred on caring for humans (cf. Bye 2009; Coldwell 2007). The transition process seems to have been painful for some of the men, as the following account indicates:

I am not a dairy farmer anymore. It is an identity that has disappeared. I am somewhat identity-less now. It may sound very dramatic to say it, but I am. What should I call myself? Then, [earlier] I went out in the morning and I milked the cows and in-between I was on the tractor in the fields, or in the woods, and then I brought in the cows in the evening ... and I milked them and then I went home. And it was the same thing whether it was Monday, Sunday, Christmas Eve or Midsummer Eve.

The last sentence is said with some nostalgia, and the man continues, not entirely convincingly: 'So I feel much better now'. For another man, having to give up pig farming seems painful too, as reflected in his wife's account when the interviewer asked her if his process was like hers. She said:

No, I don't think so. He walked out of the pig barn and never went back. I didn't really know. I thought he had cleaned up and done something, but he went out and closed the door. Then after a few years when we were going to start to sort things out... I didn't go in either, because I was busy. 'You haven't been here since we closed?' 'No'.

Through the development of care farming, the central activity for both women and men on the farm becomes caring for people, whereby altered emerging gender subjectivities develop. This altering tends to change the very concept of agriculture, through women's (re-)connection with farming and men's engagement in caring for people (cf. Bye 2009; Coldwell 2007). A related aspect, contributing to the changed view of agriculture is developed through how (some of) the women farmers are (re-)connecting to the agricultural land and forests. Care farmer Johanna is one example. She walks in the forest every day with the participants and her dog. One of us joins her on a walk and describes it in the field notes:

The walk goes over a wintry frozen field - where we note traces of wild boar, elk and deer - into an old coniferous forest with the ground covered with moss. One participant holds the dog's leash. Johanna holds another participant by the hand, so that they do not cower and hide behind a tree or an old tree root. We do not

follow a path, but Johanna leads us over small mounds and around old stumps under the trees. We arrive at a small stream. One participant splashes around happily in their boots. Johanna is calm and in the present and notes details of nature wherever we go. She documents some of them with her camera: A fir, reflected in a pool of water. A bullfinch, with its red breast, high up in a tree. A piece of lichen, which she likens to a beard.

Rather than exploiting the agricultural land and forests through production, people-place connections are developed by and for the care farmers themselves, as well as for the participants (cf. Morrighi et al. 2020). Like Johanna, other farmers make new use of the land and the forest in their caring work. Eva describes it as follows: 'Together we can make a fire in the forest and have a barbeque and eat outside.... Like a nice day out'. She contrasts this to the work of her spouse, Erik, who according to her produces 'cubic meters of forest'. There is thus some ambivalence in the work women and men do on the care farms, and around their gender subjectivities changing or not.

Concluding discussion

Relatively little is known about how and why care farmers do care farming. Looking at the care farmers through a lens of feminist care ethics, developed by feminist geographers, we have therefore aimed to explore why and how women and men carry out care farming, paying attention to farming being gendered. By engaging in geographical research on feminist care ethics and by drawing on post-structural feminist understandings of gendered farm subjectivities we have sought to understand care farming by considering the connections cultivated.

We conclude that care farmers are *working from the heart* and thereby cultivating feminist care ethics as an ontology of connections (cf. Lawson 2007; Milligan and Wiles 2010; Popke 2006). This has meant that care farmers are developing *people-place connections* to connect participants to farms, nature and animals; to the farm places as homes; and by farmers caring for the farm places. We find that an aspect of people-place connections is care farmers themselves connecting with farms and land by seeking to sustain the farms. These findings around people-place connections, which we have chosen to underline as an important part of feminist care ethics, we argue, go beyond developing social relations (Lawson 2007; Popke 2006). We therefore contend that a contribution to the geographical theorisations feminist care ethics is to explicitly include socio-spatial people-place connections.

In addition, we find care farmers are developing *people-people connections*, seeking to create relationships of mutuality between farmers, participants and society, rather than the participants being dependent service users (cf. Lawson 2007).

Performing care on farms enhances caring, as the farm, home and family are strongly rooted in one another, which in turn strengthens the development of people-people connections between farmers and the participants as well as within farm families. That said, there is a need to recognise the work of feminist geographers that has challenged the idyllic image of the home as haven, since it is gendered. Whilst we conclude that men care through care farming, and thereby challenge the gendering of farming and alter masculine subjectivities (Bye 2009; Coldwell 2007), some of our findings also indicate a reproduction of gendered divisions of labour. This indicates that there is room for more gendered transformation in (care) farming (cf. Andersson 2014; Javefors Grauers 2003).

Our research thus shifts the perspectives compared to previous research by focusing on the care farmers, instead of primarily looking at the benefits to the health and well-being of service users. Nonetheless, we conclude that care farms make up a position from where care farmers seek to rest the 'othering' of persons with functional diversity. This conclusion goes beyond care farming being beneficial for participants, as it highlights feminist care ethics as an alternative ethical standpoint of the care farmers (cf. Popke 2006).

We argue that a feminist dimension of care ethics expressed by the care farmers, also in terms of their developing new gender subjectivities – women (re-)connecting with farms and men doing care work on farms – is about an emerging profound challenge of the very meaning of agriculture, namely from cultivating animals and plants to cultivating connections. We suggest that care farming thus involves the emergence of 'farming otherwise' and 'another farming' than one concerned with the production of food and fodder. Through their way of building mutual relationships (cf. Lawson 2007; Milligan and Wiles 2010; Popke 2006) and their shifted positioning of land, animals and forests as places for caring rather than production, care farmers can thus be assumed to be critical towards dominant production-orientated farming. This we find contribute to the feminist dimension of the farmers' feminist care ethics.

We also suggest that another feminist dimension of care ethics is about some of the care farmers' questioning what care is, through practising care on farms. Feminist care ethics is thus a critique of current societal developments in terms of a productivist agriculture and efficiency orientated welfare provisioning and a way of making a difference.

While we have in this study developed the theorisations around feminist care ethics, by making the various aspects of feminism explicit as well as by adding a post-structural feminist approach, there is certainly more research that could be done in this vein. For example, other aspects of feminist critiques of societal developments related to farming and welfare deserve to be explored. Further, other feminist approaches could enhance studies of the feminist care ethics, including a post-colonial feminist approach and its

questioning of privileging white, heterosexual and middle-class representations of gender.

Our study has given us an opportunity to develop an engagement in feminist care ethics by seeking to do care-ful geography, by caring for and about socially and spatially distant others (Lawson 2007). Through this way of working care-fully we have made visible small farms in Sweden that are working towards more just ends, caring for service users, animals and farms, and it has made us highlight their expression of critique and them doing differently. The engagement in doing care-ful geographies could indeed be performed in future studies, for example by listening to, and taking seriously, research ideas amongst farmers, care farmers and others. In particular, the approach of doing care-ful geography is useful in studies applying a lens of feminist care ethics (cf. Lawson 2007; Milligan and Wiles 2010). There is certainly a need for more studies applying such a lens in relation to care practices on farms, for example in exploring in depth, (gendered) human-animal relations in 'alternative' farming, or people-people connections developed in such farming and in alternative food systems (cf. Jarosz 2011), in different socio-spatial contexts.

Acknowledgements

This project benefitted from funding from the Swedish Research Council for health, Working Life and Welfare (under grant 2015-01053). We would also like to thank the care farmers who participated in this project for generously sharing their time and experiences on care farming with us, and who warmly invited us to their farms. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful feedback.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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