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# **A new approach to generational renewal in agriculture**

The agrarian social regeneration as a pathway



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# The Imperative for Agrarian Social Regeneration in Europe

A genuine interest in generational renewal is burgeoning within Europe's agricultural sector. As we embark on crafting a report focused on farm generational renewal and new entrants policies, it becomes increasingly evident that a deeper exploration of this issue is critically necessary. However, a fundamental question persists: are institutions, society at large, and the agrarian sector itself truly prepared to grapple with the intricate complexities of generational renewal across Europe?

A growing body of scholarship contends that the primary obstacle hindering young farmers and new entrants' entry into the sector is the dominant sociotechnical food regime – a globalized, capitalist system that permeates European society (Marsden and Sonnino, 2016; Van Der Ploeg and Ventura, 2020). Current challenges associated with generational renewal stem, in part, from new entrant policies overly focused on business innovation and globalized agriculture. This emphasis appears demonstrably ineffective, as it fails to address the underlying crisis of social reproduction that lies at the heart of regenerating the agrarian social system (Brent, 2022). Moreover, such policies prioritize the preservation of the existing system, which is increasingly misaligned with the needs of new entrants seeking to enter the agricultural sector.

New entrant farming policies, rather than addressing the evolving social relations within rural areas, perpetuate an intensive and extractive model of agriculture, leading to precarity for certain individuals and communities (Calo and Corbett, 2024). Consequently, a paradigm shift is necessary. New entrant farming policies must evolve to encompass the social sphere and the dynamic interplay between new actors within the context of a new agrosocial paradigm (Monllor and Fuller, 2016).

If the prevailing framework driving the agrarian social system is indeed crumbling, then a systemic transformation is warranted. However, such a transformative approach may inherently necessitate a revolution. As proponents of peaceful change, we advocate for a more measured approach – a transition. We conceptualize this transition as the pathway to the agrarian social regeneration.

Agrarian social regeneration represents a promising approach to revitalize rural communities. By promoting sustainable practices, fostering social connection, and building a viable economic model for small-scale farms, it can create a thriving rural future that benefits both people and the environment. Overall, agrarian social regeneration offers a hopeful path towards revitalizing depopulated areas.



# Understanding: drawing the scenario

When we think on European agriculture, we frequently highlight generational renewal as a priority issue. Much research has studied this issue deeply, like the EIP Agri Focus Group<sup>1</sup>, the FP7 FarmPath<sup>2</sup>, H2020 Newbie<sup>3</sup> or H2020 Ruralisation<sup>4</sup>. Recently, the European Parliament, has published a resolution related to generational renewal in the European farms of the future.

The European Parliament emphasizes the vital role of young farmers and new entrants in shaping agricultural policies and decision-making processes. Active participation of young farmers' organizations at all levels is urged to ensure that their specific needs are effectively addressed. Additionally, the importance of gender equality in agriculture is highlighted, with efforts encouraged to create an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs.

Acknowledging the challenges posed by climate change and biodiversity loss, the Parliament underscores the role of young farmers and new entrants in driving the green and digital transitions. Policies and financing instruments prioritizing the needs of the new generations are called for, with an emphasis on the current support from the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) being insufficient to address the challenges of generational renewal.

The resolution calls for comprehensive strategies to promote generational renewal, considering the specific needs of young farmers and new entrants who may not come from farming families. The importance of public policies addressing farmers' needs before farm transfer is emphasized, fostering diverse options to facilitate the transfer process, most of them focus on the local scale.

Furthermore, the Parliament highlights the role of cooperatives and farmers' organizations in supporting the new generations of farmers, providing guidance services, and strengthening their representation in policy dialogues. The importance of digital technologies is underscored, with calls for measures to bridge the digital gap between rural and urban areas.

Ensuring decent working and living conditions, social protection, and access to quality jobs in the agricultural sector are also highlighted as essential for young agricultural workers. Additionally, the resolution emphasizes the need for rural areas to provide adequate living conditions, including sustainable livelihoods, job opportunities, access to essential services, and digital connectivity.

Lastly, the Parliament calls for fair competition in agricultural markets, urging measures to prevent unfair competition from foreign products that do not meet European standards. Its President is instructed to send the resolution to the Council and the Commission for consideration.

The European Parliament document is well-documented with data and arguments, highlighting some of the key challenges regarding generational renewal in agriculture. While there's no definitive consensus on the precise scale of the "young farmer problem" or whether it constitutes a full-blown generational renewal crisis (Coopmans et al., 2021; Zagata and Sutherland, 2025), a clear picture emerges. A complex combination of demographic, social, educational, economic, environmental, territorial and institutional challenges are jeopardizing the ability for new generations to successfully take over family farms across Europe.

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1. <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/content/new-entrants-farming-lessons-foster-innovation-and-entrepreneurship.html>

2. <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/265394/results>

3. <https://www.newbie-academy.eu/>

4. <https://ruralization.eu/>

## Evidence from the European parliament

### Demographic

#### Generational renewal isn't just a demographic issue, but...

- *In 2020, a majority (57,6%) of farm managers (all genders) were at least 55 years old and approximately only 12% of farm managers were under 40 years old, with nearly half of those being between 35 and 39.*
- *In many Member States, a relatively high proportion of farmers are 65 or over, with an average of three farm managers over 65 for every farmer under 40 (2016).*
- *The challenge of generational renewal is particularly acute in those Member States that have both a lower than average share of young farmers and a higher than average share of farmers above retirement age.*

The resolution begins by acknowledging the demographic imbalance within the farming community, where a significant majority of farm managers are over 55 years old, posing a serious challenge to succession planning and the future viability of farms. This issue is compounded in Member States with both a lower share of young farmers and a higher share of farmers nearing retirement age.

Data seems to show that generational renewal in agriculture goes beyond simply replacing aging farmers with young ones. It raises concerns about the current system and proposes a new perspective. From another point of view, Calo and Corbett (2024) propose a more critical perspective. They ask what kind of agricultural system would truly enable new entrants to establish themselves, not just enter the sector. This suggests a need to address the underlying challenges that make it difficult for new farmers to succeed, rather than just filling empty slots in the existing system.

It is true that the statistics show a significant aging population of farm managers, with a lack of young people entering the sector. This creates a challenge for farm succession and the long-term viability of agriculture. Existing policies and support for young farmers and new entrants often focus on a technical solution, just attracting more young people to become farmers and replicate the current model.

It seems to be necessary a change that argues for a critical lens on the new generation of farmers. Instead of just increasing numbers, the question becomes: what kind of agricultural system would actually encourage and support new farmers to establish themselves? This suggests a need for a systemic change, not just a demographic one. In simpler terms, it's not just about getting more people into farming, but also about creating an agricultural system that makes it attractive and feasible for them to succeed.



## Economic

### Generational renewal isn't just an economic issue, but...

- *Agricultural income remains below the average for the rest of the economy in almost all Member States, standing at 47 of average gross wages and salaries in the European economy.*
- *Farms run by managers aged 40 or younger have the lowest income on average at European level, and farms run by women have lower incomes than those run by men.*
- *The import of agricultural products of a lower standard than those produced in the European is also an obstacle to the ability to obtain fair prices and returns on the market.*

The document highlights the need to address a range of economic challenges to ensure generational change in agriculture. These challenges include the need for a fair and decent income, income stability and predictability, access to land at affordable prices, access to credit and other financial services, adequate pensions and social protection, quality of life, and work-life balance.

The European parliament points out the necessity that farmers earn an income that allows them to live a decent and dignified life. The current level of income, which stands at 47% of the average European gross wage, is too low and discourages new generations from entering the sector. The instability and unpredictability of agricultural income is a major obstacle to generational change. It is necessary to have policies that guarantee greater stability and predictability of agricultural income.

There is income disparity by age. Farms managed by younger farmers have the lowest average income across the European and farms run by women have lower incomes compared to those managed by men. This gender disparity could discourage women from entering or staying in agriculture, further limiting the pool of potential new entrants. These economic inequalities within the agricultural sector make it more difficult to attract and retain young people and women, thus hindering a smooth generational transition. The Parliament document also emphasizes that farmers must have adequate pensions and social protection to guarantee them a decent standard of living after retirement. It is necessary to improve pensions and social protection for farmers, as quality of life in rural areas is an important factor in attracting new generations to agriculture. By revitalizing both, rural and remote areas, a paradigm shift offers a compelling vision for young people who might be interested in a career connected to nature and food production.

The European Parliament Resolution raises concerns about the import of agricultural products that do not meet European standards, undercutting fair prices for domestically produced goods. The Parliament calls for fair competition in agricultural markets, urging measures to prevent unfair competition from foreign products that do not comply with European standards. It instructs its President to forward the resolution to the Council and the Commission for consideration.



## Social

### Generational renewal isn't just a social issue, but...

- *Farming remains a predominantly family activity, as in 2020, almost 9 in 10 (86,1%) people who worked regularly in agriculture in the European were the sole holder (farmer) or members of the farmer's family.*
- *In 2020 slightly more than two thirds (68,4%) of farm managers in the European's 9,1 million holdings were male.*
- *Generational renewal requires young people from agricultural backgrounds to remain on this professional path and newcomers to be encouraged to enter the sector.*

The resolution addresses the gender disparity within the agricultural sector, noting that the majority of farm managers are male. It highlights the importance of gender equality in agriculture and urges efforts to create an enabling environment for female entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the resolution stresses the significance of family farming and the need for effective measures to facilitate farm transfers, especially to non-family members. The resolution calls for comprehensive strategies to promote generational renewal, considering the specific needs of young and new farmers who may not come from farming families. It emphasizes the importance of public policies addressing farmers' needs prior to farm transfer, fostering diverse options for facilitating the transfer process.

The text also argues that seemingly neutral programs promoting new farmers might have hidden assumptions (Sutherland, 2023). These assumptions could dictate who gets support (e.g., favoring certain backgrounds or farming styles) and potentially exclude diverse perspectives. Existing efforts often focus on age, traditional entry paths to farming, and experience (EIP-Agri, 2016). This overlooks the challenges faced by minority groups who have historically contributed to agriculture but haven't had equal access to land ownership (Leslie et al, 2019).

Data brings new ideas related to using social reproduction theory to analyze generational renewal. This theory focuses on how societies maintain themselves, including how people care for themselves, their families, and the land they work with (Brent, 2022). This approach suggests a shift in focus from just "production" to the act of caring for oneself and the land as a form of "reproduction." This broader view could help identify and address the needs of new entrant farmers beyond just technical farming skills. In short, social data could argue that current programs might unintentionally exclude diverse groups. Analyzing generational renewal through the lens of social reproduction theory could help create a more inclusive and sustainable approach to attracting a new generation of farmers.





## Educational

### Generational renewal isn't just an educational issue, but...

- *72,3% of farm managers in the European in 2020 had only practical experience, while barely 10,2% had full agricultural training and the remaining 17,5% only basic agricultural training.*
- *Young farmers had higher levels of educational attainment in terms of full agricultural training (21,4% vs 3,6% for farmers over 65) and had followed up-to-date professional training courses, including courses on new and innovative farming practices.*
- *Policy objectives cover three main areas of new entrant support: land access, capital for business start-ups, and advice and training services.*

The European Parliament emphasizes that education matters, but it's not enough. The statistics show a significant gap in educational attainment between younger and older farmers. Young farmers are more likely to have formal agricultural training and participate in modern farming practices.

The resolution also emphasizes the need for infrastructure development, access to financing, and "soft skills" training, suggesting a recognition that agricultural success requires skills beyond traditional farming techniques. It argues for a flexible and multi-faceted approach to supporting young farmers and new entrants in agriculture. It highlights the importance of tailoring services, providing early intervention and ongoing support, and utilizing diverse models for knowledge transfer, as mentoring programs or farm incubators.

The document indicates the necessity to inspiring the next generation of farmers, recognizing the importance of sparking interest in agriculture among young people. It highlights networking initiatives and educational programs, including promoting healthy eating in schools, as ways to cultivate a positive image of agriculture for future generations.

In summary, while education is crucial, a successful generational renewal strategy needs to address a wider range of factors. This includes financial support, infrastructure, soft skills development, and fostering a positive image of agriculture among young people and new entrants.



## Environmental

### Generational renewal isn't just an environmental issue, but...

- *Almost all European regions are experiencing a steady increase in average farm sizes and a concentration of production on fewer and larger farms, affecting different types of production in different ways.*
- *The number of farms in the EU-27 declined by about 37% between 2005 and 2020, with a downward trend and with small farms experiencing the strongest decline.*
- *Land concentration and a reduction in the number of farms and farmers generally lead to simplification, with less product diversity and greater biodiversity loss.*
- *Agricultural land has some unique characteristics, in that its area and location are fixed, while its fertility can be improved or reduced by the practices of farmers.*

The resolution highlights the trend of increasing farm sizes and consolidation of production, leading to a decline in the number of farms, particularly smaller ones. This consolidation trend raises concerns about biodiversity loss and reduced product diversity. Land concentration and fewer farms can lead to simplification in agricultural practices and landscapes. This could result in less variety of crops and potentially harm biodiversity.

Recognizing the challenges posed by climate change and biodiversity loss, the Parliament emphasizes the role of young farmers and new entrants in driving the green and digital transitions. It calls for policies and funding instruments that prioritize the needs of young farmers, emphasizing that the current Common Agriculture Policy support is insufficient to address the challenges of generational renewal. It calls for policies and funding that specifically address the needs of the new generation of farmers, suggesting a need for a more targeted approach.

The trend of farm concentration might be even more pronounced in remote areas. Factors like distance to markets, transportation costs, and limited access to resources could make it even harder for smaller farms in these areas to compete with larger operations, potentially accelerating their decline.

A decrease in the number of farms, particularly smaller ones, could lead to a decline in the variety of agricultural products grown in remote areas. This could have implications for local food systems and potentially limit access to fresh produce for residents. A decline in farm numbers, especially in remote areas, could have a negative impact on the social and economic fabric of these communities.

From a more optimistic perspective, remote areas could be a potential for niche markets. While there might be challenges, remote areas could also offer opportunities for young and new farmers. The remoteness itself could be a selling point for certain niche markets, such as organic farming or producing specialty products.

In essence, attracting a new generation of farmers is not just about economic viability, but also about environmental sustainability. Young and new farmers with fresh ideas and potentially greener practices are seen as crucial for the future of agriculture.

Generational farm renewal is essential to ensure more sustainable agriculture that protects the environment and fights against climate change, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, water scarcity, and pollution.

## Territorial

### Generational renewal isn't just a territorial issue, but...

- *Remoteness is an important element of difficulty in rural areas, affecting numerous aspects of life, meaning that mountain areas are in dire need of a coherent process of generational renewal in the agricultural sector.*
- *Data points out that the low level of generational renewal in farming, while part of a larger trend of demographic decline, is a general European concern for the sector and for society as a whole, affecting remote rural areas in particular.*
- *Generational renewal is key for the future social, economic and environmental sustainability of rural areas, European food security and rural landscape preservation, and in particular for the future of agriculture, including for the diversity of sustainable farming systems and traditional family farming models.*

The resolution recognizes the unique challenges faced by rural areas, particularly mountainous regions, and calls for a coherent approach to generational renewal that addresses the specific needs of these areas. Overall, the resolution underscores the importance of addressing generational renewal as a key priority to ensure the sustainability and prosperity of European agriculture in the future.

The European Parliament emphasizes the critical role of generational renewal in ensuring the future sustainability of rural areas, food security, and the preservation of the agricultural landscape. Recognizing the challenges faced by the agricultural sector, particularly in remote regions, the Parliament stresses the need for innovative approaches to attract young farmers and new entrants.

Ensuring decent working and living conditions, social protection, and access to quality jobs in the agricultural sector are also highlighted as essential for young farm workers. Moreover, the resolution emphasizes the need for rural areas to provide adequate living conditions, including sustainable livelihoods, career opportunities, and access to essential services and digital connectivity.

Generational renewal in remote rural areas plays a critical role ensuring the viability of agriculture. The resolution recognizes the need for a tailored approach to generational renewal that specifically addresses the challenges faced by remote and mountainous regions. Attracting young farmers and new entrants to remote areas is critical for the future of European agriculture and it is clear the need for creative and agrosocial solutions to overcome the unique challenges these areas face.



## Institutional

### Generational renewal isn't just an institutional issue, but...

- *Generational renewal measures under the common agricultural policy (CAP) are not always well suited to farm transfers to non-family members.*
- *Supporting generational renewal in agriculture is an objective of the 2023-2027 CAP, Member States must devote at least 3% of their direct payment envelope, before transfers, to this objective, which represents an upgrade from previous programming periods.*
- *A fair and dignified income, a sustainable and stable livelihood, equitably distributed EU direct support, a positive image of farming, a predictable legal framework, quality of life for farmers and their families and an adequate work- life balance is essential in attracting young farmers and new people to the sector.*

Nowadays, most of the policy programs objectives are related with access to land, access to capital and access to advice and training services, but the existing generational renewal measures within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) might not always be effective for transfers to non-family members, even for family members focusing in new alternative models.

The resolution underscores the importance of supporting young farmers and new entrants in introducing innovative business ideas, promoting sustainable farming practices, and enhancing the diversity of farming systems. It acknowledges the objectives set forth in the 2023-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to allocate resources for generational renewal, aiming to upgrade support from previous programming periods.

Identifying barriers to entry into farming, such as land availability, profitability, administrative requirements, and access to credit, the resolution calls for comprehensive strategies to increase the attractiveness of agriculture. It emphasizes the need for fair income, stable livelihoods, and a supportive legal framework to attract and retain young farmers.

Moreover, the resolution highlights the importance of intergenerational cooperation, promoting pathways for farm succession, and providing access to advisory services and training. It calls for measures to facilitate land access for young farmers, including land leasing and cooperative arrangements.

Additionally, the Parliament stresses the role of cooperatives and farmers' organizations in supporting young and new farmers, providing guidance services, and enhancing their representation in policy dialogues. It underscores the importance of digital technologies for young farmers' activities and calls for measures to bridge the digital divide between rural and urban areas.

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of generational renewal, the resolution calls for coordinated efforts between European and national policies. It emphasizes the sharing of best practices, the promotion of intergenerational dialogue, and the integration of soft skills training into agricultural education.

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## ■ Multifaceted challenge of farm generational renewal in Europe

The European agricultural sector faces a critical challenge: ensuring a smooth generational shift from exit farmers to new entrants. The resolution from the European Parliament acknowledges this complexity and calls for a multi-pronged approach.

### Key Issues

#### Aging Population

A significant portion of farm managers are nearing retirement age, with a lack of young people entering the field.

#### Economic Concerns

Low and unstable income, difficulty accessing land and credit, and limited social security discourage young people from pursuing agriculture.

#### Social and Educational Gaps

Existing support programs might favor traditional entry paths and exclude diverse groups. Young farmers need not only technical skills but also knowledge of sustainable practices and business management.

#### Environmental Sustainability

Farm consolidation can lead to biodiversity loss. Young farmers with fresh perspectives are crucial for adopting greener practices.

#### Challenges in Remote Areas

Remote regions face additional hurdles like limited infrastructure and distance to markets, making it even harder to attract young farmers.



## Proposed Solutions

### Financial Support

Ensure fair and stable income, improve access to land and credit, and provide adequate pensions.

### Education and Training

Offer programs that combine technical skills with business acumen, soft skills development, and knowledge of sustainable practices.

### Institutional Reforms

Review and improve existing CAP measures to better address generational renewal, particularly for non-family transfers.

### Intergenerational Collaboration

Encourage knowledge transfer from experienced farmers to young entrants and new through mentorship programs and other initiatives like incubator farms.

### Focus on Rural Areas

Address the specific challenges of remote regions and invest in improving infrastructure and quality of life.

### Promote Diversity and Innovation

Create an enabling environment for young women and new entrant groups to enter agriculture and explore niche markets.

The resolution emphasizes the need for a systemic change that goes beyond simply replacing farmers. It calls for creating an agricultural system that is economically viable, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable, attracting a new generation of enthusiastic farmers who can ensure the future of European agriculture.



# Conceptualising: finding a meaning

## ■ Generational renewal in farming

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD)<sup>5</sup> acknowledges generational renewal in European agriculture as a critical challenge. They emphasize it's more than just replacing farmers; it's about creating an attractive and sustainable agricultural system for a new generation.

Generational renewal in a rural development context goes beyond a reduction in the average age of farmers. It is also about empowering a new generation of highly qualified young and new farmers to bring the full benefits of new ideas to support sustainable farming practices in Europe. Generational renewal in farming refers to the process of ensuring the continuation of agricultural production by new blood taking over farms from retiring farmers. It's a complex issue with significant social, economic, and environmental implications.

Generational renewal is not simply a linear process of transferring ownership and knowledge from one generation to the next. It's a complex phenomenon, and probably a circular process, shaped by the dynamic interplay of direct and indirect factors within the agricultural system. Multiple pathways exist for both exiting and entering the agricultural sector. Recognizing this diverse entry and exit points is crucial for facilitating a smooth and successful generational renewal process.

Although direct succession within a farming business remains the most common mechanism for generational renewal (Jack et al., 2019), there is evidence that a growing number of new entrants have limited previous experience with agriculture but frequently have other non-agricultural experience (EIP-AGRI, 2016; Monllor and Fuller, 2016). Intra-family succession is still the dominant form of entry into farming, but other pathways to enter the sector are increasing (European Parliament, 2023).

Traditional farm succession from parent to child is just one path within generational renewal. Recognizing the various entry and exit points is essential for a comprehensive approach that take into account aspiring farmers that may enter the sector through inheritance, land purchase, leasing arrangements, or partnerships with existing farms. Educational and training programs can equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge. These are mainly the “entry points”.

On the other hand, the “exit points” related to retirement, illness, or economic hardship can prompt farmers to leave the sector. But it is also necessary to take into account alternative land ownership models like land trusts or cooperatives that can ease the transition and ensure the land remains in agricultural use. This shift towards a more complex and cyclical agricultural system requires increased focus on supporting the retiring generation.

By acknowledging the dynamic nature of generational farm renewal and the influence of diverse factors and pathways, stakeholders can develop more effective strategies. Supporting knowledge transfer between generations, enhancing the economic viability of farming for young and new entrants, and promoting sustainable practices are all crucial elements for ensuring a thriving agricultural future.

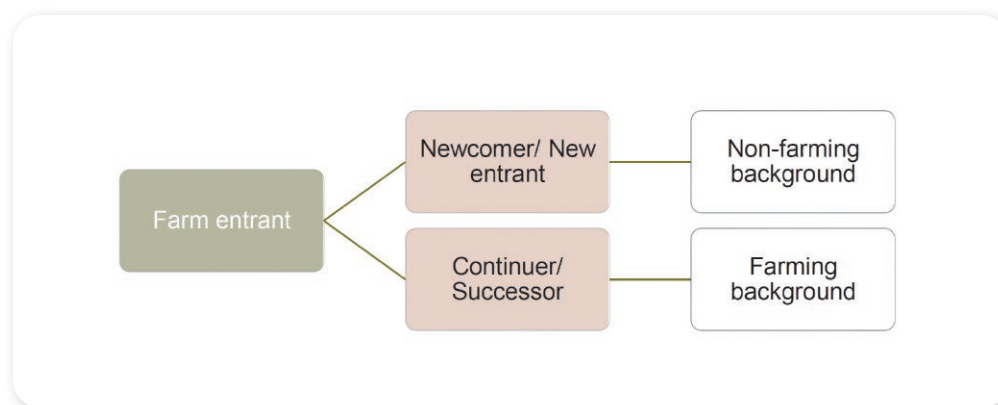
Generational farm renewal is not merely about handing over the reins of family farms; it is about fostering a diverse farming sector that embraces innovation, sustainability, and knowledge transfer. By addressing the challenges faced by younger generations, facilitating knowledge transfer, and promoting sustainable practices, we can ensure the continued success of family farms, and also the creation of new ones, fostering vitality of the agricultural sector for generations to come.

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5. [https://ec.europa.eu/enrd/home-page\\_en.html](https://ec.europa.eu/enrd/home-page_en.html)

## Different profiles

In the last decade many formal and informal documents have brought evidence about the different profiles of people entering to the agrarian sector (Coopmans et al., 2021; Pindado et al., 2018; Zagata et al. 2017). Monllor (2013) identifies in her research two main ways, based on the family background. She also found that the way young people enter agriculture influences the type of farming they engage in. The following figure shows the two main pathways that continuers (individuals who enter agriculture following a family tradition) and newcomers (individuals who enter agriculture without a direct family farming connection) follow.



These two pathways could be more complex if we take into account other variables like working off-farm for a period of time, making changes to farming practices or farm diversification. The Focus Group on new entrants into farming defined multiple variables of these profiles related in the mini paper “defining new entrants”<sup>6</sup>.

In this document we are not focusing on the definition, we just want to make clear that the necessities and the assets new entrants have, are different considering the pathways they follow. We are simplifying the reality into continuers and newcomers to farming. All of them are new entrants<sup>7</sup>.

The Focus Group on new entrants to farming defined a new entrant like:

***A natural person, or group of people who have within the past ten years established a new agricultural holding, farming business or cooperative. The natural person or group of people should be actively farming (i.e. producing some agricultural products for sale) and be either establishing a new agricultural holding or returning to a family-held holding after a minimum of 10 years of off-farm education or employment.***

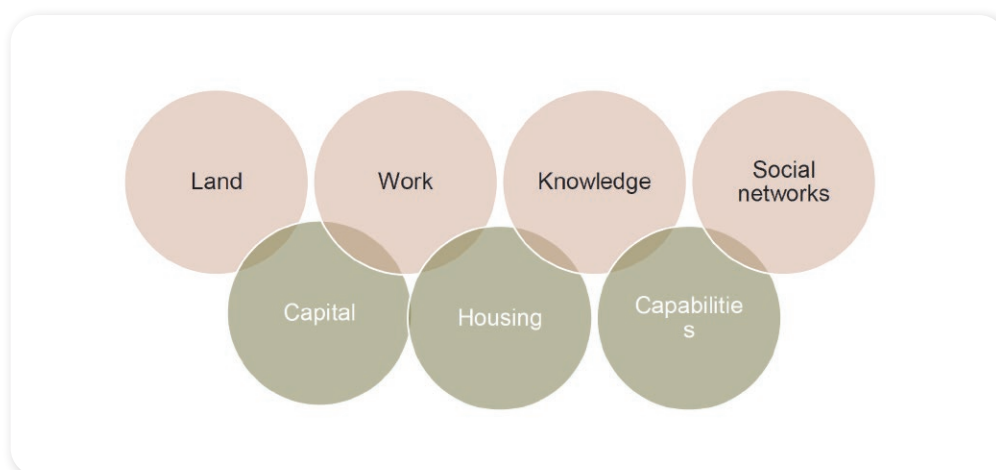
6. [https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/sites/agri-eip/files/fg14\\_08\\_minipaper\\_defining\\_ne.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/sites/agri-eip/files/fg14_08_minipaper_defining_ne.pdf)

7. For a deeper discussion: Creaney, R.; Hasler, H.; Sutherland, L.-A. What's in a Name? Defining New Entrants to Farming. EuroChoices 2023.



## Different assets

It is essential to recognize the differences between continuers and newcomers. They have different sets of needs and assets, and consequently it is necessary to provide targeted support. For example, a young farmer taking over a family farm might have access to land and equipment but might need training in modern agricultural practices. In contrast, a newcomer with an agricultural degree might need help with securing land and financing but could bring valuable knowledge and skills.



**Land** is a crucial asset for starting a farm. Continuers often have an advantage. They might inherit land, purchase it within the family, or benefit from established relationships with existing landowners. This gives them a head start compared to newcomers who face challenges like high prices, competition, and limited access to leasing arrangements (European Council of Young Farmers, 2023).

**Work Experience** as a practical experience is invaluable. Continuers who grew up working on the family farm gain a strong foundation in agricultural practices. However, newcomers might have limited experience in hands-on farming. While some might have relevant work in horticulture or landscaping (Barham et al., 2001), they might require additional training to adapt to the specific demands of running their own farm.

**Knowledge** considers formal education and traditional knowledge. Continuers possess traditional farming knowledge passed down through generations, but might lack awareness of modern practices and technologies. Newcomers often have formal education in agriculture, environmental sciences, or related fields. This equips them with knowledge of modern techniques and sustainable practices, potentially making them well-suited for the evolving agricultural landscape (Ruhf et al., 2011).

**Social Network** establishes connections that can be a significant advantage. Continuers benefit from networks within the farming community. These networks provide access to resources, mentorship, and valuable information that can be crucial for success (CEJA, 2023). Newcomers, lacking these established connections, might face challenges accessing information and support systems readily available to those with a family history in agriculture (Ploščinski et al., 2020).

**Capital** and financial resources are essential for starting any business. Continuers might inherit farm equipment and assets from the family, reducing their initial investment needs. Newcomers, on the other hand, often have limited access to capital. They might rely on loans, grants, or alternative financing methods to get their farms established (OECD, 2023).

**Housing** is important for securing farming. Continuers might already have access to housing on or near the family farm, eliminating the need for additional investment. Newcomers, however, might need to find housing in addition to securing land, increasing their financial burden and potentially limiting their options for farm location (McIntyre et al., 2022).

**Capabilities** are the skills and abilities individuals bring to the table are diverse. Continuers might have developed strong physical skills and practical problem-solving abilities from working on the farm. Newcomers, on the other hand, might bring different strengths like business management skills, technological knowledge, or innovative ideas from their previous experiences. These diverse capabilities can be complementary, with both continuers and newcomers contributing valuable assets to the agricultural sector.



As it is shown, both continuers and newcomers bring valuable assets, their starting points differ. Continuers often benefit from inherited land, established networks within the farming community, and practical experience. However, they might lack awareness of modern practices and knowledge from other sectors. Newcomers, on the other hand, often have formal education in agriculture and knowledge of other areas of interest for farming, but face challenges securing land, accessing established networks, and acquiring hands-on experience. They might also have limited capital and need to find housing on top of securing land.

Understanding these differences is crucial for developing effective support systems. Programs that facilitate land access and mentorship for newcomers, along with training opportunities for both continuers and newcomers, can encourage a smoother generational renewal within the agricultural sector. By leveraging the strengths of both continuers and newcomers, we can ensure a more inspiring agricultural future.

## Farm generational renewal from a complex system approach

If we want to understand generation renewal as a complex system, we need to emphasize the importance of moving beyond simple demographics and delving into the underlying factors influencing the flow of farmers entering and exiting the sector. We have to view generational renewal as a distinct system within the broader agricultural system.

This focus allows for a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics affecting the number of farmers and the transfer of knowledge between generations. Unlike viewing generational renewal solely within the agricultural sector, this approach allows for a more granular analysis of the specific factors influencing entry and exit from the system.

The core objective of this framework is to identify the essential elements that constitute the generational system and their interconnections. This analysis focuses on factors influencing generational renewal that either hinder or foster generational renewal. By focusing on these factors and their interactions, we can identify areas susceptible to positive influence through targeted policies and programs.

### Barriers

These are factors that impede young and new people from entering agriculture or cause existing farmers to leave prematurely. Examples include lack of access to land, limited financial resources, inadequate training opportunities, or low social prestige associated with agriculture.

### Drivers

These are factors that encourage a healthy flow of new farmers and knowledge transfer between generations. Examples include government support programs facilitating farm transfers, mentorship initiatives, or educational programs fostering the necessary skills for successful farm management.

It is necessary to understand the differences between:

### Difficulties vs. Barriers

Difficulties are inherent challenges associated with farming (e.g., long working days, low profitability). Barriers are factors outside a farmer's control that significantly impede entry or exit from the generational renewal system (e.g., lack of access to land, complex regulations).

### Drivers vs. Needs

Drivers are positive factors enabling generational renewal, while needs are specific requirements of farmers within the system (e.g., training opportunities, access to credit). Tools (e.g., training programs) are then implemented to address these needs and leverage drivers to promote generational renewal.



By identifying **leverage points** within the generational renewal system, interventions can be designed to address the challenges at various levels. It is also key to understand the specificities of a region, including land ownership structures, farmer needs, and existing support systems, being crucial for developing effective policies and programs.

A broad **governance** scheme involving all administration levels, society as a whole and farmers themselves is essential to address the multifaceted challenges of generational renewal in agriculture. By working together, these groups can develop innovative solutions, such as new educational programs or alternative land access models, that will ensure a thriving agricultural future and a new generation of farmers to be part of the system.

This framework provides a valuable tool for policymakers and stakeholders to move beyond simple demographic data and develop targeted interventions to ensure a vibrant and sustainable future for the agricultural sector through a healthy generational renewal process. Generational renewal in agriculture is a critical issue facing the world today. A complex system approach recognizes the interconnectedness of various factors influencing the transfer of farms from older generations to younger ones.

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## ■ Main barriers for a new agrarian generation

Barriers to enter the sector are one of the key issues related to generational renewal. The sources of information are diverse (CEJA, 2019; European Commission, 2017; EIP-Agri, 2016), but most of them agree on some of the items that are listed in this section. Most of the research suggests that there is an abundance of people interested in farming who do not feel able to do so, largely for many complex and interlinked reasons.

### Land as a Critical Hurdle

#### Price and Availability

Land access remains a major barrier, often exceeding the financial resources of aspiring farmers.

#### Marginal Land

New farmers frequently find themselves starting on land with limitations, including poor soil quality, inadequate infrastructure, or distance from key markets and resources.

### Additional Barriers

#### Low Profitability

The generally low return on investment in agriculture discourages many potential entrants.

#### Administrative Burdens

Complex regulations and paperwork can be overwhelming for new farmers.

#### Negative Image

The perception of agriculture as a demanding career with low prestige deters some young people.

#### Capital Constraints

Limited personal capital and difficulty accessing credit further restrict entry.

#### Inadequate Technical Support

The lack of readily available technical services can hinder new farmers' success.

#### Climate Change Impact

The unpredictable and potentially disruptive effects of climate change pose a significant threat to new entrants.

## Attitudinal Barriers Among Existing Farmers

### Pension Concerns

Uncertainty about receiving a fair pension might incentivize older farmers to delay retirement, limiting opportunities for new entrants.

### Focus on Growth

Existing farmers seeking higher margins might prioritize farm expansion over facilitating the entry of new farmers.

### Subsidy Dependence

Reliance on Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidies can incentivize land acquisition for increased subsidies rather than facilitating generational renewal.

## Societal Challenges

### Limited Housing Access

Finding affordable housing in rural areas can be difficult for aspiring farmers.

### Institutional Support Shortfall

A lack of adequate support from relevant institutions can impede new entrants.

### Local Community Integration

Potential social friction or lack of understanding from existing residents can create challenges for newcomers.

### Poor Infrastructure

Inadequate infrastructure, especially in isolated areas, presents additional hurdles.

### Language Barriers

Language difficulties can be a significant obstacle for foreign aspiring farmers.



## Gender-Specific Challenges

### Undervaluation and Paternalism

Women in agriculture may face a lack of recognition and respect for their contributions.

### Work-Life Balance

Balancing childcare and other caregiving responsibilities with farm work can be particularly challenging for women.

## Barriers for Ethnic Minorities

### Difficulties entering farming

Minority groups, particularly migrant workers, face obstacles when trying to become farmers in Europe.

### Inadequate policy focus

Current policies prioritize worker rights but lack a clear path for migrant workers to transition to farm ownership.

### Limited data collection

the absence of data on ethnicity in farm management makes it difficult to understand the specific challenges faced by minority groups.



## ■ Generational Renewal is a circular process

Securing a future for agriculture necessitates a successful generational renewal, where established farmers effectively transfer knowledge and assets to younger and new generations (Van der Ploeg et al., 2016). This process, however, extends beyond simply replacing retiring farmers. As highlighted by Sutherland (2023), fostering intergenerational collaboration is crucial for a sincerely and sustainable transition. Importantly, generational renewal should be viewed as a circular process, where the knowledge and experience gained by younger and new farmers eventually feeds back into the system as they become mentors to the next generation.

A central tenet of successful generational renewal is the recognition that both younger and older generations possess valuable assets (Verdolini et al., 2021). Established farmers bring experience and institutional knowledge, while younger generations often contribute fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and familiarity with modern technologies (McIntyre et al., 2022). Intergenerational cooperation and dialogue are essential to bridge this knowledge gap and ensure a successful knowledge transfer process (Ploščinski et al., 2020). This collaborative process creates a cycle where the skills and experience passed on empower the younger generation to become the future mentors and knowledge holders within the agricultural sector.

By implementing these strategies and fostering collaboration between generations, we can ensure a more successful and sustainable generational renewal in the agricultural sector. This cyclical process, where knowledge flows from experienced farmers to the next generation and back again, will not only secure the continuity of agricultural knowledge and practices but also pave the way for a more innovative and adaptable agricultural future. Generational renewal needs both younger and older generations and that intergenerational cooperation and dialogue must therefore be fostered.

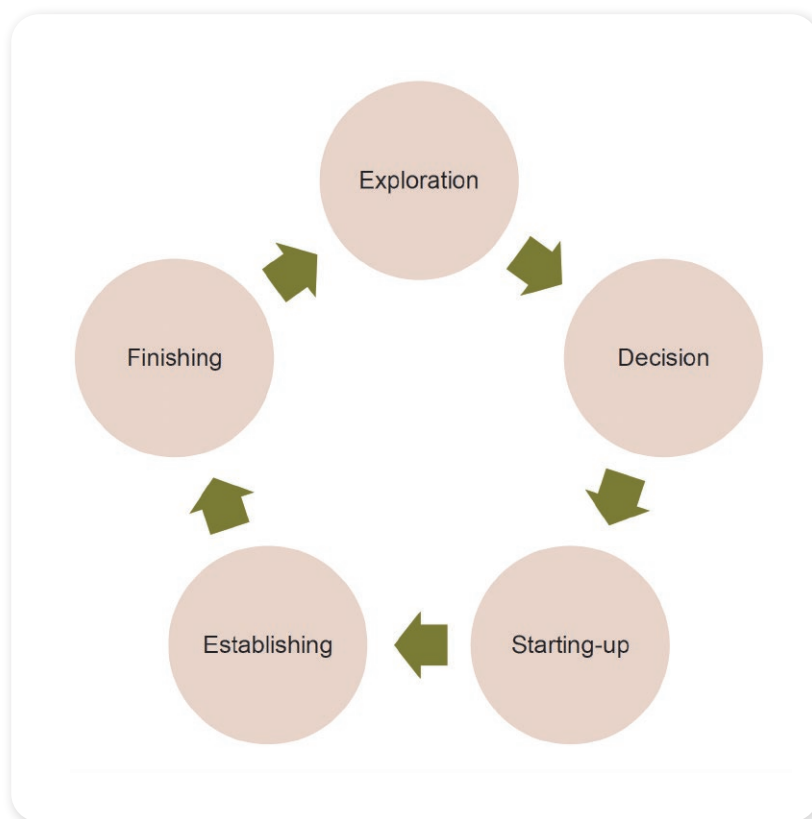
The benefits of looking at generational renewal as a circular process could be that it preserves traditional knowledge as ensures the continuation of traditional farming practices and techniques vital for maintaining the land and agricultural heritage. It fosters innovation and sustainability, being confident with the fresh perspectives and a focus on innovative and sustainable practices, ensuring the farm's long-term viability. It strengthens agricultural sector, as a generational renewal process leads to an agricultural sector with a blend of experience and innovation.

Some of the challenges to the circular process of generational renewal are the economic pressures and financial difficulties that might push experienced farmers out before a successful knowledge transfer or deter young people from entering; land access and high land prices competition that can make it difficult for young and new farmers to acquire land, creating a barrier to entry and also, lack of support or inadequate government policies or support programs can hinder the knowledge transfer process and discourage young people from pursuing agriculture.





## Different phases



This cyclical process can be broadly classified into five phases: exploration, decision, starting-up, establishing, and finishing. It is necessary to take into account that the phases are not strictly linear and can overlap. This is a simplification of the system in order to better understand the needs and the tools required in each phase.

### Exploration

This phase is for people with an interest in agriculture embarking on the journey of exploration the idea to become a farmer. They are interested in agriculture and might explore different options through education, internships, or working on a farm. This phase helps them explore if farming is a suitable option in their professional career, developing knowledge, skills, and a network within the agricultural sector.

### Decision

This phase follows the exploration to make evidence for a firmer decision to pursue a career in agriculture and is a pivotal point in the cyclical journey of generational renewal in agriculture. This decision might be influenced by factors like land availability, financial feasibility or career aspirations. By the end of this phase, entering people have a clearer direction for their agricultural careers. New entrants have a clearer vision of what they want and actively prepare to start farming in their own agricultural activity.

## Starting-up

This phase marks the initial steps in establishing a new farm or integrating into an existing one. It is the moment when the entrepreneur begins its own activity. In this phase is necessary to take into account finding suitable land, acquiring the resources required for farm operations, have access to financial resources to cover initial establishment costs and carefully develop business plan adapted to the farm activity. During this phase, the focus is on laying the groundwork for a successful farming enterprise.

## Establishing

This phase is about building and developing the farm business. Some key aspects to take into account are gaining new practical experience and honing skills in agricultural production techniques, improving marketing strategies, sharing knowledge and explore collaborative models like joint ventures or shared farming arrangements with established farmers for knowledge transfer and risk mitigation. In this phase, the focus shifts towards growth and establishing a sustainable farm business and also in start mentoring younger generations or getting involved in knowledge-sharing initiatives within the agricultural community. This phase represents the beginning of knowledge transfer back into the system.

## Finishing

This phase considers the experienced farmer gradually transitioning out of active farming, potentially through pre-retirement schemes. As experienced farmers approach retirement, their focus shift towards ensuring a smooth transition of knowledge and assets to the next generation. As the farmer approaches retirement age, they might consider partnering with a young farmer through joint ventures or shared farming arrangements.



As these phases show, there is a cyclical process of generational renewal in agriculture, highlighting the importance of intergenerational collaboration. The process of generational renewal is not a linear progression, but rather a cyclical flow. Knowledge and experience gained by younger and new farmers eventually feed back into the system as they become mentors to the next generation. This ongoing exchange ensures the continuity of agricultural knowledge and practices.

While the finishing phase often emphasizes transitioning farms to the new generations, collaboration between generations can and should occur throughout the entire process. Experienced farmers can provide invaluable guidance and mentorship during exploration, decision-making, and farm establishment. In turn, younger farmers bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and familiarity with modern technologies, fostering a knowledge exchange that benefits the entire agricultural sector.

The specific phases and timelines within the generational renewal cycle might vary depending on individual circumstances. For instance, the exploration and decision phases might be shorter for continuers who inherit land from their families. They might have a clearer path and require less time to solidify their career goals in agriculture.

It's important to remember that the generational renewal process is not a rigid sequence of events. The specific experiences and timelines can vary depending on individual situations and access to resources. However, understanding this cyclical flow and the importance of intergenerational collaboration is crucial for a thriving agricultural future.

## Analysing: going deeper

### ■ What is happening with Generational Renewal in our region?

Understanding the aspirations and challenges of young and new people entering agriculture is crucial for fostering a successful generational renewal. Here are some research questions to consider in our region when we want to know more about it. We propose some questions to investigate generational renewal through the lens of the key areas of the exit generation, the entry generation, the land, the actors involved, and the available tools. We believe that it provides valuable insights into the regional dynamics of rural development and generational renewal.

#### The Exit Generation: key element of the process

Understanding the patterns and needs of farmers approaching retirement is crucial. Research questions to explore include:

- *What are the most prevalent pathways for farmers exiting the sector? Do these involve retirement, selling the farm, or transitioning to another agricultural activity?*
- *What is the typical age range and characteristics (gender, education) of exiting farmers? Are there gender disparities in who exits agriculture?*
- *What are the key concerns and needs of farmers nearing retirement? Do they require financial assistance, support with succession planning, or access to pre-retirement schemes?*

#### The Entry pathways: energy for a new generation

Investigating how young and new people enter agriculture provides insights into their aspirations and challenges. Key questions include:

- *What are the typical paths young and new people take to enter agriculture in this region? Do they inherit the family assets (continuers) or enter without farming background (newcomers)? Are there established programs to assist with farm entry?*
- *What educational backgrounds and prior experiences do young people entering agriculture possess? Are there any specific demographics (age, gender, etc.) overrepresented among new entrants?*
- *What are the aspirations and goals of young and new farmers in this region? What are the biggest challenges they face (access to land, financing, knowledge)?*

By analyzing these questions, actors can identify potential barriers faced by new entrants and develop strategies to promote their integration into the agricultural sector.

## The Land: critical resource

Access to land is a fundamental requirement for new farmers. The following aspects of land ownership and use should be investigated:

- *What is the current situation regarding land availability for new farmers? Are there significant barriers to land ownership or leasing arrangements?*
- *Who owns the majority of land in this region (individuals, corporations, etc.)? Are landowners open to land-sharing arrangements or lease agreements with young farmers?*
- *How can landowners contribute to facilitating generational renewal? Can they offer mentorship opportunities or participate in land-matching programs to connect with aspiring farmers?*

Understanding these aspects of land availability and ownership is crucial for developing strategies that ensure access to land for the next generation of farmers.

## The Actors: a support network

A robust network of support services is essential for the success of both exiting and entering farmers. The research should focus on:

- *What existing support services are available to farmers in this region? This could include technical and professional support, training programs, assistance with taxes and grants, insurance options, farm equipment suppliers, cooperatives, and access to shared facilities.*
- *Do specific organizations or programs cater to farmers transitioning into retirement or young people entering the sector? Do these services effectively address the unique needs of both groups?*

By examining the existing support network, stakeholders can identify gaps and develop targeted programs to provide comprehensive support for farmers throughout their careers.

## The Tools: facilitating generational renewal

Investigating the tools and resources available to facilitate farm establishment and farm transfers is crucial. Key areas for research include:

- *What range of tools, facilities, and programs are available in the region to facilitate farm establishment and farm transfers? Do these tools encompass financial assistance, legal guidance, or mentorship opportunities?*
- *Analyze relevant policies and regional development plans that might impact generational renewal in agriculture. Do these plans incentivize farm transfers to young farmers or promote innovative collaboration models like joint ventures or shared farming arrangements?*

By understanding the available tools and policies, actors can identify potential areas for improvement and advocate for policies that promote a real generational transition.

## ■ Areas of assistance and support for generational renewal

Securing a thriving agricultural future demands a focus on generational renewal, where established knowledge and assets are effectively transferred to younger and new generations. To achieve this, various forms of assistance and support are crucial. Here's a breakdown of key tools related with the main areas of assistance to support a new generation of farmers.

### Awareness and Visibility

#### Promoting agriculture as a career path

Highlighting the diverse career opportunities in agriculture, through educational programs, outreach initiatives, and media campaigns.

#### Showcasing successful young and new farmers

Sharing stories of successful young farmers and their innovative approaches can inspire and motivate others to pursue agriculture.

### Access to Information

#### Centralized Information Hubs

Creating online or physical platforms aggregating resources on farm establishment, financing options, and government programs.

#### Mentorship Programs

Connecting young and new farmers with experienced mentors who can provide guidance and share practical knowledge.

### Education and Training

#### Developing Tailored Programs

Offering educational programs specifically designed for aspiring farmers, covering topics like business management, sustainable practices, and agricultural technologies.

#### Apprenticeship and Internship Opportunities

Facilitating practical experience on established farms for young people to learn from seasoned farmers or in incubator farms created to facilitate the experience pathway.

### Revitalization and Facilitation

#### Succession Planning Workshops

Assisting existing farmers in developing succession plans to ensure a smooth transfer of their farms to the next generation.

#### Land-Matching Programs

Connecting retiring farmers with potential successors by facilitating land access and lease agreements.

## Access to Land

### Land Inheritance Incentives

Introducing policies that incentivize land transfers within families.

### Land Trust Programs

Establishing land trusts to acquire land and lease it to aspiring farmers at affordable rates.

## Service-providing, Assistance and Coaching

### Business Development Support

Offering assistance with financial planning, loan applications, and business development strategies for new farmers.

### Technical and Professional Support

Providing access to expertise in areas like soil health management, crop production or social networking.

## Added Value and Food Aggregation

### Developing Local Food Systems

Supporting the creation of farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and other initiatives that connect farmers directly to consumers.

### Value-Added Processing

Offering assistance with processing agricultural products to increase profitability for farmers.

## Infrastructures, Equipment and Existing Facilities

### Shared-Use Facilities

Developing shared-use facilities for processing, storage, and equipment, to make resources more accessible and cost-effective for young farmers.

### Investment in Rural Infrastructure

Improving infrastructure in rural areas, like roads and broadband access, to attract and retain young farmers.

## Ecosystem Services, Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

### Training in Sustainable Practices

Educating farmers on sustainable agriculture practices that promote soil health, water conservation, and biodiversity.

### Climate-Smart Agriculture Programs

Providing resources and support for farmers to adopt climate-resilient agricultural practices.

## Networking, Cooperation, and Mutual Support

### Farmer Networks and Associations

Facilitating the creation of networks and associations where young farmers can connect with peers, share knowledge, and access resources.

### Collaboration Models

Promoting collaboration models like joint ventures or shared farming arrangements between established and new farmers.

## Governance

### Policy Development

Enacting policies that promote generational renewal in agriculture, such as tax breaks for young farmers and loan guarantee programs.

### Research and Development

Investing in research and development programs focused on innovative solutions for challenges faced by new farmers.

By addressing these areas of assistance and support, we can create a more enabling environment for generational renewal in agriculture. This will foster a local and resilient agricultural sector with a future secured by the knowledge, passion, and innovative approaches of the next generation of farmers.

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## Proposing: acting together

Securing the future of agriculture hinges on a successful generational renewal within the farming sector. This process, however, transcends individual farm operations and needs a collaborative approach at the local level (Van der Ploeg et al., 2016). There are several compelling arguments for prioritizing collective action in fostering generational renewal.

Firstly, by pooling resources, local communities can offer a more comprehensive support system for aspiring farmers (Woods, 2017). Individual farms may lack the financial muscle or specialized expertise to establish robust training programs, land banks, or effective marketing initiatives. Collaboration allows for the creation of shared resources, such as mentorship programs or workshops, that bridge the knowledge gap between retiring and aspiring farmers (McIntyre et al., 2020).

Secondly, a united front carries significant weight when advocating for policy changes or securing funding from government or private entities (Van der Ploeg et al., 2016). A collective voice is more likely to gain traction when lobbying for measures that benefit aspiring farmers or address challenges faced by transitioning farms. This collaborative approach strengthens the bargaining power of the agricultural community.

Furthermore, collaboration fosters a sense of community and belonging for aspiring farmers, particularly those from minority backgrounds or newcomers to the sector (McIntyre et al., 2020). This supportive network provides not only encouragement and guidance but also potential partnership opportunities. A sense of community can be a crucial factor in attracting and retaining new talent in agriculture.

Finally, working together allows for exploring larger-scale solutions that benefit all participating farms (Woods, 2017). This could involve shared infrastructure projects like collective slaughterhouses or joint marketing initiatives that lead to increased efficiency, cost savings, and innovation within the local agricultural sector. Collaboration ultimately contributes to a more sustainable agricultural future.

In conclusion, a collaborative approach at the local level is essential for facilitating a sustainable farm generational renewal. By pooling resources, advocating for change, fostering a supportive community, and exploring shared solutions, communities can create a robust ecosystem that empowers both the retiring generation and aspiring farmers. This collective effort ensures the successful transfer of knowledge, resources, and a thriving agricultural legacy.



## ■ Tools from the local scale

The traditional perspective on generational renewal often focuses on what aspiring farmers need to do to succeed. However, a crucial shift in mentality involves asking a different question: What can I do for Generational Renewal?

This reframing broadens the scope beyond just aspiring farmers and encourages everyone to consider their role in fostering a real transition. Here's how this shift can be beneficial:

### Shared Responsibility

It acknowledges that generational renewal is a collective effort. Everyone in the community, from established farmers to policymakers and society as a whole, can contribute.

### Action-Oriented

It fosters a proactive approach, encouraging individuals to identify ways they can personally contribute to supporting the next generation of farmers.

### Inclusion

It opens opportunities for diverse stakeholders to get involved. This could involve mentoring programs, advocating for policy changes, or investing in local agriculture.

By adopting this "What can I do?" mentality, we can create a more supportive ecosystem for aspiring farmers, and also for retiring farmers. This ultimately leads to a more active, real and dynamic agricultural future for everyone. After that, we ask some questions like:

- *Which areas of assistance and support are available in my region?*
- *What tools are required to facilitate generational renewal that are not yet developed?*
- *Can we establish a focus group to deal with generational renewal?*
- *What measures in favour of generational renewal are we able to take in our region, given our resources and expertise?*
- *What could be our strategy for the following months and years to bend the curve of depopulation and generational renewal decline?*

By asking these questions and adopting a collaborative, action-oriented approach, our region can create a supportive ecosystem for the circularity of the process. This will not only ensure a successful generational renewal but also contribute to a more vibrant and sustainable agricultural future for everyone.

From our experience, here are some tools that can be implemented from the local scale.

### **Registry of Potential Transmitters and Retirees<sup>8</sup>**

This connects retiring farmers looking to transition their farms with aspiring farmers seeking opportunities. It creates a matching system to bridge the gap between generations.

### **Professional Support<sup>9</sup>**

Experts can guide both retiring and aspiring farmers through the complexities of farm transfer processes, ensuring a smooth and successful handover.

### **Land Banks**

These act as intermediaries, facilitating access to land for aspiring farmers who might otherwise face challenges in acquiring it due to high costs or limited availability.

### **Training and Skill Development<sup>10</sup>**

Providing technical training and business courses equips aspiring farmers with the knowledge and skills necessary to run successful agricultural businesses.

### **Farm Incubators<sup>11</sup>**

These offer aspiring farmers essential resources and support systems during the crucial early stages of establishing their farms. This could include shared infrastructure, mentorship, and business development assistance.

### **Joint Marketing and Commercialization<sup>12</sup>**

By collaborating, farmers can achieve economies of scale and reach wider markets. This allows them to collectively manage marketing efforts, branding strategies, and potentially, distribution channels.



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8. <https://slms.scot/>

9. <https://escoladepastorsdecatalunya.cat/acompanyament/>

10. <https://agora.xtec.cat/ecamanresa/>

11. <https://reneta.fr/>

12. <https://baserritikgernikara.eus/es/venta-directa-de-productos-del-caserio/>

### Local Branding and Markets<sup>13</sup>

Promoting local agriculture through branding initiatives and participation in farmers' markets allows farmers to connect directly with consumers, potentially fetching premium prices and building stronger community connections.

### Shared Infrastructure<sup>14</sup>

Investing in collective facilities like slaughterhouses reduces costs and improves efficiency for all participating farms. This allows them to focus on core agricultural activities.

### Institutional Coordination<sup>15</sup>

Working with government agencies, universities, or agricultural organizations can streamline regulations and procedures, making it easier for aspiring farmers to navigate the complexities of starting and running a farm.



13. <https://www.productesdelripolles.com/>

14. <https://vallaecolid.es/>

15. [https://agricultura.gencat.cat/web/.content/09-desenvolupament-rural/programa-desenvolupament-rural/agenda-rural/230412\\_Estrategia-relleu-generacional-agrari\\_230322.pdf](https://agricultura.gencat.cat/web/.content/09-desenvolupament-rural/programa-desenvolupament-rural/agenda-rural/230412_Estrategia-relleu-generacional-agrari_230322.pdf)

## ■ The need of integrated policies

The long-term sustainability of agriculture hinges on a successful generational renewal process (McIntyre et al., 2020). However, current policy frameworks in many regions exhibit limitations in fostering a smooth transition between retiring and aspiring farmers (European Parliament, 2023). Addressing this challenge requires a comprehensive approach built on integrated policies to manage the need for a more effective action to support farm renewal strategies. Developing and implementing integrated policies requires collaboration among stakeholders, including farmers, policymakers, academics and other key actors.

A key criticism of current policies lies in their predominantly individualistic focus (European Parliament, 2023). Support mechanisms often cater to individual new entrants, neglecting the potential of collective or cooperative farming models (Calo & Corbett, 2024). This overlooks the viability of alternative ownership structures that could revitalize rural areas and attract a wider range of talent.

Furthermore, existing policies often exclude marginalized groups, particularly migrant workers who play a significant role in the agricultural sector (Aznar et al., 2020). These workers lack secure land ownership and are largely absent from support programs designed to facilitate farm succession (Calo & Corbett, 2024). A social reproduction lens (Calo & Corbett, 2024) is necessary to understand the experiences of these workers and explore pathways for their integration into the agricultural sector as future farm owners.

Finally, the effectiveness of current farm transfer programs can be limited (Burton et al., 2020). These programs may not adequately address communication gaps between generations regarding transfer goals and expectations (European Parliament, 2023). Additionally, navigating the legal and financial complexities of farm transfers can be challenging for both retiring and incoming farmers (OECD, 2023). Furthermore, limited follow-up support for new farmers can hinder their long-term success (Shucksmith et al., 2016).

To address these shortcomings, a multi-pronged approach to policy reform is recommended. Firstly, a shift towards a social reproduction lens (Calo & Corbett, 2024) in policy design is crucial. This would involve considering the experiences of migrant and itinerant workers, promoting fair labor practices, and exploring pathways for their integration into the agricultural sector as potential future farm owners.

Secondly, policies should actively encourage a wider range of land ownership and farming structures beyond the traditional family-run model (European Parliament, 2023). This could involve supporting the development of cooperatives, partnerships, or shared farming arrangements (Ploščinski et al., 2020).

Thirdly, strengthening farm transfer programs is essential (Burton et al., 2020). These programs should prioritize intergenerational communication, facilitating open communication between retiring and incoming farmers to ensure a clear understanding of transfer goals and expectations; legal and financial support, offering guidance on legal aspects of the transfer process, including taxation implications and available financial mechanisms or farm assessment and follow-up, providing comprehensive farm evaluations to inform the transition plan and identify areas where new farmers might require ongoing support (Shucksmith et al., 2016).

Beyond policy changes, additional measures can enhance generational renewal in agriculture. Exploring innovative collaboration models holds promise (McIntyre et al., 2022). This could involve partnerships and shared farming arrangements, formal partnerships or shared farming arrangements can ease entry for young farmers by providing mentorship, access to land and resources, and a gradual learning curve (Ploščinski et al., 2020). Land-matching services that connect young farmers seeking land with retiring farmers or landowners can be of use to overcome a significant barrier for new entrants (McIntyre et al., 2022).

It could be also interesting to promote non-family farm transfers by supporting farm transfers outside a family context. Promoting innovative models like partnerships with experienced newcomers can help broaden the pool of potential successors (Verdolini et al., 2021). In this sense it could be also relevant to support retiring farmers by implementing pre-retirement schemes can incentivize successful generational renewal (Burton et al., 2020). These schemes can facilitate a gradual handover process, allowing for knowledge transfer and ensuring a safe financial future for the retiring farmer.

A vision that explores new approaches, could include pilot programs testing innovative approaches to further enhance generational renewal (McIntyre et al., 2022). Examples include Joint Ventures as pilot programs for joint ventures between established farmers and newcomers hold promise for knowledge transfer, shared business development, and risk mitigation (McIntyre et al., 2022). Projects supporting experienced migrant farmers in establishing new farms can also leverage their skills and contribute to the sector's renewal while addressing labour shortages in rural areas.

## Why we need to act?

The agricultural sector faces a critical juncture. An aging farmer population coupled with a lack of young talent entering the field poses a significant threat to the long-term sustainability of food production systems (McIntyre et al., 2020). However, by fostering a successful generational renewal through collective action, we can unlock a multitude of benefits for rural areas, food security, and the future of agriculture.

Generational renewal serves as a cornerstone for the enduring well-being of rural communities. The influx of young and new farmers brings fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and a renewed energy to rural areas. This not only bolsters the local economy through job creation and increased agricultural production but also fosters a vibrant social fabric within rural communities. Furthermore, young farmers are often more receptive to adopting sustainable farming practices, such as agroecological methods and organic farming, which contribute to environmental protection and a healthier ecosystem (European Parliament, 2023).

The traditional landscapes and unique character of rural areas are intricately linked to agricultural activity. Generational renewal helps maintain these landscapes by ensuring continued farming practices that contribute to their preservation. Furthermore, fostering a diverse pool of new farmers encourages the exploration of alternative farming models beyond the traditional family farm structure. This can include cooperatives, partnerships, or shared farming arrangement. Such diversification fosters innovation within the sector and strengthens the overall resilience of agricultural systems.

New farmers are often at the forefront of adopting new technologies and innovative business models in agriculture. Their enthusiasm for experimentation and willingness to embrace new approaches can lead to advancements in agricultural practices, potentially leading to increased efficiency, improved yields, and more sustainable production methods. Additionally, new farmers are more likely to embrace shorter food chain models, which connect them directly with consumers and promote a more localized food system.

In conclusion, collective action in fostering generational renewal within agriculture is not merely desirable; it's essential. By working together to empower a new generation of farmers, we can ensure the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of rural areas, safeguard healthy food systems for future generations.

## Considering: remaining the key issues

Generational renewal in agriculture is more than just filling empty positions. It's about cultivating a legacy that embraces the unique character of farm life and the diversity of potential newcomers. This inclusive approach fosters innovation, strengthens rural communities, and accelerates sustainable food production.

The key lies in recognizing generational renewal as a cyclical process. By supporting aspiring farmers with education and mentorship, facilitating easy farm transfers, and valuing the contributions of all generations, we can create a collaborative environment. Every action, big or small, contributes to this brighter future. So, let's actively engage in these initiatives and become a vital force for positive change in farm generational renewal.

Here you can find a list of the main ideas and concepts that we take into account when we work on generational renewal at the local scale. We hope it is useful for you.

### ■ Main ideas to change our lens

#### Imbrications of paradigms

The reality shows that there is an imbrication of paradigms. Alternative agrifood networks develop interfaces with the conventional agrifood systems (Schneider&Gazola, 2015). Recognizing the imbrication of paradigms underscores the interconnectedness of agricultural systems. In the context of farm generational renewal, this interconnectedness offers opportunities for knowledge transfer, market access facilitation, and the development of innovative farming models that cater to the aspirations of the next generation. By fostering collaboration and leveraging the strengths of both conventional and alternative approaches, we can create a more vibrant and adaptable agricultural future for generations to come.

Connecting the generations in agriculture requires bridging the gap between existing and future agricultural models. By actively connecting agricultural models, we can create a space where the experience of seasoned farmers meets the innovative spirit of the younger generation. This collaborative approach holds the key to ensuring an effective and sustainable agricultural future for generations to come.

Van der Ploeg et al. (2015) highlights how rural actors don't fit neatly into conventional or alternative categories: "Nothing is pure... actors may spend part of their time engaged in conventional farming and another part being involved in creating new patterns." This concept of intertwined practices offers a fresh perspective on generational renewal in agriculture. Traditionally, farming practices have been viewed as either conventional (large-scale, established methods) or alternative (sustainable, local focus). However, the reality for farmers, especially across generations, is more fluid.

## The local scale is essential

We need active actors and tools to foster the transition process to generational renewal. By recognizing the local scale as essential and engaging active actors with appropriate tools, we can empower both established and aspiring farmers to build a more dynamic agricultural future. A localized approach fosters collaboration, leverages community resources, and ultimately cultivates a fertile ground for successful generational renewal in agriculture.

While fostering collaboration and leveraging community resources are crucial, a key pillar for successful generational renewal in agriculture lies in strong local governance. Local governments play a vital role in creating an enabling environment that empowers both established and aspiring farmers.

## Honouring the exit generation

The concept of generational renewal in agriculture extends beyond simply finding replacements for retiring farmers. It's about honoring the knowledge and experience of the exiting generation while facilitating a smooth transition for the incoming generation.

At its core, generational renewal is about reconnecting people within the agricultural sector. By fostering relationships between retiring and aspiring farmers, we can bridge the gap between experience and innovation. This reconnection creates a fertile ground for knowledge transfer, collaboration, and ultimately, a more vibrant and sustainable agricultural future.

Generational renewal is not just about replacing farmers; it's about honoring the past, facilitating knowledge transfer, and building bridges between generations. By implementing these strategies, we can create a more enriching experience for both retiring and aspiring farmers, ensuring a thriving future for agriculture.

## New glasses to look carefully

By adopting a new perspective on generational renewal, we can unlock its true potential. By seeing it as a collaborative journey, breaking down prejudices, and crafting a compelling narrative, we can inspire a new generation of farmers and cultivate a more sustainable and prosperous future for agriculture. Let's open our eyes, break free from limitations, and together, create a story of agricultural renewal that benefits all. The challenge of generational renewal in agriculture demands a fresh perspective. We need to shift our gaze, break free from preconceived notions, and craft a compelling narrative for the future.

We must break down prejudices that might exist between generations. Instead of focusing on perceived differences, let's celebrate the unique strengths each generation brings to the table. Experienced farmers might view young farmers' tech-savviness as an asset, while young farmers can appreciate the wisdom and experience of retiring farmers.

Generational renewal isn't just about individual success stories; it's about creating a shared narrative for the future of agriculture. Let's co-create a story that celebrates collaboration, knowledge transfer, and a collective commitment to a sustainable and vibrant agricultural sector.

## Farming is more than a job

Farming is more than just a profession; it's a way of life. It's a deep connection to the land, a sense of belonging to a rural community, and the satisfaction of contributing positively to society. This unique character is precisely why generational renewal in agriculture goes beyond simply filling open positions. As the European Parliament (2023) highlights, it's about cultivating a legacy by considering the life histories of those involved.

Generational renewal in agriculture requires a multifaceted approach. By recognizing the unique character of farm life, honoring the stories of those involved, and implementing supportive strategies, we can cultivate a legacy of skilled and passionate farmers who will continue to nourish our communities and sustain us for generations to come.

## All profiles of new farmers are welcome

Generational renewal in agriculture needs to be a broad and inclusive endeavor. By welcoming newcomers, fostering diversity, and implementing supportive strategies, we can cultivate a vibrant agricultural sector equipped to face future challenges and ensure food security for generations to come. Let's ensure all the "best players" have a chance to contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future for agriculture.

The future of agriculture hinges on a thriving new generation of farmers. However, the concept of generational renewal needs to be inclusive and embrace the diversity of potential newcomers entering the agricultural sector (Sutherland, 2023).

Traditionally, the focus might have been on young people inheriting family farms. However, the reality is more nuanced. We need to welcome all profiles of aspiring farmers, including young people with a passion for agriculture and a desire to build a career in the sector; experienced professionals from other fields seeking a career change and a connection to the land and new rural residents who bring fresh perspectives and a commitment to sustainability (Vizuete et al., 2024).

## Generational renewal is a circular process

Traditional views of generational renewal in agriculture painted a simple picture: replacing retiring farmers with new ones. However, a more nuanced approach is needed. Agriculture is more than just a job; it's a way of life connected to nature and community. Generational renewal should cultivate a legacy, not just fill positions.

By embracing the diversity of potential newcomers, from young inheritors to experienced career changers, we can enrich the agricultural sector. This inclusivity fosters innovation, strengthens rural communities, and accelerates the transition towards sustainable food production. Furthermore, recognizing generational renewal as a cyclical process ensures a smooth flow of knowledge and experience. Supporting each phase, from pre-entry education for aspiring farmers to smooth retirement transitions for experienced ones, creates a collaborative environment where all generations contribute to a thriving and sustainable agricultural future.



## ■ Agrarian Social Regeneration as a pathway

The current state of agriculture presents a stark challenge: ensuring a future where the land continues to be nurtured, communities thrive, and our plates are filled with healthy and sustainable food. Generational renewal, a term often associated with workforce replacement, feels insufficient to capture the depth of transformation needed. Perhaps, what we need is an Agrarian Social Regeneration.

This concept goes beyond simply attracting young and new people to farms. It envisions a complete revitalization of the social network of rural areas. Imagine a scenario where a passionate new generation bring fresh ideas and energy to agriculture, collaborating with seasoned farmers to create a more innovative and sustainable sector. This social exchange wouldn't just benefit agriculture; it would breathe new life into rural communities, attracting families and businesses, and diversifying the local economy. The benefits extend beyond our immediate needs. A regenerated agricultural sector, brimming with new talent and innovative practices, can build trust with consumers. We can envision a future where transparency reigns, and consumers have a clear understanding of how their food is grown. This connection fosters a sense of shared responsibility, encouraging support for local food systems and sustainable farming practices.

Specifically, Agrarian Social Regeneration in remote rural areas demands specific considerations. Investment in infrastructure development, such as reliable internet access and improved transportation networks, is crucial for attracting and retaining young and new people. Additionally, tailored support programs that address the unique challenges of remote locations, such as land access models and financial assistance programs, are essential for success.

This reflection on Agrarian Social Regeneration is not merely wishful thinking. It's a call to action. By fostering collaborative spaces where established farmers, new entrants to farming, and local governments come together, we can chart a course for a more inspiring and equitable agricultural future. The pathway won't be easy, but the potential rewards make it a journey worth taking.



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