

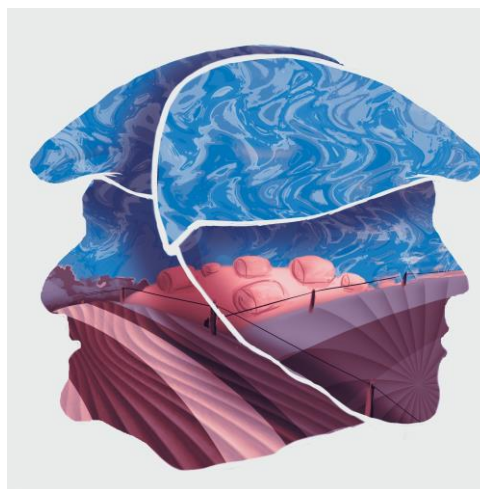
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Join to Farm



Key external stakeholders:

Dairy, beef, tillage & drystock farmers; female, male, older & younger farmers; Teagasc specialists; DAFM, the Law Society; Macra na Feirme.

Practical implications for stakeholders:

This project identified how Joint Farming Ventures (JFVs) can enhance the demographic profile and socio-economic sustainability of Irish farming, specifically identifying:

- How JFVs can operate to most meaningfully involve women and youth in agriculture for their benefit and for the benefit of the sector.
- Irish farmers' awareness of and preferences for different types of JFVs nationally
- Where, spatially (at county scale), there is greatest potential for different JFVs, highlighting spatial variations between different parts of the country.
- How JFVs may be supported through agricultural extension, in the form of practice-ready advisory tools accessible on a dedicated interactive web interface.

Main results:

We identified a diversity of ways in which women and youth may become involved in agriculture. Specifically, we identified three categories (progressive, competitive and reconstitutive) forms of participation involving meaningful participation and leveraging of resources, and two categories (integrative and substitutive) that do not. Our analysis also highlights that contributing to poor demographic diversity in Irish agriculture is a conflation between 'land owner' and the occupation of 'farmer'. While the importance of asset ownership cannot be ignored for empowered participation in agriculture, women and youth are typically excluded from policy schemes on the basis that they do not own land, despite working on farms/in JFVs. The nationally representative survey and spatial analysis found that JFVs with most potential in Ireland are farm partnerships and producer groups involving dairy and tillage farmers. However, farm partnerships are better known than other JFVs. From a spatial perspective the distribution of areas with higher potential are those with higher concentrations dairy enterprises i.e. Cork county, north Kerry, Tipperary, and east Donegal. The findings of the participatory focus groups indicate that benefits of JFVs are variable in practice and require genuine participation of women and youth in order for the agriculture sector to benefit.

Opportunity / Benefit:

Findings were translated into practice-ready extension tools to support impactful JFVs.

Collaborating Institutions:

NUI, Galway; UCC

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1. Project background:

A diverse farming population in terms of age, gender and skill is critical for the innovative and economic performance of the agri-food sector, as well as for social sustainability in rural areas. There is an officially acknowledged need at the national and EU level to encourage greater representation of younger farmers in the farming demographic, informed by statistical data showing that farmers in younger age cohorts have higher levels of educational attainment and economic performance (Europa, 2012). Equally, the importance of maintaining female farmers in agriculture is argued to be critical for enhancing innovation and growth in the agri-food sector (COPA, 2011) and quality of life in rural areas (Byrne and Shortall, 2009; Coveney, 2011). Maintaining age and gender diversity in farming of strategic importance in enhancing 'Knowledge, Training and Skills' in the farming sector, which is ranked by Food Harvest 2020 and FoodWise 2025 as a critical factor for future growth. However, traditions of protracted, patrilineal (father to son) inheritance and low land mobility hinder demographic diversity. Joint Farming Ventures (JFVs) are organisational innovations that may have the potential to manoeuvre around traditional land ownership traditions by supporting collaborations involving farm owners, women and youth.

2. Questions addressed by the project:

While relatively new, JFVs such as Milk Production Partnerships (MPPs) have demonstrated success thus far in Ireland (Macken-Walsh and Roche, 2012). Despite this the potential of a broader range of joint farming ventures in bringing about sustainable change in Irish agriculture was under-exploited and under-researched at the time the Join to Farm project was initiated. The Join to Farm project was an inter-disciplinary, applied research project to: explore a range of joint farming ventures that may possibly have potential in the Irish context; consider the capacity of the ventures to improve population diversity in terms of age, gender and skills; assess the prospects of Irish farmers' uptake of joint ventures; and assess how joint ventures can be effectively promoted through extension and policy.

3. The experimental studies:

The project's research approach was structured according to three main tasks, for which different methodological approaches were employed:

State of the Art

A review of the literature and existing secondary data was undertaken to identify the types of advantages associated with a diverse farming population, paying attention to specific advantages associated with representation in the farming demographic of (i) young farmers; (ii) female farmers; and (iii) farmers/entrepreneurs with diverse skills. A variety of examples of joint farming ventures are operating internationally and are directly instrumental for achieving population diversity in different ways. Joint farming ventures, such as farm partnerships, share milking, labour sharing, share farming, producer groups/farm clusters in addition to facilitating enhanced scale and productivity, facilitate collaboration between farmers of different age, gender and skill. The potential of joint farming ventures was explored and the particular benefits associated with each type was identified, paying attention to how they are instrumental to realising benefits for improving population diversity in terms of age, gender and skill. International state of the art in how different joint ventures are supported by policy and extension was examined. Particular attention was paid to the policies, measures and extension methods that have been used to promote and support the formation/establishment of joint farming ventures.

Survey and Spatial Tool to Identify the Potential of Joint Farming Ventures in Ireland

Two surveys were completed. The first survey, which is nationally representative, was implemented by phone and provided an overview of the general farming populations' awareness of, and attitudes towards

joint ventures. Based on these findings, the second survey was refocused on joint venture participants only, and using a qualitative methodology, sought in-depth information on the experience of joint ventures from a purposive targeted sample. Given its approach, this second survey provides generalisation on key issues around joint venture participation rather than statistical generalisation to the broader population of joint venture participants. The static spatial tool identifies, at county level, those areas of the country with potential for the development of joint ventures. An electoral district (ED) scale map was developed to highlight spatial variation between different parts of the country. The map provides a profile of farm structures and enterprises, and drawing on the results of Survey 1, it provides an assessment of the potential for partnerships within the county.

Participatory Design of Extension Template

A Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology was designed for five focus group sessions, which informed the co-design of extension resources. The extension resources are research-informed communication and facilitation tools to effectively promote the greater inclusion of women and youth in agriculture; and to facilitate farmers to consider gender, age and compatibility issues when establishing Joint Farming Ventures. The extension resources are published online with the spatial tool, which enhances the navigability and accessibility of the tools for advisors and other professionals working with farmers. The url for the tool is: www.farmappvice.com

4. Main results:

The sociological review supported a nuanced understanding of the diversity of ways in which women and youth may participate in agriculture. A main lesson arising from the review is that it is insufficient for policy initiatives to simply increase the number of JFVs and women and youth involved in agriculture 'on paper' and crucially important are initiatives to foster the meaningful participation of women and youth so that their skills and knowledges are leveraged for the benefit of the sector. Within this context, it is important to note that although adequate remuneration of women, youth and men is important to those seeking careers in agriculture, having an ownership stake in the farm business is an important mid and long term goal. Therefore, JFVs providing farmers with a genuine ownership stake, rather than employment alone, have most potential in the Irish context. The framework we developed allows an understanding of the different ways youth and women can become involved in agriculture – some of which should ideally be avoided (substitutive, integrative) and others that should be pursued (progressive, competitive, reconstitutive). It's also the case that to support JFVs, women and youth working on farms should be recognised by policy schemes as farmers, irrespective of whether or not they own land. Recognising all people who work in agriculture as farmers is important for attracting and building human resources in the sector.

Analysis of the survey indicates that there is high awareness among farmers of different types of JFVs (86% of respondents) with farmers most aware of farm partnerships, family partnerships and producer groups. At the same time a large proportion of farmers (49%) is not sure that a JFV would definitely benefit their farm, although dairy farmers are more optimistic about the potential benefits of a JFV compared to farmers in other farming systems. Given the large percentage of respondents who think that a JFV would 'definitely not' or 'probably not' be of benefit to their farm it is unsurprising that 71% of respondents stated that they were unlikely to establish a JFV in the future and only 10% stated that were 'quite likely' or 'very likely' to do so. Looking at farming systems, those with a Mostly Cattle enterprise suggested that they are not likely not to establish a JFV in the near future whilst there are higher proportions of 'Mostly Dairy' (19%) and 'Mostly Tillage' (27%) farmers that will consider doing so. Based on these data, it is possible to conclude that the JFVs with most potential are farm partnerships, family partnerships and producer groups among dairy and tillage farmers. Overall, 29% of all farmers reported that they thought that JFVs would be of benefit to them and 10% of all farmers reported that they were quite likely or very likely to consider establishing a JFV in the future. Notwithstanding this, there remains a substantial segment of the remaining farming population (22%) who responded that they did not know whether or not a JFV would be of benefit to them, so the potential for JFVs could be increased if this segment of the farming population is convinced of their value.

From a spatial perspective the distribution of areas with higher potential are those with higher concentrations of, particularly, dairy enterprises, i.e. Cork county, north Kerry, Tipperary, and east Donegal. This reflects the survey results, which established that at 46%, Mainly Dairy enterprises stood out in terms of the percentage of respondents who thought that a JFV could possibly or definitely benefit the development of their enterprise. This contrasted with 27% - 30% amongst the other enterprise types. Areas with concentrations of tillage producers, e.g. north Dublin, Wexford and Waterford, also stand out as having higher potential. These data need to be treated with caution given that only 4% of the sample was classified as 'Mainly Tillage' enterprises. With respect to those areas classified as having 'lower' potential there are a number of important

points worth noting; firstly all areas have potential regardless of how low that potential is; secondly, whilst these areas are the most likely to benefit from JFV they are unlikely to engage in such initiatives due to the combination of older age profile of the population of farmers and high proportions of smaller, drystock enterprises; finally, the wider policy context needs to be considered as individual farmers weight up the potential risks and rewards associated with engaging in a JFV compared to, for example, long term leasing or afforestation.

The findings of focus groups highlighted that in order to enhance the demographic profile of agriculture it is more important to focus on how Joint Farming Ventures (JFVs) can be strategically used to enhance the participation of women and youth rather than focusing on the JFVs themselves (JFVs do not necessarily deliver greater participation of women and youth unless they are strategically used to do so). This is confirmed by research internationally that JFVs can be entered into tokenistically to access extension/financial benefits rather than improving the meaningful participation of women and youth in agriculture. Focus groups sessions concentrated on how women and youth may be better represented in agriculture and how JFVs may be used as instrumental in achieving better representation rather than JFVs *sui generis*. In this context, the importance of policy recognition of farmers beyond those who own land was emphasised.

Using a capacity-building *Participatory Action Research (PAR)* methodology, practice-ready advisory tools and a flexible extension template for the promotion and development of joint farming ventures were developed. The flexible template/resources – the navigability and accessibility of which has been enhanced by an online interactive interface - provide guidance to practitioners using group-based and other extension methods (Teagasc advisors and private advisors) in promoting the key benefits of joint ventures and in addressing the key challenges to success. Farmers, as participants in this learning process, will be the ultimate beneficiaries of the enhanced extension resources. The url of the interactive interface is www.farmappvice.com

5. Opportunity/Benefit:

Advisory tools, including spatial information tools, for the promotion and development of joint farming ventures were developed are also accessible on a dedicated interactive web interface (www.farmappvice.com). The tools provide guidance to practitioners using group-based extension methods (Teagasc advisors and private advisors) in promoting the key benefits of JFVs and in addressing the key challenges to success. Farmers, of both genders and at all stages of the lifecourse, will be the ultimate beneficiaries of the enhanced extension resources. The url of the interactive interface is: www.farmappvice.com

6. Dissemination:

Main publications:

Cush, P. and Macken-Walsh, A. (2018) Reconstituting Male Identities through Joint Farming Ventures in Ireland, *Sociologia Ruralis*, Wiley
 Cush, P., Macken-Walsh, A., Byrne, A. (2018) Joint Farming Ventures in Ireland: gender identities of the self and the social, *Journal of Rural Studies*, Elsevier
 Hooks, T., McCarthy, O., Power, C., Macken-Walsh, A. (2017) A Co-Operative Business Approach in a Values Based Supply Chain: a case study of a beef co-operative, *Journal of Cooperative Organisation and Management*
 Hooks T., Macken-Walsh, A., McCarthy, O., Power, C. (2017) The Impact of a Values Based Supply Chain (VBSC) on farm level viability, sustainability and resilience: case-study evidence, *Sustainability*, 9, 267.
 Cush, P. and Macken-Walsh, A. (2016) Cooperation in Irish Agriculture: the potential of Joint Farming Ventures (JFVs), *European Countryside*, De Gruyter
 Cush, P. and Macken-Walsh, A. (2016) Farming 'through the ages': Joint Farming Ventures in Ireland, *Rural Society*, Vo. 25, Iss. 2, Taylor and Francis

Popular publications:

Macken-Walsh, A., Byrne, A., Curran, T., Roche, B. (2014) Strategies of resilience: Cooperation in Irish family farming. *T-Research*, Summer 2014
 Macken-Walsh, A. (2014) Food, Sustainability and the Family Farm, *Burren Insight*, Issue 6, BurrenBeo Trust, May 2014.

7. Compiled by: Áine Macken-Walsh, Kevin Heanue, David Meredith