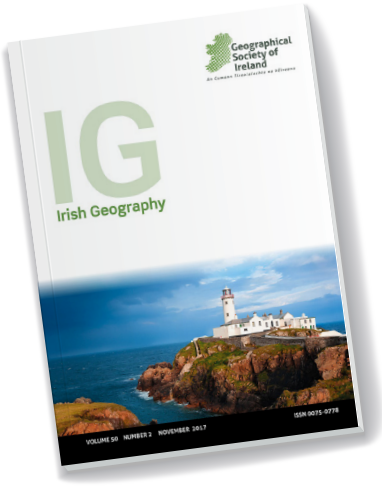

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Introduction: Continuity, Change and the Family Farm

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The place of farming in the national discourse was radically altered through a confluence of events around the time of the collapse of parts of the Irish economy, 2008-2011. Firstly, the most recent of a sequence of forward looking strategic plans, Food Harvest 2020, was published in 2010 which primarily sought to position Ireland to take advantage of the abolition of EU milk quotas (Department of Agriculture, 2010). Secondly, the government of the day adopted this plan as national strategy and, despite a change of government shortly afterwards, the strategy was retained by the new administration. Finally, and crucially, these events coincided with a global upturn in food commodity markets which saw farm incomes increase. Farming then, in a country short of much by way of good news at the time, was a source of hope for the Irish economy even if the discourse was, at times, over-blown and crucial implications of the strategy when it was originally published, e.g. impact on the environment, were largely absent. These developments were all the more remarkable given that much of the public discourse in the years leading up to the Great Recession concerning agriculture and farming was predominantly negative. Indeed, *Rural Ireland 2020*, a foresight study published in 2005 had, at its heart, a provocative premise that agriculture in general and family farming in particular was, based on contemporary trends affecting the sector, in terminal decline (Kinsella *et al.,* 2005) In the years since the publication and adoption of Food Harvest 2020, farming and food have remained high profile economic sectors. This focus has resulted in a range of initiatives, overseen by an implementation committee chaired by the Minister for Agriculture, that seek to tackle issues considered to adversely impact on the development potential of the sector. Despite considerable progress in some areas, substantial challenges remain not least of which is the small economic scale of most farm enterprises; 29% of farm enterprises being classified as economically sustainable and a further 34% considered to be economically vulnerable (Dillon *et al.,* 2017). A farm is classified as sustainable where it does not generate sufficient financial returns from the market but there is an off-farm income, and vulnerable where there is no off-farm employment. Foodwise 2025, the successor strategy to Food Harvest 2020, reflects

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not only the challenges to the development of the sector arising from limited incomes, i.e. inability to invest or adopt new technologies, but also sets of social and cultural challenges associated with the lack of a functioning agricultural land market due to family attachment to the land (Department of Agriculture, 2015). In developing proposals to overcome these challenges, Foodwise 2025 recognises that change at the farm enterprise scale is framed not only by the characteristics of the enterprise and the farmer, but more significantly, by the farm family and wider farm community.

The tension between change and continuity is a key characteristic of the development of Irish agriculture (Crowley *et al.,* 2008). It was an issue central to Prof. Willie Smyth's PhD (1969) which later formed the basis of two articles published in *The Maynooth Review* in 1975. This body of work concerned itself with the territorial organisation of rural communities and assessed the structure and functioning of social networks to elucidate continuities and changes in the spatial expression of social and economic activities over time. Central to the research was a perspective of change being driven by the penetration of rural society and the associated economy by capital. Smyth conceptualises this process in terms of changes in the structure of economic production that impact on the respective functions and, hence, relative integration within rural communities and between rural areas, towns and commercial/commodity markets (Smyth, 1975a). This perspective has come to dominate much of the literature concerned with agricultural change or restructuring (Crowley, 2007). The processes of change are, Smyth argues, filtered or mediated by powerful cultural anchors, particularly 'family farms' (Smyth, 1975a). The concept of the family farm is defined by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) as farms that rely primarily on family members for labour and management (Garner and de la O Campos, 2013). This is a functional definition rather than one which seeks to categorise farms on the basis of their size or volume or value of production. It is intentionally broad and captures the diversity of types of family farms to be found around the world, ranging from subsistence and semi-subsistence family farms to the small but growing number of 'global' operators, e.g. farm families that own and operate, using family labour, farm enterprises in two or more countries. Since the late 1800s, family farms have been the dominant type of farm enterprise in Ireland, indicating that this is a highly adaptive social institution capable of assimilating societal, economic and technological changes in order to preserve itself (Daly, 2006). The issue of the continuation of the family farm in Ireland is, nonetheless, a constant within public discourses concerned with agriculture, food and rural development. This discourse, commonly framed in terms of social, economic, environmental or regulatory threats to farm enterprises, suggests vulnerability to change and is at odds with the vision put forward in both the Food Harvest and Food Wise strategies.

These contrasting perspectives of farming in Ireland raise the question of the evolution of farm enterprises and the impacts on farm families. This special issue brings together five papers developed following a conference organised by Teagasc, the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority, as part of a series of events marking the Food and Agriculture Year of the Family Farm held in 2014. The papers seek to provide insights

into the evolution of farms and farm households in Ireland. In doing so, the contributors highlight the intersections between the past and present through consideration of the social, environmental and governance context that have shaped or are shaping the development of farm enterprises and households. More specifically, they draw attention to the significance of broader social changes framing the contemporary context within which family farms function. This extends the framework developed by Smyth to include non-agricultural forces that are increasingly significant in shaping the functioning and future of farms and farm households; i.e. whilst commodity markets remain crucial to the economic (un)sustainability of the farm enterprise, broader social forces, including the feminisation of the workforce or demand for residential sites, are increasingly significant to the continuation of the family farm model.

In the first of two papers exploring the intensions of potential future farmers, David Meredith and Caroline Crowley provide an overview of the demographic structure of the population of farmers and how this has change over the period 2000-2010 by way of providing a context for the papers contained in this special issue. Drawing on the Census of Agriculture, a small number of researchers have developed a substantial body of literature, describing and evaluating the changing structure of farms and farm enterprises in Ireland. This paper contributes to that body of work through the development and application of a geo-demographic typology. The research highlights the ageing of the population of farmers between 2000 and 2010 and describes the resulting spatial patterns. The application of the geo-demographic typology enables the association between farmer age and the outcomes to processes, resulting in the geographic specialisation of farm enterprises to be identified and assessed. The paper then considers the potential implications of intergenerational transfer of land and farms to a new generation of land holders. This is an important topic given the increasingly elderly age profile of farmers. The coming years will see the transfer of land to a new generation of land holders. In this context, the land use intentions of this group of land-holders will shape the future development of the sector not only in terms of food production and the attainment of targets set out in agri-food development strategies, but also in terms of meeting societal demands for the production of renewable energy and mitigation of climate change through afforestation. The international literature highlights the complexity associated with intergenerational farm transfer and points to the variety of factors influencing what occurs to farm assets, including land, resulting from the transfer process (Calus *et al.,* 2008, Ingram and Kirwan, 2011). In general, this literature focuses on the presence of a viable enterprise in the successful transfer of the farm. There is relatively little research considering the implications for farm assets in alternative scenarios, i.e. where the farm enterprise may not be viable or the successor may not wish to operate it. The research highlights the on-going attachment to the land amongst most respondents even in those cases where the farm enterprise is not economically viable, and associated with this, the need for off-farm sources of income.

The next two papers by Arlene Crampsie and Patrick Duffy develop a theme introduced in Smyth's work. Commenting on changes to the organisation of farms,

Smyth highlighted the separation of home and workplace arising from the 'growing popularity… of the bungalow house type on farms of all sizes – often located at a respectable distance from the farm out-buildings.' (Smyth, 1975b, p.55). In Cassidy's contribution to this special issue the separation of the residence from the workplace is traced to the institution of biopolitical legislation in the late 1800s that mandated separation between the residence and animal housing. In doing so, Crampsie considers a perennial concern for contemporary farm households, the issue of regulation. This is a common theme in discourses which frequently highlight the 'burden' of complying with regulations, particularly those associated with EU Common Agriculture Policy supports or schemes. Crampsie, however, explores the issue of early state intervention into farm households during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and in so doing highlights continuities between then and now. Her work demonstrates that while the increase in state control and supervision of aspects of Irish life had been expanding throughout the 1800s, it was only in the later part of the century that this attention began to shift from the wider land and landscape to focus on the previously sacred private space of the family home. She describes how the Victorian preoccupation with improvement, particularly in relation to standards of hygiene and sanitation, would result in a raft of biopolitical legislation that impacted all families but that this was felt most strongly by farming households across the country. Public health and sanitation legislation ordered the eviction of animals from inside cottages, the removal of manure heaps from outside doors and introduced regulations for the sale or even provision of dairy produce. These changes, whilst ostensibly concerned with the health of the household, had implications for the structure of the farm and, associated with this, its economic viability that are traced through the use of local authority records which reveal the practical consequences of this incursion of agents of the state onto private property and into private lives. Furthermore, Crampsie's paper charts the emergence of a governance system that is very much present today as reflected in the development of regulation at the state level intersecting with implementation at the local scale.

Patrick Duffy's paper is the first of two which embody a personal approach to the theme of continuity and change by revisiting case study areas in Monaghan, Mayo and Meath that formed the basis of earlier research to evaluate the role of the farm in mediating changes in land use and the resulting implications for the landscape. Similar to the paper from Sally Shortall which follows, Duffy's paper situates farm family 'survival strategies within a broader economic imperative that in the face of limited incomes from farm enterprises, necessitate the generation of income from other sources, e.g. land sales or off-farm employment. There is, in light of the importance accorded to the landscape in a range of agri-food, tourism and spatial development strategies, also a political context to these developments. Contemporary demand for rural housing poses a challenge to the maintenance of farmscapes. Rather than large scale developments, it is the one-off rural house that poses the most significant challenge to traditional landscapes. National policy makers have, tentatively, attempted to engage with this issue with limited success. In part, the unwillingness to grapple with this issue reflects a tacit understanding of the social,

economic and cultural significance of rural housing to, particularly, farm households. As the primary controllers of land in rural areas, farm households, within the constraints of the topography of the farm, have played a key role in both the development of traditional and contemporary farmscapes. This is most evident in areas dominated by smaller farms. These enterprises, which are declining in number, face a variety of challenges, from providing housing for immediate and extended family members to generating an income. Those strategies, involving allocation or sale of land for residential development, are of particular interest given that they simultaneously facilitate continuation of the family farm as a social entity and local change through expansion of non-rural settlement patterns. Insight into the processes of change in small farm structures and communities in recent decades is critical in explaining and understanding the evolution of local settlement patterns up to the present.

Focusing on gender roles in farm households during the period 1987-2012, Sally Shortall's paper draws on four discrete qualitative studies to identify and chart selected continuities and changes shaping contemporary farm households. As a social unit, the farm household has been subjected to substantial change over time. Whilst some of these changes represent distinct breaks from the past, others are continuations of trends that have been at work within farm households over decades. These developments have impacted on the micro-interactions within the family, resulting in significant structural changes in broad social relations and, to a lesser extent, impacted on gender roles in farm households. The paper explores these developments by focusing on four aspects of gender relations that reflect continuity and change: women's employment on and off the farm; how farming institutions have viewed and interacted with men and women over time; inheritance, the transfer of property and the question of divorce; and, gender identities within the family farm. Whilst there were substantial changes in gender roles within the farm family, Shortall concludes that these are not reflective of the dramatic change in broader social relations. This, in part, reflects the co-option of women's identities in order that the work identity of the male farmer, as the decision-maker and the person in charge, be maintained.

The final paper by Anne Cassidy is, appropriately, focused on the next generation of farmers. This paper explores some of the issues facing Irish university students who are likely to inherit a farm. This is a group which must juggle responsibilities to their family and the landholding while simultaneously forging their own professional careers away from the farm. Increasing numbers of Irish family farming offspring participate in third-level education and go on to pursue non-farming careers. Despite this, there is no evidence of the rate of land sale increasing which is unsurprising given the attachment of farm families to the land. This implies that most of this population have to navigate two distinctive roles: that of a farm successor and that of a student intending to pursue a career away from the farm. In light of the elderly demographic profile of farm holders in Ireland, the rate of inter-generational farm transfers will increase in the coming years. Therefore, it is opportune to examine some of the issues confronting this group. The data for this work is based on eight participants from an original cohort of thirty students who

took part in PhD research and is based on a series of semi-structured interviews. The analysis establishes that this group's duality is an example of how family farming can adapt to social pressures whilst still retaining its own cultural norms, thus ensuring that the farm is passed onto the next generation. However, this is not without some challenges as highlighted in the work, where conflicted attitudes to succession are discussed as well as the framing of the farm, the likely nature of their future relationship with the holding and the dual path they have as students and heirs.

Looking to the future

The research presented in this special edition highlights the adaptive capacity of the social system that is the family farm. From structural changes in the number, size and intensity of production to fundamental alteration of social relations, the family farm has both endured and continued to evolve over the past number of decades. The coming years will see further challenges to the capacity of family farms to adjust to not only the on-going or persistent economic challenges but also the challenges of climate change, ranging from alteration of production practices, managing water scarcity and surfeit, all the while responding to societal demands for greater levels of carbon sequestration and flood protection. A further issue confronting farm families, particularly in terms of the potential to engender changes to roles and the status of male household members is the pervasive knowledge intensification that accompanies the continued penetration of technologies into farm production systems or societal demands for the maintenance of landscapes. We can also expect to see changes in the functional organisation and intensification of agricultural land through greater adoption of long-term leases that will not only contribute to structural change but also engender new or altered social relations between those renting in and those renting out land. Each of these issues has an important spatial and social dimension that warrants significant multidisciplinary research in order to fully understand their implications and to ensure that policy stakeholders have the evidence required to develop strategies that can support and sustain the family farm model into the future.

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