REFEREED ARTICLE

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New entrants and succession into farming: A Northern Ireland perspective

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, family-farm businesses have been passed down through a number of generations and the facilitation of a smooth transition from one generation to another is central to the profitability, continuity and sustainability of the business. There are many factors which can impact on an individual beginning to manage a farm in their own right. This study seeks to determine the barriers to new entrant farmers in Northern Ireland through a survey of young farmers/new entrants to farming. The results from the survey show that the profitability of the farm business, the age of the farmer when they identify a successor, the stage in the household lifecycle when a successor is identified, the wider dynamics of the family household and the role of the wider rural economy affect the success of new entrants to farming.

KEYWORDS: Succession; family-farm; barriers; new entrants

1. Introduction

There is a renewed interest, from both a policy and industry perspective, in how to encourage new entrants into farming and how best succession and inheritance can be planned for and facilitated. Family-farm businesses tend to operate as sole trading businesses (self-employed) or in partnerships and very rarely involve individuals from outside of the family in the management and decision-making processes. Traditionally, family-farm businesses have been passed down through a number of generations and it is this tradition of family succession which can create structural difficulties in farming and presents one of the biggest barriers for new entrants to farming. Succession is considered one of the biggest challenges facing many family businesses (Benavides-Velasco *et al.*, 2013) and the facilitation of a smooth transition between generations is central to the profitability, continuity and sustainability of the business. Intergenerational transfers within family businesses continues to be a focus for researchers within the family business literature (Brockhaus, 2004; Ward, 2004; Lockamy *et al.*, 2016). Previous research has identified several factors why businesses fail to establish a successful transfer between the generations such as; process, financial, individual, context, relationship and governance, (De Massis *et al.*, 2008; Lockamy *et al.*, 2016). Davis and Harveston (1998), and Ward, (1997, 2004) highlight that only a limited number of family businesses are transferred successfully to the next generation and indeed many do not survive, failing shortly after transfer.

In this context, family-farm businesses are no exception and the nature of family-farm transfers can be influenced by family dynamics which can have a significant impact on the success or otherwise, of farm transfers (Taylor and Norris, 2000; Venter *et al.*, 2005). Bowman-Upton (1991), found that succession decisions are more complicated as the number of children (as potential successors) in the household increases. The span of time that the owner/manager of a business and their spouse/partner have been together has also been shown to influence the succession process (Wilson *et al.*, 1991). Moreover, reluctance on the part of the older generation to pass on the farm business due to for example, a lack of provision for retirement or concerns about how the business will be run when it would be handed over, have all been shown to impact on the success and sustainability of the farm business into the future (Bowman-Upton, 1991).

The main policy instruments available to governments to assist with farm transfer have been financial e.g. tax relief or grant based schemes. However, historically, there has been no strategic long-term EU policy in place to encourage the timely transfer of farms. Early retirement schemes were used in the past, aimed at reducing the average farmer age and increasing the entry of young farmers. However, these schemes were found to be of limited effect as they only succeeded in incentivising

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farmers who were already close to retirement, (Caskie *et al.*, 2002; Hennessy, 2014). An alternative to early farm retirement schemes is the new entrant schemes, and while there is a paucity of information on the success of new entrant schemes, indications are that new entrant schemes could be more effective than early retirement schemes at restructuring the sector (Davis *et al.*, 2013).

Outside of these issues around succession and inheritance, there are other issues that have been shown to create barriers for new entrants to farming. The sustainable profitability of the farm is a major difficulty for new entrants into the industry with most farms not able to support an additional family member (ADAS, 2004). Milne and Butler (2014) found that long working hours, often in inclement weather conditions can, alongside the uncertainty of returns, deter new entrants to the farming industry. Accessing training and knowledge, as well as the location of the farm when it comes to accessing off-farm labour to secure additional income, were also identified as barriers by Milne and Butler (2014). Moreover, low land mobility and high capital input combined with low levels of farm profitability have made it very difficult for new entrants to enter farming through the purchase of a farm (Matthews, 2014).

The structure of farming in Northern Ireland (NI) is somewhat different compared to the United Kingdom (UK) but not unlike that found in other EU member states. The majority of farms are very small, family owned and operated businesses. Some 77 percent of NI farms are categorised as very small; that is, requiring less than one Standard labour unit[5], therefore, generally not big enough to provide full-time employment for one person, (DAERA, 2018a). About two thirds of the smallest farms specialize in beef and sheep production. Over half of these farms are managed on a part-time basis, either by combining them with income from off-farm employment or self-employment or in the case of older farmers, with pension income, (Jack *et al.*, 2009). Over the last decade, the number of farms in NI has been relatively constant with 24,900 farms reported in 2018 (DAERA, 2018b) and an average land area per farm of 40.9 hectares compared to an average of 79.9 hectares in the UK and 34.3 hectares for the EU-15, (DAERA, 2018a).

In view of the current structure of family-farm businesses in Northern Ireland, changes within the sector might provide challenges for the existing workforce. The sector is being driven by new innovations and technologies with farm operators being encouraged to adopt these new practices in order to increase farm productivity, maintain or increase profitability and ensure farm business sustainability. Younger farmers tend to be more efficient and innovative compared to older farmers (Potter and Lobley, 1996; Lobley *et al.*, 2010; Howley *et al.*, 2012) as well as contribute most to fostering innovation and resource efficiency within the industry (Dellapasqua, 2010). However, the farming population in the EU is on-average an ageing population (Eurostat Yearbook, 2016) and, therefore, from the perspective of sector sustainability, there is an increased need to encourage more young people into farming.

At a family-farm business level, there has been limited research undertaken to examine and explore the nature of barriers to new entrants to farming. While some barriers to farming may be universal (i.e. apply to all farms for example, how succession is managed) others could be quite regional in nature or specific to farm type (i.e. the ability to secure off-farm employment to make the farm more sustainable and the type of employment available will be influenced by the spatial location of the farm). The aim of this paper is to examine the nature and extent of barriers to new entrants into farming in a Northern Ireland context.

2. Data description and methodology

To explore fully the nature of these barriers at a Northern Ireland level, a survey of new entrants to farming was conducted by the Agri-Food and Bioscience Institute (AFBI) in Northern Ireland. The survey aimed to explore the experience of young farmers/new entrants to farming, focusing on their levels of education and training, whether they were currently farming full-time or part-time, what other employment they were engaged in (if any), their attitudes to farming as a career and the barriers and issues around establishing a sustainable farm business. The survey was initially piloted in an online format in February 2015 with forty-two agriculture students undertaking a level 2 course. The responses to the pilot (20 completed) identified some minor editorial revisions to the questionnaire.

Respondents were recruited from a cohort of part-time students undertaking a tailored Level 2 course in agriculture designed to support the provision of the new 'Young Farmers Scheme' under the 2014-2020 CAP reform[6]. The students were undertaking the course through evening classes, over a twenty week period at various venues throughout Northern Ireland. An email with the link to the online survey was sent to all the 2,200 Level 2 registered agriculture students in mid-February 2015. The questionnaire remained 'open' for six weeks and follow up reminder emails were sent to the students through their tutor before the online survey closed.

In total, 420 completed responses were received from the students participating on the course, giving a response rate of 19 percent. This response rate would be quite typical for current web-based questionnaires, (Deutskens *et al.*, 2004 and Tobin *et al.*, 2012). Although this sample group is not statistically representative of all new and perspective entrants to farming across the farming population in Northern Ireland, the results provide a useful insight into intentions and attitudes and the perceived barriers to entering farming from the perspective of this defined cohort group.

The average farm size was 40.8 hectares of owned land while 60 percent of respondents indicated that they also rented some land. The main enterprises of those surveyed[7] were beef cow enterprises, (50 percent), sheep, (22 percent), beef finishing, (12 percent), dairying, (11 percent), and other (i.e. pigs, poultry, arable (5 percent). Seventy six percent of those surveyed had some form of employment outside farming, with 78 percent working full-time, 19 percent working part-time (less than 30 hrs per week) and the remainder employed in casual/

[5] Standard labour unit = 1900 hours. In UK agricultural statistics, business size is described in terms of five SLR size bands (very small, small, medium, large, and very large).

[6] The course was delivered by the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE).

[7] The main enterprise being defined as the one which contributes most to farm business income.

seasonal employment. Fifty five percent of the respondents indicated that they work 30 hours or less per week on the farm, the majority of whom, 40 percent, work between 15 and 30 hrs per week on the farm. Eighty eight percent of the respondents were males and 12 percent were female. The average age of respondents was 35 years and had on average, attained a higher level of education compared to the wider farming population in Northern Ireland. The highest level of qualification for 17 percent of those surveyed was a professional qualification while a further 23 percent had a degree level qualification. In terms of farm ownership, the majority of the farms were owned by the respondent's family, 98 percent, with 55 percent being owned by the same family for more than sixty years. Forty eight percent of respondents self-reported that their role on the farm was both working on the farm and a 'joint-decision maker', mainly in conjunction with their father and/or mother. Twenty six percent of respondents described themselves as both working on the farm and being the sole decision maker. A fifth of respondents indicated that they were the current legal owners of the farm, with 74 percent indicating that they became owners through inheritance, the remainder, 26 percent having purchased the farm/land. Although a significant percentage, these land purchases could be within families as sales of farms land through private treaty, which is a common method of sale within the Irish agricultural market, (Jordan, 2019). Three quarters of respondents indicated that they had been making the day-to-day decisions on the farm for 5 years or less with 46 percent making the main day-to-day decisions on the farm for the last 1 or 2 years.

3. Results

Barriers to new farming entrants

Respondents who indicated that they would be interested in establishing a new enterprise in their own right on the existing farm were asked to rank the main difficulties/barriers which they thought they would encounter when establishing their new enterprise (Figure 1). Securing finance was identified as the main difficulty followed by the lack of profitability in existing farming enterprises and the availability of land.

Respondents were then asked to respond to a range of statements in relation to what they perceived to be some of the difficulties/barriers for young people entering farming. The responses are represented in Figure 2. Individuals owning farms but not actually farming (non-farming landowners) were considered the main barrier to young people wanting to farm. This is also reflected in the high number of responses agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, 'the current system of land letting through conacre[8] can make it difficult to get into farming and also impact on future medium to long term investment decisions'. Respondents indicated that although it had always been hard to get into farming in your own right as a young person, the perception is that it is now much harder compared to previous generations and, in reality, inheriting a farm was the main way that a young person could get into farming. There was also a perception that core farming skills are in danger of being lost, as young people choose not to farm, or farm in such a way that they do not build up and retain their knowledge and skills.

In relation to the barriers to pursuing farming and maintaining a sustainable farming business, respondents indicated that broader economic and social factors (beyond the availability of capital from banks, working capital, cash flow issues and the cost and availability of land) were important when considering farming as a career. For example, the availability of good off-farm employment opportunities locally, and how well farming fits in around a spouse's/partner's off-farm employment, and the overall attractiveness of farming as a career were identified as being important.

Figure 3 shows the perception towards different support and policy measures, which may assist new entrants to become established in farming. Financial support directed specifically at young farmers wanting to farm in their own right is the highest ranking response, however, there are positive responses to other aspects of support, particularly in relation to advice to both retiring farmers and new entrants, mentoring and farming partnership schemes for young farmers, more flexible approaches to the terms and taxation issues around land letting and support mechanisms to remove perceived barriers to retirement.

Farm transfer issues

Respondents were then asked an open-ended question

"When a farm is being passed on within the family from one generation to the next, what would you say the main difficulties are in achieving a smooth handover?"

Four distinctive themes emerged in the responses to this question:

(i) The future financial viability of the farm;
(ii) Inter-generational issues (i.e. between generations for example, children, parents and grandparents);
(iii) Issues across the current generation;
(iv) Issues around planning (financial and administrative).

The future financial viability of the farm

In terms of the concerns raised around the future financial viability of the farm respondents highlighted that: "*If the farm has to be split up then it is no use as a farm*". Other respondents indicated that if a farm has been run down leading up to retirement then financing new enterprises can be difficult: "*It can be difficult now to get the finance required to launch the inherited farm as a new business*". The ability of farms to support two families was also raised as an issue. "*If the farm is not big enough young farmers take off-farm employment and their priorities change and their focus changes to work, young family etc. .... so parents end up staying at the helm longer*". Concerns were also raised around the level of farm investment and associated debts as well as the lack of available working capital when the farm is handed on, so it is difficult for the next generation to make further investments. Although the younger generation may have been working on the farm on a day to day basis, there was an acknowledgement that this did not necessarily translate to them having full knowledge of the financial position of the farm business: "*Lack of*

[8] Farm land rental in NI is based around a system of short-term leasing over an eleven-month period called, conacre. This system of rental arose as a result of the Irish Lands Act introduced between 1870 and 1925 aimed at bringing an end the landlord–tenant system and prevented long-term leasing.

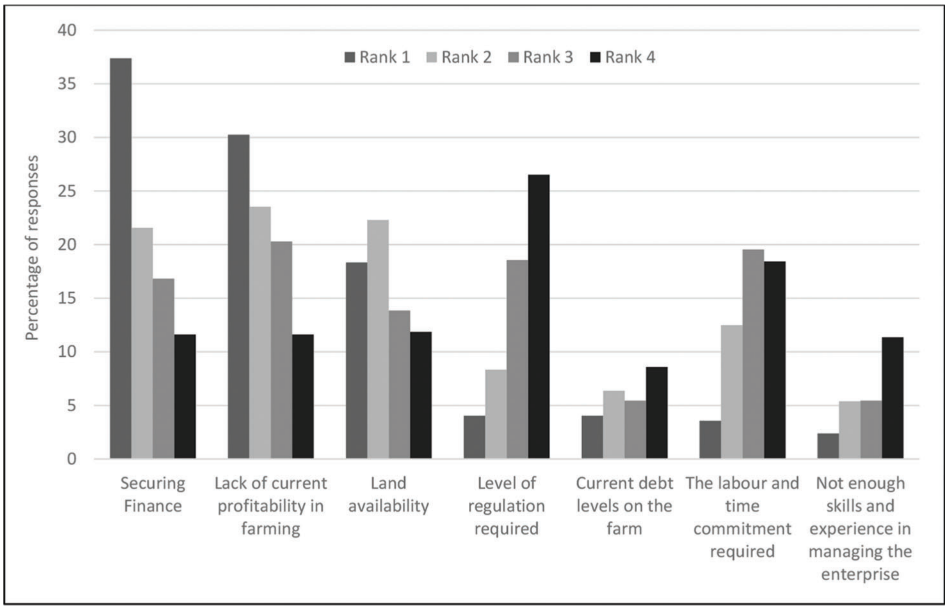

Figure 1: Perceived difficulties in establishing a new enterprise on an existing farm for new entrants

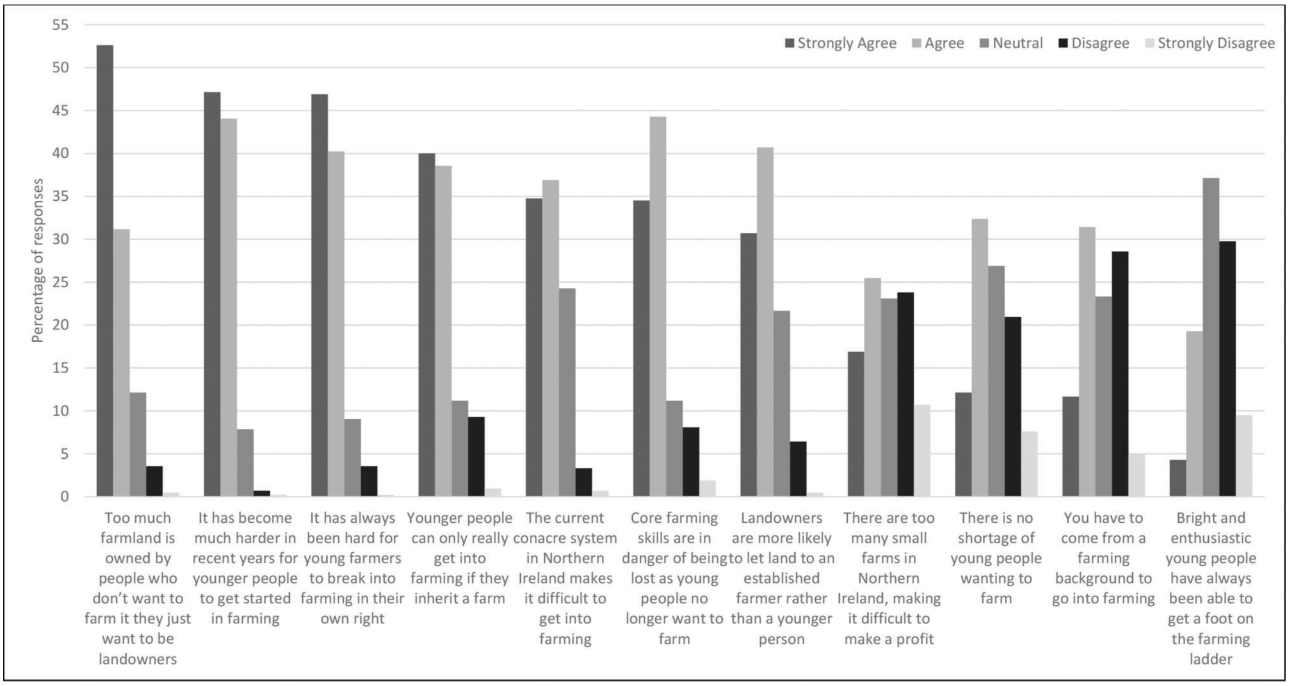

Figure 2: Attitudinal responses to 'percieved barriers/difficulties' for new entrants to farming

knowledge of the financial state of the business with creditors and in general....as information is not generally shared other than market prices on the day''. In addition, respondents highlighted that there may still be a need for the older generation to be provided with a retirement income from the farm business which can create additional pressure. The balance and difficulty of maintaining a smooth transition in the farm transfer process was also highlighted: ''*There is an overlap....retaining a level of financial security for the predecessor whilst ensuring that the new member is not overburdened with crippling debt*''.

Respondents highlighted that if a farmer chooses not to actively farm land that has been rented out in conacre over a number of years impacts on how the land has been maintained. These conacre rental agreements tend not to provide incentives for the renting farmer to make longer term decisions around land management and improvement compared to the land which they own themselves. Consequently, the respondents suggested that a higher level of investment would be needed to re-establish the land into production. This finding is supported by previous research undertaken in Ireland, (O'Donoghue *et al*., 2015). A number of respondents highlighted that if the land is currently rented on conacre due to retirement it acts as a barrier for the next generation wanting to establish the farm again as a viable business: ''Getting entitlements, capital for farm improvement and sound

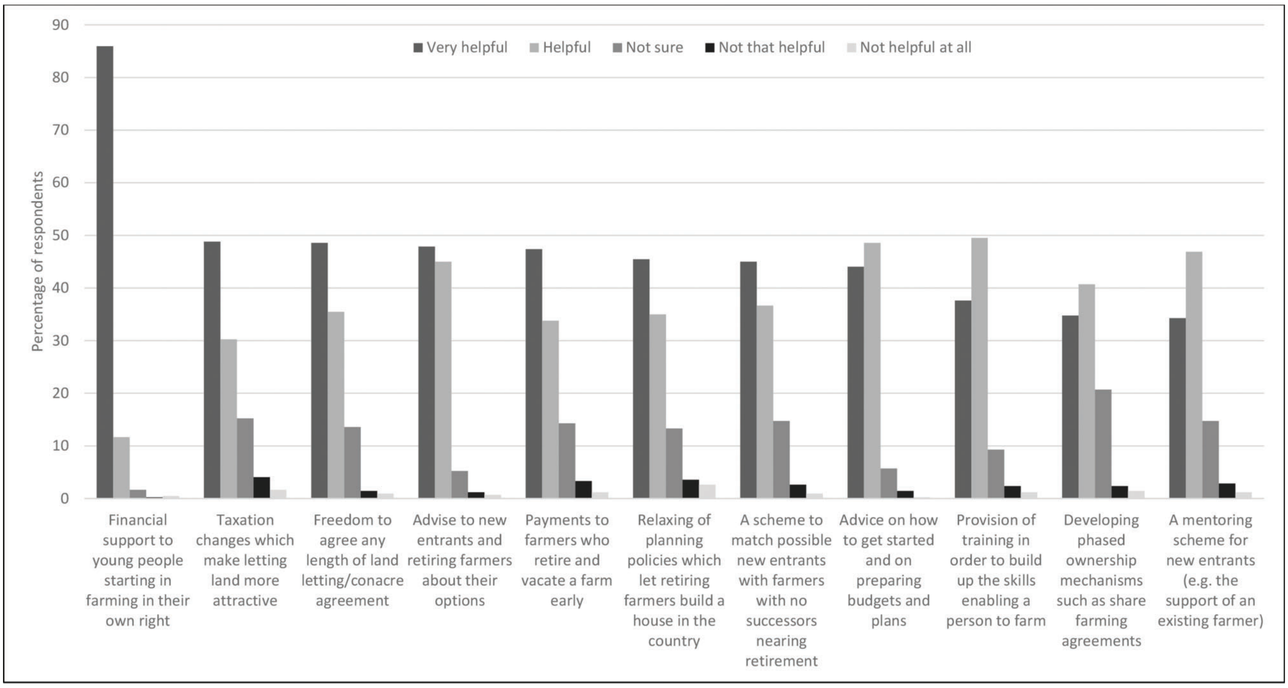

Figure 3: Helpfulness of measures to assist new entrants to become established in farming

advice are the biggest issues''. Finally, many respondents did feel that despite perhaps leading to: ''Awkward conversations which they would prefer to avoid,'' there needed to be more openness in communication between one generation and the next to discuss expectations and plans from all parties' perspectives.

Inter-generational issues

One of the main inter-generational issues was the timing around when the farm is handed over to a successor and this was viewed as crucial to the sustainability of the farm: ''*No point in receiving it (the farm) when you are in your forties or fifties you need it in your thirties to make good use of it*''. From the perspective of the person handing the farm on, respondents indicated that there can be concern around marital/partner break-ups and the financial impact that this could have on the future of the farm with the: ''*Farm having to be sold*''. The transfer of managerial control was also highlighted as an area of difficulty. A commonly occurring theme throughout the responses was the view that older generation farmers want to stay in control and make little changes to the way the farm business is run, while the younger generation want to take control and introduce new ways of doing things. ''*It is easier to let the farm be transferred on death as it avoids difficult situations,*'' and in contrast: ''*It is about getting complete control of the business at the right time....being able to bring new ideas and make your own decisions to enhance the business*''. However, it is evident this is an area where more discussion and guidance and perhaps facilitation by a third-party is required: ''*The person passing on the farm has to be comfortable and confident that the person taking over has the ability and maturity to take the farm on,*'' and: ''*In my opinion there needs to be more support and guidance offered on creating partnerships between father and son*''.

Issues across the current generation

The respondents to the survey did not indicate that there had been any difficulties or rivalry between other siblings in terms of the choice of the successor. This may be attributable to the fact that for those who responded to the survey, (their average age was 35 years), the decision on the farm around who would be the potential or actual successor had already been made. This would be in line with other research, which indicates that often, either directly or in directly, the choice of successor can happen at an early age (Schwartz, 2004).

However, issues arose across the current generation around who is family, when it comes to inheritance, how other siblings/in-laws may: ''*Want their cut,*'' or: ''*Need provided for,*'' and again the impact that this may have on the viability of the farm as a business. This was mainly perceived as disagreements amongst the siblings of those inheriting the farm and other: ''*Family disagreements about who gets what*''. Housing and the requirement for additional housing, or the provision of housing for other siblings, on the farm land was also identified as an issue. Furthermore, the relationship and tensions that may arise between farming and non-farming siblings was raised as an issue: ''*Family members with no interest in farming trying to sell it (land) to make a quick profit,*'' and: ''*Other members thinking that they must get a share from it, even if they have moved away and have no interest in farming*''.

Issues around planning (financial and administrative)

Timely and good financial planning and provision by the older generation makes handover much easier, (Wilkinson and Sykes, 2007; Winter and Lobley, 2016). In addition, difficulties were perceived in relation to business planning relating to, and around the area of, succession. For example: taxation issues (inheritance and capital gains), the administrative burden around setting up a new farm business herd number, solicitors/accountants fees and land valuations. A number of respondents expressed difficulties around a lack of co-ordination amongst the various agencies when land is being transferred: "*When you inherit a farm the assumption amongst the agencies is that you know what to do and the rules*". Respondents indicated that the area of timely succession planning and advice around this is something where more guidance could be given and also that again impacts on both generations, i.e. the generation exiting farming and the new generation coming into farming, needed to be involved in that dialogue and advice.

4. Discussion

The majority of new entrants involved in this study were currently farming in some way, with their farming experience gained mainly from working on a family-farm. There was a general acknowledgement that farming has high start-up costs and outside of inherited or earned wealth, for someone wanting to go into farming, access is very difficult. Respondents predominately expressed that entry for them into farming will take place eventually through succession (where they take over the management of the family-farm business) and ultimately inheritance of some/or all of the family-farm business and assets. As with all businesses, the succession strategy, in terms of both the farm business and wider farm household priorities, will take account of the economic situation, family life cycle and preferences and attitudes of family members. Given this, the new entrants surveyed exhibited a range of strategies in relation to their farming activities and how they viewed the future potential of the farm business alongside other wider objectives. Examples of new entrant's strategies included: introducing new enterprises, intensifying production, diversifying into other enterprises or non-traditional farming enterprises or developing a pluri-active approach where farming is undertaken on a part-time basis as well as engaging in off-farm employment. Those respondents from smaller farms, particularly beef and sheep farms were more likely to be in and planned to remain in, off-farm employment.

For many of those surveyed, both the cost and availability of land was deemed a fundamental barrier to entering farming. In terms of land availability, the capitalisation of agricultural support payments into land values (under successive CAP reforms) has resulted in farmers being disinclined to sell land in the expectation of future gains (Jack *et al*., 2009). Even when land becomes available the current levels of farm profitability and capital constraints can impact on the ability to purchase land to allow for expansion (Hennessy and Rehman, 2007). Therefore, in a situation where a farmer wants to bring a potential successor into the farm business but needs to expand production/enterprises to allow for it to be profitable to do so, land availability is a limiting factor. The current conacre system was also raised as a concern in the current survey because it did not allow for longer-term strategies in relation to farm business planning. Furthermore, the authors also found concerns about both securing conacre land and the price of securing it as farmers remained uncertain about the impact of the implementation of current CAP reforms. In addition, new entrants in this survey indicated that farmers letting land took a: "*Better the devil you know,*" approach, that is they were more likely to continue to let it to existing established farmers rather than allow it to be taken up by a younger farmer who is a new entrant. The flexibility of land-letting agreements was raised as an important issue in the current survey in relation to the ability to expand farm enterprises or take on new enterprises. From a policy perspective, an assessment of the nature of and role of different types of land-letting agreements and support for the introduction and development of shared farming initiatives is something which should be explored. However, this should be viewed in the context that farmers may be reluctant to be seen as 'non-active'; or not involved directly in farming from the perspective of taxation regulations, particularly income, inheritance and capital gains tax relief, which may incentivise a farmer to remain active and in business (Hill and Cahill, 2007).

Historically, for rural areas in Northern Ireland, policymakers have tended to emphasise the need for employment generation and creation at a local level and rural development policies tended to focus on agriculture and agriculturally related industries, (Scott, 2004). However, the rural and the urban in terms of economic activity have shown a greater degree of integration and over recent years the rural economy has become more diversified, (Scott, 2004). This has brought significant change for indigenous rural families, and those surveyed did indicate the importance of the wider rural economy in terms of influencing their decision to farm.

Farm operator, spouse, or both face important decisions regarding maintaining the farm business, sourcing additional income and accessing off-farm employment. In 1997, for those farmers aged under 65 years of age, 30 percent had some other form of 'other gainful activity' and this had increased to 44 percent by 2016; an increase of almost a third, (DAERA, 2017). In the current survey, most respondents indicated that not only for themselves but for their spouse/partner, the ability to access good off-farm employment was important, this is reflected in DAERA (2017) which indicated that for all those farms were the farmer is under 65 years of age, 55 percent of households have either the farmer, the spouse or both engaged in off-farm employment. This trend towards a greater reliance on off-farm employment has broadened the context of farm household decisions, (Moss *et al.* 2004). Whilst farm businesses and households through their production and consumption activities on and off-farm contribute to the rural economy, a strong and diversified rural economy providing off-farm work as well as services is critical for the well-being of farm households for whom farming alone would not sustain an adequate household income (Jones *et al.*, 2009). Respondents indicated for succession to be successful on a farm, particularly those which may not be able to sustain two family households, off-farm sources of income and, in particular, income from off-farm employment is of vital importance in ensuring the sustainability of farms, particularly smaller farms. Household consumption demands and farm investment cannot be financed from the income generated by a small farm and off-farm income can remove the pressure of having to meet all family consumption needs from farming income and can have a smoothing out effect during periods of 'cash flow' difficulties (Jack *et al.*, 2009). These results support the idea that in terms of farm viability, family-farm households and farm business sustainability is intrinsically linked to the wider economic and social development of rural areas.

A key factor in the development of the family-farm business is planning farm succession. Researchers in the field of family businesses agree that the intergenerational transfer decision is one of the most important issues that family businesses can make (Brockhaus, 2004; Glover, 2011). A distinguishing feature of family-farm businesses is that farming is not just a job but a way of life, involving the wider family household so transferring management and subsequently ownership of a family-farm from one generation to the next is a crucial aspect of the sustainability of any farm business into the future. Projection of structural change in agriculture requires an understanding of the complex social and economic motives underlying household behaviour. Respondents indicated that one of the strong motivational factors for being in farming was to: ''*Keep the family name on the land*''. This response encapsulates the idea that the family-farm is not only a business but a family home (often incorporating a wider group of family members and siblings) and any transfer of resources can be difficult within this context. The responses within the survey reflected the difficulties of the very sensitive issue of succession and subsequent inheritance. A number of issues were raised around the provision for other siblings and whether or not the farm, in the short to medium term, could provide adequate financial resources to do this without compromising the long term viability and sustainability of the farm itself. This complexity of issues around farm succession was also found by Conway *et al.* (2017) who stated that a farmer's decision to retire can be affected by inter-generation conflict, the balance of power, the farmer's anxiety over their future security, a lack of confidence in their successor's ability or personal circumstances and reservations about the changes their successor would make.

Traditional gender roles in farming are reflected in the survey results; 12 percent of the respondents were women, the majority of which were farming part-time. In 2010, within the NI farming population 9 percent of farmers were women, (DAERA, 2018c) with 45 percent of the female farmers aged 65 or over compared with 35 percent of male farmers. Although primogeniture often characterises farm succession, increasingly as the nature of farming changes there is evidence that women are more involved in the farm decision-making processes. In the US, 62 percent of farm women who were of working age had off-farm jobs, providing an income that helps to support the household and indirectly farm investment. Findeis and Swaminathan 2002, identify that women who are involved in their own family farm are more likely to be involved in decision-making on the farm. In research undertaken in the UK by Glover (2014), using an ethnographic longitudinal case study, this identified the power struggle and gender issues in a small family-farm business, suggesting gender creates conflict not only in the business but also in the family. The case study focuses on the struggle of the single daughter position as a partner in the family-farm, in the context of her father's preference towards male farm employees. Gender stereotypes seems to hold in the agrarian context well into the 21st Century, males favoured over daughters. Shortall's research (2017) on gender roles in Irish farm households over a period of 25 years (1987 to 2012) argues that even though there are considerable changes in the gender relation with the farm household, farming as an occupation remains tied to gender and male farmer work identity. The focus group research suggested that women reinforce their husband's position as breadwinners, even when their off-farm employment income is the primary source of income in the farm household. The line of inheritance remains in place with both parents expressing concern for the future of the son in farming in the context of economic uncertainty around future viability of farms while their hope would be that the daughter, ''if she loves farming'' to ''marry into land'' (Shortall, 2017).

Succession planning within farm businesses involves a smooth financial transition from the older generation to the younger generation as well as considering factors such as, housing provision for a retiring farmer and adequate income provision in retirement, to ensure the long-term viability of the business. Poor succession planning can make it difficult to achieve a desirable level of income to provide for both households and young entrants can be often caught in a 'holding position' where they work off-farm with a view to taking over the management of the farm at a later date. However, rather than this being a short-term solution, this can continue indefinitely and as a number of respondents from this survey stated, this can lead to a change in objectives particularly in relation to the farm business and wider household objectives, which may make the probability of the farm being operated on a full-time basis less likely. Respondents indicated that the area of timely succession planning and advice around this was something where more guidance could be given with both generations involved in that dialogue and advice. Respondents showed support for this dialogue to be facilitated through the engagement of professional mediators with the involvement of other professionals (i.e. accountants and solicitors).

A key component of the EU agricultural policy agenda is to redress an ageing farm population by increasing the number of younger entrants to farming (European Commission, 2012). Younger farmers are deemed to be more innovative, better educated, and more open to adopting new technologies and innovations on the farm resulting at an overall aggregate level, in improved competiveness and productivity within the sector (Potter and Lobley, 1996; Lobley *et al.*, 2010; Howley *et al.*, 2012). However, an emerging issue is the understanding of the definition of young farmers, successors and/or new entrants to farming (Zagata and Sutherland, 2015). As the results of this survey show, for those who are successors and for those who are entering farming as new entrants there can be a range of ages and variety of circumstances under which succession can happen. Successors and/or new entrants can be farming on a part-time basis or they can be returning to farming after being away from farming for a number of years. They may have a high level of agricultural related training whilst others may have minimal agricultural training and/or experience. This is supported by Uchiyama (2014) who found that new entrants to farming can either be those who come 'back to home farms' from non-farming jobs (i.e. farmers' children or retired people); those who are 'new employees in farm businesses'; and those who 'create new farms' (i.e. who do not succeed to farming through inheriting the management and ultimately the assets of the farm). There is no indication that a successor or a new entrant will necessarily be young as defined by the legislative framework of the CAP.

The wider demographic characteristics of new entrants including gender, age and educational achievement, alongside other key socio-economic variables, can have important influences on new entrants/young farmers' attitudes and behaviours around the future sustainability of the farm and at a broader level, how that impacts on the economic development of rural areas. Therefore, in the context of structural adjustment and informing the policy evidence base a better understanding is needed to explore the intentions of young farmers and new entrant farmers particularly in relation to their decisions to farm either full-time or part-time. Currently, Eurostat figures are limited in this area and do not provide the detail from which to explore who are the new entrants to farming. However, important decision-making processes and behaviours are on-going at the farm-level and there is merit from an evidence based policy perspective to investigating further how an individual's entry into farming comes about.

5. Conclusion

The results from this study, reflect the strong interaction which exists between 'family' and 'business' within the Northern Ireland farm sector and an appreciation of the difficulties which can be encountered in family-farm businesses, particularly in relation to the sustainability and viability of the farm as it moves from one generation to the next. There are a number of issues which can impact and influence new entrants to farming being successful. These issues include the profitability of the farm business, household factors, the age of the farmer when a successor is identified, the stage in the household lifecycle when a successor is identified, the dynamics of the family household and the role of the wider rural economy. All of these issues were raised within the context of the results of this survey, highlighting potential barriers to new entrants to farming in Northern Ireland and the influence this may have on the future trajectory of family-farms. In view of the undesirable structural rigidities that can arise due to the barriers to resource mobility identified in this study there is a public interest in facilitating positive structural change and an ongoing role for public policy to target some of the key constraints identified.

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