BECOMING A FARMER IN KOREA: THE BACKGROUND, VALUES, AND OCCUPATIONAL EXPECTATIONS OF RURAL YOUTH*

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Abstract

With industrialization and urbanization, increased income, prestige and other positive values in urban life pull rural youths from the rural areas. Left behind in the rural areas are those on relatively small farms and those with lower levels of education. Given the relatively small numbers of youth in the countryside, the characteristics of those who expect to enter farming take on great importance. This paper focuses on the social characteristics, interests and farming experience, and conceived urban values indicative of anticipatory socialization to farm occupations.

Data were obtained through a questionnaire administered to a sample of members of the *Saemaul* Rural Youth Clubs (previously known as 4-H clubs) in April, 1980.

A path model is employed to analyze the relationships between the above factors and occupational expectations, focusing on the process of socialization to farming. Results show that age, educational level, and interest in farming are directly related to occupational expectation. Guidelines are presented for training programs for rural youths which can enhance recruitment to the agricultural sector.

I. Introduction

The process by which individuals choose, enter, and maintain farming as an occupation has received growing attention in recent years, as Korean agriculture has undergone a downward shift in the number of farm households and farm population. In 1966 the farm population in Korea repre-

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sented 54.1 percent of the national population; by 1980 it was only 28.9 percent. During the same period farm households fell from 48.9 percent to 27.1 percent of the national total.

With industrialization and urbanization in Korea, increased income, prestige, and other positive values in urban life pull youths from the rural areas, as is the case of most other developing countries (Lee & Barringer 1978, 51). At present, those left behind are on the relatively smaller farms and have a lower level of education (Lee et. al. 1978). Besides, they still express the desire to leave their family farms at the first opportunity.

In addition to urban influences, there are other factors contributing to a reduction in the number of rural youth, These are mainly from peculiarities of the farmer's occupation and socialization to farming. Traditionally, Korean agriculture has been based on peasant family farms cultivating an average of 1.0 ha. The generally accepted pattern of the organization of labor on this individual farm assumes full family participation. As farming has been traditionally a father-son career path (Coughenour & Kowalski 1978), becoming head of the family is synonymous with attaining vocational independence (Galeski 1968). Advancement in the vocation is consequently connected with changes in the family. But a father in rural Korea does not want his son to enter farming. This comes from low prices of agricultural products and unstable agriculture policies. There is no idea of leisure on the family farm, because the place of work is that of residence (Kim et.al. 1980). Many youths currently expect a higher income and more leisure than farming provides.

This paper examines the characteristics of rural youths who expect to enter farming as an occupation, focusing on the decision-making process. Three factors—social characteristics, interest and experience in farming, and urban-related values—are expected to contribute to the expectation to farm.

The objective of the analysis is to develop a path model that describes the relationships between the above factors and the expectation to farm. The results would provide further understanding of the process of socialization to farming and guidelines for training rural youths so as to increase recruitment to the agricultural sector.

II. Conceptual Framework

An expectation to farm reflects an individual's estimation of probable occupational attainment (Molnar & Dunkelberger 1981, 63). Occupational expectations are the product of personal interests, abilities, and values as moderated by a more or less accurate assessment of the external limiting environment (Kuvlesky & Bealer 1966,276). The first factor that contributes to an expectation to farm is an assessment of the environment. This depends

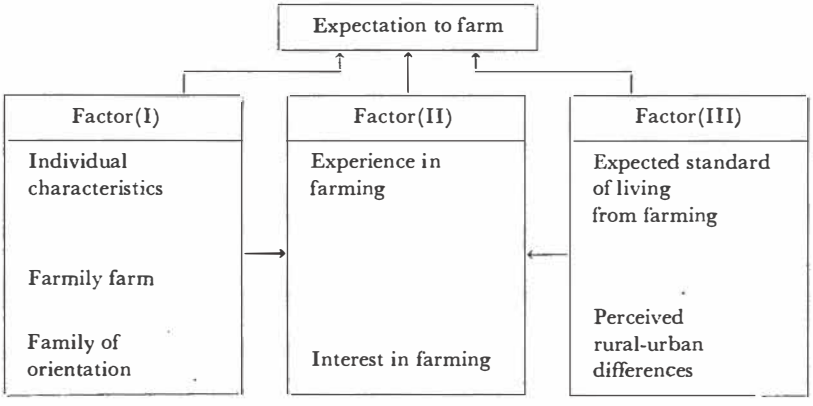
on individual characteristics, family of orientation, and family farm. Occupational opportunity varies with individual's age and educational level. Socialization to farming occurs at an early age, as individuals are exposed to par nts, relatives, and the farm environment. As a career line or job trajectory, farming is a life-cycle pheonmenon consisting of a sequenced pattern of experiences and work positions (Spilerman 1978). Thus, with change and cycles in the family a son has varied experiences on the farm. As the importance of personal values in the process of occupational selection is probably greater at upper socioeconomic levels (Mortimer & Lorence 1979), socioeconomic level may be identified as a significant factor. In addition, the potential to inherit a farm reflects possible access to the necessary resources and a chance to begin farming.

The second factor is composed of experience and interest in farming. Expectations for careers in farming often are fostered by prior experiences in an agricultural environment (Molnar & Dunkelberger 1981, 66).

The third factor is an expected standard of living from farming compared with those from other occupations, especially in the urban areas. The main motive for the flight of young people from the village is the way of life based on the family farm, and not the conditions of physical labor required in agriculture. Thus, perceived rural-urban differences reduce the likelihood of entering the farm.

As shown in Figure 1, socio-economic characteristics (factor I), experience and interest in farming (factor II), and expected standard of living compared with urban (factor III) are related to the expectation to farm. Relationships among the factors are presented in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 Conceptual Model of Factors Influencing the Expectation to Farm



III. Method

Sample

Given the relatively small youth population at the village level, those enrolled in the training course of the Provincial Office of Rural Development in April, 1980 were sampled for this study. They all are members of the *Saemaul* Rural Youth Clubs (previously known as 4–H clubs).The *Saemaul* Rural Youth Clubs were reorganized so that they could actively participate in the *Saemaul Undong* (New Community Movement). This reorganization resulted in the formation of village level and town/municipal level groups, according to the age-specific group. This sample in a farming and machinery course is a representative of village-level clubs and, therefore, it is thought to have a higher expectation to farm than other rural youths.

The average size of farms of those in the sample is 1.5 ha while the national average is 1.0 ha. Table 1 shows that the sample is skewed to the larger size family farm compared with all agricultural households. Thus, rural youths in the present sample have access to more land than others.

TABLE 1 Proportions of Farm Households by Size of Cultivated Land

Unit: %

Size of cultivated land	Proportion	
	Sample (N = 193)	All agricultural households*
Less than 0.5 ha	15.0	33.6
0.5 — 1.0ha	31.1	35.3
1.0 — 1.5 ha	17.1	18.2
1.5 — 2.0 ha	18.7	7.5
More than 2.0 ha	18.1	5.4
	100.0	100.0

* 1979 statistics

Source: Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries, *Yearbook of Agriculture and Forestry Statistics,* 1980.

Measurement of Variables

Among the individual characteristics age is the actual number, and educational level is measured as the school completed. Primary school was coded as one, junior high school as two, senior high school as three, and college or others as four.

The 'family farm' group variable includes farm size, expected inheritance, and perceived socio-economic status. Farm size was measured as number of *Pyongs*[1] owned. Expected inheritance was measured as number of *Pyongs* respondent expects to inherit. Perceived socio-economic status was derived from the question, "What do you think about the socio-economic

[1] 1 ha = 3,000 Pyongs

status of your household in your village?" Low status was coded as one, middle as two, and high as three.

The 'family of orientation' group variable is composed of the respondent's birth order and father's age. Father's age is the actual number. Birth order was derived from the question, "Are you a first son?" and was coded one for Yes and two for No.

Experience in farming,defined as the degree to which the respondent has participated in the activity of the family farm, was measured by five scores. A score of 5 is assigned when he works on the family farm on his own responsibility, while 1 is assigned when he works only when sent on errands.

Interest in farming, defined as the degree to which the respondent is interested in farming, was derived from the question, "To the what extent are you interested in farming?" It was measured by five scores from very low to very high. A score of 5 is assigned as very high and 1 is assigned as very low.

Expected standard of living from farming, compared with that from other occupations, was derived from the question, "How do you feel about the income level you can expect if you work on a farm of 1 ha?" Responses were coded into five categories from: (1) hard to pick up a scanty livelihood to (5) earnhigh income compared with other occupations.

Perceived rural-urban difference was measured by three items: expectations of receiving health service, educational service, and transportation in rural areas after 5 years. Composite scale scores were computed by summing the responses to the items. A score of 9 is assigned to perceptions of large rural-urban differences while 3 is assigned to perceptions of small rural-urban differences.

The variable 'expectation of farming as a career' was derived from the question, "Do you expect to do farming as an occupation?" and coded one for Yes and zero for No.

Methods of Analysis

The primary comparison was made between those who expect to do farming and those who do not. A Chi-square test and/or F-test were used.

Path analysis was selected as the appropriate statistical procedure for the study. It is primarily a method of decomposing and interpreting linear relationships among a set of variables assuming that a causal ordering among those variables is known and that the relationships among the variables are causally closed.

IV. Findings

A comparison of those who expect to farm and those who do not in Table 2 reveals that there are significant differences between the groups for

TABLE 2 MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF VARIABLES: EXPECTANTS AND NON-EXPECTANTS COMPARED

Variables	Expectants (N = 137)	Non-expectants (N = 56)	Uni-variate F
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Age	22.31(2.34)	21.00(1.99)	13.46*
Educational level	2.31(0.74)	2.61(0.71)	6.69*
Father's age	48.06(22.33)	47.80(21.34)	0.01
Perceived SES	2.04(0.57)	1.98(0.45)	0.53
Size of owned land	4590.51(3587.05)	4004.46(3100.30)	1.14
Expected inheritance	1402.57(1187.10)	1375.00(1451.80)	0.02
Experience in farming	3.28(1.14)	2.71(1.09)	9.91*
Interest in farming	3.87(0.97)	3.20(0.90)	19.89*
Expected level of living standard	3.58(0.97)	3.19(0.90)	7.27*
Perceived rural-urban differences	6.77(1.06)	6.95(1.21)	1.05

* $P < .05$

five variables including age, educational level, experience and interest in farming, and expected standard of living. Those who expect to farm have more experience and interest in farming with lower educational level and older age, and they expect a higher standard of living from farming. Age and educational level are related to the opportunity to have another job. Experience and interest in farming related to the occupational value, and expected standard of living to the occupational reward.

In order to examine the relative effects of each background variable on experience in farming, stepwise regression analysis was used, as shown in Table 3. The relative effect of a variable such as age, father's age, and educational level is significant. The beta coefficient is largest for the youth's age, and the effect of age on the experience is positive. Father's age and education level retain negative effects on the experiences. These results may be interpreted as an indication that the participation in the family farm varies with son's age and father's age. This implies that farming is a father-son career path.

Regression analysis conducted to determine the effects of background variables on interest in farming explained only 9 percent of the variance (Table 4). The effect of perceived socio-economic status on interest in farming is positive. Those who perceive the socio-economic status of their households to be of upper status have more interest in farming. Since this status is achieved through farming, upper status youths come from successful farmers. This presumably increases their interest.

In a regression analysis conducted to determine the effects of background variables on the expected standard of living, only educational level

TABLE 3 REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR EXPERIENCES IN FARMING WITH BACKGROUND VARIABLES

Independent variables	r	Beta Coefficient	F-etest	R
Age	.440	.436	$p < .01$	.193
Father's age	−.214	−.217	$p < .01$	.242
Perceived SES	−.013	−.029	n.s.	.244
Educational level	−.229	−.189	$p < .01$	.280
Birth order	.020	.041	n.s.	.281
Size of owned land	−.011	.030	n.s.	.282

TABLE 4 REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR INTEREST IN FARMING WITH BACKGROUND VARAIBLES

Independent variables	r	Beta Coefficient	F-test	R^2
Age	.186	.171	$p < .05$	.035
Father's age	−.128	−.148	$p < .05$	.052
Perceived SES	.202	.160	$p < .05$	.088
Educational level	.006	−.008	n.s.	.088
Birth order	.005	.033	n.s.	.089
Size of owned land	.144	.067	n.s.	.092

was found to have a significant effect on the dependent variable;that effect was negative. Those with higher education expect a lower standard of living from farming.

As shown is Table 5, the effect of size of owned land on perceived rural-urban differences is significant and negative. In rural areas those who have more access to land resources perceive few rural-urban differences. Those with much land see the rural way of life as a good one.

TABLE 5 REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR PERCEIVED RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENCES WITH BACKGROUND VARIABLES,

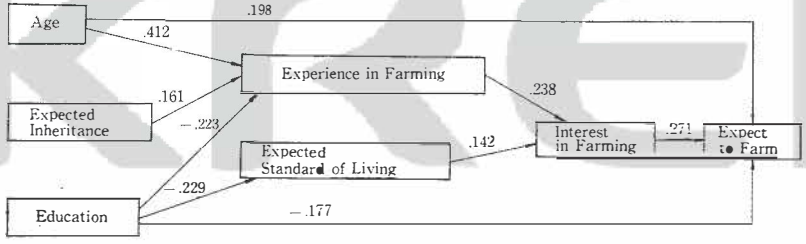
Independent Variables	r	Beta Coefficient	F-test	R^2
Age	.132	.150	$p < .05$	.017
Father's age	−.072	−.060	n.s.	.023
Perceived SES	.020	.088	n.s.	.023
Educational level	.110	.150	$p < .05$	.038
Birth order	−.067	−.001	n.s.	.039
Size of owned land	−.122	−.201	$p < .05$	.067

Finally, to draw a more synoptic picture of the sequential process of background features, value orientation to farm, and expectation to farm, a path analysis was attempted. The assumption here is that certain background features provide an orientation to farming and a value orientation to farming has some impact on the expectation of farming. A youth's age,

expected inheritance, and educational level were selected as significant background features. Expected inheritance is determined by the combination of the size of owned land and birth order. It is a resource of future farming and educational level is an ability to enter another occupation with high prestige.

As shown in Figure 2, age, educational level, and interest in farming were directly related to the dependent variable. This means that a life cycle, ability and interest affect the choice of occupation. Among these variables interest had the most important effect on the choice of farming. Since the farmer's labour is to a great degree self-managed, the intrinsic occupational value is important to the process of farming selection. This intrinsic indicator includes: 1)the opportunity to exercise one's abilities and skills, 2) the opportunity to express one's interests, and 3) the opportunity to be creative and original (Mortimer & Lorence 1979).

FIGURE 2 PATH ANALYSIS FOR BACKGROUND VARIABLES, VALUE ORIENTATION TO FARM, AND EXPECTATION TO FARM (standardized path coefficients)



Age, expected inheritance and educational level affect the experience farming which affects interest in farming. The interest in farming is also affected by the expected standard of living. Thus, the interest in farming is a function of past experience and rewards in farming. In a path model educational level has negative effects on the variables related to choice of farming as an occupation. Education can be a channel to improved social status and entry to non-farm occupations for the individual in a rural society. Parents value education and its articulation with urban ways to the extent that they want their children to move off the farm (Sanders 1977, 96).

In conclusion, the 'occupational socialization hypothesis' that occupations mold the personality and the 'occupational selection hypothesis' that persons choose their work on the basis of already formed psychological characteristics were examined in a path model. Experience and expected income affect psychological characteristics such as interest, supporting the

occupational socialization hypothesis. Interest affects the selection of farming as an occupation, supporting the occupational selection hypothesis. As far as farming is concerned, the occupational socialization process appears to be more important than the selection process.

V. Discussion and Policy Implications

The present research findings show that rural youths' interest in farming is most important to retain the rural population and the farmer in particular. In addition, we take a dim view of the future of farming in Korea, since rural youths with low educational level expect to farm. Thus, social education is required for an increase in interest in farming and advanced farming. Spiritual training, farming and machinery course and on-the-job training in the *Saemaul* Rural Youth Club should continue. Research with the non-youth club sample shows much less interest in farming than in the present sample of rural youth club members. In Cho's survey (Cho 1975, 42), only 5.2% of respondents expected to do farming and 58.5% of respondents occasionally thought they would enter farming, while in my survey 71.0% of the respondents expected to farm. This difference appears due to the fact that my sample is active participants in the town/municipal *Saemaul* Rural Youth Club as described in the sampling procedure. Participation in clubs may contribute to achievement orientation and group process values.

In order to increase interest in farming, the expected standard of living from farming must be raised as must experience in farming through the reinforcement of the activity of the youth club. Agricultural and urban policies should be adjusted to raise the expected standard of living from farming. Since the important characteristics of a successful farm establishment are the youths' aptitude for and interest in farming and parent's understanding and assistance(Lee 1981, 84), both government and society should make efforts to create a desirable climate for profitable farming. Interest and rewards for farming are to be raised in the social atmosphere desirable for farming.

In conclusion, the difficulties of the retention of rural population may be considered in two aspects, considering rural youths. Farm establishment of youth is a long and slow process. Secondly, the influences of the urban sector make the socialization to rural society difficult.

Farming involves constant decision-making in the use of labor and other limited resources and in the taking of riskes. A young man requires maturity, experience, sound judgement, considerable knowledge and pratical skill in many aspects of farming. Thus, in most countries a man is unlikely to be able to become an independent farmer below the age of thirty years. Between leaving school and becomig a farmer he has had to gain

his experience and save money by working for others. Inevitably it is a long and slow process (Wilson 1968, 34).

In addition to the farming-related problems, the change of rural society affects the rural population and results in rural-to-urban migration. More contacts with the urban areas through mass media and rural development weaken the traditional bond between farmer and rural society (Kim et. al. 1980, 27). This makes socialization to the way of life in rural society difficult.

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