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Title: Young farmer innovation practices for agricultural and rural development
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Motivation for the work

The increasing age profile of farmers in Ireland presents difficulties and opportunities in expanding and improving the agricultural sector. While the age structure of Irish farming is not ideal, the increase in interest in agricultural education by potential young farmers is a positive step. Young farmers represent 6% of the farming population and are of critical importance for the continued growth of the sector.

Research question

What innovations are young farmers involved in and does innovation affect farm output?

Methodology

The research focuses on graduates, who were enrolled in eight specific courses, from Teagasc Agricultural Colleges over the period 1995-2010. Semi-structured questionnaires were administered in the counties of Galway and Wexford focusing on practices drawn from the Dairy Efficiency Programme specifically grassland, financial and breeding. These practices will be used to create an index of innovation across all farm systems. Indexes of innovation have been used in other studies before however this index will focus on young farmers in Galway and Wexford.

Findings

Some problems encountered during the fieldwork include that the graduate database used to access the sample was historic and, as a result, there were a large number of potential participants that could not be contacted. Other reasons for non-response include emigration, unwillingness or unavailability to participate in the project, currently not farming or in some exceptional circumstances bereavement. These issues will be addressed by carrying out further research through the use of qualitative case studies at a later date.

This presentation will provide preliminary analysis exploring the potential relationship between innovation and farm outputs.