People Power: Incorporating the Social Dimension in Assessing Farm Sustainability

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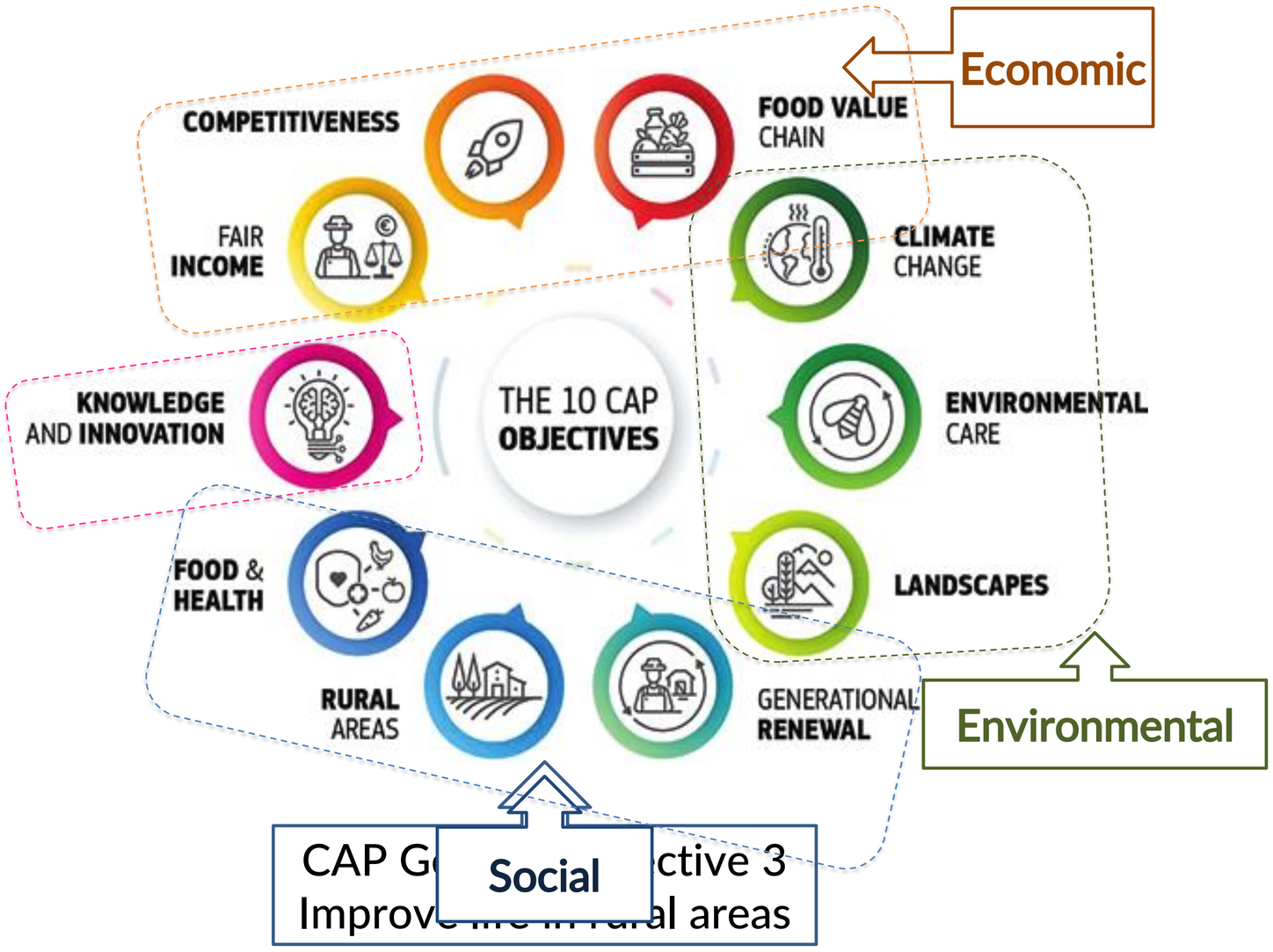
Outline

- Policy context
- Defining social sustainability
- Measurement challenges
- Social data inclusion in the NFS
- Some data insights
- Conclusions and future work

Policy context



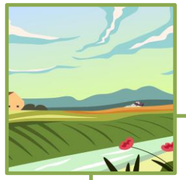
- Holistic nature of sustainability increasingly reflected in policy
- Multidimensional objectives of the CAP
- A multifaceted just transition
- Balancing dimensions a real challenge
- Enhanced reporting requirements e.g. CMEF, Social Conditionality, CSRD
- EU Farm Sustainability Data Network

What do we mean by social sustainability?

- Specifying and managing both positive and negative impacts of systems, processes, organisations and activities on people and social life (Balaman, 2018)
- People at its core – meeting human needs now and in to the future
- Aspects relating to both the individual and wider society (Van Calker et al. 2005)

Internal

- Farmer wellbeing
- Working conditions
- Education & training
- Access to services



External

- Rural development
- Generational renewal
- Diversity & inclusion
- Animal welfare

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Measurement challenges

- Broad range of topics – **diverse aspects** and therefore data requirements
- **Subjectivity** of social metrics – harder to quantify
- **Sensitivity** of certain subject areas e.g. farmer health and wellbeing, succession
- **Data collection burden** – difficult to adapt existing mechanisms to incorporate this type of data
- Complexity and cost e.g. detailed fieldwork, interviews etc. **resource intensive**
- **Context specific** – trade-offs and synergies
- **Data gaps** highlighted in the literature e.g. Latruffe et al. (2016), Robling et al. (2023) and Asai and Antón (2024)

Social data inclusion in the NFS

Annual Survey

- Farm household socio-demographic data
  - Age profile, marital status, household composition, off-farm employment, hours worked (on and off farm) & agri-training

Additional Survey

- Farmer health & safety, wellbeing, succession, ICT, access to services & role of women on farms

Small Farms

- Motivation & future farm plans

- Brennan et al. (2020) categorised NFS social metrics in to **farmer, community** & **animal** wellbeing

Assessing social sustainability

Received: 30 November 2021 | Accepted: 25 November 2022
DOI: 10.1111/soru.12417
SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE
Sociologia Ruralis Journal of the European Society for Rural Sociology
ESRS

Putting social into agricultural sustainability: Integrating assessments of quality of life and wellbeing into farm sustainability indicators

Mary Brennan PhD[1,2] | Thia Hennessy PhD[2] | Emma Dillon PhD[1] | David Meredith PhD[3]

Farmer Sustainability Index

Farmer Sustainability

Farm Business Continuity

1. Economic viability of the farm
2. Business Continuity: plans for farm output
3. Generational Renewal: identification of a successor

Community and Social Connections

1. Isolation: risk if farmer lives alone
2. Connections: frequency of social contact
3. Ability to access public services and amenities

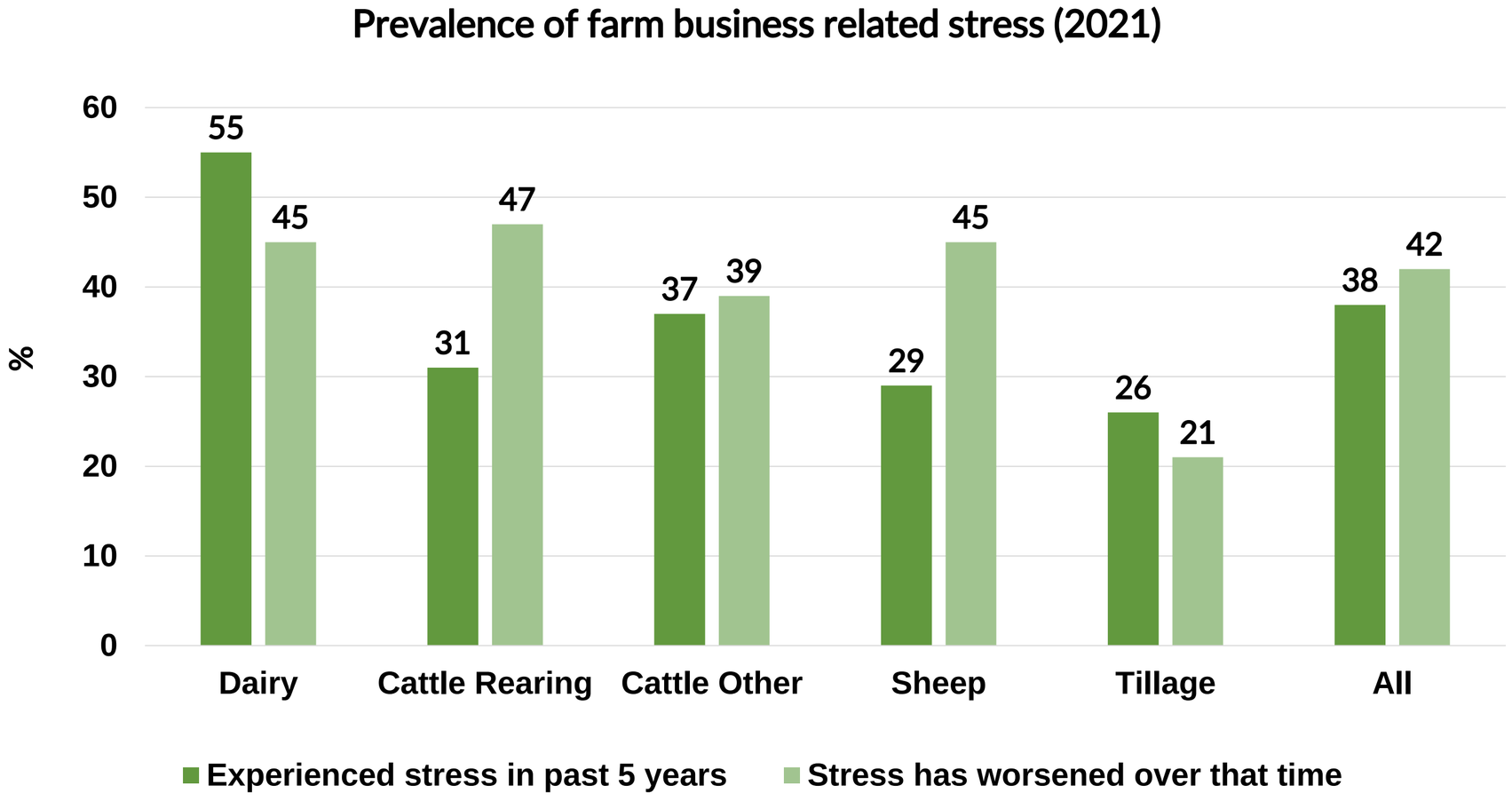
Farmer Comfort and Quality of Life

1. Working hours: On and off farm
2. Prevalence of occupational stress
3. Farmers sense of secutrity

- **Cattle/Sheep** farmers and **those aged >60** performed less well in terms of social sustainability
- **Trade-offs** i.e. dairy farms better on economic viability but more stress and poorer work-life balance
  - Conversely, sheep farmers better on work-life balance but greater levels of economic vulnerability
- **Regional differences** –South-West & Border had less access to services and more economic vulnerability

Farmer wellbeing

- Almost 4/10 farmers experienced stress relating to their farm (2017 – 2021) - highest on dairy farms – a particularly challenging period



JOURNAL OF AGROMEDICINE
2022, VOL. 27, NO. 2, 132–142
https://doi.org/10.1080/1059924X.2021.1988020

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Weather, Workload and Money: Determining and Evaluating Sources of Stress for Farmers in Ireland

Mary Brennan [a,b], Thia Hennessy [b], David Meredith [a], and Emma Dillon [a]

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- Recent insights - Hammersley et al. (2022, 2023), Russell et al. (2023) & Rose et al. (2024)

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Accounting for animal welfare

- Use of routinely collected herd data
- De Vries *et al.* (2011) identified 3 dimensions:
  (i) production intensity
  (ii) milk production & composition
  (iii) management and facilities

Original Study • DOI: 10.15212/ijafr-2020-0133 IJAFR • 60(1) • 2021 • 129-141

Irish Journal of Agricultural and Food Research

Embedding animal welfare in sustainability assessment: an indicator approach

Selected NFS variables
Stocking rate
Calf mortality
Fat-to-Protein ratio
Milk yield
Somatic cell count
Investment in housing
% with slatted housing
Days at grass

- **Welfare** standards on dairy farms remained **stable** (2014-17)
  - despite structural change post-quota
- **Expanding** farms improved welfare relatively **more**
- **Positive correlations** between **welfare** standards & **economic** & **environmental** performance
  - *win-win strategies* to improve sustainability
- Subjectivity of composite indicators

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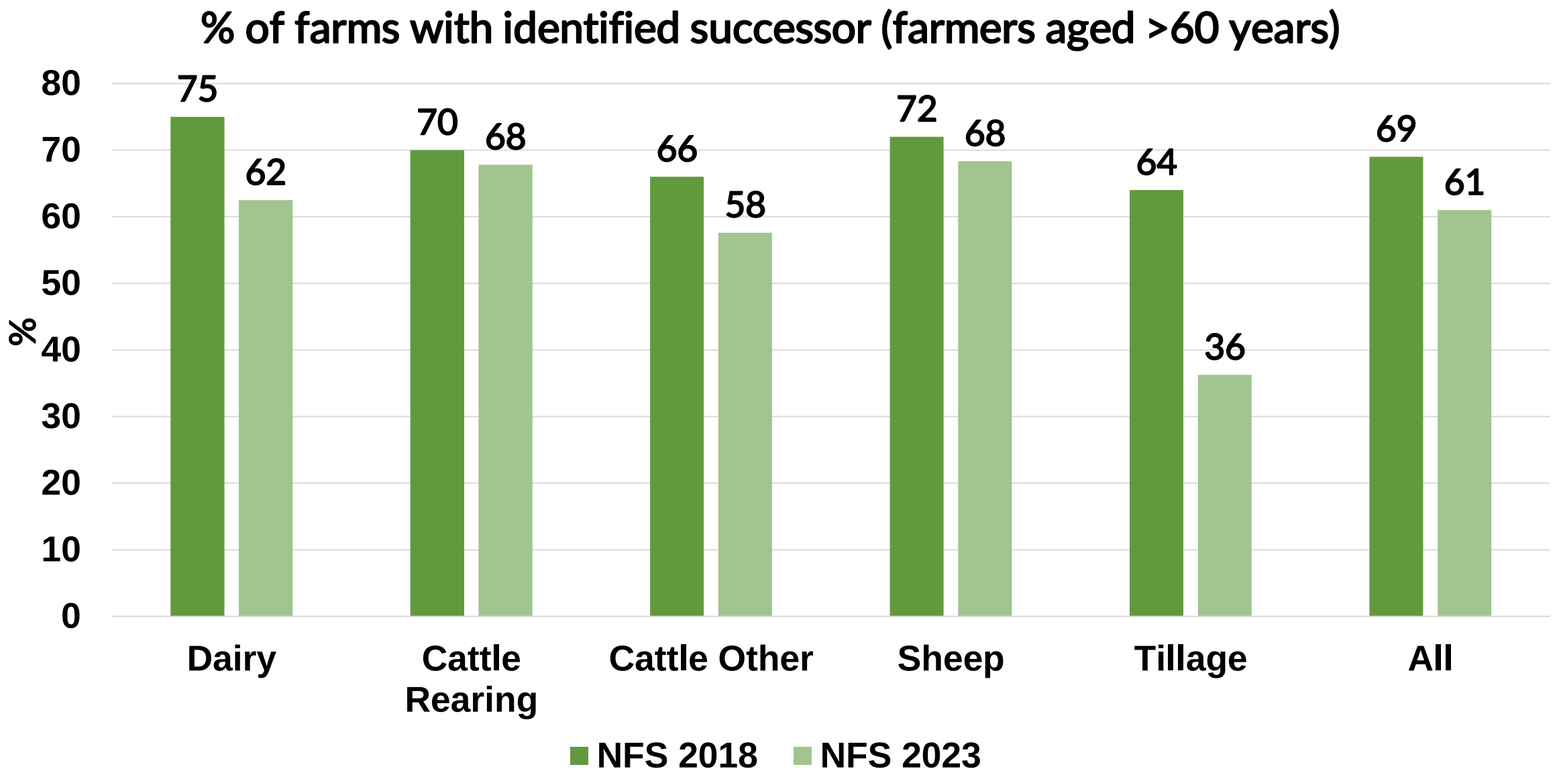
Generational renewal

- CSO 2020 - 33% of farm holders were aged >65 years, up from 23% in 1991
  Only 7% were aged <35 years, down from 13% over the same period



- NFS 2023- 6/10 farmers aged >60 have identified a successor – decline on 2018
- Ongoing research highlighting the nuanced nature of farm succession

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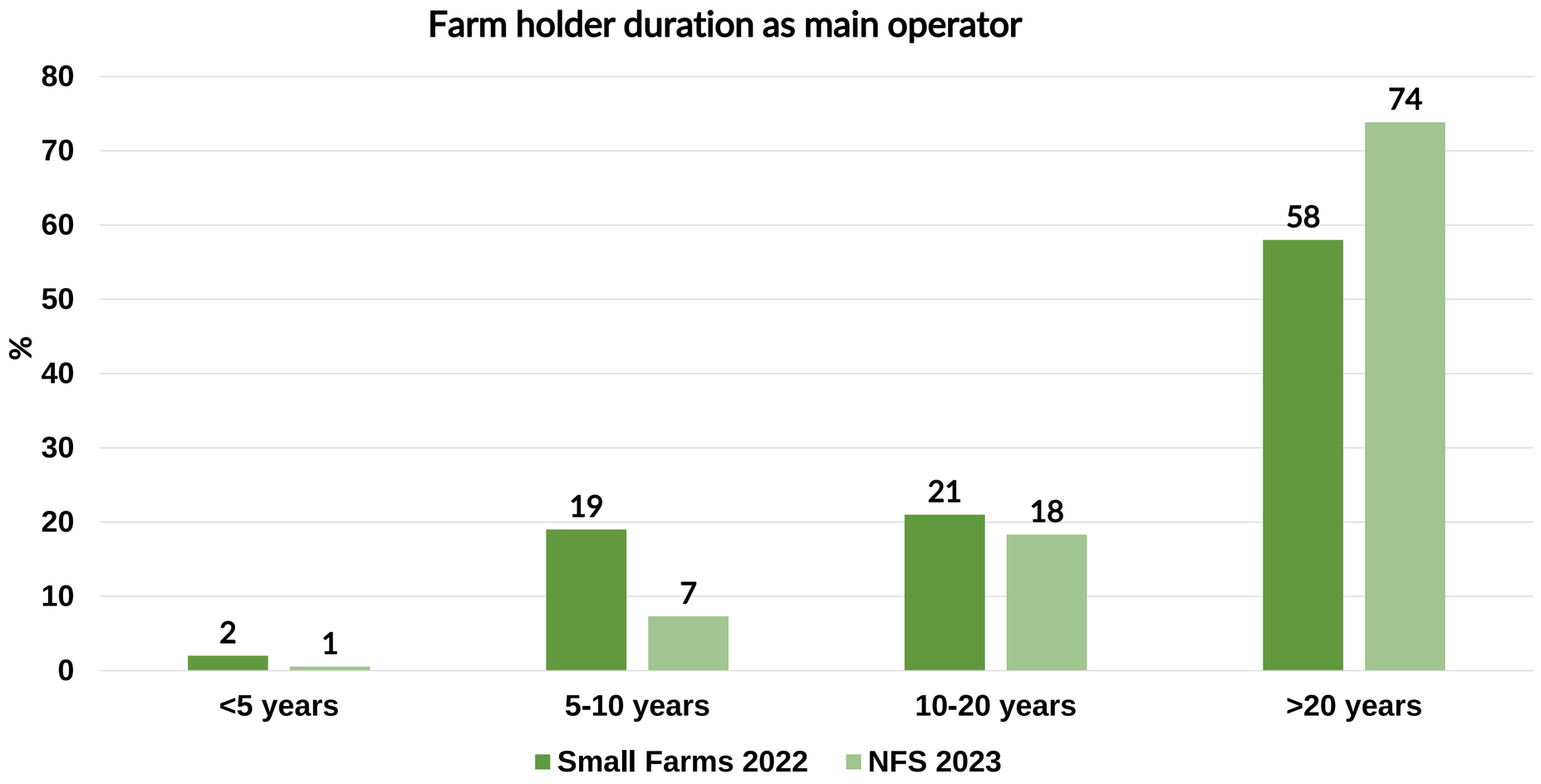
Generational renewal

- Almost 3/4 of farm holders have had managerial control for >20 years – the figure is a little lower on Small farms (<8K SO)



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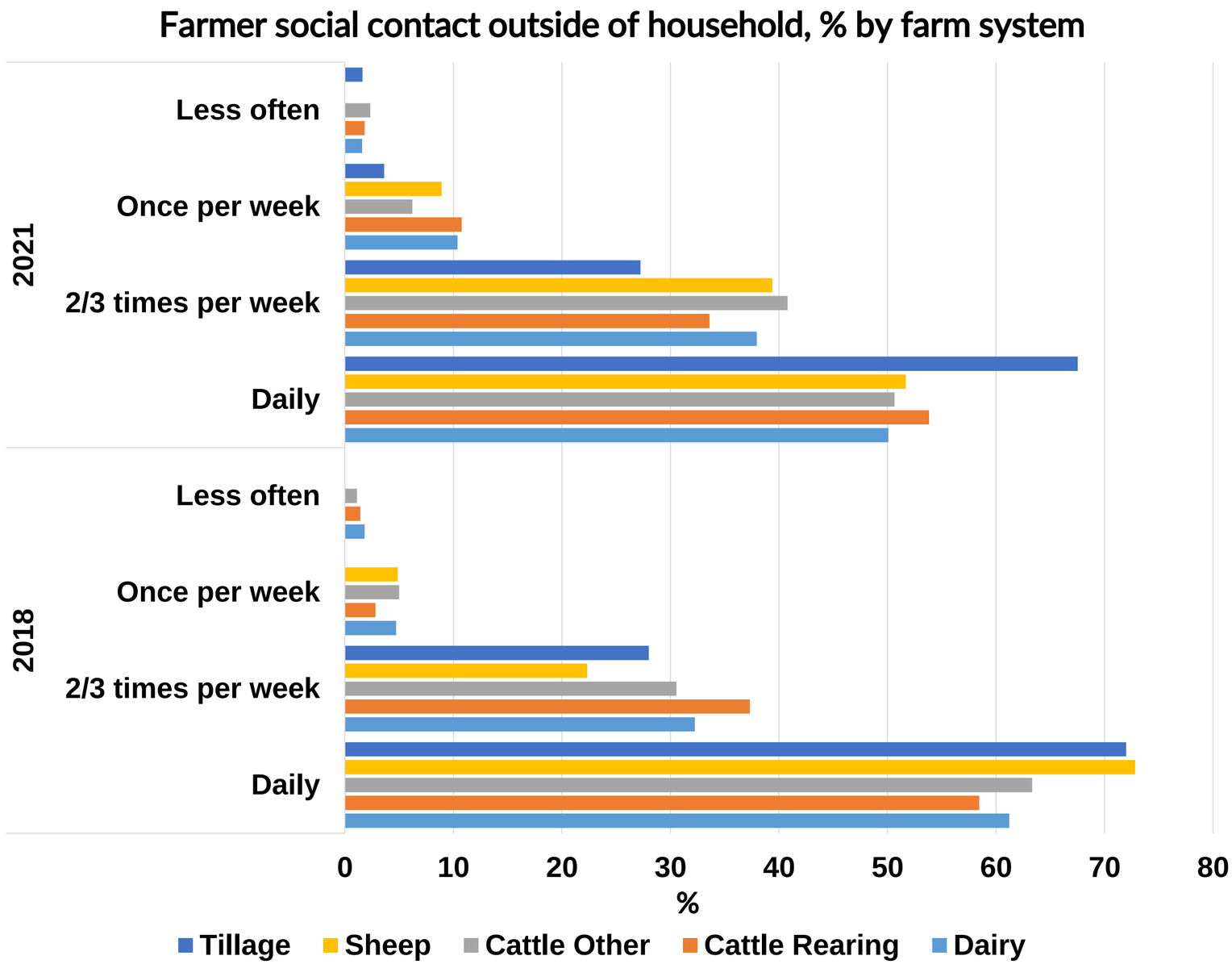
Social engagement



COVID impact in terms of daily contact evident across all farm types – particularly Sheep with a typically older farmer age profile

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Conclusions

- Growing recognition of importance of social issues in achieving broader sustainability goals
- Strategic Dialogue guiding principle - sustainability dimensions can be reinforcing
- Data collection issues
  - Challenging to collect broad ranging data every year
  - Sensitivity around wellbeing, quality of life etc.
  - Future linking to administrative data sources crucial e.g. animal medicines register

- Role of stakeholders in knowledge exchange and co-design of suitable survey instruments

MEASURE

GENFARMS

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Acknowledgements

- Voluntary co-operation of NFS farmers
- NFS data collection team, administrators & analysts
- Research collaborators
- Teagasc Walsh Scholarship Programme

WALSH SCHOLARSHIPS
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THANK YOU

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