

# Transitional Arrangements: The Importance of Intergenerational Communication and Cooperation in the Farm Transfer Process

RURALIZATION Online Conference

*Facilitating our Future Farmers:*

*National and International Perspectives*

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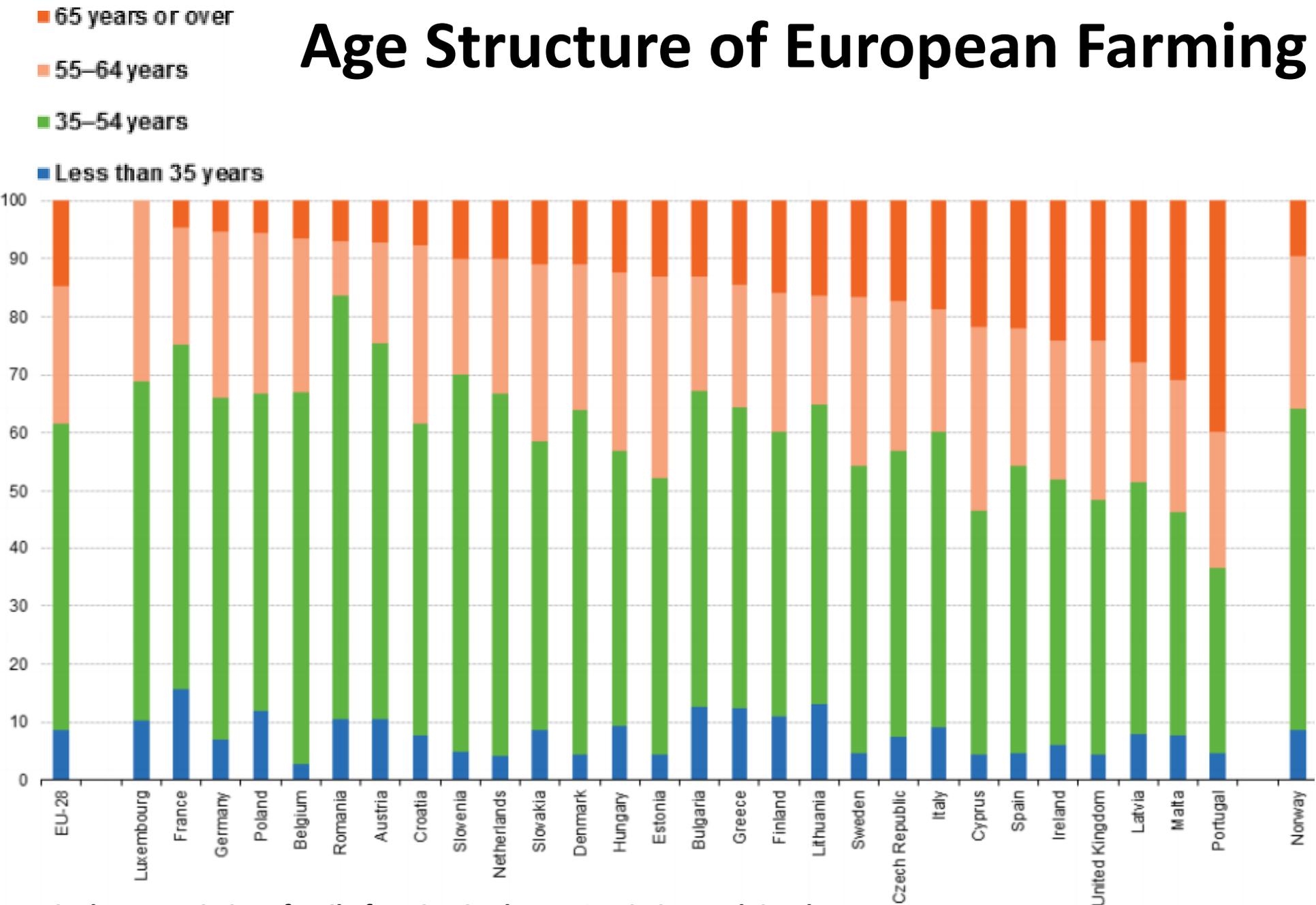
# 'Greying' of the Farming Community



- **Demographic trends reveal that close to one-third of European farmers are above the normal retirement age of 65.**
- **Only 5.6% of farms are run by farmers under the age of 35**
- **It is estimated that for every young farmer, there are 9 older farmers.**



# Age Structure of European Farming



Agriculture statistics - family farming in the EU Statistics Explained

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/38078.pdf>

# Generational Renewal in Agriculture

**This is a pressing matter in contemporary Europe, due to the fact that generational renewal in agriculture is viewed as crucial for survival, continuity and future prosperity of the:**

- **Farming industry**
- **Traditional family farm model &**
- **Broader sustainability of rural communities.**

**Key objective of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Reform post-2020.**



# Generational Renewal in Agriculture



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# Intergenerational Farm Transfer

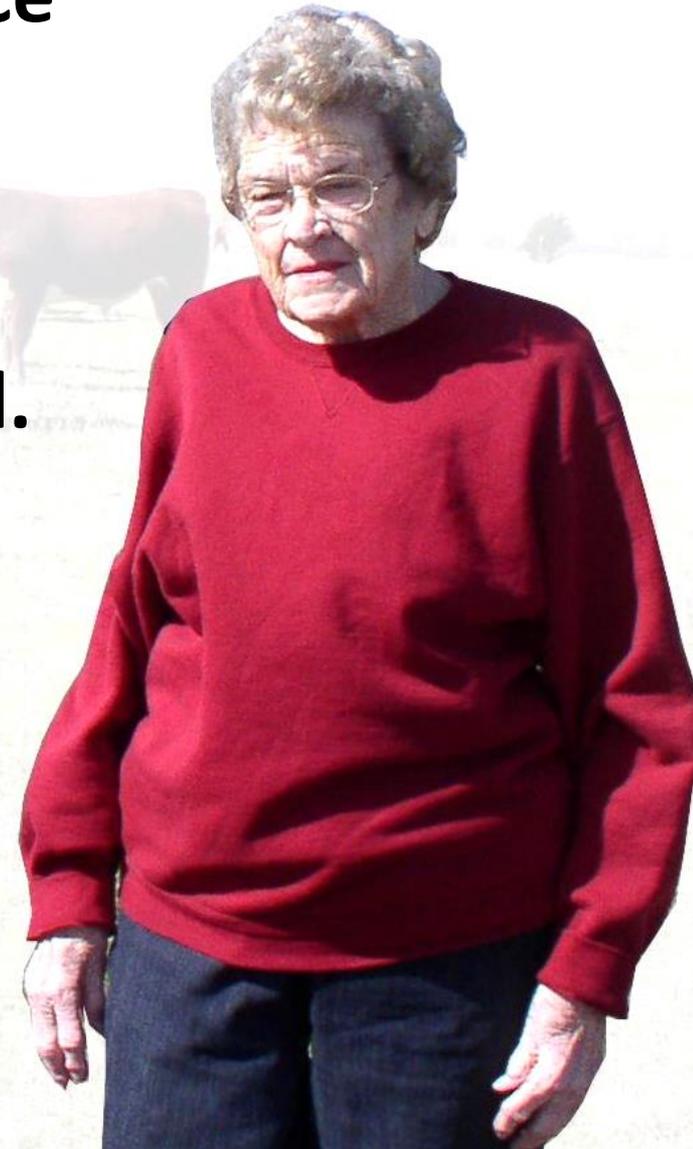
- An aging farming population raises concerns about the future competitiveness of European agriculture and guaranteed food production in the coming decades.
- Major challenge presents itself in the area of intergenerational farm transfer.



- **Gaining access to land is widely reported to be the single largest barrier facing young people attempting to enter the agricultural sector in Europe.**
- **The lack of land mobility currently experienced is stifling agricultural growth and development by preventing young ‘enthusiastic’ farmers gaining access to productive assets (Bogue, 2013).**



- **The older generation's reluctance to 'step aside' and retire to facilitate young farmers who want to establish a career in farming is globally recognized.**
- **This is despite the array of financial enticements encouraging the process.**



# Emotional Ties to Farming

- **Human Side - overlooked**
- **Clear disconnect between farm transfer policy measures and the mind-set of its targeted population.**
- **Cultural expectation that 'farmers don't retire'.**
- **Older farmers wish to remain active and productive**

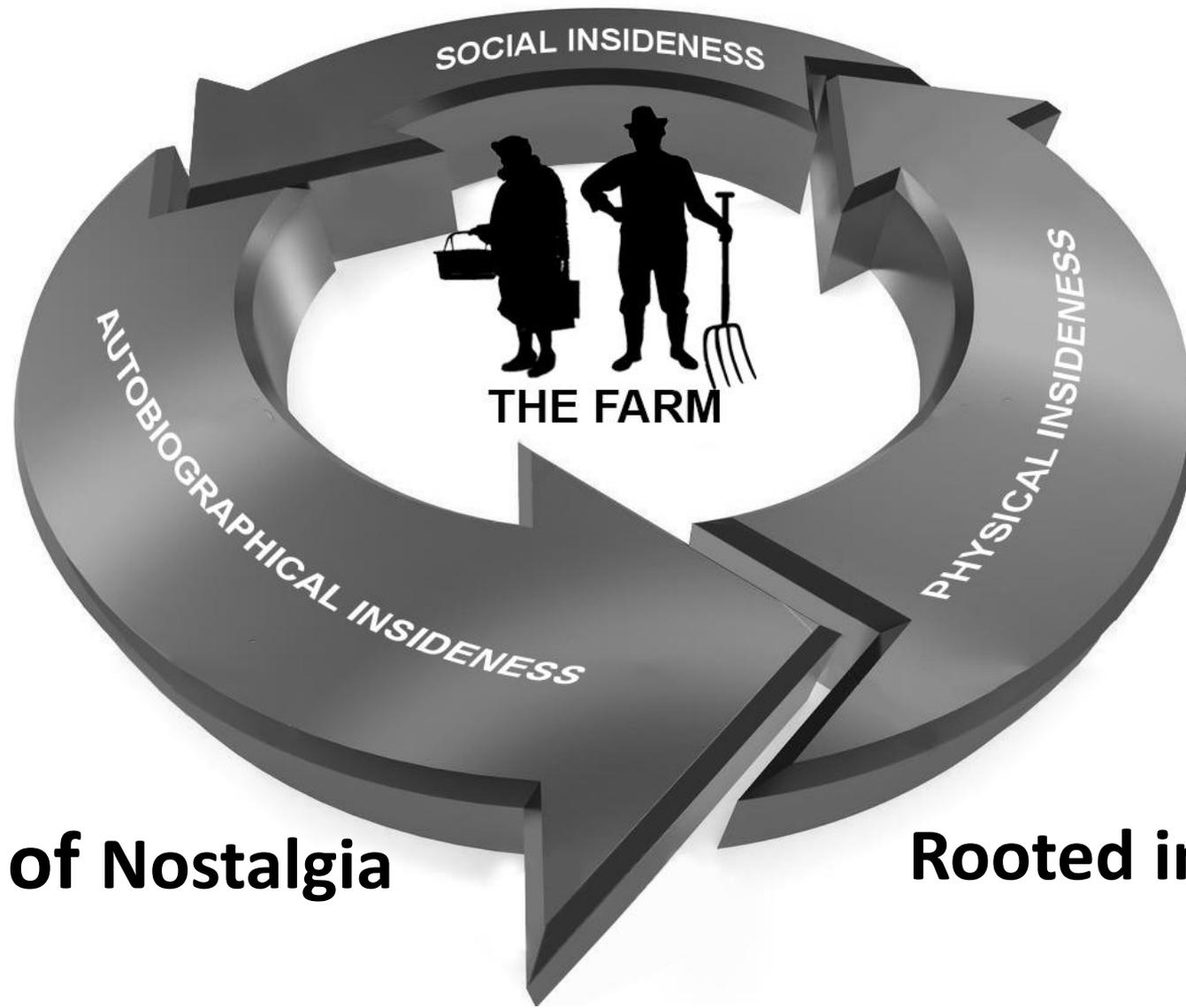


# Farmer-Farm Relationship



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## Legitimate Connectedness



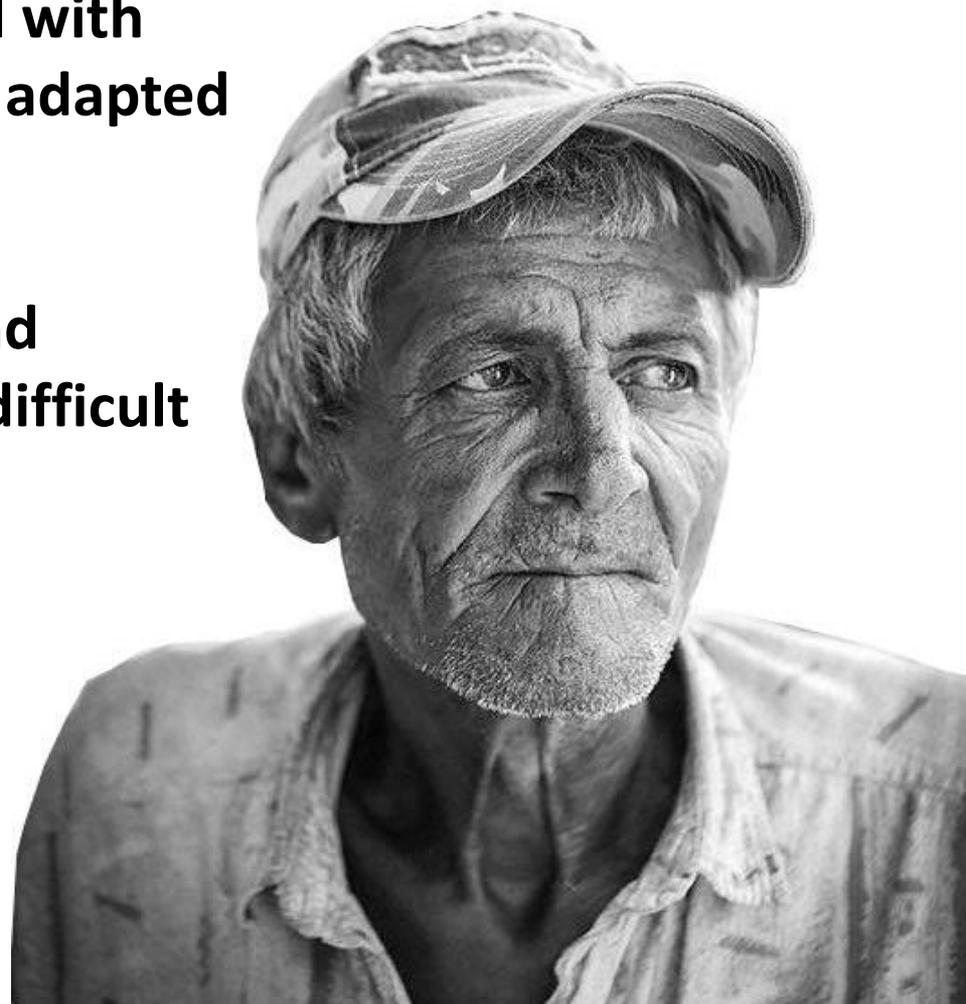
**Sense of Nostalgia**

**Rooted in Place**

# Soft Issues.....?



- **Challenge of transition is overwhelming for a growing number of ageing farmers.**
- **Policy should be more concerned with the welfare of older farmers and adapted to their needs.**
- **The ‘soft issues’, i.e. the social and emotional factors, are the most difficult issues to deal with.**
- **These really are the ‘hard issues’.**
- **An age-diverse farming population is imperative.**



# Emerging Narrative



Common Agricultural Policy 2020:  
Young Farmer Roadmap for  
Generational Renewal  
Macra na Feirme Policy Paper



‘Macra na Feirme suggests a **move away from focusing aid on retirement grounds to farmers exiting agriculture** with a shift in concentration aimed at farm succession. Succession of farms from the older to younger generation should become a positive process’ (p.29).

‘Macra na Feirme proposes a **new focus on farm succession rather than retirement**. To create a positive view around farm succession, that supports older generations’ (p.21).

# Collaborative Farming Arrangements



- **Collaborative farming arrangements such as farm partnership, share farming and contract rearing have actively been promoted within Irish policy discourses as ideal stepping-stones to intergenerational farm transfer in recent years.**
- **While farm partnerships etc, appear to ‘tick all the boxes’, they will be of little benefit if policy fails to consider methods of addressing the micro-politics and management power dynamics at play within farm households.**



# Uncovering Obstacles

## Family Farm Power Dynamic

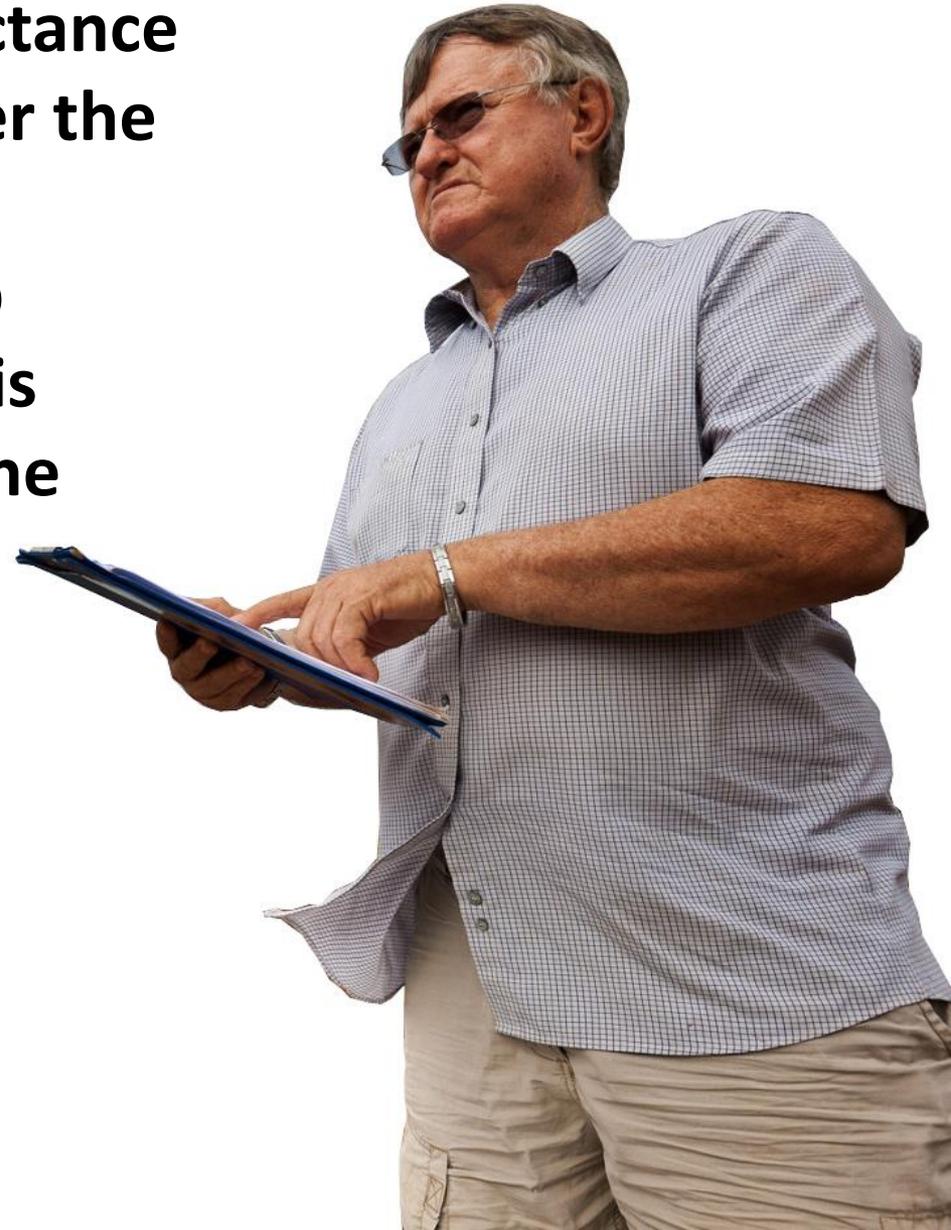


# Managerial Dynamics at Play



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- **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.**



# Hierarchical Relations

**Asymmetric hierarchical relations within farm households can be sustained through a veiled but powerful mix of defence mechanisms and tactics, delivered through everyday channels of communication and cognition (Conway et al., 2017).**

- **Reiterating one's indispensability**
- **Imposing one's mind-set**
- **Unilateral acts of generosity**
- **Reasserting one's authority**



# Farmer Interview Quote Example

Colm, a 71 year old mixed livestock farmer from the South West:

***‘Even though most of the farm is now signed over to my son, in my head it’s still mine, well while I am fit and able to do a bit around the place anyways. In fairness though, I’ve made sure that all the returns on the cattle and sheep and everything else are going into the farm account which is now in his name, but at the same time, I stay in charge of that account, because I do the biro work you see, I sign the cheque books and that kind of stuff. It makes sense though, like I’ve been doing it for a hell of a lot longer than he has after all’.***



## The Prince Charles Syndrome (Keating, 1996)



# Next Generation of Farmers

- **Younger farmers looking for more independence and responsibility.**
- **Generational renewal goes beyond a reduction in the average age of farmers - It is also about empowering a new generation of highly qualified young farmers to bring the full benefits of technology in order to support sustainable farming practices in Europe.**
- **The modern farm is a dynamic workplace, often using innovative technology such as milking robots or irrigation via mobile phones.**
- **The older generation must encourage younger family members to be involved, bring them into the decision-making process and permit sharing of control to maintain peak efficiency**



# The Language of Farming



- Ultimately the older generation of farmers decide whether farm transfer occurs or not.



- Most sophisticated of farm transfer/land mobility schemes are of little avail if policy makers are not adequately prepared and competent to 'understand the language of farming' and how hard it is for them to let go.

# Farmer-Sensitive Policy Design and Implementation

A cultural shift on an age-old problem of intergenerational farm transfer requires well-informed and intelligent policy interventions and strategies to help ease the stresses of the process.



# Challenge for Policy



## The challenge for policy makers and practitioners is twofold:

- Consider methods in which this power can be legitimately exercised, in the interest of whatever ‘good’ is at hand (preserve the crucial intergenerational dynamic of family farming).

&

- Remain cognizant of the fact that it has the potential to act against the good at hand (inappropriate domination of the younger generation).

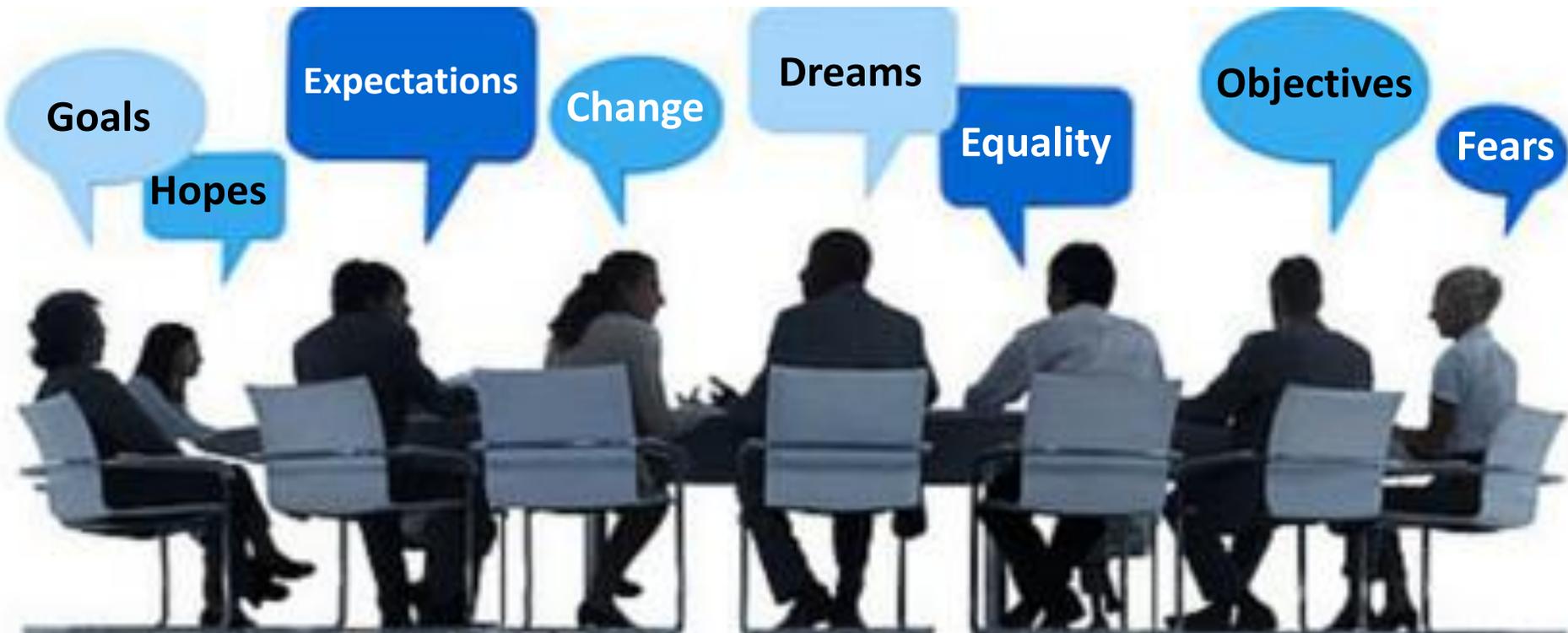


**As every farmer and each family situation is unique, there are no uniform or easily prescribed solutions to solving this complex challenge, however it needs to be handled professionally.**



# Farm Succession Facilitation Service

•A Farm Succession Facilitator/Coordinator, trained in accordance with an international best practice model (International Farm Transition Network in the U.S.A.), is essential; particularly when facilitating discussions between old and young family members' vision, objectives, goals and expectations for the farm.





**Farm Succession Coordinator Certification Training**  
**September 21—23, 2015**  
**University of Wisconsin Pyle Conference Center**  
**Madison, Wisconsin**

Monday & Tuesday, Sept. 21 & 22: 8:30 am—4:45 pm  
Wednesday, Sept. 23: 8:30—noon

University of Wisconsin's Center for Dairy Profitability in collaboration with the International Farm Transition Network is offering a Farm Succession Coordinator Certification Training on September 21—23, 2015 at the Pyle Conference Center on the UW-Madison campus. This training is for individuals interested in becoming a Certified Farm Succession Coordinator. This program is offered to agricultural professionals, service providers, educators, and organizational leaders who work with farm businesses on succession issues.

Succession planning is not only the transfer of assets, but also the transfer of labor, skills and decision-making. It requires financial analysis to ensure the business can support the goals of all the members and requires planning and communication skills. Many farm businesses are realizing the importance of creating a succession plan and the value of a skilled facilitator to lead the process of clarifying their goals and ideas, exploring options, and coordinating communication. A facilitated process can lead to better informed business planning and estate planning decisions.

This training will offer participants insight on the barriers to farm succession, strategies on working with farm businesses, tools to guide the facilitation process and opportunities to consider real-life examples of farm succession issues.

### Who should attend?

- UW Extension Educators
- WTCS Farm Business Instructors
- Accountants
- Tax Planners
- Estate Planners
- Financial Advisors
- Attorneys
- Ag Lenders
- Farm Management Association Staff
- Conservation Specialists
- Mediators
- Farm Family Consultants

### Registration is \$750/participant and includes:

- Continental breakfast and lunch all 3 days
- Conference reference materials
- Certification as an IFTN Certified Farm Succession Coordinator (after successfully completing certification exam)
- One year membership to the IFTN

Register online: <http://bit.ly/farmsuccession>

A block of rooms are being held for participants at the Lowell Center, 610 Langdon St., Madison. Lowell Center is just one block from the Pyle Center. Room rate for this block is \$82/night + tax. This block is limited and will be released on August 20th. You can make reservations by using this link: <http://bit.ly/farm20sep> or calling 866-301-1753 and use the code: FARM.

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United States Department of Agriculture  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture



Also supported by the International Farm Transition Network and University of Wisconsin Extension



**One of the key activities of the IFTN is that they offer a 20-hour training programme on the various elements of farm transition and succession planning for professionals working with farmers who are interested in becoming a Certified IFTN Farm Succession Coordinator/Facilitator.**



# Local Ties & Global Reach

**The need for policy relevant research in this field is imperative as this is not just a national or even European issue, but a global one.**



# International Farm Transition Network



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farmtransition.org/resources/

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Timely and relevant information from qualified sources on farm and rural succession.

**International Perspectives on Farm Succession and Retirement in Later Life**  
By Dr. Shane Conway, National University of Ireland, Galway

**RESOURCES**

Follow the links below to explore farm succession planning organizations and institutions. Farm families and farmers can find these resources useful in planning how the business will be passed on.

16:35

farmtransition.org/internat

### IFTN

#### INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON FARM SUCCESSION AND RETIREMENT IN LATER LIFE



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#### INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON FARM SUCCESSION AND RETIREMENT IN LATER LIFE

By Dr. Shane Conway  
National University of Ireland, Galway

The farming community increasingly consists of a farm population with a high age profile. Demographic trends in many parts of the USA, Europe and beyond reveal an invasion of the age pyramid with those aged 65 years and over constituting the fastest growing sector of the farming workforce.

Dr Shane Conway, Postdoctoral Researcher in the Discipline of Geography's Rural Studies Unit at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway) was awarded a Farm Succession Coordinator Contribution by the International Farm Transition Network (IFTN) in September 2015 whilst he was carrying out his PhD on the issue entitled Exploring the Human Dynamics Affecting the Intergenerational Family Farm Transfer Process in Later Life: A Roadmap for Future Policy. This PhD research, supported by Dr John McDonagh and Dr Maire Farrell at NUI Galway provided an in-depth, nuanced understanding of the complex nature of the various emotional and social factors governing the behaviour patterns and attitudes of older farmers facing the 'late process' of farm succession and retirement.

Empirical findings from the research indicate that the senior generation's reluctance and reduced willingness to allow the status quo of the existing management and ownership structure of the family farm to fundamentally change within the farming community. The reasons why older farmers fail to plan effectively and expeditiously for the future as an imperative, and range from the potential loss of identity, status and power that may occur as a result of engaging in the process, to the interest, multi-level relationship farmers have with their farms in later life. The common denominator however is the intergenerational family farm transfer is about emotion. The so-called 'soft issues' in the emotional and social issues, identified in my research, are the issues that inhibit and generate the older generation's decisions on the future trajectory of the farm. Such issues have resulted in intractable challenges for farm succession and retirement policy over the past 100 years. These really are the 'hard issues'.

In terms of research recommendations, as it is the senior generation who ultimately decide whether intergenerational farm transfer occurs or not, Dr Conway's research findings suggest that financial interventions, encouraging intergenerational farm transfer must be accompanied by a comprehensive set of interventions to deal with the personal and social loss that the senior generation of the farming community may experience upon transferring the farm. A series of recommendations are set forth general specifically towards ensuring farmers' emotional wellbeing and quality of life in old age, such as the services of a certified Farm Succession Facilitator, trained in accordance with an international best practice model, such as that of the International Farm Transition Network (IFTN) in the USA, 'farm succession' policy design and implementation, and the establishment of a national voluntary organisation that 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 (Gleaners of the Land) for example. Such recommendations are directed at policy makers and programme designers who have the means and ability to deliver future interventions and programmes that constructively deal with problematic issues surrounding this complex and highly topical area.

As this research on the issue of intergenerational farm transfer is not just a national or even European challenge, but a global one, the recommendations outlined in the research are equally as relevant and applicable in the USA as they are in an Irish context. They essentially aim to allow older farmers to maintain and sustain normal day to day activity and behaviour on their farms in later life, to help ensure their sense of purpose and quality of life in their age, whilst still 'volunteering the time' to allow for the necessary disengagement of managerial responsibilities and ownership of the family farm to their successors. If this fails to materialise however, there will continue to be extraordinary socio-economic challenges for younger people seeking to pursue farming as a career. As it is a worldwide policy issue that the survival, continuity and future prosperity of the agricultural sector, traditional family farm model and broader sustainability of rural society depend on an age-diverse farming population, these recommendations are very timely.

Dr Conway continually advocates in his academic publications and in the farming press that policy must not forget about, and disregard the older generation of the farming community when devising generational renewal in agriculture policy. Farming is a way of life for many of them and there can be detrimental consequences to their emotional wellbeing if they are cut off from their daily routines on the farm. Furthermore, the loss of older farmers from the farming sector can create critical shortages of experienced personnel, which in turn can have negative effects on farm performance. The older generation hold an invaluable store of locally specific tacit and lay knowledge developed over years of regularized interaction and experience working on the family farm, that the younger generation have not yet accumulated. Such 'tacit-specific human capital' as it is referred to in academic literature, is not easily transferable, communicated or loanable, and as a result, the family farm may be left in the hands of a young, inexperienced farmer, unable to make competent management decisions without the continued guidance and advice of the senior generation.

Dr Conway has published this research in a number of international peer reviewed journals since he completed the Farm Succession Coordinator Certification training programme offered by the International Farm Transition Network (IFTN) at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in September 2015. Please see below:

- Conway, S.F., McDonagh, J., Farrell, M. & Kinsella, A. (2015) Human dynamics and the intergenerational farm transfer process in later life: A roadmap for future generational renewal in agriculture policy. *International Journal of Agricultural Management*, 1(5), 22. DOI Link: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263424343>  
eprint & fulltext: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263424343>
- Conway, S.F., McDonagh, J., Farrell, M. & Kinsella, A. (2015) Do death do us part? Exploring the Irish farmer-farm relationship in later life through the lens of 'habitus'. *International Journal of Agricultural Management*, 7(5), 113. DOI Link: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263424343>  
eprint & fulltext: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263424343>
- Conway, S.F., McDonagh, J., Farrell, M. & Kinsella, A. (2015) Uncovering Obstacles: The Exercise of Symbolic Power in the Complex Arena of Intergenerational Family Farm Transfer. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 34, 63-75. DOI Link: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263424343>
- Conway, S.F., McDonagh, J., Farrell, M. & Kinsella, A. (2016) Grass Agricultural Activity Forecast? Underestimating the Importance of Symbolic Capital. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 44, 164-176. DOI Link: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263424343>

- The role of a **Certified IFTN Farm Succession Facilitator/Coordinator** is not to come up with instant solutions, instead they guide and support farm members through the process in an unbiased manner.
- Their duties 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.**
- Take place outside the family home to neutralize any existing hierarchical household structures (i.e. the older generation's customary seat at the top of the kitchen table may reflect power dynamics within the family for example).



- **Intergenerational communication is key to effective succession planning**
- **Bring all family members together to discuss, evaluate and clarify the current status of the farm business.**
- **Uncover each individual's views, their perceived role on the farm and how they foresee the farm business being dealt with in the future**
- **Facilitator then directs them towards the many different tools, resources and strategies needed to achieve a shared vision.**



# Keeping Discussions on Track



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- **Help farm members navigate through difficult conversations.**
- **Clarify expectations and avoid assumptions amongst farm members.**
- **Tension and even conflict can arise from almost any aspect of the succession plan, particularly when disparities have arisen.**
- **A Facilitator ensures that tough questions and emotions are dealt with, and various ‘what if’ scenarios are investigated.**
- **Achieving outcomes with a shared understanding and common agreement will help farm members from both generations make better informed decisions on the future trajectory of the farm, in a collective manner.**



# Succession Facilitation Vs Mediation

- The role and indeed usefulness of mediation in the farm transfer planning process is outlined in Teagasc's Guide to Transferring the Family Farm (Teagasc, 2015).
- Mediation is generally seen as intervention in a dispute however (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', 'facilitation/coordination service' is more appropriate.



**In recognition of the heterogeneity of the farming population, the ideas presented here should not be viewed as 'one size fits all model' for 'fixing' the farm succession/land mobility situation (problem).**

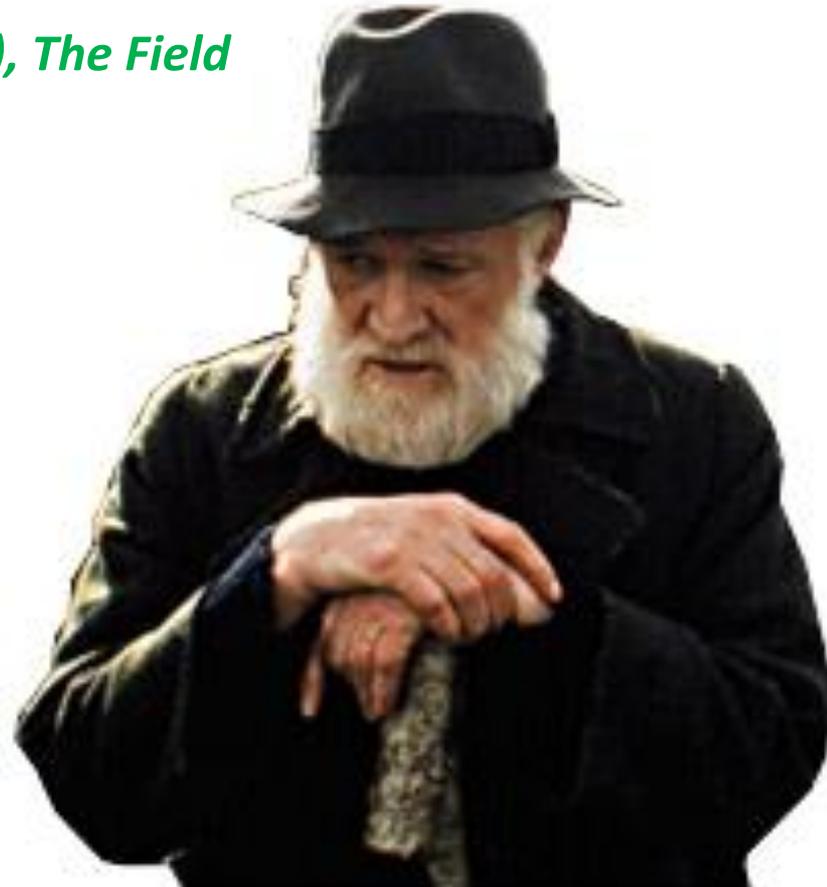
**However, addressing the human side of the process is essential moving forward.**



# Thank you for your attention

*'It's my field. It's my child. I nursed it. I nourished it. I saw to its every want. I dug the rocks out of it with my bare hands and I made a living thing of it! My only want is that green grass, that lovely green grass, and you want to take it away from me, and in the sight of God I can't let you do that.'*

*John B. Keane (1965), The Field*



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