

Young Farmers and New Entrants: Contributing to Transition Processes Towards Sustainability of Agriculture in Europe

Background

The last EU Agricultural census conducted in 2010 revealed that almost one-third of the farms (29,5%) in Europe have a holder who is above 65 years of age, which amounts to 3.7 million farms. These figures highlight that populations of farmers in Europe are ageing due to the relative shortage of young people starting up in agricultural businesses. What are the implications? It is thought that European agriculture is, as a result, losing its potential to drive structural change and to improve efficiency and innovativeness that would enhance the overall sustainability of agriculture in Europe. One of the main project objectives has been the identification of mechanisms to provide viable models for young farmers. For this purpose the relationship between the *ageing population of farmers and engagement of young people and new entrants in agriculture* has been explored, and in particular the role of the young people in innovative rural initiatives.

Key findings

- Discussions around the 'young farmer' (YF) and "new entrant" (NE) problems in Europe draw on statistical data about the age of farm holders and specific policy documents. In statistical surveys young farmers are considered to be the sole type of farm holders within the age category of 18–35 years, while in policy documents (which describe the conditions for supporting young farmers) young farmers are combined with new entrants, because all applicants must be setting up their businesses for the first time and must be under 40 years of age. This definitional inconsistency makes it difficult to define the YF and NE problem.

- The 'young farmer problem' is more apparent in some European countries than others. Some countries, such as Austria, Finland, Germany, Poland and Switzerland have more favourable age structures, while

others, such as Bulgaria, Italy and Portugal are threatened more by the problem of ageing farmer populations.

- We support the claim that the shortage of young farmers is generally related to the presence of entry barriers, the presence of exit barriers, low productivity in agriculture and inter-sectoral labour force movement in the intermediate age classes. The key condition for young people entering agriculture is that farming allows them to generate a stable and adequate income.

- YF and NE entrants play a significant role in innovative rural initiatives. However, their engagement (and also their contribution to transition processes) is highly selective. They are not always the most important

source of innovativeness in agriculture. Also, some of the newly developed initiatives include "traditional" entry barriers which often prevent the access of YF and NE.

- Participatory workshops with the representatives of the YF and NE groups identified specific visions for the future of agriculture. These visions included keeping family farms as a major organisational form using mixed farming (plant production together with animal husbandry), a higher diversification of activities, production with high added value, and distribution through short food supply chains, which together are seen as a prerequisite for improving the income derived from agriculture.



Young farmer/ new entrants at a FarmPath project workshop in Aberdeenshire, N.E. Scotland
(Image courtesy of Annie McKee, Aberdeenshire, N.E Scotland, Feb 2013)

Policy recommendations

1. The distinction between young farmers and new entrants needs to be emphasised in strategic documents and statistics.

Based on the evidence from the project, it is evident that the two groups, young farmers and new entrants, differ in their needs thus making measures that do not distinguish between those two groups less effective.

2. Empirical evidence from the project also pointed out that, in many countries, agriculture and farmers suffer from low prestige. We recommend that communication about agriculture and farmers' roles in rural areas be improved.

3. One of the most important barriers for young people, who are entering agriculture, is that sufficient income cannot always be generated from farming. It is thus recommended to improve income from farming, especially from farming on small farms through support for diversification, part-time farming and existing payment schemes.

4. More generally, there should be enhanced education in the areas of

technology, environment and business skills. Evidence generated in the project highlighted the clear demand of young farmers and new entrants in these areas.

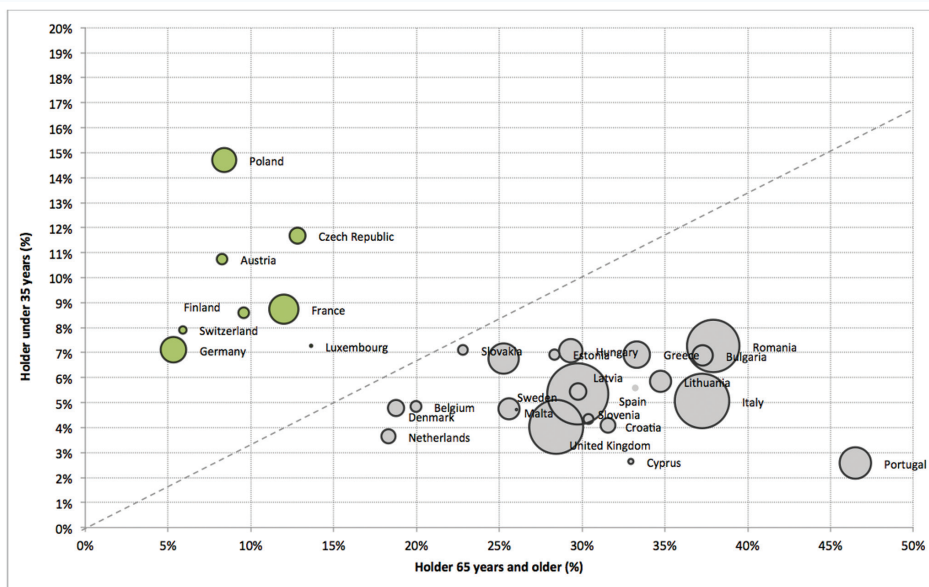
5. Living in, and the engagement of young people in, the countryside goes hand in hand with quality of life in these areas. Increasing the quality of life in the countryside can thus been seen as a major opportunity to help prevent the outflow of young people from rural areas.

6. Alternatively, owing to the importance of non-farming experience to innovation, rural young people should be encouraged to work off-farm and seek urban employment, and return to the farms later in life.



A young farmer selling meat at the farmers' market in Pilsen (Image courtesy of the ENVIC, o.p.s., 2012)

Relative share of farms with elder and young sole/main holders (Source: Eurostat 2011; authors' calculation)



Note: Size of the bubbles is determined by the overall utilized agricultural area farmed by holders above 65 years of age (in thousand hectares of UAA, e.g. Poland 618,9; France 910,9; United Kingdom 3 108,9; Spain 3 985,0; Portugal 1 057,2)

7. The specifics of the 'young farmer problem' need to be clarified through further research. The empirical results emphasised the fact that young farmers play an important role in some of the innovative initiatives supporting transition processes in agriculture. Future research is needed to underpin the development of targeted measures that would acknowledge their roles and implement measures for their support.

For further information

See the FarmPath project web-site:
www.farmpath.eu

Contact

Project Coordinator:

Lee-Ann Sutherland,
The James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen,
Lee-Ann.Sutherland@hutton.ac.uk

Young Farmers and New Entrants

Workpackage Leader:

Lukas Zagata,
Czech University of Life Sciences Prague,
zagata@pef.czu.cz

The FarmPath project (Grant no. 265394) is funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research within the 7th Framework Programme's thematic field 'European Knowledge Based Bio-Economy'. It is being implemented between March 2011 and May 2014. Further information on the FarmPath project can be found at www.farmpath.eu



Aberdeen
Craigiebuckler
Aberdeen AB15 8QH
Scotland UK

Dundee
Invergowrie
Dundee DD2 5DA
Scotland UK

**The James
Hutton
Institute**

Tel: +44 (0)844 928 5428
Fax: +44 (0)844 928 5429

info@hutton.ac.uk
www.hutton.ac.uk