FARM ENTRY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF YOUNG FARMERS, THEIR PATHWAYS, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES IN ONTARIO (CANADA) AND CATALUNYA (SPAIN)

FINAL REPORT

Dr. Neus Monllor
Researcher in new agriculture and food systems
Director of espai TOMATA
neus@laccb.cat
www.laccb.cat

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Dr. Neus Monllor
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1. Introduction

The origin of this comparative report on farm entry is the question of how demographic renewal is taking place in western agricultural systems. Farm renewal has been identified as a problem since the restructuration of western farming took place at the beginning of the 1960s (White, 1966; González, 2002: 18; Alberdi Collantes, 2002: 8; Sotte, 2003: 2; Izcara Palacios, 2005: 51). The new social and economic context drawn from the logic of industrialization and modernization facilitated by migration from rural areas to the cities has redrawn the demographic map in traditional farming societies (Bollman, 1982; Camarero, 1993; Abad and Naredo, 2002; Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, 2006: 4; Blanco, 2006: 303). At the beginning it was not seen as a huge problem, as machinery supplanted farm labor and new technologies supported the overall capitalization of agriculture. However, after some decades of losing farm population an alarm is being rung (Lasley, 2005: 1; Gillespie Jr and Johnson, 2010: 31). Farmers are aging and filial succession is not the first option among most farm families today (Williams and Farrington, 2006: 1).

Given the international attention paid to this issue, it is important to ask the open question about who is going to farm in the next few years. In probing this question it becomes clear that any changes in the regular pattern of renewal could have important impacts on the future of farming. The present trajectory of commercial farming based on industrial and technological improvements will continue if fewer operators enter the industry and increased capital and operational size continue to dominate the logic of farming. However if new strains of farmers are entering the industry, then it is unclear what new directions farming might take and with what consequences, especially in this era of environmental imperatives such as climate change. Much depends on who the new farmers are, their practices and their aims.

The research explores this question by first establishing who is entering farming in the first decade of the new century. If both old style continuers and new farm entrants are evident, then an examination of their differences, based on their entry path, their farm practices and their attitudes, can be tested and analyzed. In this way, it is possible to determine if new and important trends of renewal are being created.
In order to establish who the young farmers are, an hypothetical proposition was formulated. Young farmers were conceptually assumed to be either: 1) **Continuers**, those who take over the family farm or 2) **Newcomers**, those who enter farming without any previous connection to agriculture.

Based on this dichotomy, it is critical to know if and in what ways the two groups are different. It was decided to test this question by establishing degrees of difference by looking at farming practices and farmer attitudes. If differences are strong, then their significance can be assessed in both theoretical and policy terms.

### 2. Methodological choices

This research approach is based on a comparative exploration using a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. The comparative dimension is between two different agro-rural areas: Southern Ontario (Canada) and the Girona area in Catalonia (Spain). The following maps show the two areas of study.

**Map 1. World situation of the areas of study.**
Learning from the principles underlying the International Comparative Rural Policy Studies (ICRPS) program enables the researcher to increase the understanding of what factors or processes are influencing policy change, both over time and over space. Examining a common problem in two locations with different or similar contexts enables us to learn whether the structural (political or cultural) factors or the geographical contexts are uppermost in explaining the differences and/or similarities between the phenomena in question. Comparative study offers the researcher the possibility of experiencing two different contexts and to deepen his/her skills in standardizing the variables to be measured and compared. Assessment of constraints and limitations is an essential feature of comparative study especially in overcoming the distortions of scale, uneven data systems, and cultural interpretations of reality.

For the student who undertakes comparative study it is a challenge for different reasons. The first is that the researcher knows one area better than the other, which means that the work to be done has to be thought about in a different way for each of the areas of study. At the same time the demand for rigor in scientific research means that the methodology has to be quite similar to be able to compare information that will be of value. Another issue to be taken into account is the language, accent or dialects in the areas of study. If they are different, most parts of the survey documents have to be written in the two languages. This fact makes comparative research slower and more complex, but forces the student to improve in a foreign language. Ultimately, the question of comparing structures or processes has the

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1 More information: www.icrps.com
challenge of being policy relevant. It is inevitable that studying in two places means that they will be different in their political make up. This is especially true when comparing over two continents with two vastly different historical backgrounds and political systems.

The areas of study in Ontario and Catalonia were chosen because of two main reasons: 1) because the two areas of study have the same problem of an ageing farm population and 2) because they have different policy approaches to the same farm reality.

In the two areas of study the agricultural sector has been traditionally very strong and has been one of the significant pillars of social, economic and cultural development of both areas. Southern Ontario is one of the main agricultural regions of Canada, where the geographic and climatic conditions make a high capability farmland (Fuller, 1984; Caldwell and Hilts, 2005). The Girona area also includes very good farmland and traditionally agriculture has been a highly diversified sector including livestock and field crops (Monllor, 2007). However, even though both areas of study have a strong farming sector, the ageing of the farming population has become a significant problem.

Regarding policies, at the time of the study Ontario did not have a focused policy to support young farmers to entering farming. There is attention given to succession planning to assist in the continuity of commercial farms that are already operating coming basically from Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). The problem in Ontario is that fewer members of the current younger generation wish to continue the family farm business (Statistics Canada, 2007). In Catalonia on the other hand, there is a specific budget to help young farmers to set-up in farming. The policy is framed in the Catalan Rural Development Program in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union\(^2\). These two different policy approaches to young farmers makes the study richer and provides the option to analyze the farm entry issue from a policy perspective.

To understand the current reality of farm renewal the research process was undertaken in three different phases: (1) exploratory phase, (2) data collection phase and (3) results analysis phase. All three phases have been undertaken in the two areas of study in order to collect consistent data to be compared.

\(^2\) The European Policy provides economic support in the first phases of the entry process (between 30.000€ and 70.000€). In order to be eligible the farmer has to be between 18 and 40 years old, has to commit for 5 years in agriculture, has to achieve a minimum level of education and has to have a written business plan.
2.1 The exploratory phase

The exploratory phase consisted of my checking the literature in order to know what kind of work has been done in relation to the research question of farm entry. I found that the literature is very limited (Clawson, 1963; Clemenson and Down, 1984: Errington and Lobley, 2002; Niewolny and Lillard, 2010: 66). There are very few published studies on young farmers and their experience of farm entry and just a few comparative studies about succession in farming (Baker, 2008). The paucity of evidence lends more importance to this research because of the lack of knowledge about farm renewal issues.

I classified the few studies of farm entry that have been done into five different approaches: (1) structural change in agriculture from the sixties and the migration of the agricultural population to cities, (2) changes in rural societies and segregation of rural youth by gender, (3) evaluation of public policies about rural youth and agriculture, (4) barriers to access to agriculture and difficulties for farmers to retire (5) new training programs and support for newly arrived farmers. Despite these different themes, all of which touch on the issue of young farmers, there is little research on the process of entry into farming at the international level (Stiglbauer and Weiss, 2000: 15). In recent years there has been an effort to examine the problem of generational change, especially related to the aging farm population issue in most industrialized countries (Mishra and El-Osta, 2007: 2).

In the exploratory phase I collected preliminary information to form the context of the two areas of study: background information, news items, magazines, policy documents and program brochures, etc. The document collection also included statistical analysis of the main data on the agriculture sector as well as a collection of the most important socioeconomic descriptors to form a comparative profile of the two areas. The source of basic information was the Statistical Institute of Catalonia and the Department of Agriculture for the Catalan area, and for Ontario it was Statistics Canada and OMAFRA.

The third step in the exploratory phase was to do some field work with key actors in the two areas of study. To acquaint myself with the reality of the two areas it was necessary to interview people involved in agriculture from different perspectives. In 2007, in the Ontario area, I undertook seven interviews with local actors and three interviews with young farmers. Secondly in 2008, I undertook thirteen deep interviews and twelve informal interviews in trying to collect more preliminary information. In the Catalan
area I interviewed four local actors and seven young farmers in 2007, and eight more local actors in 2008.

After this stage, three important methodological decisions were taken: 1) the definition of “Young farmer” (a person between 18 and 40 years old when he or she sets-up in farming) 2) the confirmation that there are two different groups of young farmers to be studied (those who were born on a family farm –Continuers- and those who didn’t have a direct farming background – Newcomers-) and 3) the creation of an Index to measure the practices and attitudes of young farmers.

To understand better what young farmers do on the farm and what they are thinking about in terms of farming it was deemed necessary to measure their practices in agriculture and their attitudes to new concepts and ideas in farming such as environmental sustainability, social responsibility, community or food safety. To analyze a specific concept one needs to deconstruct it to observe and work with each of its parts (Dominguez and Simó, 2003: 101). It is also crucial to identify all the parts of the theoretical framework in order to compare the differing realities of the two areas of study. Reviewing the literature I chose the OECD idea of the New Rural Paradigm (OECD, 2006) in order to conceptualize a useful theory to test the reality and to connect with policy. The experience of the author and the complementary literature helped to define the New Agrosocial Paradigm Index, based on a selection of attributes in the New Rural Paradigm defined by the OECD in 2006. After much consultation, I chose eight different components: (1) local scale, (2) diversity, (3) environment, (4) cooperation, (5) innovation, (6) autonomy, (7) social commitment and (8) ‘slow’ focus.

The Index was constructed in two different parts. The first part is related to the practices that are undertaken on the farm and in relation to the local rural society. The main idea is to know what the farmer is consciously doing in the day job at the farm level in relation to his socio-economic and physical environment. The second part is related to the attitude that young farmers have in relation to the present and the future of farming in the two rural areas. The Index measures the approximate place where the young farmer is between the old and a new paradigm.

2.2 The data collection phase

The information collecting phase begins with the design of the field work. It must be taken into account that the framework details have to be very similar in order to compare the realities in the two countries. At first it was proposed to create a large and statistically significant sample to analyze a
large universe of young farmers. It was thought that using a telephone survey to collect data would achieve this, but access to personal data of Ontarian farmers by phone survey was considered too problematic. This was one of the reasons why the snowball technique was chosen as a probabilistic approach to meeting young farmers. This is one of the peculiarities of comparative analysis involving two different areas of study. Sometimes it is not possible to operate in exactly the same way in both areas and it is necessary to adapt the methodology carefully during the research process.

The snowball technique proved to be a good way to identify young farmers in the two areas of study. Data were collected with a questionnaire survey administered by personal interview. At the end the sample was configured with 50 farm people in each study area. This number corresponds to the criteria of *theory saturation* (Taylor and Bogdan, 1992:90; Baylina, 2006:126). In fact, it was in the Ontario study area where the survey reached theoretical saturation. Later it was decided that the sample number of cases should be the same in both study areas. For this reason in the Girona area 50 young farmers were also interviewed.

The technique of using a questionnaire survey by personal interview permitted the researcher to establish a personal contact with all the farmers in both areas. This approach also brings with it the opportunity to work with both quantitative and qualitative data. The richness of the questions made through the personal interview provided ample data to work with and enabled the researcher to build and utilize an holistic perspective. According to Domínguez and Simó (2003) the questionnaire survey is suitable to analyze both subjective and objective elements in any enquiry and therefore any social phenomenon can be studied from a survey.

The field work was conducted in two phases. The first was between June and August 2008 where the interviews were done in the Ontario area. The second was between March and September, 2009 in the area of Girona. When field work began in June 2008, seven pilot interviews were conducted to test the questionnaire, which was then modified especially to improve the wording of the questions in the latter part of the questionnaire. It has to be said that the experience of fieldwork in the Southern Ontario study area was helpful in conducting the Girona one. The Catalan questionnaire was slightly modified to facilitate field work, which in no way affected the structure and development of the interviews in Ontario.
2.3 The result analysis phase

The result analysis phase contains quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex reality of entry into farming.

Regarding the quantitative data, once the field work was done, I proceeded to develop the data matrix using an SPSS program to treat the information. The closed questions were identified by a code directly, but the open ones required a process of closing them to be coded. This was done when 43% of the interviews were completed. Once the data were entered into the matrix, it was ‘cleaned’, a first statistical analysis to debug any errors in data entry (Domínguez and Simó, 2003: 157).

The next step was to conduct a Univariate Descriptive Analysis which takes into account the frequency tables, measures of central tendency and dispersion and distribution of responses for each of the variables analyzed. Once the sample is known from the Univariate Descriptive Analysis, contingency tables are defined with the Bivariate analysis. Many of these univariate and bivariate analyses were also carried out through an analysis of sub-populations which were made using techniques of selection and segmentation cases. The selection involves working with the whole sample and with those individuals who meet certain conditions. In the case of segmentation, it involved working with all the data, but making as many groups as the variable response categories would allow.

Finally I proceeded to the qualitative analysis of the personal views and indicators of attitudes within the questionnaire. A transcription of relevant paragraphs was selected in order to clarify and enrich the quantitative data results. Choosing the more relevant and appropriate quotes to provide additional evidence and to illustrate the dynamic practices and thoughts of the farmers in the sample was a concluding exercise.

The combination of the two techniques was very useful as it enabled evidence from the two areas to be compared and to support the discussion of the results. Of particular utility was the ability to answer some of the questions raised by the quantitative enquiry with information from the qualitative sections of the interview. If there had been more time and resources, it would have been potentially rewarding to have established the deeper questions from the quantitative enquiry, followed up later with qualitative discussions.
3. The Entry Process

The aim of this section is to show who the young farmers are and in what ways they begin to farm and to compare them in the two areas of study.

Although most traditional farmers think that there is just one way to farm entry, the literature has shown that different routes are possible to achieve the goal of becoming a farmer (Barham et al., 2001; Ruhf et al., 2003; Lefebvre et al., 2004; Williams et al., 2006; Mailfert, 2007). One of the main objectives of this research was to make it evident that farmers follow different Pathways to enter agriculture. Despite the many different personal stories, there are clear common phases in the entry process. Figure 1 shows the main ones disaggregated into two different time periods (planning and establishment), divided by the actual young farmer Starting point in farming.

*Figure 1. The pathway to become a farmer.*

The first is called the *Planning period* and it contains the *Exploration phase* and the *Decision phase*. The two are very important to achieve a successful start-up in farming.

The second is called the *Establishment period* and has four different time phases. The first one is *Start-up phase* and occurs just after the *Starting
point, the moment when the young farmer begins to take decisions in farming. This is the more vulnerable phase in the whole pathway because of the lack of experience, market knowledge and confidence. The next one is the Re-strategizing phase, which is where the young farmer knows more about what to expect and can re-consider how to achieve his/her main goals. In some cases there is a reorganization of some strategies on the farm. After more or less eight years there is the Establishment phase, the moment when the young farmer is settled and well positioned in the field. Some changes can be made, but usually not strategic ones. Finally there is the Established phase, considered the last step of the Entry process. The farmer has sufficient experience and enough commitment and security to advise other young entrants in earlier phases of the pathway (Johnson et al., 2001; Ruhf et al., 2003).

3.1 The profiles of young farmers

Taking the farm sample as a whole, most of the entrants follow, more or less, the structure of the pathway shown in Figure 1. The first comparative point is the age at which young farmers start on the pathway. It is clear that, at the Starting point, Continuers start more than five years earlier than Newcomers (21.9 - 26.5 years).

The comparative analysis of the sample shows some difference in the profile of young farmers taking into account Continuers and Newcomers. One of the main differences is gender. Today’s farmers who grew up on a traditional farm are mostly men (85%), while in the Newcomers group there are more women entrants (53%) than men. All Continuers, having been born on farms, have spent most of their time in rural areas. Newcomers have both urban and rural backgrounds, predominantly the city (59%). The type of education is also different. Farmers coming from farm family backgrounds finish agricultural college studies (63%). On the other hand, Newcomers have non-agrarian university studies (63%), but have specialized in such disciplines as environmental, social science or policy studies. Just a few Continuers use their own website (9%) contrasting with Newcomers who use it much more (63%) for selling their products and communicating directly with consumers. Finally it is also interesting to note that Continuers are not used to writing a business plan. Just 15% of the Continuers work with a

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3 The Starting Point is identified by each of the young farmers. It is the moment when he or she begins to take decisions in the farm.
business plan compared to 56% of Newcomers. Being new to farming makes it more necessary to plan carefully for the new enterprise.

When the sample is split taking into account the two geographic areas it can be observed that Continuers have a similar pattern and that Newcomers also have a quite common profile, but with some greater differences.

In the Continuers group, for example, one of the differences has to do with the age that farmers start in farming, being younger for Catalonia (20.4 years) than for Ontario (23.5 years). Another difference is that a few Ontario entrants have their own website (6.3%) while for Catalan farmers (13.9%) the percentage is a little bit higher. However, these differences are quite small and are based on small numbers. In the final analysis Continuers follow a similar pathway in the two areas of study.

In the Newcomer group, there are two big differences that have to do with their urban origin and education. In Ontario 78% of the Newcomers come from cities, while in Catalonia the percentage is just 36%. In Ontario, 72.2% have a university career compared to just 35.7% in the Catalan area of study. These two items are linked. Most of the people coming from cities have University studies. Regarding gender, there is also a difference between the numbers of women in the two areas of study. In Southern Ontario, there are more women entrants (61%) than in Catalonia (43%) There are also more Ontario Newcomers that have a website (77.8% compared to 42.9%) and also more have an updated business plan (66.7% to 42.9% in Catalonia). The predominant profile of the farm Newcomer in Ontario is a woman with an urban background and a university degree. The Catalan group of Newcomers is more heterogeneous. There are more men than women, with lower levels of education and they mostly come from rural areas.

This data shows that the two study groups, Continuers and Newcomers, are different. They follow different pathways to enter farming and have gender and education characteristics that also follow different patterns. These results show two different profiles. The **Continuer** is a man who has set up on the family farm after finishing Agriculture College in his early twenties. He does not have his own website and business plan. The **Newcomer** is more likely to be a woman who has set up in farming after finishing her university studies (not related with agriculture) and enters farming in her late twenties. She has her own website and uses a business plan to develop the farm.
3.2 Young farmer enterprises

All young farmers begin their farm activity at the Starting point when they enter the Establishment period. However, the farm enterprises they establish are quite different especially when taking into account their farm origins.

Most Continuers (85%) start mostly on the family farm, keeping on with the family enterprise, which reflects the dominant form of agriculture in the area such as milk production (31%) or cattle raising (21%). The major tendency is to get bigger, to invest in machinery and to sell to an intermediary or corporation (78%). Most continuers have the farm operation already running, with attendant obligations and debts, so it is very difficult to change to another farming model. Most continuers are partners with their family members.

Newcomers on the other hand begin a new farm as a sole operator (56%) or join a farm that is already running (22%). The predominant enterprises are growing vegetables (56%) and raising sheep (19%) and they tend towards organic production (81%). The major characteristic is to maintain a small-scale of operation, to not make big investments in the early stages and to sell directly to the consumer (88%).

When we split the sample into the two areas of study, we can see that the differences are very few. The entrants who start on the family farm are nearly the same, being 84% for Ontarions and 86% for the Catalans. If we compare the sectors, we can see there is the same percentage for milk (31% in the two areas of study), but that there are some differences in the rest of the livestock sectors. In the Ontario area there are more cattle (31%) than in the Girona area (11%), where the animal sector is more diversified, there being more pigs (11%) and sheep (11%). The general tendency of Continuers is quite similar. For example 84% of Ontarions are following conventional production practices and 89% of Catalan continuers are also doing the same.

If we compare Ontarions and Catalan Newcomers, there is a difference in how they begin at the starting point. Most Catalan Newcomers start as a sole operator (93%), while Ontarions mix different options like sole operator (28%), join a farm that is already running (33%) or begin as farm workers (28%). The predominant sector in both areas is vegetable growing, being 61% for Canadians and 50% for the Catalans and sheep that are 17% and 21% respectively. The organic production is also quite similar in percentages,
being 83% for the Canadians and 79% for Catalans. Regarding direct marketing the numbers are also quite similar, being 89% for Canadians and 86% for Catalans.

The data emphasizes how different the farm enterprises are in relation to the family background of the young farmer. Continuers are mostly following the pathway of their parents who have opened this pathway to them, getting bigger and more capitalized. Newcomers begin a new pathway setting up a small and diversified farm, with low investments that are easier to manage in the first stages.

4. Exploring practices and attitudes of young farmers

One of the main objectives of the research was to understand what young farmers do in farming (practices) and what young farmers think (attitudes) in relation to agriculture and life in rural areas. The method to examine these questions was to create an Index to compare the two groups in the two areas. The New Agrosocial Paradigm Index (NAPI) is a quantitative tool to measure on a systematic scale how far young farmers are from a new paradigm.

The first relevant result is that young farmers in the two different areas have similar patterns in their practices and in their attitudes. The next two figures show the relative similarity between farmers in the two areas of study and the big difference between entrants with different farming backgrounds.

**Figure 2. Ontarians and Catalans NAPI.**

**Figure 3. Continuers and Newcomers NAPI.**

*Source: Author’s elaboration (2010)*
The following tables and figures display the data analysis results comparing the farmer groups in two different dimensions. The first one is to compare Continuers with Newcomers. The second one is to compare Ontario Continuers, Ontario Newcomers, Catalan Continuers and Catalan Newcomers. The first table shows the main results of the Index, built on a scale of 0 to 10. The maximum score obtainable is 10 which indicates that practices and attitudes are very close to the New Agrosocial Paradigm.

**Table 1: Indexes for Continuers and Newcomers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Continuers</th>
<th>Newcomers</th>
<th>All the sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>3,9</td>
<td>7,0</td>
<td>4,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>6,0</td>
<td>7,6</td>
<td>6,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Agrosocial Paradigm Index (NAPI)</strong></td>
<td>4,9</td>
<td>7,3</td>
<td>5,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s elaboration (2010).

**Table 2: Indexes for Ontarian Continuers, Ontarians Newcomers, Catalan Continuers and Catalan Newcomers Practice.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Southern Ontario</th>
<th>Girona area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuers</td>
<td>Newcomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>7,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>6,3</td>
<td>7,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Agrosocial Paradigm Index (NAPI)</strong></td>
<td>5,1</td>
<td>7,5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s elaboration (2010).

In general, Continuers are far away from the New Agrosocial Paradigm in practice but they are closer in attitude. The analysis makes it evident that the practices of young farm entrants follow the family pathways that are still rooted in the old productivist paradigm. However, as noted there is an optimistic result when we pay attention to attitudes. Continuers have a more agrosocial attitude than their practices show. This result opens an interesting question about what young farmers appear compelled to do compared to what they might like to do.
Newcomers are consistently closer to the New Agrosocial Paradigm. They have a notable proximity in practices and also in attitudes. It is interesting how they have more similarities than Continuers in the way they act and think. The results show that Newcomers can set up in farming by doing what they want to do and what they believe in.

4.1 Farming practices of young farmers

Practices are reflective of the reality of farming in the daily life of the young entrant farmer. Figure 4 shows the differences between Continuers and Newcomers for each of the eight components of the New Agrosocial Paradigm. The components that display the greatest differentiation are Local Scale, Innovation and Environment. This means that the way young farmers act are rooted in two different agriculture models of farming. On the one hand, Continuers do not work on the local scale (for example selling directly to the consumer), they are not implementing alternative innovations other than technological ones and they are less able to following environmentally friendly practices. On the other hand, Newcomers have adopted these three components as a strategy to enter agriculture. They value the proximity of agriculture to the consumers, they introduce new innovative practices in their enterprises and they grow organic food and take greater care of the natural resources close to the farm.

If we compare the results of the analysis between the two areas of study the main observation is that farmers are more similar depending on their farming background than on their geographic location. The two Continuer groups are closer to the Old Paradigm although some components like Local scale are higher for Catalon farmers or ‘Slow focus’ for Ontarions. Figure 5 also shows how Newcomers are closer to the New Agrosocial Paradigm. There are some differences between individual farmers in the study area but they are not significant.
Figure 4: Practice Indexes for Continuers and Newcomers.

Figure 5: Practice Indexes for Ontarians Continuers, Ontarians Newcomers, Catalan Continuers and Catalan Newcomers.

Source: Author’s elaboration (2010).
4.1 The attitudes of young farmers towards a New Agrosocial Paradigm

Attitudes refer to the way farmers think about the future in agriculture as a worldview to understand their reality. I have measured the attitudes towards a New Agrosocial Paradigm in order to have a better idea of how farmers see the future. It is a way to have more knowledge about how the agriculture industry may develop in the next few years.

Figure 6 shows how both Continuers and Newcomers are open, in different degrees, to new ideas. That means the way farmers are thinking about the future of farming includes the components of the New Agrosocial Paradigm. For example it is clear that farmers will have to reorient some of their strategies to grow food for local people. It is also important to notice the desire of farmers to be more autonomous from the bank, the big corporations, chemicals, companies and expensive machinery, etc. Farmers have also shown the necessity for cooperation among them even if for most of them it is difficult to realize. A handful of Continuers and Newcomers are oriented to this new way of thinking in agriculture.

Attitude differences between the two groups are rooted in some key issues like the regular use of GMO’s or the importance of organic agriculture. These kinds of elements are the ones that separate some of the views of Continuers and Newcomers. These clues are useful for continuing research on the different ways that young farmers approach the way they farm. For example, the component that most differentiates the two groups is Social Commitment, where here is a measure of the use of Genetically Modify Organisms (GMO’s). This element was considered in the sense of the commitment to future generations implementing the precaution principle. There is also debate between the two groups in relation to organic farming, for Newcomers it is ‘the way they farm’ and for most of Continuers is just a fashion or an opportunity to find a new market.

Figure 7 shows the differences between farmers in relation to their geographic background. We observe that the tendency is to be more open to the New Agrosocial Paradigm than in their practices. For the two groups, Ontarions are a little closer to the new ideas than Catalans, but the final picture is quite similar.
Figure 6: Attitudes Indexes for Continuers and Newcomers.

Figure 7: Attitude Indexes for Ontarians Continuers, Ontarians Newcomers, Catalan Continuers and Catalan Newcomers.

Source: Author’s elaboration (2010).
5. Discussion of Findings

An exploration of the pathways, practices and attitudes of young entrants farmers leads to the discovery that there are newly emerging concepts of farming that may extend into long-term agricultural systems. The conventional pathways and imperatives that require productivist thinking are being broken with the creation and demonstration of new ways of being a farmer: people are working the land to recover their autonomy, to reconnect to consumers and are redefining earth care in a local, small-scale and community context. The comparative analysis shows that new agrarian models are appearing in different parts of the countryside as a real alternative to capital intensive agribusiness models.

The first research question posed was whether the way in which youth entered the profession had an effect on the type of farming they carried out. Fieldwork has shown that the Starting point determines the type of farming that youth become involved in. As such, two main ways to enter the agricultural sector have been identified as distinct pathways: Continuers, who with family support follow the agro-industrial trajectory, and Newcomers who practice a new small-scale of farming. It demonstrates that one can enter the world of agriculture without having direct family connections to farming. Their enthusiasm and drive complements of Continuers and the eco-economic viability of the farms they establish puts them on the present-day farming map. The scientific literature supports the evidence of my field work and it shows how this type of newcomers is drawing attention from around the world.

The second research question explored the agricultural practices and attitudes of youth regarding a new paradigm, and whether there were differences between groups based on the geographical origin and on their farming background. The results show that agricultural practices differ depending on the way a farmer entered his or her profession. Continuers, many with heavy debt loads, tend to maintain the previous family trajectory and, therefore, tend to keep up the old productivist paradigm. Newcomers show clearer signs of change with values closer to the New Agrosocial Paradigm. Regarding attitudes, both groups express values in line with the paradigm shift, but it is the Newcomers who express them more intensely and who are practicing them in their operations.

These results show how two totally different models stand out with strategies for viability of different natures. On the one side, there is the adoption of specialization, intensification and capitalization in production; on the other,
the preservation of a small or medium-sized land area, the direct sale of products to the extent possible and an effort at forming ties to the area where farming takes place. It should be made clear that between these polar opposites there exist different degrees of adherence to one model or the other.

One of the main contributions of this research is the visualization of a group of farmers who are close to the New Agrosocial Paradigm. They are mostly Newcomers but some of the Continuers are also showing trends that put them in the new emerging group of farmers. They may be called the New Peasantry, following the theoretical framework that Professor Jan Douwe van der Ploeg specifies in the book “The New Peasantries” (Ploeg, 2008). They are farmers rooted in the locality, believing in diversification, promoting environmentally friendly practices, cooperating to advance their common cause, introducing appropriate technologies, exploring their own autonomy, fighting for the future generations and trying to reduce the capital intensification of conventional farming practices. This New Peasantry, both Continuers and Newcomers, are drawing the future of a new agriculture in Ontario and Catalonia.

They are not just a handful of people with pie-in-the-sky ideas who decide to test and experiment with agriculture just to see what happens. The evidence shows that this group is serious and is being recognized by more and more sections of society who see that the role played by these farmers is clearly strategic. In the past five years several reports, books and articles have appeared (Maynard and Green, 2006; Aurélie, 2007; Maïlfert, 2007; Binimelis et al. 2008; Ploeg, 2008; Webb, 2009; Gillespie and Johnson, 2010; Euskadiko Gazteriaren Kontseilua, 2010; Niewolny and Lillard, 2010; Perez-Vitoria, 2010), that speak of this emergent group as a ray of hope to address the many questions of sustainability and the increasing incoherence of the prevailing agricultural model.

6. Contributions to Theory

Regarding theory two concepts have shown up in the research: New Peasantry and New Agrosocial Paradigm.

What is occurring in different parts of the world is a new phenomenon where agricultural activity is being revalued by society, where it is generating jobs with dignity across the land and where quality food is available to a greater number of people. Synergies between agriculture and society are being
strengthened and this we may call the New Agrosocial Paradigm. Increasingly, there are organizations from the third sector that are supporting this new agriculture. Examples are ever more heterogeneous, and range from consumer groups, to schools that set up ecological cafeterias to organizations that assist a new generation of farmers in establishing a business in agriculture. The whole of this amalgam of social organizations have in their hands the power to push for a new model of food production that is compatible with the land, local economies, the environment, and to society as a whole.

This new social reality displays the emergence of a vital energy for re-strengthening farming. Although Hervieu (1997: 52) reminds us that at the end of the last century modernization had transformed peasants into farmers, Ploeg (2008) adds that, at the same time, new peasantries are born and reappear precisely as a response to the old agro-industrial paradigm. The coexistence of the two models in the same space and time creates ‘a complex battlefield in which different interest, prospects and projects compete’ (Ploeg, 2008: 151). This idiosyncrasy results in parallel processes of repeasantization, industrialization and deactivation (Ploeg, 2008: 1-8). It is clear that the three processes create territorial tension where they come up against one another and have to compete for resources, to meet regulations or for access to land, among many other disputes.

The emergence of a New Peasantry and the concept of a New Agrosocial Paradigm have to be found along a path toward a return to small-scale farming, where the farmer struggles for autonomy in a world full of tensions and obstacles, as well as opportunities and new ideas. The New Rural Paradigm proposed by the OECD lacks the social aspect that characterizes the New Agrosocial model that is emerging from the New Peasantry. They share a theoretical and practical framework in assuming that the countryside no longer belongs exclusively to agriculture, in decentralizing public policies and in giving more weight to the public to decide how it wants to develop the land it depends on. But the approach of the OECD does not entirely value the peasant condition as defined by Ploeg (2008), it does not highlight the relevant role of women in the new agrarian society and also it does not analyze the consideration of factors such as social commitment. However, to use the OECD's work as a starting point has enabled this research to progress in the formulation of a new theoretical framework that incorporates additional elements adopted from other authors. From this framework of analysis, evidence from the field has given us new-found knowledge to
describe a new reality that goes hand in hand with the theoretical model proposed in the New Agrosocial Paradigm.

Not all agricultural practices promote regional vitality. The activities undertaken by the New Peasantry, among other things, adds to social capital, keeps the rural and urban spheres connected, aims for optimal food quality thereby promoting people’s health, re-inhabits abandoned areas, creates new social relations, proposes alternative ways of organizing and collaborating, bears in mind future generations and struggles to maintain a rich, diverse and economically dynamic agricultural area. All these attributes are what define Rural Development, which has been studied and revised so much in old and recent literature (Etxezarreta, 1987, European Commission, 1988; Ploeg and Long, 1994; Hervieu, 1997, Bryden, 2000; Ploeg et al. 2000; Viladomiu, 2003; Monllor et al. 2005; OECD, 2006, O’Connor et al. 2006). Therefore, the economic, social and environmental contributions of the New Peasantry need to be seriously taken into consideration. Public policies should consider the New Agrosocial Paradigm as a model that provides quality of life to its participants (farmers and consumers), preserves natural resources and makes agricultural and rural areas more economically viable.

7. Contributions to Policy

Policy is a key element when we speak about farm entry. The two areas of study have different policy approaches to support farmers to enter into agriculture. The Ontario government does not really directly help the new generation of farmers but there are many activities from third sector social organizations, many of which are supported by government agencies in various ways. This means that society is answering the problem of supporting a new generation of farmers as, for example, is witnessed by the growth in farmers markets in Ontario. Catalonia has a governmental program that supports farmers in their Start-up phase, but it seems not to be enough to cover the necessities of many entrants. The social organizations supporting begging farmers in Catalonia are not as visible as those in Southern Ontario.

The results of the research show three different points related to policy. The first one is that a person who wants to enter the agricultural sector goes through a series of steps from first taking the decision to go into farming up to the point of carrying through with it. Understanding entrance to the sector as a process helps to structure a system of assistance aimed at people getting started based on their needs. Money may not be what is required by
some, but advice on the legal aspects of entry or training in certain entry procedures could be very helpful.

The second one has to do with the role policy could have in helping Continuers to change some of their practices in order to reach sustainability. It has to be considered whether a strong boost by way of public policy may shape the transition from ideas to reality.

The third one is related with the future of agriculture, food systems and rural areas. The way young farmers are entering agriculture has a direct bearing on the enterprise they set-up. That means that different ways of farming are emerging. If policy is more towards sustainable agriculture, then it is necessary that new programs offer clear support for farmers to be closer to the New Agrosocial Paradigm. In this sense there are some issues that can be considered as future questions in need of resolution, such as whether the age limit should be rescinded on young people wanting to enter the sector when it comes to providing public assistance. A recent study in the United States (Ahearn and Newton, 2009:22) shows how people going into the agricultural sector are not exclusively young. This suggests that the criteria for supporting the incorporation of new people into the agricultural sector can be more closely linked to issues such as environmental protection, their establishment on the land or quality production, and not so much on age. If the definition of the person eligible to benefit from public policies supporting a new generation of farmers is more flexible and inclusive then the range of newcomers widens and the human capital in the field is strengthened. One way to measure eligibility criteria is to apply the components of the New Agrosocial Paradigm in policy.

8. Summary: the value of comparative studies

The comparative study has enabled me to analyze farm entry in two areas with different cultural, social and policy backgrounds. The results show similar trends in both areas in the way young farmers enter agriculture, and also in their practices and attitudes. This evidence has led to the identification of a new group of farmers that I have named the New Peasantry, according to Ploeg (2008) theory, and of a new agricultural model that I have called the New Agrosocial Paradigm.

At the beginning of the research we opened the question about who is going to farm in the next few years. The results have shown that there are two different groups entering agriculture: Continuers and Newcomers. Young
farmers follow different pathways depending on their background. That means that the directions of future farming are a mixture of the different models that farmers are creating and developing.

For the moment we can determine that a new wave of farmers is entering the sector with new energy and projects, although we do not really know the quantity flow and survival rate of this emergent group. The comparative analysis has also produced the evidence that Newcomers are able to introduce new ideas more freely than Continuers who are obliged to follow the productivist innovations trajectory. They repeat the family model of management from the old paradigm, and it is very difficult to introduce new alternative agricultural practices beyond the continuous modernization process. Commercial farms are highly structured and most need to be maintained to pay off debt. Therefore, at present we have on Catalan and Ontarian farms, a system inherited from the Green Revolution that still specializes, enlarges and intensifies to stay ahead of the cost-price squeeze.

In this scenario it is easy to see that a dominant model ever present in discourses determines who can stay, who should leave and who can come in for the first time. Those who can show the ability to adapt to the ground rules of the agricultural models that feed the system remain or are able to enter the sector, while those who cannot meet established production standards must go. Therefore, the number of young people excited about carrying on with the system continues to diminish, and this serves the current model well because those who remain are those who best adapt themselves to established patterns and need to enlarge their operations.

This reality makes it necessary to support and enable farmers to enter from outside the sector. They do not have a pessimistic and tired discourse about farming. They want to farm in a sustainable way and they are proud to work the land. Moreover, some Continuers will change, at different intensities and scales, to a more agrosocial way of farming if they can find a way to do it. Newcomers can act as a catalyst in this change.

This comparative study has shown us how this duality is emerging in the two areas of study. Policy establishes differences, but global economic and social trends seem to be more powerful. The pathways young farmers follow in Ontario and in Catalonia are framed in the same international system of the XXI century.
9. References


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