

Appendix 20: West of Ireland (Ireland, SC5)

Organising partner:	NUI Galway	Innovation Type
Practice:	Vital agriculture and forestry in Uusimaa region: The ELINA project (Finland, FI8B)	
Practice context:	NUTS 3 region - Uusimaa - Predominantly urban	
Confrontation context:	NUTS 3 region - West of Ireland - Predominantly rural	
Workshop location:	Online	
Date:	October 26th 2021	

Summary

Exploring the replication of the ELINA training and information programme to support farm succession in the west of Ireland identified strengths and new learnings for the context. Further to this, also emerging were a range of considerations that could enhance a similar programme, and the wider succession support framework, in the context. Aspects of its strength were: ELINA's attention to the successor and the existing farmer; its focus on peer to peer learning; its engagement with farmers not just through formal training; and its multi-pronged approach elevating the succession issue to a place sitting alongside other central farming issues. To enhance a similar programme in the west of Ireland a number of considerations emerged. This included: combining training with an individualised approach targeting individual farmer needs and focusing attention on improving the gender balance in farming at succession. Further to this, making supports available to support action on succession issues as a follow on to training and information programmes emerged as important. Overall, succession is a process that occurs over a long timeframe and actions need to tackle issues at different stages (e.g. from pre-succession and raising interest in the farming profession to the farm transfer stage) and of the different actors (successor, existing farmer) in the process.

Context

The west of Ireland was chosen as the confrontation context. This is a predominantly rural area. Farm livelihoods in this region face economic challenges. Family farm income is €13,941 in the region, the second lowest of all regions in Ireland. The border region is the lowest at €13,292. The age profile of farmers in the region is predominantly an ageing one. The average age of farmers in the western region is the second highest in Ireland at 59.9 years, while the highest is the midland region at 61 years (Teagasc National Farm Survey 2019). The ELINA project, and its focus on both issues of generational change in

tandem with focusing on farm business development, made it a strongly relevant practice to examine in the west of Ireland context.

Another important aspect of the west of Ireland context is that while the ELINA project presents a novel way of approaching succession issues, it does not present a unique approach. With a similar objective of information provision on succession, Teagasc (Ireland's Agriculture and Food Development Authority) runs the 'Transferring the Family Farm Clinics' across Ireland. These 'clinics' aim to prepare farm families for succession by providing information and guidance on all the diverse considerations surrounding transferring the family farm (Teagasc, 2020). ELINA was chosen because it presents something familiar, therefore potentially more easily gaining acceptance, however also offering new ideas to build on the current approach.

The ELINA project context is the Uusimaa region of Finland (see Appendix 1 for an overview of ELINA and the Uusimaa region). Uusimaa is a predominantly urban area. The confrontation context is a predominantly rural area. Despite being different region types, farming in both areas share important characteristics. Part-time farming is common in the Uusimaa region. In the western region of Ireland more than half of farmers have an off farm job (54.1%). The average age of farmers is similar in both regions. In the Uusimaa region and more widely in Finland the average age of farmers is 53, while in Ireland the average age is 58 and in the west of Ireland 59.9 (Ruuska, 2021; Teagasc National Farm Survey 2019).

An important difference between the regions was the extent of the gender imbalance in farming. The main farmer is female on 17% of farms in the Uusimaa region of Finland, while in the western region female farm holders/managers only made up 2.6% of all farms (Ruuska, 2021; Teagasc National Farm Survey 2019).

To gain more specific insight on the context, and the key issues facing agriculture and succession, a pre-workshop survey was circulated to participants of the brainstorming sessions and focus group (see Appendix 2 for the detailed results). According to the results, a variety of challenges impact agriculture in the region. Of ten challenges associated with agriculture in the west of Ireland, all participants identified them as a challenge to some degree, apart from one respondent who did not see persistence of traditional gender roles as an issue. Most significantly, all participants identified the ageing farmer profile and farm viability as significant or extremely significant issues. More than 90% identified succession and farm supports as significant or extremely significant issues. This further underlined the relevance of the ELINA approach where it deals with succession issues in tandem with other farming challenges. To gain an initial insight on the ELINA approach as a tailored, area based project the pre-workshop survey also assessed in what ways participants felt succession support would benefit from being tailored. Tailoring support based on multiple perspectives emerged as a top area of priority. The second area of concern was tailoring based on older farmer issues. As a result of this, we provided space for themed discussion in the focus group on

the older farmer. This involved the presentation of a project exploring the establishment of a social organisation for the older farming community in Ireland. This is with view to supporting a more age-friendly environment in the farming sector (see Appendix 3).

Results

Organised as part of one online workshop, this confrontation involved three brainstorming sessions and one focus group. A pre-workshop survey was also used to gather initial insights. The main results emerging are presented here as a whole. The findings cross-over elements that are specific to the context and to the practice.

Acceptance and interest in implementing the practice

The ELINA project was accepted by participants as a practice of interest in relation to dealing with farm succession in Ireland. However, it was also felt that for future approaches to effectively deal with farm succession they must also go beyond the ELINA approach and its focus on training and information provision. Despite this, a number of particular aspects of interest emerged. One was ELINA's focus on dealing with succession issues in tandem with other farming challenges. ELINA had a number of core focus areas: investments and generational change; inter-farm cooperation; entrepreneurial skills; and product development and environment. Another was the area-based, tailored approach. As a training programme, ELINA's focus on peer-to-peer learning was also seen as a crucially important aspect of the project's approach.

Identified critical factors related to the implementation of the practice in the context

Attention to both the successor and existing farmer

ELINA's target group was both the successor and the existing farmer. This dual focus emerged as critical in the west of Ireland. This also emerged in our pre-workshop survey where two thirds of respondents suggested succession support would benefit from a tailored approach based on multiple perspectives. Focusing on older farmer issues emerged of particular importance, but this was also followed by the need to also focus on younger farmer issues. During the workshop, participants emphasised the importance of focusing on the needs of the successor (e.g. farming as a viable, attractive occupation) and the older generation stepping back (e.g. social needs of retiring farmers, re-defining the continuing role of the older farmer on the farm). Further to this, more technical and organisational aspects (e.g. the farm is transferred to successor or the farm is in partnership) also need consideration. Overall the challenge is to embrace the complexity of farm succession through appropriate training and information.

Peer-to-peer learning

ELINA fosters peer-to-peer learning and helps create a bridge for current knowledge transfer into farming practice (Ruuska, 2021). The peer-to-peer approach emerged as a crucial element for a similar project in the west of Ireland context. The focus on knowledge exchange and sharing is important in

farming for more effective learning and skills outcomes, rather than more one-way knowledge transfer.

Different spaces of engagement

ELINA focuses on a combination of different types of training, such as small groups, study trips and some larger events. Farmers may take part in public, larger training events but then join smaller training groups for follow on learning (Ruuska, 2021). Similarly, in the west of Ireland context the need for a range of different spaces of engagement emerged. Those discussed went beyond the more formal training spaces utilised by the ELINA project. For example, the mart (i.e. livestock auction) was highlighted as a crucially important space to engage the existing, older farming generation. Potentially also schools could be a further space of engagement. This would be to raise awareness and interest in farming as a profession with the potential successor well before the time of transfer arrives.

Succession as part of the wider farming conversation

ELINA brings a range of information together for farmers on the succession process and services that can facilitate it, but in the context of also dealing with a wider set of farming challenges (Ruuska, 2021). In the west of Ireland context this approach was viewed positively. Succession is a sensitive topic and the social, cultural and psychological factors influencing it must not be overlooked. Succession is an issue farmers and farming families can be reluctant to discuss and consequently act on. Bringing the issue to the fore and dealing with it alongside other farming challenges raises its profile, highlights its importance and could help to normalise the conversation. The pre-workshop survey also showed the importance of increased focus in farm families on the issue. Over three quarters indicated a lack of intergenerational communication as a significant or extremely significant issue impacting succession from the younger farmer perspective.

Coordinating organisation with strong farming connections

The coordinator of ELINA, ProAgria, is a farmer-owned organisation and has a wide network to promote events (Ruuska, 2021). Reflecting on the west of Ireland context, the brainstorming revealed the crucial importance of organisations that deliver succession information projects to have strong trust built with farmers, or in its absence, proactively work on building it.

Potential successors a necessary focus

Potential successors could also access the ELINA programme, not just those in the process of succession (Ruuska, 2021). In the west of Ireland context, availability of successors is an issue which makes active targeting of potential successors an important part of a future approach in this context. The pre-workshop survey showed that almost three quarters of respondents felt identifying a successor, as well as provision for non-successor family members, were significant or extremely significant issues impacting succession from the older farmer perspective. Further to this, if the

transition into farming is not immediate and potential successors leave the farm for a period to pursue education and/or work, they may still return. Encouraging this return of potential successors is important, as well as building understanding among the existing farming community that departure from the farm may be temporary. In addition, it may benefit the farm's future in the long term allowing professional development of the potential successor.

Key issues and barriers for implementing the innovative practice in the context

Farm viability and availability of successors

A particular problem emerging in the west of Ireland context was that farming may not be viewed as a career option for children in farm families. As part of the pre-workshop survey over 90% of respondents indicated that farm viability was a significant or extremely significant issue impacting succession from the younger farmer perspective. So regardless of information and guidance on farm transfer and succession issues, if farming does not provide a viable livelihood, full or part-time, for the next generation successors will not be available to enter farming. The issue of farming as an economically sustainable livelihood is a major issue threatening the future of the family farm in the west of Ireland. The need for a wider shift emerged in the brainstorming sessions where there is transformative change in farming to support the survival of the family farm and farming as a sustainable rural occupation. Potential avenues towards this change could include increased support for organic farming. It was discussed as a potentially more economically viable type of farming.

While area-based and tailored, ELINA still represents a too generalised approach

ELINA took an area-based, tailored approach and responded specifically to the needs of farmers in the Uusimaa region of Finland. ELINA also had a tailored approach in the sense of operating with flexibility allowing the content of the programme to change in response to needs and for farmers to shape the topics of the training received. This is an appropriate approach in the west of Ireland. While farm types and sizes vary, common issues could be identified specific to the west of Ireland to tailor a similar project in this context. However while this approach has potential, the brainstorming also raised the issue of the need for an even more specific approach. ELINA does not take a sectoral approach, but deals with all farm types together. The pre-workshop survey helped to identify some of the more specific key issues to address from the younger farmer and older farmer perspectives. In relation to the younger farmer the top five issues emerging as significant or extremely significant were: succession planning, farm viability, lack of intergenerational communication, lack of farmer retirement and access to land. For the older farmer, the top five issues emerging as significant or extremely significant were: succession planning, access to support/resources, fear/anxiety associated with change in later life, emotional ties to farming and lack of awareness of the succession process. However even beyond this, the need for a more individualised approach emerged from the brainstorming. Farms are all different which consequently also have different issues to deal with in relation to succession. Projects dealing with succession also need to encompass the addressing of individual needs.

Farmer engagement

The issue of how to effectively engage farmers emerged in the brainstorming groups. Gaining farmer participation was a challenge highlighted by participants. Being part of ELINA and its training would require a time commitment. The Finnish analysis of ELINA also highlighted how part-time farming made the time capacity to engage in the project a challenge. In addition it was noted that training is a typical tool used to assist farmers and perhaps fatigue exists (Ruuska, 2021). Further to this, there is also the challenge of engaging existing farmers and potential successors that are not actively thinking or planning for farm succession. The analysis of ELINA also highlighted how data protection requirements can pose a challenge. Farmers approaching retirement cannot be identified and approached, they must come forward to engage in ELINA (Ruuska, 2021).

Capacity of agricultural advisors

Another emerging challenge was the wide-ranging skill-set required to implement ELINA and the capacities of agricultural advisors. It was felt advisors would not hold the required skills to deliver such a programme.

Identified measures and actors that need to be involved to overcome the obstacles and succeed in the implementation of the practice

A number of potential key actors

In the west of Ireland, Teagasc is well-placed to act as a coordinating organisation for a project similar to ELINA. It operates the similar 'Transferring the Family Farm Clinics', as well as a range of other services for farmers e.g. advisory services and discussion groups. However, other actors were also highlighted as a key part of the succession support system. The Land Mobility Service provides succession planning and matching farmers to support collaborative farming arrangements. Enterprise Boards also emerged as important in relation to finding new ways to support farm viability and more entrepreneurial, innovative approaches to farming. Even before this, schools could have a potential role to play. The idea of succession and careers in farming could be integrated in some way in the educational curriculum. The involvement of the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine would also be a central anchor point for any future approach.

Involve a range of 'advisors' with varied skill sets

Involving a range of experts with different skill sets would be important to the successful implementation of ELINA in the west of Ireland context. ELINA did involve a range of experts with different areas of expertise (Ruuska, 2021). This is an important aspect to carry forward. This also perhaps needs to go beyond the type of expertise engaged for the ELINA project. The future need for cross-departmental work to support succession is also highlighted in the Finnish study of ELINA

(Ruuska, 2021). The idea of a farm welfare group emerged in one of the brainstorming sessions that could involve social care and public health workers. Trust among farmers and these professionals is also crucially important. This could build on existing connections, if present, in rural and farming communities. The organisations listed above would also present a key source of expertise.

Engaging farmers at different levels

There is a need for widening the spaces of engagement with farmers (and potential farmers) to support succession more effectively. ELINA did use a variety of means to share and develop knowledge, such as public, larger training events and smaller training groups. However, from the brainstorming it was clear that going a step further is important. Both more formal (workshops, training sessions, discussion groups) and informal (social places of farming, the family itself) 'spaces of engagement' are important.

Incentives for participation and wider financial supports

Incentives emerged as an important measure to support increased engagement with farm succession. These are important on both sides, for the successor and the existing farmer. In addition to this, support to assist follow through and taking action would also support greater effectiveness. This may entail availability of supports to assist with the costs associated with using professional services (e.g. solicitors, mediators). This would help to realise the actions promoted by projects such as ELINA. Costs can be a key barrier to putting actions into practice.

Further innovative ideas to foster rural regeneration and development in the context

Re-define 'farmer retirement'

Farmer retirement has to be looked at in the context of farming as a way of life. The expectations generally associated with retirement, that involvement in the profession ceases, were strongly highlighted as often having little relevance in a farming context. Often the older, existing farmer, while stepping back, continues to work alongside the successor. Retirement is a sensitive topic and new terms are required in agriculture to properly represent the process of farm 'retirement', which can be more about stepping back than stepping away from farming.

A greater role for women

The availability of a successor is a key issue that inhibits succession. There is untapped potential because of traditional gender roles. The pre-workshop survey also identified the persistence of traditional gender roles as an issue impacting succession. From the older farmer perspective 40% said it was a significant or extremely significant issue, while from the younger farmer perspective 50% agreed it was. Brainstorming identified that women may not see themselves as potential successors, or be viewed as such within the farm family. More broadly, women in farm families can play an important part of the wider solution and be part of a collaborative approach to the farm succession process in their farm family.

An age friendly farming environment

Greater focus is needed on the human side of farm succession and an important part of this is attention to the needs of the existing, older farming generation. Part of the solution currently being explored in the Irish context is the establishment of a social organisation for this generation addressing their needs. This would be a similar organisation to what exists for young people in rural Ireland (Macra na Feirme) (see Appendix 3). The pre-workshop survey also reinforces these findings. More than 90% of respondents indicated that the fear/anxiety associated with change in later life and emotional ties to farming were significant or extremely significant issues impacting farm succession from the older farmer perspective.

Lessons learned and recommendations

What could be additionally learned about the practice

Overall, ELINA could be a valuable approach in the west of Ireland, but with some adaptations. It could be valuable as a project that is part of a wider succession support framework. Additional considerations emerging are:

- There is a need to look beyond the area-based approach and also address some of the more micro and individual needs of farms and farmers. The individual farm level is also an important space where engagement with the succession issue is needed.
- Focusing on improving farm viability alongside addressing the wider issues of succession could also add to improved farm succession.
- Incentives to support increased engagement on both sides, for the successor and the existing farmer, could improve outcomes.
- Following training and information provision, there is need for follow through and support for taking action on succession issues. This could include making financial assistance available to use professional services (e.g. solicitors, mediators).
- Exploring using more diverse spaces of engagement would also be important. These include both formal training and more informal social places of farming, to more effectively deliver information and training on succession.
- There is a need for greater gender equality when it comes to participation in farming in the west of Ireland context. A higher predominance of male farmers emerged as a greater issue in the west of Ireland context compared to Uusimaa. This issue would need greater specific attention in an ELINA-type project in the west of Ireland.

Further consequences for the context and next steps

ELINA's focus on training and information provision to ensure farmers have access to key information on succession is important. However, while projects focused on training and information are an important

part of the farm succession policy framework, they should only be one part of it. The reflections of Ruuska (2021) on the ELINA programme also note the complexity of the farm succession process (e.g. economic, legal, psychological, social, cultural aspects) and effectively dealing with it, as well as the particular challenge of dealing with the psychological/human aspect of succession. Further measures are important at different scales, levels of engagement and over time. More specifically this could involve:

- A collaborative, multi-actor approach involving stakeholder (e.g. The Land Mobility Service, Macra na Feirme) and public bodies (e.g. Teagasc, DAFM, Enterprise Boards).
- A multi-level approach for example targeting the micro family and individual level, alongside wider awareness raising, training and information projects such as ELINA.
- A longer-term approach where succession is not just on the farming agenda as farmers approach traditional 'retirement' age but the succession question is a continuous part of farm planning.
- A specific focus on supporting greater levels of gender balance in the next farming generation.
- Greater attention to the human side of farm succession, particularly for the existing, older farmer and the creation of supports that support a more age-friendly farming environment (e.g. see Appendix 3).

More broadly, a wider idea that emerged was the relevance of looking towards international good practices to help adapt and improve approaches to supporting succession in the west of Ireland. Assessing 'good practice' is helpful to re-imagine approaches to succession and could also be a useful approach in other areas such as in relation to rural newcomers and new entrants to farming.

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Reporting: Aisling Murtagh, Maura Farrell, Louise Weir (NUIG)

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Report SC5 appendix 1: The ELINA project and Uusimaa context

Presentation by Pertti Ruuska on ELINA and the Uusimaa region given at the confrontation workshop before the brainstorming sessions and focus group.

RURALIZATION

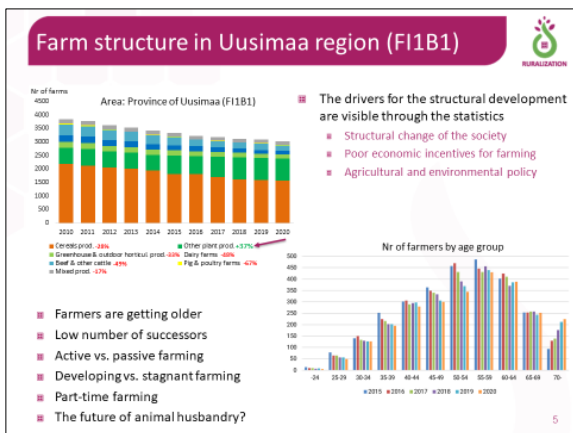
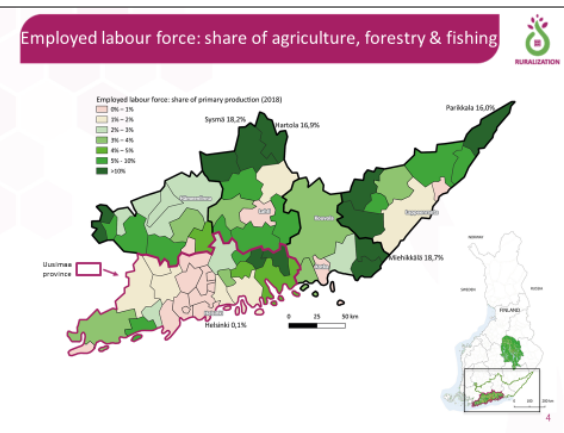
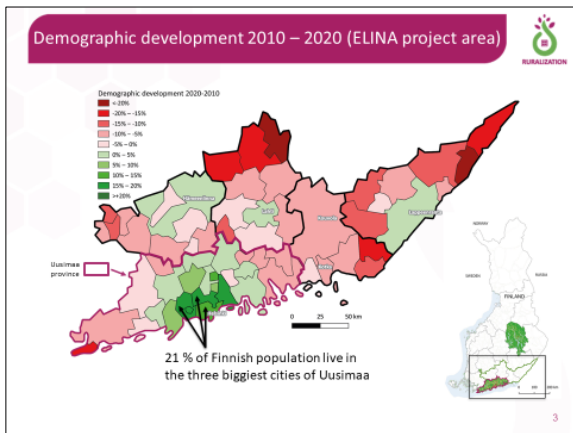
Case ELINA in Finnish context
26.10.2021

Pertti Ruuska
Project researcher
FFRC, University of Turku

Case ELINA in RURALIZATION project

Vital agriculture and forestry in Uusimaa – The ELINA project, lead by the ProAgria organisation

- 11/2015-12/2018 -> 12/2021 (larger area)
- Kind of professional updating education for farmers
- CAP pillar II funding (EU+national)
 - Budget 389,000 € (90% public funding)



- ### Goals and organization of the project
- Goals of the project
 - developing farmers' know-how to improve the profitability of farming
 - utilising the new research information in developing farmers' competence
 - Farm management and environmental management cross-sectional themes
 - Focusing on promoting the farm investments, transfer of farms to the next generation, farmers' collaboration
 - The designing consortium had members from the ProAgria, regional Farmers' Union, some farmers, Food industry (dairy cooperative, grain industry), regional ELY Centre (public funding)
 - The project staff (the core group 2-3 experts) of ProAgria organized the planning and implementation of training actions
 - A 'neutral' and well-known source of information
 - The ProAgria has versatile expertise available, wide networks
 - following the demand for training subjects (listen to farmers)

Some features of ELINA-Uusimaa project



- The project is an “umbrella” for many themes
 - Large operating area, economies of scale in project administration
 - Richness of themes
 - For farms successions a specialized project could work as well
- The idea of a study path
 - from public events and webinars to field trips and to study groups
 - [personal training not possible → Aid of advisory services for individual farms in CAP]
 - Peer-learning, peer-support, networking
 - Training almost free of charge* (90 % public funding)
 - Many ways to reach the training, still some challenges to catch (the right) farmers
- 566 persons (+webinars) took part in training sessions (11/2015 – 12/2018)

*webinars usually 0 €, theme days or seminars 20-30 €/attendee, study groups 100-250 €/person (5-6 meetings, 1-2 advisors), study trips 50-70% of the costs

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Can a practice like ELINA activate regeneration (1)?



- It is not a silver bullet for exploding the change of generation in farms, still it can
 - Encourage to start discussions e.g. in training groups to develop individual future plans and to continue the succession process with the peer support
 - Both the successor and the retiring farmer should prepare themselves mentally (years) before the timing for the actual succession is relevant
 - Collect, with many specialists, the pieces of up-to-date information about the farm succession process easily available for the farmers.
 - Make the younger farmers to trust that they are not left alone

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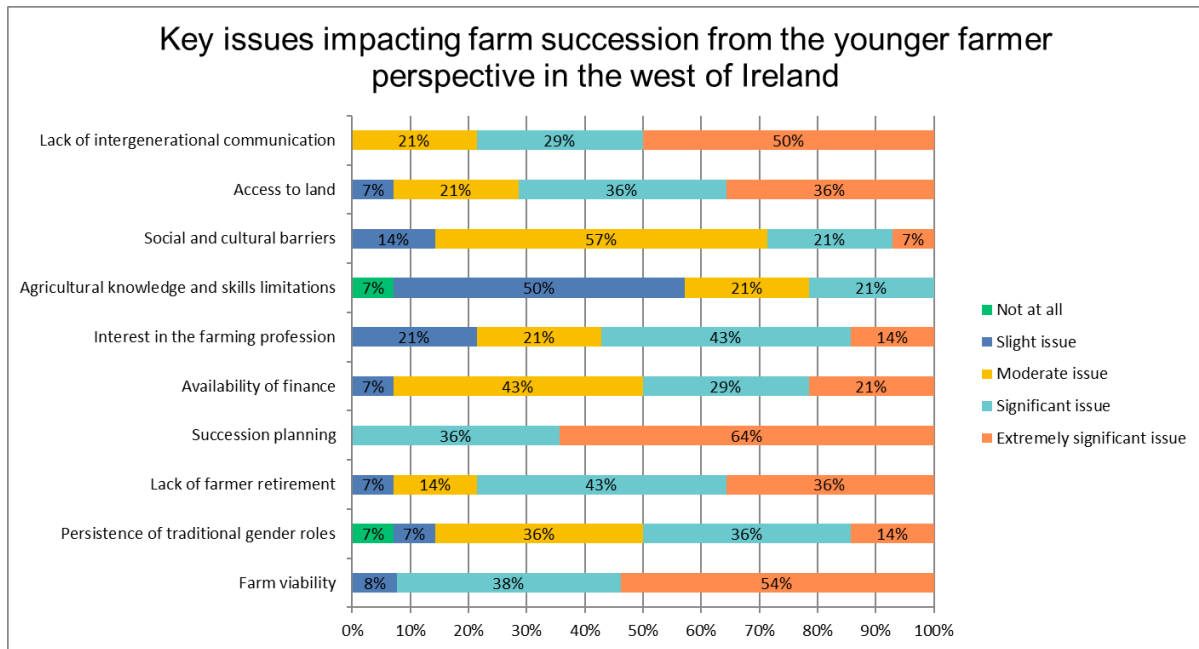
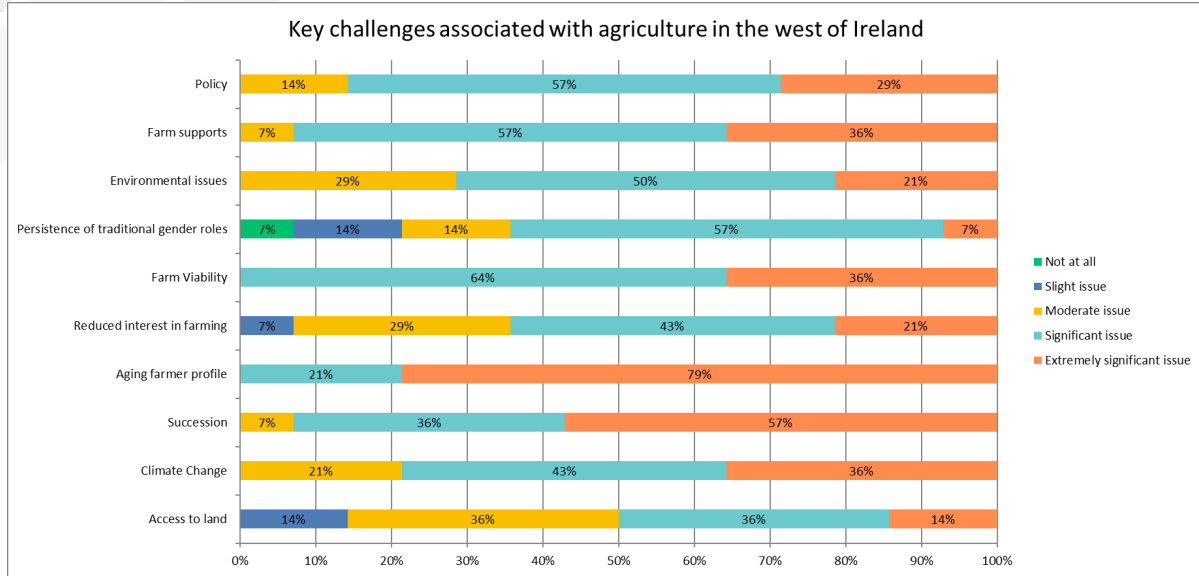
Can a practice like ELINA activate regeneration (2)?

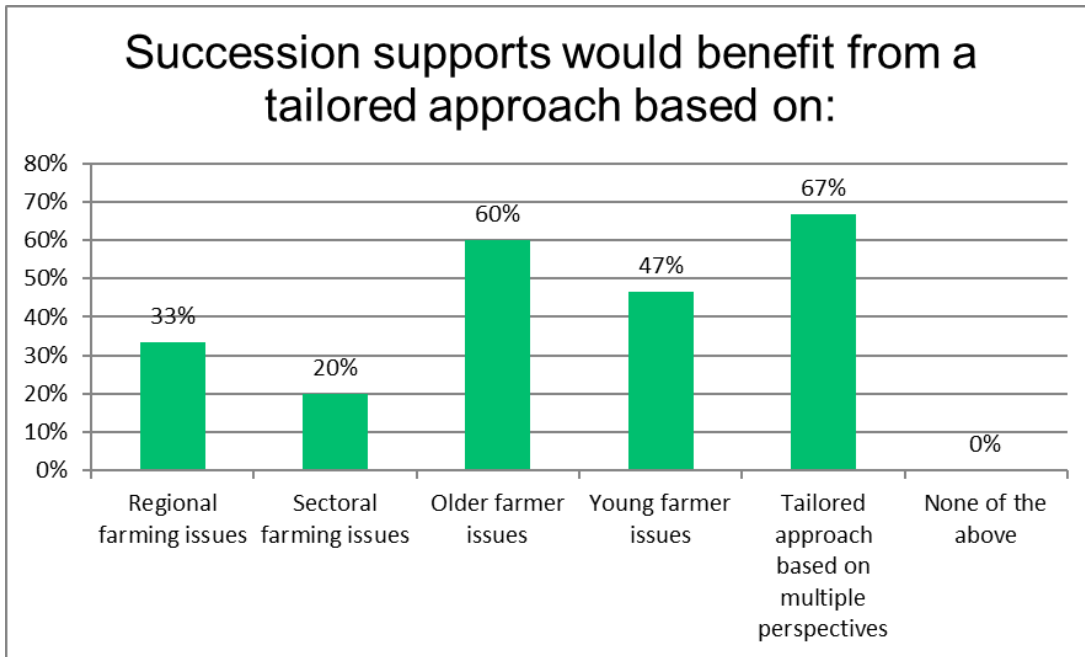
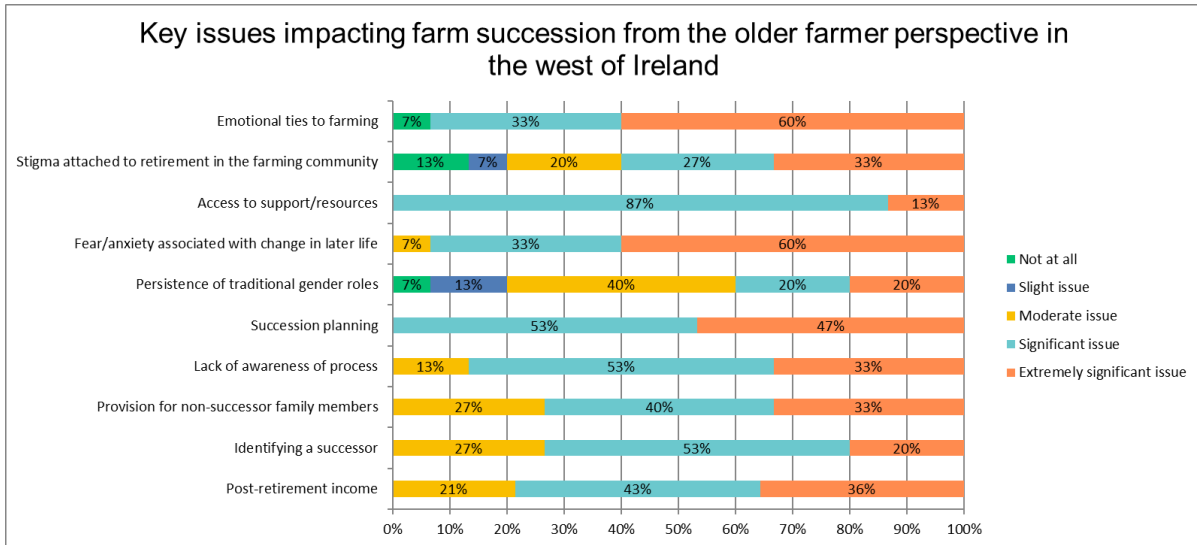


- Improve the image of farming and rural lifestyle
 - Unknown or even negative for many urban people
 - The development projects could be used to improve the communication with the surrounding society
 - e.g. the significance of the agriculture and efforts made for environmental issues
 - Take fresh thoughts from the outsiders
- The network and stakeholders near farmers must cooperate to reach and encourage potential successors
 - Keep that in mind when meeting farmers and their potential successors
- [The society and the food system should give better economic incentives for farming → could be easier to have more successors]

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Report SC5 appendix 2: Pre-workshop survey results





Report SC5 appendix 3: An age-friendly farming environment

Creating an Age-Friendly Environment in Farming through the Establishment of a National Social Organisation for Older Farmers in Ireland

Dr Shane Conway, Postdoctoral Researcher, Rural Studies Centre, Discipline of Geography, NUI Galway

Generational renewal in agriculture policy's preoccupation with developing strategies and interventions encouraging older farmers to 'step aside' and retire to facilitate young farmers wanting to establish a career in farming appears at complete odds with the basic principles of the World Health Organization's age-friendly environments concept, centred around the formation of policies, services, and structures which 'support and enable people to age actively' (WHO, 2007, p. 5). Moreover, existing research and literature on this concept is predominantly focused on a model of urban aging, thereby failing to reflect the diversity of rural areas, particularly the farming community. With over one third of farmers in Ireland aged 65 and over, policy makers must now reconsider their excessive preoccupation with financial incentives encouraging older farmers to step aside from farming, and instead place a greater emphasis on delivering strategies aimed at protecting their quality of life.

A new study by Dr Shane Conway in the Discipline of Geography's Rural Studies Centre at NUI Galway is exploring the potential of creating an age-friendly environment in the farming sector through the establishment of a social organisation for the older generation of the farming community in Ireland, designed to fit their specific needs, interests, equivalent to that of younger people in rural Ireland, i.e. Macra na Feirme. This initiative will have a particular focus on the health and well-being benefits of social group membership in later life, in line with the World Health Organization's age-friendly environments concept. As extensive research on the social and emotional issues affecting older Irish farmers by Conway et al. (2016; 2017; 2018; 2021) has identified their deep-rooted desire to continue farming, such an organisation has the potential to help farmers develop a pattern of farming activities suited to advancing age, thus providing them with a sense of purpose and legitimate social connectedness within the farming community in later life. Such an investigation is particularly timely in the current COVID-19 pandemic as rural communities prepare to adapt, rebuild, redevelop, and reenergize as part of their recovery plans. Social isolation measures brought into effect in an effort to curb the spread of the virus have further highlighted the importance of ensuring social inclusion for the elderly population of society (OECD, 2020), including older farmers, to help avoid social isolation and loneliness in later life. The extent to which older farmers themselves can be involved in the co-production of age-friendly policies and practices at farm level, which are responsive to their aspirations and

requirements will also be explored to illustrate how policy, and indeed society more generally, can respond positively to the aging farming population.

The potential of collaborating with Ireland's livestock mart sector, consisting of over 60 co-operative mart centres across the country to roll out such an organisation nationally will also be investigated. Livestock marts provide a vital social facility for the farming community, some of whom have no other social outlet. Their existing positionality and reputation as a 'hive' of activity within the heart of rural communities, provides marts with a ready-made platform to diversify their services and become social hubs for the older generation of the farming community in their catchment area.

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