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AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION



EIP-AGRI Focus Group

New entrants into farming: lessons to foster innovation and entrepreneurship

MINIPAPER: Voice of New Entrants – 01 12 2015

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Voice of New Entrants

The Voice of new entrants

This minipaper deals with the voice of new entrants, that is to say the representation of new entrants as a group of entrepreneurs that have specific needs which policy makers should take into account. Representation can thereby take place at various levels: local, regional, national, European or international. All established organizations, from unions to multinationals, recognize the importance of such a voice and have representatives specialized in this task, *lobbying* to get their needs integrated in political decisions.

The Council of Europe understands lobbying generally as a "concerted effort to influence policy formulation and decision-making with a view to obtaining some designated result from government authorities and elected representatives. In a wider sense, the term may refer to public actions (such as demonstrations) or 'public affairs' activities by various institutions (associations, consultancies, advocacy groups, think-tanks, non governmental organizations, lawyers, etc.); in a more restrictive sense, it would mean the protection of economic interests by the corporate sector (corporate lobbying) commensurate to its weight on a national or global scene."

Your Voice in Europe is the European Commission's "single access point" to a variety of consultations and feedback opportunities which enables citizens to express their views on EU policies at different stages throughout the policy lifecycle. As part of the Commission's Better Regulation Agenda the Commission intends to listen more closely to citizens and stakeholders from the first idea, to when the Commission prepares a proposal, through the adoption of a proposal and its evaluation.

Focusing on farming in Europe, we observe several groups. The best known are the large farmers unions, which are represented at the European level by COPA-COGECA. However, as different farming approaches and practices arise, new voice can be heard represented by for example IFOAM (European umbrella organization for organic food and farming), Via Campesina (the International Peasant Movement) and CEJA (the European Council of Young Farmers).

Several questions can be raised on the issue of 'the voice of New Entrants in Farming'. Foremost, why should new entrants have a voice? Second, to what extent are they already heard through the voice of existing organizations? Third, what are the experiences of new entrants in terms of lobbying at the local, national or European level? And, finally, what actions could be taken to strengthen the voice of new entrants in Europe. These questions are dealt with successively in the four sections of this minipaper.

Why should new entrants have a voice?

In practice, a voice means that a limited group of people represent the opinion and needs of a large population. "A" voice is never the only voice of the group. The minipaper on the characteristics of New Entrants demonstrates the diversity of new entrants. In this context, it is relevant to reflect on the possibility and the opportunity of having a voice for new entrants as a coherent group. In this section we will argue that the benefits of giving new entrants a voice is twofold. On the one hand, such a voice could deliver benefits for the new entrants in Europe. On the other hand, a voice for new entrants might lead to a benefit for the society as a whole.

What could be the individual benefit of joining forces among new entrants in farming? In order to answer this question, we refer to several other minipapers within this focus group which pronounce the specific needs and problems that new entrants face. For example, the paper on access to land, capital and markets, demonstrates that despite the heterogeneity among new entrants, most of them are confronted with similar obstacles. From a theoretical point of view, we hereby refer to the transition theory (Geels and Schot 2007). New entrants can be considered as niches, experimental settings, that are confronted with a regime that consists of established companies and regulations. This regime has no straight forward answers to the specific needs of new entrants. One can think of the struggle local and national advisors face in guiding a small new entrant - with often less than 1.5 ha of land, through the EU legislation and subsidy requests.

A regime won't change unless the demand for changing the system is relevant for society. At that point, various options occur. The regime might consider it worthwhile to develop a regulation that specifically answers the needs of the niche. The regime can however argue that the system as whole should change, in order to provide growth potential for the niche, and hence, integrate the niche within the regime.

A voice is a step forward in bundling the specific needs of European new entrants and have their needs heard by policy makers. It should thereby not be seen as a problem that not all needs are equal across new entrants. After all, this diversity holds true for most farmers' organizations. As an example, we mention the national farmers' unions which represent very small farms just as well as the largest farms in a country, young farmers just as well as farmers at the end of their career, ...

Giving a voice to new entrants also encompasses benefits for the European society as a whole. This argument is based on the idea that new entrants bring a value added to European society in general and more specifically to the European farming sector. We hereby refer to the minipaper 'Added value of New Entrants'. New entrants are very often (silent) pioneers, operating at a very local level.

Representation of New Entrants in existing organizations across the EU

In principle, new entrants have access to the various existing organizations across Europe. This holds true for all levels, from local up to European levels. Indeed, we may spot new entrants in the large farmers unions, CEJA, IFOAM, Via Campesina, CSA networks, etc. While none of the existing organizations would exclude new entrants, we could neither observe organizations that are particularly focusing on new entrants. Even there, new entrants are indirectly promoted through an agricultural model, a vision, rarely as a category of farmers or entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, new entrants are often categorized into other groups. As an example, we mention that organizations claim to consider the voice of new entrants through a unit on young farmers. At first sight, this might seem obvious as the majority of new entrants 'seem' to be young people¹. However, young farmers taking over a farm (as well as land, and often generations of experience) have different needs as compared to young new entrants, starting from scratch in the sector. In the same context, we do recognize the importance of CEJA for young farmers across Europe, nevertheless they can't be considered as the voice of new entrants.

Another example is the perception that new entrants can be classified into the various niche groups like CSA farmers, green care farming or organic farmers. Again, one should recognize that the profile and needs of an established CSA farmer, started up 10 years ago, differs significantly from a new entrant.

Then, one can question why new entrants don't make themselves more visible within the existing organizations. Generally, new entrants consider themselves as atypical in the sector. As referred to in the previous section, they don't belong to the regime and the rules of the regime do not fit their perspectives and most accurate needs. This view is confirmed in a study among new entrants in the Rhône-Alpes region, where 60% of new entrants into farming settle down without using any of the public schemes designed to help new farmers. On the one hand, the public and professional institutions (e.g.: Comité Départemental d'Orientation de l'Agriculture) never even acknowledge their existence. On the other hand, the new entrants themselves believe that they are "atypical" even in areas where they are a majority².

A reason for this is also the fact, that existing organizations focus on the traditional farming society. The different social background of New Entrants and their diverting views and goals in farming naturally exclude them from the majority in these organizations.

We have good information about the age of farmers that is very worrying – only 14% of EU farmers are under 40 years old, but this is just part of the picture. Because not all new entrants are young, and not all young

¹ http://civamardeche.org/IMG/pdf/Installation_Milieu_Rural_Cecile_Potier_final.pdf - (in French) see page 43 for a local illustration of new entrants not knowing they are a majority

² See slides 41 to 43 from "Innovation management in complex settings"
<http://fr.slideshare.net/pablomunozroman/complex-settings-and-the-evolution-of-the-innovation-process>

farmers are new entrants. Considering their value and important to the future of the sector and the lack of information about who they are, what kind of farming they are doing, their needs, we derive that a European research and statistics project is necessary, as well as a European observatory on new entrants.

Example of good and bad practices

Although at the European level, there is not yet a common voice for new entrants, the examples of new entrants bundling forces at the regional or local level increases. This gives rise to both good, though also bad examples on how new farmers can be represented. We limit ourselves here to a general overview of practices that occur across Europe.

At the local level, one can observe that the majority of authorities is not aware of the issue and hence, doesn't take any initiative at all to give a voice to new entrants. Alternatively, some local authorities are aware of the increasing number of new entrants in their region and interested in their story. In this case, we see that new entrants are – literally – offered the microphone, or a space on fairs and events. Nevertheless, if new entrants don't see the direct benefit of the offered forum, they will be reluctant to participate. Finally, an increasing number of local authorities really involves new entrants in the debate. One can think of urban agriculture platforms, established for example in cities like Ghent and Leuven, where local policy makers make efforts to involve new entrants recognizing their peculiarities and listening to their concerns.

Generally the lack of organization results in a lack of awareness of New Entrants. The term itself is not known to the large majority.

There are however also examples of new entrants that put themselves in the picture and pronounce the needs of new entrants. Sjoerd Wartena established as a new entrant in Southern France in the 1970s and created Terre de Liens in 2003, today a major French association successfully dealing with access to land. Another obvious example is the involvement of the new entrants in our focus group.

New perspective

New entrants are not a social movement nor a scientific concept (yet). They are a phenomenon, still vastly unknown, and of notable public policy interest. Since our focus group aims at analyzing patterns in new entrants in order to bring new growth and innovation to European agriculture, the invisibility and self-downgrading observed in new entrants is a major challenge to any data collection and dissemination from them to the wider farming stakeholders. Our efforts to gather statistical data about them and research material is undoubtedly useful, but we realize the leverage on knowledge would be huge if new entrants would speak for themselves. This starts with these business creators realizing the multiple advantages of getting together in terms of practical know-how, commercial networking, favorable public policies, image enhancement and other positive consequences.

Therefore, our suggestions both target the socio-technical regime² (established institutions) through public policy, and propose ways to accelerate the uptake of niche (new entrants) innovations through acknowledgement and networking. These ideas are not comprehensive of what can be done to improve the voice of new entrants, they are an attempt towards concrete solutions that could later on be taken up by Operational groups interested in the matter.

Open-source mapping of New Entrants

New entrants will only see the need to join forces, if they realize that their concerns are common obstacles for many farmers across Europe. The goal of the open-source mapping would be threefold:

- > improve visibility
- > initiate networking
- > accumulate data to analyze the phenomenon of new entrants

For instance it could make sense to build on the experience of the Ozwilllo platform, born from a European Research project.

Build networks using social media

The majority of the new entrants are people familiar with current social media platforms. These platforms are accessible and free for everyone and might be a means to share ideas and experiences easily and fast.

Work towards an EU-wide association acting as a long-term platform for New Entrants, enabling

- Discussion, sharing of know-how
- Gathering and maintaining data concerning New Entrants
- Creating a common core of interests
- Lobbying at regional, national, european level for these interests
- Engaging New Entrants in projects with public value, increasing their impact as innovators

Encourage the European institutions to engage with existing farming organisations specifically on issues of new entrants. For example, a socio-cultural shift could be achieved through European policies giving incentive for major unions to allow new entrants more space within their structures, or quotas of new entrants within beneficiaries of support and advice.

Finally, we realize that the implication of "A regime won't change unless the demand for changing the system is relevant for society" is that we should also aim at the general public. Indeed, new entrants often bridge the societal gap between what European society expects from its agriculture nowadays and what is actually done in the field. "Changing the system" by uptaking farming techniques or business models from new entrants is in that sense highly "relevant for society". The question then becomes "How do we broadcast the idea that new entrants broadly fulfill society's demand for healthy food, sustainable practices and social reconnection to nature?". This question could also be dealt with through experimentation within an Operational group.