



# Identifying beliefs underlying successors' intention to take over the farm



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## ABSTRACT

The youth out-migration of rural areas, the ageing of farmer population and the lack of a successor within the farm family imply some drawbacks for rural development and for a more sustainable agriculture. This study used the reasoned action approach (RAA) to identify the beliefs underlying Brazilian successors' intention to take over the farm. The RAA hypothesizes that successors' intention to take over the farm is determined by three constructs: attitude, perceived norms and perceived behavioral control. These three constructs are derived from behavioral, normative and control beliefs. Results showed that the behavioral beliefs 'Satisfaction for taking care of family farm assets' and 'Ease for managing the farm' influence successors' evaluation (attitude) of taking over the farm. The normative beliefs 'Father' and 'Mother' influence successors' perceptions about the social pressure (perceived norms) to take over the farm. The control beliefs 'Ease to buy more land' and 'Professional recognition' influence successors' perceptions about their own capability (perceived behavioral control) to take over the farm. The identification of these beliefs revealed important implications for designing interventions to encourage successors to take over the farm.

## 1. Introduction

Youth out-migration of rural areas and the consequent ageing of farmer population are common phenomena in developed and developing countries (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson, 2006; Bednarřková et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2014; Mihi-Ramirez and Kumpikaite, 2014; Mishra et al., 2010). These phenomena also occurred in Brazil (Maia and Buainain, 2015; Matte and Machado, 2016). Moreover, it has been identified by previous research that farmers' successors in Brazil do not intend to take over the farm (Spanevello et al., 2011; Foguesatto et al., 2016; Panno, 2016).

The youth out-migration of rural areas, the ageing of farmer population and the lack of a successor within the farm family imply some drawbacks for rural development and for a more sustainable agriculture. For instance, research conducted in European countries found that older farmers are less likely to engage in agri-environmental schemes (Duesberg et al., 2017; Suess-Reyes and Fuetsch, 2016). In addition, the lack of a successor within the farm family increases the probability that the farm goes for a period of stagnation (i.e. not adopting efficient technologies and infrastructure) (Wheeler et al., 2012). The lack of a successor within the farm family also results in the loss of site-specific knowledge in agricultural activity (Bertoni and Cavicchioli, 2016). Moreover, the youth out-migration of rural areas in Brazil has caused cultural deterioration in local communities (Matte and Machado, 2016).

These drawbacks have become a source of major concern for the agricultural sector in many countries. For instance, public policies have been developed in Europe to encourage young farmers to enter or to remain in the agricultural sector (Zagata and Sutherland, 2015). In Brazil, governmental institutions and private agricultural organizations have also designed programs to encourage successors to take over the farm. For instance, Brazilian government provides credit for young farmers (especially heirs of small farmers) to buy land and to invest in the farm (Lima et al., 2013). Moreover, in some Brazilian regions, rural extensionists have developed projects to capacitate rural youth to take over the farm (Castro, 2016). Given the importance of farm succession for rural development in Brazil and for a more sustainable agriculture, it is useful to explore Brazilian successors' intention to take over the farm.

Researchers have used two main approaches to study farmers' succession. In one approach, researchers inquire the head of the farm to indicate whether or not a farm has a potential successor, and then test the impact of three main categories of variables on the probability of intra-family succession: farm factors, farmer characteristics and family factors (Bertoni and Cavicchioli, 2016). Farm factors include, for instance, the size of the farm, the proportion of rented land, and if the farm is specialized or diversified; farmer characteristics includes, for instance, age and education level of the head of the farm; and family factors include, for instance, the gender of the heirs (Aldanondo Ochoa et al., 2007; Bertoni and Cavicchioli, 2016; Cavicchioli et al., 2015;

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Glauben et al., 2004; Glauben et al., 2009; Mishra and El-Osta, 2008; Mishra et al., 2010). For a review of the impact these three groups of variables on the probability of intra-family succession, see Bertoni and Cavicchioli (2016). Another common approach used by researchers is to investigate the expectations of rural young people in out-migrate rural areas. These literature found that, for instance, access to labor market out of the agriculture sector, search for a higher quality of life, cultural factors (i.e. feeling of being at home), family background (i.e. parents' educational level), and personal characteristics (i.e. gender and educational level) influence youth expectations of out-migrate rural areas (Bednaríková et al., 2016; Bjarnason and Thorlindsson, 2006; Corbett, 2005; Garasky, 2002; Mihi-Ramirez and Kumpikaite, 2014; Stockdale, 2006; Thissen et al., 2010; Rérat, 2014). The aforementioned studies on farmers' succession and out-migration were conducted in European countries, Canada and in the United States. Specifically in Brazil, previous research found that the lack of parents' recognition of successors' knowledge and their work, limited access to leisure and cultural options, an uncertain income, and the lack of governmental policies, influence farmers' successors decisions to out-migrate rural areas (Castro, 2016; Costa and Ralish, 2013; Foguesatto and Machado, 2015; Panno, 2016; Spanevello et al., 2011). Both approaches, however, have not considered the impact of psychological factors on successors' intention to take over the farm.

One approach to studying people's intention to perform a specific behavior is to use the reasoned action approach (RAA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010) and its earlier version the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). In the RAA and in the TPB, behavior originates from the individual's intentions, which in turn are determined by three main constructs: attitude, perceived norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of this paper, the intention of a successor is defined as follows: a successor anticipates taking over the farm after the head of the farm quit the job. Attitude explains how successors evaluate the behavior of taking over the farm, the role of perceived social pressure on successors' intention to take over the farm is explained by perceived norms, and perceived behavioral control identifies successors' perceptions about their capability in taking over the farm. These three constructs, in turn, are derived from behavioral, normative and control beliefs, respectively. One of the advantages to use the RAA over the TPB is that in the RAA the three main constructs can be separated in components; for instance, perceived norms is divided in injunctive and descriptive norms (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). The separation of the constructs in components allow for the identification of which component is the most important predictor of intention, which might result in a more precisely intervention target to change behavior (McEachan et al., 2016).

In the light of the foregoing, the general objective of this study was to identify the beliefs underlying successors' intention to take over the farm. Specifically, this study aimed to identify the behavioral beliefs that drive attitude, the normative beliefs that drive perceived norms, and the control beliefs that drive perceived behavioral control.

This paper moves beyond the existing literature from different viewpoints. First, a common limitation in most farmers' succession studies is a lack of theoretical basis (Suess-Reyes and Fuetsch, 2016). We overcome this limitation by testing whether the RAA, which is a consolidated framework that have been successfully used to understand a wide variety of intentions and behaviors in different agricultural contexts (Borges et al., 2016; Lalani et al., 2016; Martinovska-Stojcheska et al., 2016; Senger et al., 2017; Sok et al., 2015; van Dijk et al., 2016; Van Hulst and Posthumus, 2016), could be used in farmers' succession studies. Second, most studies on farmers' succession in Brazil have been conducted using qualitative approaches and with small sample sizes in specific regions, which makes difficult the generalization of results to other regions and the application of these results to develop public policies to encourage potential successors to take over the farm (Lima et al., 2013). We overcome these shortcomings by using

a quantitative approach and with a relatively big sample in different Brazilian regions. Third, in a previous study, which is part of the same research project, Morais et al. (2017), using structural equation modeling, identified the relative impact of attitude, perceived norms and perceived behavioral control on Brazilian successors' intention to take over the farm. In this previous study, however, beliefs that drive attitude, perceived norms and perceived behavioral control were not explored. The identification of these beliefs can provide specific targets that can be used to tailor interventions aimed to encourage successors to take over the farm.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Reasoned action approach (RAA)

The RAA predicts that a given behavior originates from individuals' intention (INT) to perform the behavior. In the RAA, it is hypothesized that intention is determined by attitude (ATT), perceived norms (PN) and perceived behavioral control (PBC) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). Attitude is the degree to which execution of the behavior is positively or negatively evaluated, perceived norms refers to a person's perception of the social pressure upon them to perform or not perform the behavior, and perceived behavioral control is the perceived own capability to successfully perform the behavior (Wauters et al., 2010; Sok et al., 2015). There are two components of PN: injunctive norms (NI) are the perceptions of others of what one should do, while descriptive norms (ND) are the perception of what others actually do (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). As a general rule, the intention to act is stronger when attitude and perceived norms are more favorable, and when perceived behavioral control is greater (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). Attitude, perceived norms and perceived behavioral control, in turn, are derived from behavioral, normative and control beliefs, respectively.

Attitude, perceived norms and perceived behavioral control are latent constructs that can be either elicited directly or indirectly (Sok et al., 2015). Theoretically, indirect measures of attitude, perceived norms and perceived behavioral control are based on an expectancy-value model (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2008). Indeed, attitude is derived from the multiplicative composites of behavioral beliefs ( $b_i \times e_j$ ), where  $b_i$  is the belief about the likelihood of outcome  $i$ th of the behavior, and  $e_j$  is the evaluation of the  $i$ th outcome. The perceived norms is derived from the multiplicative composites of normative beliefs ( $n_j \times m_j$ ), where  $n_j$  is the belief about the normative expectations of the  $j$ th important referent, and  $m_j$  is the motivation to comply with the opinion of the  $j$ th important referent. Perceived behavioral control originates from the multiplicative composites of control beliefs ( $c_k \times p_k$ ), where  $c_k$  is the belief about the presence of the  $k$ th factor that may facilitate or inhibit the performance of the behavior, and  $p_k$  is the perceived power of the  $k$ th factor to facilitate or inhibit the behavior. The RAA model is shown in Fig. 1.

In a previous study, using the same questionnaire and the same sample as here, Morais et al. (2017) used direct measures of the constructs attitude, perceived norms (injunctive and descriptive) and perceived behavioral control, and found that the intention of successors in taking over the farm was mainly determined by their positive evaluations of taking over the farm (attitude), followed by their positive perceptions about their own capability in taking over the farm (perceived behavioral control), and their perceptions about the social pressure to take over the farm (perceived norms – injunctive norms). However, the use of direct measures only does not enable to access the underlying behavioral, normative and control beliefs that influence attitude, perceived norms and perceived behavioral control behavioral, respectively. To better explain intention, it is necessary to access people beliefs that are readily accessible in memory, which constitutes the prevailing considerations that ultimately guide intentions and actions (de Leeuw et al., 2015). Therefore, in this study we used multiple

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