

Factors Influencing Tillage Students' Decision to Diversify into Horticultural Food Production

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Abstract

Innovation is vital for the development of the agricultural sector in Ireland. Opportunities are present within the horticultural food production sector for those who are responsive to market or sustainability signals. Due to shifting market trends and agricultural policy objectives, diversification is an option being promoted and built into EU agriculture and rural development policy. This study analyses factors influencing innovative diversification into the horticultural food sector from the perspective of level five tillage students in Kildalton Agricultural College. Based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), this study uses a survey, semi-structured interview and 'before and after' analysis to assesses participants' perceptions, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control towards diversification and horticultural food production. Characteristics of 'Potential Innovators', 'Non-Innovators' and factors influencing diversification were identified among the participants. Social influences, a lack of knowledge and exposure and a perception of risk associated with the horticultural sector were the primary barriers to diversification into the sector. This study also assesses the influence of the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) on innovation and diversification in Irish agriculture and proposes areas to enhance its effectiveness.