

Extended Abstract

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Paper/Poster Title	Exploring the attitudes of farmers in Northern Ireland
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Abstract prepared for presentation at the 98th Annual Conference of The Agricultural Economics Society will be held at The University of Edinburgh, UK, 18th - 20th March 2024.

Abstract	<i>200 words max</i>
<p>A mixed methodological approach was used to explore farmer attitudes across Northern Ireland. Attitudinal data was collected using ten statements of pride associated with farming, these were offered as potential responses to the question “what makes you proud about your farm?” during a quantitative survey. Attitudes were explored in greater depth during in-person qualitative workshops with small groups of farmers (n=30 attendees over 8 workshops). Farmers showed a positive response to the statements of pride with all statements selected by a minimum 52% of respondents. Principal Component Analysis identified three farmer types: Productivist, Environmentalist and Familial. Farmers most often comprised varying degrees of each and commonly emphasised the importance of their interrelatedness. When asked to state expectation(s) on how other farmers had responded to the survey, results were highly varied and inconsistent with both overall survey findings, and those farmers own survey responses. Farmers appear to find judging the attitudes of other farmers difficult and tend to rate them as being more productivist than they really are.</p>	
Keywords	Agri-environment schemes, environmental land management, agricultural policy
JEL Code	Q18, Q24, Q58
Introduction	<i>100 – 250 words</i>
<p>In recognition of the importance of ecosystem services and the failure of markets to deliver them, agri-environment schemes (AES) have been developed to provide incentives for the providers of ecosystem services. However, the voluntary nature of AES presents attitudinal barriers to maximising uptake with negative consequences on the anticipated benefits of AES.</p> <p>Much research has been undertaken into exploring the motivations underlying farmer decisions whether to participate in AES. This has identified two main categories of farmers, either as ‘Productivists’ or ‘Environmentalists’. Productivist farmers are essentially categorised as profit maximisers who act in a way that improves the financial situation of their business. Under this attitude, the success and continuity of the farming business is a major concern when deciding on AES participation. Much of</p>	



the European literature portrays farmers as tending toward productivist attitudes. In contrast, 'environmentalist' farmers are driven by environmental objectives with a desire to improve the ecological value of their land (Guillem and Barnes, 2013, Hanley *et al.*, 2012). Environmentalists tend to show greater commitment to a larger number of government and non-government schemes which require a higher degree of dedication (Josefsson *et al.*, 2017).

In this study, these attitudes were explored using the Theory of Planned Behaviour model (TPB), where such attitudes are a key driver of action, in this case the adoption of AES. These attitudes were explored to identify the drivers and barriers relevant to Northern Ireland farmers. Insights into relevant underlying attitudes have the potential to support the development of future AES.

Methodology

100 – 250 words

To explore the attitudes of farmers within Northern Ireland and to better understand what impacts their decision whether to participate in an AES, a mixed methodological approach was undertaken, combining a quantitative survey followed by qualitative workshops.

Online survey: all farmers within Northern Ireland were targeted (paper option was available). The survey was widely publicised and ran continuously from March to December 2023. A key component was the question "what makes you proud about your farm?" for which 10 'pride statements' were offered in conjunction with the opportunity to expand on their answer. Farmers could tick as many statements as they wished. These statements were designed to reflect the attitudes identified in wider literature concerning decision making around AES, and were made relevant to farming in Northern Ireland. A Principal Components Analysis (PCA) was used to identify whether farmers could be categorised into 'farmer types' based on their attitudes.

Workshops: these were held during September and October 2023 in 8 locations across Northern Ireland and were designed to explore in more depth the attitudes revealed in the on-line survey. The activities undertaken within the workshops were based on survey data collected between March and May 2023. A key aspect was the exploration of subjective social norms held by farmers. This was undertaken by:

- 1) Exploring what farmers expected others to view as sources of pride on their own farms.
- 2) Determining how farmers related to the 'farmer types' resulting from the PCA using an experiment with stickers portraying each type.

Results

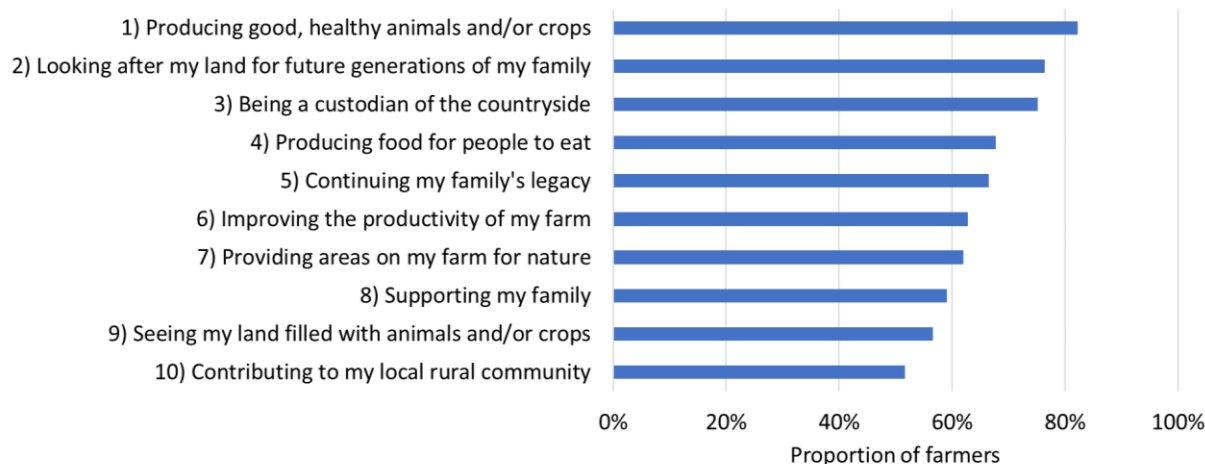
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Online survey

- Sample comprised 368 farmers.
- Age profiles, farm size, location and enterprise(s) farmed were broadly representative of the Northern Ireland farming community.

Attitudes: respondents selected statements which reflected their pride in farming, their responses are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Pride statements and the proportion of farmers selecting them



PCA results:

- PCA identified 3 'farmer types' from their pride statements:
 - Productivist.
 - Environmentalist.
 - Familial.
- Farmers were mainly found to comprise a mix of all three types.

Workshops

- A sub-sample of farmers (n=30) attended.

Attitudes: farmers were asked in more detail about each statement. This highlighted unexpected interpretations of some statements, e.g.: "Supporting my family" was perceived by many as an unachievable aspiration for a farming income, rather than a source of pride.

Social norms: when asked which pride statements other farmers would have selected:

- Many expressed that they found this difficult.
- Productivity-based statements were the ones most often proposed (particularly statements 1, 4 and 6, see Figure 1).
- This differed from their own responses expressed during the survey.

Farmer types: Farmers were unsurprised by the three farmer types identified through PCA, however they emphasised inter-relatedness being especially relevant. When asked to confidentially state which farmer type they identified with, farmers expressed difficulty often resulting in them choosing all available options.

Social norms:

Stickers portraying each farmer type were provided for unobserved uptake. 88 productivist stickers were taken, 57 environmentalist, and 42 familial. Of note, one farmer took 50 of the productivist stickers (none of the others).

Discussion and Conclusion

100 – 250 words

Through exploring the attitudes of farmers, this study has identified that there is considerable diversity within the Northern Ireland farming community.

Reflecting the findings of the literature: 'productivists' and 'environmentalists' were observed in the farmer sample. However, an additional farmer type: 'familial', was identified relating to inherited and successional pressures. This resulted in some strong and emotive responses broadly polarised between:

- 1) An inability to disrespect the decisions made by previous generation(s) despite the current farmer's own attitudes and aspirations. This was reflected with examples of despair over who will succeed the farm.
- 2) A less commonly observed detachment from inherited responsibility with decisions made entirely based on the current farmer's own attitudes and aspirations. This was reflected with examples of lost confidence in farm business viability, and a desire not to burden successors with debt.

Survey Vs workshops

This study had the opportunity to compare responses made by the same farmers throughout the engagement process. These responses often did not align owing to factors such as the open discussion format and the presence of peers during workshops. Many farmers appear to perceive themselves as outliers with different aspirations and sources of pride compared with 'other farmers'. Other farmers are often expected to be more productivist in their attitudes than they really are.