

## Human dynamics and the intergenerational farm transfer process in later life: A roadmap for future generational renewal in agriculture policy

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### ABSTRACT

The senior generation's reluctance and indeed resistance to alter the status quo of the existing management and ownership structure of their family farm is undoubtedly strong within the farming community. This phenomenon has resulted in extraordinary socio-economic challenges for young people aspiring to embark on a career in farming. The reasons why older farmers fail to plan effectively and expeditiously for the future are expansive, and range from the potential loss of identity, status and power that may occur as a result of engaging in the process, to the intrinsic multi-level relationship farmers have with their farms. These so-called 'soft issues' i.e. the emotional and social dimensions involved, are the issues that distort and dominate the older generation's decisions on the future trajectory of the farm. These really are the 'hard issues'. This paper draws on three interrelated journal articles exploring the complex human dynamics influencing the decision-making processes surrounding farm succession and retirement to put forth a series of recommendations that sensitively deal with problematic issues surrounding generational renewal in agriculture, whilst also ensuring farmers' emotional wellbeing in later life.

**KEYWORDS:** generational renewal; family farming; succession; retirement; land mobility

### 1. Introduction

Globally the policy mantra about the survival, continuity and future prosperity of the agricultural sector, traditional family farm model and broader sustainability of rural society seems ultimately to depend on an age-diverse farming population (Ingram and Kirwan, 2011; Lobley and Baker, 2012; Nuthall and Old, 2017). Indeed in Europe, an aging farming population and steady decline in the number of young farm families is reported as being a key factor in the demoralization of rural communities in which the farm is located (Vare *et al.*, 2005; Zagata and Sutherland, 2015). Consequently, it is increasingly clear that a major challenge presents itself in the area of intergenerational family farm transfer, so much so that European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil Hogan, maintains that a priority for future CAP reforms must focus on generational renewal (European Commission, 2017).

Financial incentives to stimulate and entice intergenerational family farm transfer are undoubtedly important, but as argued in this paper, which draws from

evidence gathered in the Republic of Ireland, there are more facets to the farm succession and retirement decision-making process that for the most part have been neglected. Indeed, previous research carried out by the lead author of this paper published in Conway *et al.* (2016; 2017; 2018), have opened up considerable debate in this area by delving into the mind-set and mannerism of farmers in later life to help identify the dynamic mass of emotional values attached to the farm and farming occupation 'beyond the economic' (Pile, 1990, p. 147). It is from the lead author's empirical research findings published in Conway *et al.* (ibid) that this paper puts forward a series of recommendations that are necessary to address the future trajectory of the complex area that is intergenerational family farm transfer.

The three interrelated studies published in Conway *et al.* (2016; 2017; 2018) bring to surface the various human dynamics influencing and hindering the older generation's decision-making processes surrounding farm succession and retirement from a different theoretical base, whilst maintaining the same foci. Conway *et al.* (2016) theoretically pioneered the use of Pierre Bourdieu's

Original submitted December 2018; accepted February 2019.

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notion of symbolic capital (i.e. resources available to an individual on the basis of esteem, recognition, status, or respect in a particular social setting) to comprehend the psychodynamic and sociodynamic factors influencing the unwillingness and reluctance amongst older farmers towards relinquishing management and ownership of the family farm and retirement. Conway *et al.* (2017) explored the micro-politics and hierarchical power dynamics at play within family farm households through the analytical lens of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, and the exercise of symbolic violence. While finally, Conway *et al.* (2018) applied Graham Rowles' concept of inside-ness as a theoretical framework to present an insightful, nuanced analysis of the deeply embedded attachment older farmers have with their farms. These studies obtained an in-depth, holistic understanding of the various facets governing the attitudes and behaviour patterns of older farmers towards the intergenerational family farm transfer process by employing a multi-method triangulation design, consisting of self-administered questionnaires (n=324) carried out with farmers in attendance at a series of 'Transferring the Family Farm' clinics hosted by Teagasc, the Agriculture and Food Development Authority in Ireland as well as an Irish adaptation of the International FARMTRANSFERS Survey (n=309), in conjunction with complementary Problem-Centred Interviews (n=19).

Empirical findings from these studies demonstrated how the senior generation's reluctance and indeed resistance to alter the status quo of the existing management and ownership structure of the family farm is undoubtedly strong within the farming community. The reasons why older farmers fail to plan effectively and expeditiously for the future are expansive, and range from the potential loss of identity, status and power that may occur as a result of engaging in the process, to the intrinsic multi-level relationship farmers have with their farms. The common denominator identified was that intergenerational family farm transfer is very much about emotion. These so-called 'soft issues' i.e. the human dynamics involved, are the issues that distort and dominate the older generation's decisions on the future trajectory of the farm. In fact these issues have resulted in intractable challenges for succession and retirement policy over the past fifty years, consequently making them very much the 'hard issues'. Future interventions and research geared specifically towards the needs and wants of the senior generation of the farming community are therefore greatly warranted in order to help successfully mobilise various collaborative farming policy efforts aimed at facilitating land mobility from one generation to the next.

## 2. Where does this lead us?

In an era of unprecedented transition in global agriculture, particularly in the context of an ageing farming population, calls for and justifies, the development of various incentives to stimulate and entice family farm transfer. Creating an environment whereby enthusiastic young farmers can gain access to productive assets and subsequently improve the competitiveness of the agricultural sector is imperative. While accountants, solicitors and financial advisors all have essential roles to play in this process, the complex array of human dynamics

Human dynamics and the farm transfer process in later life influencing and hindering the older generation's decision-making process (Conway *et al.* 2016; 2017; 2018), suggest that policy makers and practitioners should avoid the often-implicit assumption that financial incentives and the presence of an enthusiastic potential successor are all that is required for a successful intergenerational transfer transition. Such ingredients are essential no doubt but equally crucial is the way in which such professionals are well-informed and consciously aware that the extent of effective intergenerational transfer planning lies heavily upon the senior generation's acceptance and willingness to engage in the process. Effectively an understanding that the senior farmer must be a willing participant in altering the status quo of the farms' existing hierarchical structure, as they have the respect and authority to do so by virtue of their lifelong accumulation of symbolic capital.

Without the incumbent's wholehearted commitment, the likelihood of a successful management transition from the older generation to the successor in waiting is almost impossible. Fundamental action and change in existing and future intergenerational family farm transfer policy and schemes is required if the senior generation is to maintain and sustain normal day to day activity and behaviour on their farms in later life, whilst also 'releasing the reins' to allow for the necessary delegation of managerial responsibilities and ownership of the family farm to their successors. If this fails to materialise, there will continue to be extraordinary socio-economic challenges for younger people aspiring to pursue farming as a career.

## 3. Positionality: Reflecting on the research process

Before detailing recommendations that sensitively deal with problematic issues surrounding generational renewal, whilst also ensuring farmers' emotional well-being and quality of life in later life, it is first necessary to reflect on how the research process has 'sign-posted' these recommendations. The research process itself involved a multi-method triangulation design, consisting of self-administered questionnaires (n=324) and an Irish adaptation of the International FARMTRANSFERS Survey (n=309) in conjunction with complementary Problem-Centred Interviews (n=19). Approaching the research phenomenon from three different, yet co-equal and inter-dependent methodological vantage points, counteracted the limitations and biases that stem from using a single method, thus increasing the reliability, validity and rigor of findings. Participation in a 20-hour Farm Succession Facilitation Certification Training programme offered by the International Farm Transition Network (IFTN) at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, U.S.A., in September 2015 during the research process further enhanced the lead author's understanding, and ability to address the complexity of issues surrounding succession planning by successfully equipping them with a comprehensive set of facilitation skills to work with farm families during the process. As this research topic on the issue of family farm transfer is not just a national or even European challenge, but a global one, this was invaluable in obtaining an international perspective on the issue while also enabling the transfer of such knowledge into potential practical

Human dynamics and the farm transfer process in later life applications and solutions in policy and consultancy domains.

In all, the methodological approach of the study was rigorous, accurate, professional and confidential. Research participants were hugely interested in being involved in the study, and as a result gave freely of their time in providing an honest account of their opinions and experiences of farm succession and retirement. It was this process of self-reflection and introspection on the farmer's part, which ultimately allowed the research to evolve in such a meaningful and practical way. By entering the research participants' life world, the lead author was presented with many invaluable opportunities to conceptualise the intergenerational family farm transfer issue particularly as it relates to exploring the mindset and mannerisms of farmers in later life. These experiences imbued a sense of the importance in bridging the gap between theory and practice and in giving a voice to older farmers whose stories can be marginalised by the larger assemblages of state, ultimately benefiting the research process.

The recommendations presented hereafter, which take into account the human dynamics affecting the process, are very appropriately timed, because 'for too long the policy debate has been conducted with little reference to farmers or to their view of the world' (Winter, 1997, p. 377). Indeed these recommendations demand careful consideration if the existing ambivalence towards intergenerational farm transfer is to be sensitively and successfully addressed. These recommendations are predominately directed at policy makers and key stakeholders who have the means and ability to deliver future interventions, and programmes, that deal with problematic issues surrounding this complex area.

## 4. Recommendations

### 4.1 Recommendation 1: 'Farmer-sensitive' policy design and implementation

Regarding the suitability of farm transfer policy strategies put in place in the Republic of Ireland over the past four decades, particularly several short-lived Early Retirement Schemes (ERS), designed to encourage older farmers generating low returns to retire, Conway *et al.* (2016) found that they had little or no regard for older farmer's emotions and were excessively preoccupied with financial incentives to encourage the process. Consequently, a derailment of the process in many cases has been the ultimate outcome. For example, the eligibility requirements for farmers entering the most recent Early Retirement Scheme for Farmers (ERS 3, June, 2007 p.2), was that 'Persons intending to retire under the Scheme shall cease agricultural activity forever'. This largely unsuccessful scheme (it was suspended in October, 2008) was completely oblivious to the mind-set of many farmers as exemplified by Conway *et al.* (2016). While we acknowledge that such economic efforts to confront the issue are important, and indeed have been in many aspects well meaning, Conway *et al.* (*ibid*) identified that farm transfer policy was underestimating the importance of symbolic capital when discussing the issue of intergenerational family farm transfer.

Symbolic capital defines the farmer as a social being. A key element of symbolic capital for many older farmers comprises being recognised as an active and productive

farmer in society, a status which is also central to a farmer's sense of self. However, as symbolic capital is situational, the symbolic capital assigned to a person in one situation may not necessarily carry over into other situations (Christian and Bloome, 2004). Thus, the prospect of going from being an active and productive farmer to permanently ceasing all farming activity upon retirement as demanded in this retirement scheme, compromises the older generation's lifetime accumulation of symbolic capital and forces farmers to face a number of what could be termed, painful realities. These 'realities' come with the consciousness of letting go of one's professional identity, becoming a retiree, becoming more dependent on others, the onset of old age and even impending death. The resultant outcome leads farmers, in many cases to resist 'stepping aside', even where it represents economic common sense to engage in the process. The fact that 'farm operations that would be considered financially sound, well-managed businesses can slowly collapse and fail because the older generation is unable or unwilling to face the contradicting desires of seeing the next generation succeed yet retain the independence and self-identity farming provides' (Kirkpatrick, 2013, p. 3) makes this a major concern.

As it is the senior generation who ultimately decide whether intergenerational family farm transfer occurs or not, even the most sophisticated of programs and mechanisms designed to incentivise farm transfer will be of little benefit if policy makers and extension specialists across the globe are not adequately cognizant and understanding of 'the language of farming' (Burton, 2004, p. 212) and how painful it is for the older generation to 'let go' of their ingrained productivist self-image (Conway *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, as farmers' symbolic capital is vested in the esteem in which he/she is held amongst their peers as a 'good', actively engaged farmer, policies that erode this capital base are likely to be shunned. Therefore, until there is closer congruence of policy aspirations and the symbolic capital of older farmers, the progress towards increased levels of land mobility in Irish agriculture will be an incremental process. However, as there is a deeply ingrained 'rural ideology' that prioritizes the process of handing over the farm within the family, the formulation of intergenerational farm transfer measures which augment rather than detract from the senior generation's cache of symbolic capital, is by no means impossible. It is a recommendation of our research therefore, that any new initiatives to support / encourage the process should not be conceived so narrowly as to ignore possible social consequences or wider issues of human dignity. Both emotional and economic needs must be catered for, and ideally a policy for structural reform in agriculture must be accompanied by a comprehensive set of interventions to deal with the personal and social loss an older farmer may experience upon transferring the family farm. In order to do this, we recommend that future policies and programmes relating to family farm transfer take into account the pervasiveness of symbolic capital and work within this structure to effect change. For example, on its own, and with the numerous perceived negative connotations associated with it identified, perhaps the term 'Early Retirement Scheme' is no longer appropriate language for policy makers to use in a farming context. Perhaps the term 'Farm Progression Scheme' would be more effective as

it portrays a sense of purposefulness rather than one of cessation to an elderly farmer. The development of an appropriate concept of retirement for agriculture, rather than the adoption of what prevails in other sectors of the economy is a task to which policy can connect intergenerational farm transfer measures to the senior generation's ongoing assembly of symbolic capital.

In addition, instead of reporting that farm management decisions are in the hands of a generation who may be more resistant to structural change and growth, policy makers and key stakeholders need to embrace, publicly promote and recognise the older generation's invaluable store of locally specific tacit and lay knowledge developed over years of regularized interaction and experience working on the family farm. As this farm-specific or 'soil-specific' human capital (Laband and Lentz, 1983) knowledge is not easily transferable, communicated or learnable, the family farm may be left in the hands of a young, inexperienced farmer, unable to make competent management decisions without the continued guidance, advice and knowledge of the senior generation. Indeed, Weigel and Weigel (1990), point out that the succeeding generation of farmers may seek to operate independently, yet still be dependent on the life long experience and knowledge of their elders. This may encourage the senior generation to approach the transition with greater enthusiasm and acceptance. The feeling of still being valued and needed in society may reinforce the older farmers' morale and sense of purpose in the face of the gradual diminishment of their physical capacities, all the while offering possibilities for a positive form of ageing experience. The active advisory role ideology and discourse recommended here, may subsequently help to diminish the stigma and defeatist stereotype associated with transferring the family farm and subsequently promote a more positive and wilful attitude towards the process over time. The development of such strategies concerning the emotional wellbeing of elderly farmers has the potential to greatly ease the stresses of the process.

#### **4.2 Recommendation 2: Farm Succession Facilitation Service**

Specifically, not unlike elsewhere in the world, Joint Farming Ventures (JFVs), particularly farm partnerships, have recently been promoted within Irish policy discourses as succession strategies that can provide an ideal stepping stone to farm transfer as it provides a function for intergenerational cooperation (Leonard *et al.*, 2017), whilst also allowing for greater recognition, financial independence and leadership opportunities for the younger generation (ADAS, 2007). In an attempt to entice and incentivize the uptake of such unconventional ventures, the Irish Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine launched a Collaborative Farming Grant Scheme in 2015, funded under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 and co-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), to 'encourage the establishment of new farm partnership arrangements by contributing to the legal, advisory and financial services costs incurred by farmers in the drawing up of their farm partnership agreement' (DAFM, 2015, p. 1). While appreciating the merits and potential benefits of this scheme, it again has, we would

argue, an overly simplified view of the factors influencing the succession process and fails to deal with the complex emotional dynamics facing ageing farmers (Conway *et al.* 2016; 2017; 2018). Conway *et al.* (2016) illustrate that in many cases, the older generation, through their own admission, prioritize the building and maintenance of their personal possession of symbolic capital rather than transferring the family farm, even to their own children. In fact, Conway *et al.* (2017) discovered that the senior generation employ an intricate array of complex strategies and practices of symbolic violence in an effort to sustain and maintain their position as head of the farm. Therefore, while farm partnerships, appear to 'tick all the boxes' in relation to the ideal family farm transfer facilitation strategy as they provide a function for intergenerational cooperation, they will be of little benefit if farm transfer policy fails to consider methods of addressing the micro-politics and management power dynamics at play within family farm households.

The socially recognized and approved authority afforded to older farmers via their formidable store of symbolic capital appears to be a fact of social life within farm households. The challenge for policy makers and practitioners therefore is twofold. They must consider methods in which this power can be legitimately exercised by the senior generation, in the interest of whatever 'good' is at hand (in this case to preserve the crucial intergenerational dynamic of family farming, and allow for the older generation to remain active and productive on the farm, because being recognised as such is central to their sense of self). Secondly however, policy makers and practitioners need to remain cognizant of the fact that such power has the potential to become 'symbolic violence', and act against the good at hand (which, in this case, would involve the inappropriate domination of the younger generation by exploiting their symbolic power as head of the household and farm). Having a clear transitional role for both the incumbent and the successor is seen to be vitally important (De Massis, *et al.*, 2008). According to Palliam *et al.* (2011), 'clarification of role, responsibilities, and ownership stakes will give successors the time they need to establish their credibility and independences' (p. 26) to manage the business. This echoes previous family farm literature over the past three decades which has continuously highlighted the reduction in management control as an important element of the process. Salamon and Markan (1984) previously stressed that 'the older farmer must encourage younger family members to be involved, bring them into the decision-making process and permit some sharing of control to maintain peak efficiency' (p. 174).

As every farmer and each family situation is unique, we acknowledge that there are no uniform or easily prescribed solutions to solving this complex challenge, however as suggested by Nuthall and Old (2017), 'changing farmers' objectives and management style needs to be handled professionally' (p. 56). With that in mind, we advocate that the services of a certified Farm Succession Facilitator, trained in accordance with an international best practice model, such as the one offered by the International Farm Transition Network (IFTN) in the U.S.A., is essential; particularly when facilitating discussions between old and young family members' objectives, goals and expectations for the farm. The goal of the IFTN is to support programs and activities that foster

Human dynamics and the farm transfer process in later life the next generation of farmers. The network believes that programs that help create the opportunity for young people to begin a career in agriculture, particularly by addressing land mobility, must be part of the government's rural development effort.

### **Role and Duties of the Farm Succession Facilitator**

The role of a certified IFTN Farm Succession Facilitator is not to come up with instant solutions, instead they guide and support farm members through the steps of the farm transfer planning process in an unbiased manner. The Facilitator helps address the complex and often problematic succession planning issues encountered by farm families by identifying the unique requirements of each member and then directing them towards the many different tools, resources and strategies needed to achieve a shared transition vision that ensures the future continuity and prosperity of the farm operation. In line with recommendations set out by the IFTN, the facilitation sessions are most beneficial when they take place outside the family home. Bennett (2006), in her ethnographic exploration of power relationships in a Dorset farmhouse, noted that the kitchen table is the centre of the home. The seating position round this table may reflect power dynamics within the family, as the older generation sit in their customary seat at the top of the table (Barclay, 2012). In order to neutralize such a hierarchical household structure, the Facilitator conducts the meeting with farm members at a roundtable in a neutral environment where everyone in attendance must renegotiate their position.

The key roles and duties of an IFTN Farm Succession Facilitator follow a three-step blueprint: Step 1: Where is the farm now; Step 2: Where do you want to be; and Step 3: How do you get there.

1. The first step involves the Facilitator bringing all farm members together to discuss, evaluate and clarify the current status of the farm business, such as confirming its size, financials and efficiency. This process enables members from both generations to obtain and share all the essential components and necessary information required to move through the succession planning process, and work efficiently with other relevant professionals involved. Getting the whole family to sit around a table together during this initial stage of the process also helps the Facilitator to identify those who may dominate discussions around the future direction of the farm, previously brought to light by Conway *et al.* (2017). A skilled IFTN Farm Succession Facilitator does so by gauging how farm members communicate and interact with each other, and also by observing the body language of those involved in these discussions.
2. The second step involves the Farm Succession Facilitator having one-to-one meetings with farm members from both generations. These sessions help the Facilitator to uncover each individual's views, their perceived role on the farm and how they foresee the farm business being dealt with in the future. Following on from these individual meetings, the Facilitator brings all farm members together again to coordinate an open discussion between those involved on any issues and/or disparities that may have arisen from each individual sharing their own values, vision, mission, goals and indeed

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fears for the future of the farm. As 'unspoken, misunderstood, or different visions in the same family' are reported to 'lead to conflicts' in family businesses (Aronoff and Ward, 1994, p. 75), this is the most important part of the facilitation process. Intergenerational communication is key to effective succession planning. Indeed, Lange *et al.* (2011) argue that closed communication styles in which family members are not encouraged to share their feelings and opinions openly, tend to result in more stress within the family unit and can even result in a 'breakup of the farm and a breakup of the family' (Hicks *et al.*, 2012, p. 101). These fruitful discussions towards the latter stage of step two can help clarify expectations and avoid assumptions amongst farm members.

3. The third and final step involves the Facilitator leading thorough discussions on suitable farm transition options and strategies with farm members. Achieving outcomes with a shared understanding and common agreement by engaging in this process will help farm members from both generations to make better informed decisions on the future trajectory of the farm, in a collective manner. As succession planning not only involves the transfer of labour, skills, management and decision making to an identified successor, but also the transfer of assets, building a team of resource professionals to help in the transition process is another fundamental feature of this stage of the facilitation process. Financial analysis from a team of accountants, financial advisors and tax planners for example, is required to ensure the business can support the monetary goals of all farm members. Other services for farms in the process of transitioning, such as a solicitor/attorney, who is well informed of the 'language of farming', is also advisable to assist in the creation of a farm will. Research by Conway *et al.* (2018) discovered that over 40% of older farmers do have a will in place, hence the importance of taking this important step on the path towards successful intergenerational farm transfer.

Throughout this three-step facilitation process, the Farm Succession Facilitator must ensure to keep discussions on track. Tension and even conflict can arise from almost any aspect of the succession plan. If open and honest communication is not developed in the beginning, a seemingly trivial issue can stop a succession plan in its tracks. A skilled Facilitator also ensures that tough questions and emotions are dealt with and various 'what if' scenarios are investigated. By helping farm members navigate through difficult conversations, the Farm Succession Facilitator develops contingencies to address topics such as disagreement, disability, divorce and even death (Wenger, 2010). Several authors have also highlighted that initiating the process of handing over the family business, forces the incumbent to face their own mortality, hence the significance of addressing this topic in a sensitive manner (Bjuggren and Lund, 2001; Pitts *et al.*, 2009; Nuthall and Old, 2017).

It is also essential for Farm Succession Facilitators to be acutely aware and knowledgeable of the defence mechanisms and tactics utilized by the older generation to avoid and deter the delegation of managerial responsibilities from occurring (Conway *et al.*, 2017). Analytically, so broad however, we acknowledge that Bourdieu's use of the word 'violence' in his concept of symbolic

violence, is contentious and indeed may confuse denotation to such an extent that it may result in such professionals referring to disparate and incompatible events and experiences of succession and retirement whilst referring to the same conceptual apparatus. In recognition of the concept's potential for misinterpretation, we therefore feel compelled to rephrase symbolic violence to 'symbolic authoritarianism' and/or 'symbolic sabotage' when providing Farm Succession Facilitators with an overview of the micro-politics and management power dynamics at play within family farm households.

Furthermore, we recommend that it is also imperative for such professionals to be cognisant of, and empathize with the older generations' emotional needs and cognitive insecurities about succession and retirement, since psychodynamic and socio dynamic deterrents constitute a major obstacle to the development of a plan for the future (Conway *et al.* 2016). Such a holistic understanding and knowledge of the human dynamics of the process will equip succession facilitators on the ground with the necessary credibility, skill, reverence and trust needed to personally engage with older farmers and ultimately strengthen their willingness to address the issue. Indeed, research suggests that effective facilitators need a mix of external insights and local acceptance (Slee *et al.*, 2006).

#### **Farm Succession Facilitation Service implementation**

Intergenerational debates about collaborative working processes professionally initiated and guided by a trained Farm Succession Facilitator, will allow for the succession process to be developed, based on a more logical than emotional perspective. According to Nuthall and Old (2017) however 'farmers need a strong incentive to work on their style and objective factors which are holding back succession' (p. 56). There must be a seed that stimulates the need to act. Barclay *et al.* (2007), and previously Glauben *et al.* (2004), highlighted that in many cases the older generation believe that succession is something they should deal with in isolation, without consulting other members of the family or even an outside consultant. Therefore, instead of facilitation being a voluntary service available to farmers, we recommend that existing and future policies and programmes encouraging family farm transfer and supporting younger farmers, insist on a course of mandatory facilitation sessions with a certified Farm Succession Facilitator. Ideally these would be funded or subsidised by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), with the proviso that in order to be eligible to apply and become involved in a Joint Farming Venture, such as a farm partnership for example, such facilitation sessions must be availed of. Effective communication is vital in the farm transfer planning process and such an implementation has the potential to greatly enhance the uptake and success of existing and future policy measures. Furthermore, we recommend that this compulsory facilitation requirement be extended beyond merely supporting those directly considering farm transfer and added as a criteria for all younger farmers hoping to obtain an Advanced Level 6 Certificate in Agriculture (the Green Cert obtained at agricultural universities and colleges in the Republic of Ireland), that qualifies them for stock relief and stamp duty exemptions as 'Young Trained Farmers'. This new

Human dynamics and the farm transfer process in later life module at third level education would stimulate and encourage open lines of intergenerational communication within family farm households, whether they are in the process of farm transfer planning or not, something that currently seems not to be the case. Lange *et al.* (2011) explains that 'the more open the communication style within the family, the less stress that occurs and the easier it is to address stress that does occur (p. 3).

We acknowledge that a voluntary succession mediation service already exists in the Republic of Ireland. The role and indeed usefulness of mediation in the farm transfer planning process is also outlined in Teagasc's Guide to Transferring the Family Farm (Teagasc, 2015). In many ways, facilitation and mediation are similar, but in the most elementary way, they are significantly different: mediation is generally seen as intervention in a dispute (e.g. in marriage separation or divorce) in order to bring about an agreement or reconciliation whereas facilitation is primarily used pre-conflict. Due to the potential negative and conflictual connotations associated with the term 'mediation service', we suggest that the term 'facilitation service' is more appropriate for policy to use in a farm transfer planning context as it may stimulate a more wilful attitude towards the process.

#### **4.3 Recommendation 3: Establishment of a National Voluntary Organisation for older farmers**

A third recommendation we would argue for, is that policy makers and practitioners re-examine their dominant focus on economic-based incentives by becoming more aware and knowledgeable of the intrinsic farmer-farm relationship (Conway *et al.*, 2018). Such understanding will be crucial when reforming and developing future initiatives and strategies that seek to encourage the transfer of farm process by prioritising future interventions that maintain the quality of life of those concerned. A significant obstacle to the intergenerational farm transfer process is the rigid inflexibility of the occupational role, where farmers wish to remain 'rooted in place' on the farm and in many cases, have developed few interests outside of farming (Riley, 2012). As there are no bodies or services currently in existence in the Republic of Ireland that specifically represent the needs and interests of the older farmer in rural areas, we recommend the establishment of a national voluntary organisation that specifically represents the needs of the senior generation of the farming community, equivalent to that of younger people in rural Ireland i.e. Macra na Feirme. Macra na Feirme is a voluntary, rural youth organisation in the Republic of Ireland for people between the ages of 17 and 35. Founded in 1944, the organisation now has over 9,000 members across approximately 200 clubs in 31 regions around the country (Macra na Feirme, 2018). One of the organisation's main aims is to help young farmers get established in farming and assist them through learning and skills development.

Suited to the older generation's own interests and needs identified (Conway *et al.*, 2016; 2018), such a voluntary organisation, funded annually by the Government and through membership, would provide the older generation with a support around which they could

Human dynamics and the farm transfer process in later life remain embedded 'inside' their farms and social circles in later life. A nationwide voluntary organisation, with a network of clubs in every county across the country, would allow older farmers to integrate within the social fabric of a local age peer group, whilst also providing them with opportunities to develop a pattern of farming activities suited to advancing age. This would contribute to their overall sense of insideness, and, therefore, sense of self-worth, amidst the gradual diminishment of their physical capacities on the farm in later life. Collaborating with their younger counterparts in Macra na Feirme on various campaigns and activities would also allow the senior generation to retain a sense of purpose and value in old age.

Similar to Macra na Feirme, this body for older farmers, with their added wealth of experience, would act as a social partner farm organisation together with the Irish Farmers Association (IFA) for example, that would allow them to have regular access to government ministers and senior civil servants, thus providing them with a voice to raise issues of concern. Indeed, such a group could be invaluable with regard to the development of future farm transfer strategies that would truly be cognisant of the human side of the process of inter-generational renewal. An established organisation for older farmers would also allow this sector of society to have a representative on important committees such as the Executive Council of the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) and the Board of Teagasc for example, and on other relevant stakeholder groups, similar to their younger counterparts.

#### 4.4 Recommendation 4: Occupational health and safety in agriculture awareness

On a related aspect, and while not central to the discussion so far, is the issue of occupational health and safety on the farm. The insight into the senior generation's deeply-embedded sense of insideness towards their respective farms developed by Conway *et al.* (2018) suggests that there is much to be learned from the analysis of the farmer-farm relationship that would benefit this very significant contemporary challenge. Farming is one of the most hazardous occupations in terms of the incidence and seriousness of accidental injuries (Glasscock, *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, agriculture exhibits disproportionately high fatality rates, when compared to other sectors (*ibid*). With almost half of all farm fatalities in the Republic of Ireland and many other European Union member states involving farmers aged 65 and over (HSA, 2013), this phenomenon requires immediate policy intervention. The deeply-embedded farmer-farm relationship offers potential for understanding why many farmers are unwilling to recognize or accept their physical limitations on the farm (Peters *et al.*, 2008) and instead, continue to traverse spaces that would appear to be beyond their level of physiological competence (Ponzetti, 2003), with subsequent risks to their health and safety. The general satisfaction and well-being that the older generation of the farming community attribute to the daily and seasonal labour-intensive demands of working on the farm in later life, appears to be part of the farming psyche. Such an insight into the intrinsic link to farm attachment in old age and the importance attributed to the habitual routines within the farm setting, will provide

the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and member organisations of the HSA Farm Safety Partnership Advisory committee in the Republic of Ireland with an invaluable understanding of the various actions taken by (or should be taken by) older farmers to handle age-related physical limitations and barriers on their farms. This knowledge will aid in the development of an effective health and safety service tailored specifically to the needs of older farmers.

## 5. Conclusion

In drawing all these issues together, the recommendations set forth in this paper, are geared specifically towards informing more appropriate, 'farmer-sensitive' generational renewal in agriculture policy directions. Indeed, we would argue that what is put forward here represents what, in all probability, are the first attempts to deal with one of the most challenging agricultural / rural sustainability issues of our time. Issues which have not been explored in any real depth since the late Dr. Patrick (Packie) Commins' proposals in the early 1970s (Commings, 1973; Commings and Kelleher, 1973). The fact that the average age of the farming population is increasing worldwide, means that the recommendations presented in this paper are very timely. As the future success of the family farm business may hinge on its ability to maintain internal stability, existing attitudes towards succession must change in order to make the transition between generations less problematic and more efficient. 'To change the world', Bourdieu (1990, p. 23) argues, one must change the ways of world making, that is, the vision of the world and the practical operations by which groups are produced and reproduced (*ibid*). A cultural shift on an age-old problem of farm succession requires well-informed and intelligent policy interventions and strategies which understand the complex nature of the process, like those outlined here.

In recognition of the heterogeneity of the farming population however, the ideas presented here should not be viewed as 'one size fits all model' for 'fixing' the farm succession situation. Policy interventions must be geared to the individual circumstances and specific conditions of any given case. This may encourage the senior generation to approach the transition with greater enthusiasm and acceptance. Anyone who considers such recommendations to be too idealistic, should remember that we all inevitably have to face the prospect of letting go of our professional tasks and ties in our old age. No one can avoid ageing and as the lead author of this paper identified in Conway *et al.* (2016; 2017; 2018), most elderly farmers opt to maintain the facade of normal day to day activity and behaviour instead of retiring. As such, this recommendations paper, in attempting to understand and acknowledge the world as farmers perceive it, can be drawn upon to inform future generational renewal in agriculture policy directions and as a consequence prevent older farmers from being isolated and excluded from society almost by accident rather than intention.

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## Acknowledgement

Funding for this project was provided by the National University of Ireland, Galway, College of Arts, Social Sciences, and Celtic Studies Doctoral Research Scholarship Scheme and the Geographical Society of Ireland postgraduate travel award bursary. We would also like to thank Teagasc, the Agriculture and Food Development Authority in Ireland, for their assistance with this research.

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