



Incorporating agri-environment schemes into farm development pathways: A temporal analysis of farmer motivations

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to capture the complexity and dynamic nature of motivations for participation in agri-environment schemes (AESs). Specifically, it examines the extent to which decisions about family farm participation in Tir Gofal (TG), a whole farm AES in Wales, can be traced to long-term motivations for farm continuity; and how Tir Gofal fits into dynamic farm development pathways that farmers follow to ensure their continuity. It reports the findings from narrative style interviews with 25 TG agreement holders and 12 non-agreement holders across Wales.

The results show that the continuance of the family farm is an important goal for agreement and non-agreement holders alike, and this is linked to enduring commercially or traditionally oriented values. Three broad sets of development pathways were identified and the extent to which TG fits in with these pathways is considered, with particular reference to different periods in the farm life cycle. The paper concludes that incorporating a temporal dimension into the wider question of farmers' participation in agri-environment schemes can help to improve understanding of farmers' behaviour particularly given the variety of possible opportunities currently open to, and used by, family farms.

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Introduction

Voluntary agri-environment schemes (AESs) in the UK are a key policy instrument for the delivery of sustainable management of the countryside. These schemes are central to the Rural Development Programmes of European Union member states, and their significance is reflected in their rapidly increasing budget since the mid-1990s and in their extensive coverage across European agricultural land (Espinosa-Goded et al., 2010; Riley, 2011). Current negotiations suggest that scheme payments to farmers for providing environmental benefits are set to remain an important support tool in the post-2013 Common Agricultural Policy (European Commission, 2010).

Farmers have a central role to play in implementing AES and understanding motivations for participation in these voluntary schemes is therefore crucial in any investigation of their effectiveness. Researchers have extensively debated the significance of a number of different influences on, and motivations for, AES participation including characteristics of the farmer; situational characteristics of the farm and farming system; nature and qualities of the innovation; communication or extension approaches and

policy strategies; and socio-cultural influences (Ahnström et al., 2009; Siebert et al., 2006; Smithers and Furman, 2003; Wynn et al., 2001). However, previous studies have tended to look at present-centred issues and not addressed the dynamic nature of motivations affecting farm level decision-making.

Some commentators have identified the need to view participation as a culmination of various interrelated factors and motivations which change over time and place (Skerratt, 1994). Researchers have taken a backward looking or historical perspective (Riley, 2006) as well as a forward looking perspective, incorporating the life-long goals of the family farm (Farmer-Bowers and Lane, 2009) to address this need. The significance of farm continuity to farmer decision-making has been recognised; however, there has been little exploration of this with respect to AES participation decisions. Farm continuity is ensured by a range of survival strategies or farm development pathways which have been widely elaborated (Bowler, 1992; Meert et al., 2005; Ondersteijn et al., 2003). It has been suggested that a decisive criterion for farmers' motivations about joining AES is whether or not the scheme can be incorporated into these farm development plans (Brodt et al., 2006; Siebert et al., 2006). Although motivations for participation have been examined against the backdrop of farming systems with respect to goodness of fit (Battershill and Gilg, 1997; Brotherton, 1989; Skerratt, 1994; Whitby, 1994), there has been less interest in how schemes are incorporated into the dynamic development pathways that farmers follow to ensure their livelihood and farm continuity.

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As such, this paper aims to capture the complexity and dynamic nature of motivations for participation in AES. Specifically, it examines the extent to which decisions about participation in Tir Gofal (TG), a whole farm AES in Wales, can be traced to long-term motivations for farm continuity; and how TG fits into farmers' dynamic farm development pathways. It reports the findings from narrative style interviews with 25 TG agreement holders and 12 non-agreement holders across Wales. The first part of the paper conceptualises motivation in the context of both farmers' long-term aims and their associated farm development pathways. This is followed by the methodology section which includes a description of the TG scheme. The results are then presented, examining if and how TG fits into existing development pathways. The paper concludes with a discussion of the suitability of farm development pathways as a framework for understanding AES participation in a dynamic sense, and a conclusion section.

Conceptualising motivation: a dynamic perspective

Farmers' decisions about AES participation can be subject to a wide range of motivations active over different time frames. Some researchers have examined farmers decision making under the lens of different time scales, taking both forward and backward looking perspectives (Farrar-Bowers and Lane, 2009; Kinsella et al., 2000; Potter and Lobley, 1996; Wilson, 2008). The following discussion considers firstly the long-term perspective focusing on motivations for farm continuity, it then examines the notion of farm development pathways as a means of capturing the dynamic strategies farms enact to ensure continuity.

Studies concerning influences on AES participation have tended to focus on the balance between farmers' extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, showing that, as well as seeking financial rewards, farmers are also wishing to satisfy personal goals and self-fulfilment (Greiner et al., 2009; Jacobson et al., 2003; Kabii and Horwitz, 2006; Ryan et al., 2003; Smithers and Furman, 2003; Wilson and Hart, 2000). In an effort to widen understandings of motivation and accommodate the heterogeneity of farmer preferences, researchers have also demonstrated the influence of cultural norms, identity, social and cultural context; values, goals, objectives and principles; and worldviews or personal philosophy (Ahnström et al., 2009; Burton, 2004; Fish et al., 2003; Gasson, 1973; Harrison et al., 1998; Schoon and Grotenhuis, 2000; Siebert et al., 2006; Stock, 2007). However, the dynamic nature of motivations affecting participation decisions has rarely been accommodated in previous studies. With a few exceptions (Lobley and Potter, 1998; Skerratt, 1994; Riley, 2006, 2008), the majority of studies looking into farmers' conservation practices have taken a largely static approach that sees motivations and practices as a present-centred issue.

Farrar-Bowers and Lane (2009) take a forward-looking perspective and argue that motivations reflect the personal drive farmers have to satisfy long-term aspirations of their family farm, with farm continuity being a central and overriding motivation. From analysis of interviews with farming households in their study of Australian farmers' decision-making processes and their rationale for maintaining biodiversity, they concluded that, whilst goals or objectives (and associated business decisions) are a means to an end, life-long family motivations are ends in themselves. Although there is no established link between AES participation and such a motivation, there is supporting evidence from studies in Europe of the significance of farm continuity to AES farm decision-making. In the UK and Europe, commentators talk about the farm's mission, the overall reason for farming underpinned by family concerns which govern the farm's strategy and development and management (Ondersteijn et al., 2003; Shucksmith, 1993). As Siebert et al.

(2006) note in their review of European AES participation, citing evidence from studies in the Netherlands and Finland, that long-term family and farm continuity concerns often seem to be the most important value guiding farmers' reasoning. Numerous studies have confirmed the importance of family aspirations and responsibilities to the family in farm business decisions (Garforth and Rehman, 2006; Greiner and Gregg, 2011; Miller et al., 2009). Additionally, rather than instant opportunistic or financial gratification, motivations for joining AES are more often expressed in terms of farm improvement, capital investment, security, long-term farm viability and/or risk minimisation (Gould et al., 1989; Pannell et al., 2006; Wilson and Hart, 2000). According to Potter and Lobley (1996), a basic assumption is that environmental change, and therefore arguably AES participation, can ultimately be traced to actions taken to maintain farm household income and ensure family continuity in farming. It is pertinent to ask, therefore, to what extent can decisions about AES participation be traced to long-term motivations for family farm continuity?

Farm continuity is largely guaranteed by a broad range of adjustment, survival or livelihood strategies, or development pathways (Gorman et al., 2001; Kinsella et al., 2000; Meert et al., 2005). These, if Farrar-Bowers and Lane's (2009) perspective is applied, might be thought of as the means to the end. Development pathways have been described in a general sense as broad adjustment strategies available to farm families in response to stimuli. They have been framed round three broad strategies considered open to family farms: capital accumulation, economic survival and no change (Marsden et al., 1992),¹ which have been elaborated with respect to strategies such as diversification (Ondersteijn et al., 2003). Meert et al. (2005), for example, building on previous work (Bowler, 1992; Bowler et al., 1996; Ilbery, 1992, 2001), described six pathways: (I) maintaining a viable agricultural enterprise (1. industrial model and 2. agricultural diversification); (II) non-farm income diversification (3. structural diversification and 4. income diversification); and (III) marginalisation of the farm enterprise (5. reduced farming activity and 6. part-time farming and semi-retirement), with a natural order of a declining requirement for capital from 1 to 6. The broad notion of farm development pathways offers a means of examining farmer strategies in the context of AES participation. Indeed some commentators suggest that a decisive criterion for farmers' motivations about joining AES is whether or not the scheme can be incorporated into these dynamic farm development plans (Brodt et al., 2006; Siebert et al., 2006). Others consider that AES participation represents a separate diversification pathway in itself (Meert et al.'s pathway 3).

Development paths are not mutually exclusive; the farm family can elect to combine elements of different paths. Meert et al. (2005), for example, found in their study of marginal farm households in Flanders that farmers combined a number of pathways, including a range of diversification pathways. Wilson (2008) also emphasises the complex nature of farm pathways; he conceptualised multiple transitional pathways at the farm-level showing that farm development pathways can span the entire multifunctionality spectrum (from weak to strong), influenced as they are by financial situation, successional patterns, inheritance practices, farm family life cycles, geographical location or pluriactivity opportunities. As, such, this concept offers a way of understanding how AES participation, as one pathway choice, fits in or combines with other pathways, and how the farm's overall pathway (or set of pathways) will change as a result.

¹ Marsden et al. (1992) identified three broad strategies open to family farms: capital accumulation (expansion, profit maximisation), economic survival (consolidation and production of the family farm) and no change (marginalisation and disengaging from full-time agriculture).

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