

Farmer Attitudes to Farming, the Environment and Agri-Environment Schemes

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1. Key Message

Farmers' perceptions and motivations differ significantly. These differences impact decisions made in relation to agri-environment schemes (AESs).

2. Introduction

Farmers' decisions have a significant impact on the environment. AESs are implemented to encourage positive environmental choices. It is important that the decision of farmers to participate in these is understood. We analyse how farmer attitudes to farming, the environment and AESs impact participation. Obtaining a deeper understanding of this decision will allow for the creation of improved schemes that reach goals and have a wider scale.

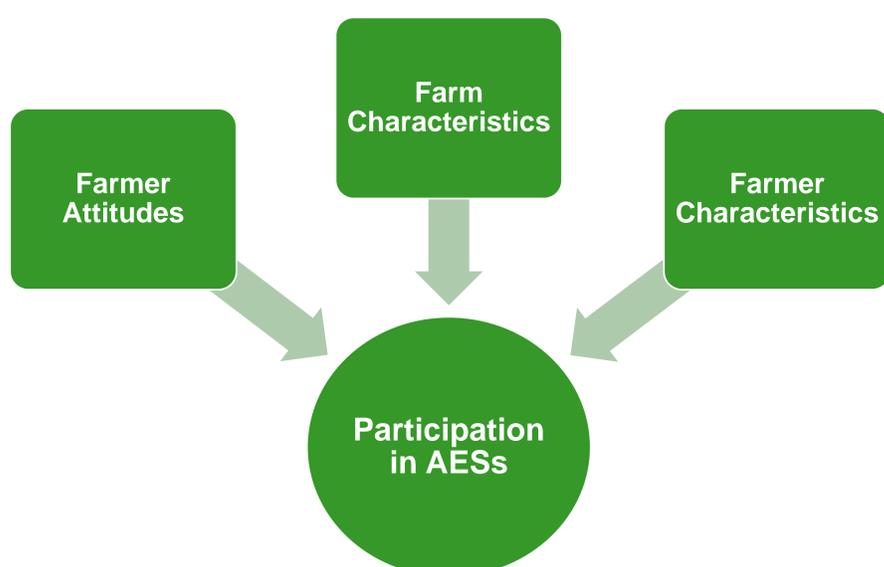
3. Methodology and Data

A survey was conducted on 1000 Irish farms in late 2012. Information was collected on characteristics of both the farm and farmer and their participation in AESs. Also, farmers' attitudes towards the environment, farming and the benefits and drawbacks of agri-environment schemes were recorded through their responses to statements on a Likert scale.

A factor analysis was conducted on these responses to find the underlying attitude groups in which farmers fall resulting in seven factor variables. Two relating to the benefits and drawbacks of AESs and five relating to attitudes towards farming and the environment.

Attitude groups	Description
Benefits Conscious	More inclined to recognise the upsides of participating in AESs
Drawbacks Conscious	More inclined to recognise the downsides of participating in AESs
Future Orientation	More open to new technology, using new information to help farm continue to run in the future
Financial Orientation	Focused on making profit regardless of environmental consequences
Positive caretakers	Positive attitude to farming and believe farmers are having a positive impact on the environment
Conservative Orientation	Cautious about new ideas, do not like risk and believe it is important to be respected by other farmers
Agricultural Optimism	Optimistic about economic potential for farming, feeling that agricultural land is underutilised

Using these derived variables and various farm and farmer characteristics a binomial logistic regression was used to analyse the relationship with the participation choice for AESs.



4. Results

Being 'Benefits Conscious' has a strong positive effect on the likelihood of participating in AESs. The opposite is true for being 'Drawbacks Conscious'. The relationship between attitudes towards farming and the environment and participation is more complex. It is only through their relationship with the farmer's perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of AESs that they have an impact.

Direction of effect of attitudes on participation in AESs

Benefits Conscious	Positive
Benefits Conscious * Financial Orientation	Positive
Benefits Conscious * Future Orientation	Negative
Benefits Conscious * Conservative Orientation	Negative
Drawbacks Conscious	Negative
Drawbacks Conscious * Positive Caretakers	Negative
Drawbacks Conscious * Agricultural optimism	Negative

Other key results:

- Attitudes impact other decisions made in relation to AESs including the choice of measures within schemes and the decision to keep up maintenance after the scheme ends.
- Neighbour participation is extremely important i.e. farmers with all neighbours in schemes are 7 times more likely to join than those with some neighbours in schemes.
- Outside influences such as getting help from a agricultural consultant or being part of a discussion group positively relate to participation.

5. Conclusions

We have identified broad attitude groups that farmers fall into, which, due to the nature of the survey, is representative of all Irish farmers. These attitude groups have a significant impact on the decision to participate in agri-environment schemes.

Perceptions

- Changing farmers' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of AESs is key to increasing participation.

Incentives

- Motivations of each attitude group is different. Identifying these groups will allow for targeted incentives.

Social

- Importance of neighbour participation in the decision is a key result for locally led programmes.

Part of ensuring the success of agri-environment schemes lies in creating schemes that entice farmers to participate. By identifying evidence based attitude groups that farmers fall into this study will help create more successful schemes. Further research will be conducted on what policy levers will most influence each of these groups and also their impact on biodiversity outcomes.

6. Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the funding provided under the Teagasc Walsh Fellowship Scheme for the PhD 'The Economics of Maintaining and Enhancing Biodiversity on Irish Farms'.