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Generational transmission of smallholder farms in late capitalism

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ABSTRACT

Despite contextual differences, the future of smallholder farming faces many similar challenges worldwide. This introduction to the special section previews case studies from Australia, Austria, Ireland and Japan of generational transmission of smallholder farms in late capitalism. It frames key issues in the generational reproduction of smallholder farming, combining perspectives from agrarian studies and youth studies. The cases include intrafamilial succession and extrafamilial transmission to "newcomer" farmers. Intergenerational farm transfers are a two-way interaction between the older and the younger generations, in which neither fully controls the process.

RÉSUMÉ

Malgré des contextes différents, l’avenir des petites exploitations agricoles est confronté à de nombreux défis similaires à travers le monde. Cette introduction à la section spéciale présente des études de cas d’Australie, d’Autriche, d’Irlande et du Japon portant sur la transmission générationnelle de petites exploitations dans le capitalisme tardif. Elle aborde les questions clés liées à la reproduction générationnelle de l’agriculture à petite échelle en combinant des perspectives issues des études agraires et des études sur la jeunesse. Nous étudions des cas de succession intrafamiliale et des cas de transmission extrafamiliale à des agriculteurs « nouveaux venus ». Ces transferts confèrent des relations bidirectionnelles entre les vieilles et les nouvelles générations, dans lesquelles ni l’une ni l’autre ne contrôle complètement le processus.

The importance of intergenerational succession in smallholder farming futures

Smallholder or family farm units are estimated to number more than 500 million worldwide, and 98 per cent of all the world’s farm units. Depending on how they are defined, they farm 50–75 per cent of the world’s farm land, while the other 2 per cent of farming units (large corporate and private farms) occupy the remaining 25–50 per cent (Graeub et al. 2016; Lowder, Skoet, and Raney 2016).
In the past half century, average farm sizes in late capitalist countries have increased and their numbers correspondingly declined. The number of farm units in the European Union declined by over 26 per cent from 2005 to 2013 (Eurostat 2016), and by 70 per cent in the USA in the second half of the twentieth century (US Department of Agriculture 2017b). In the European Union the number of farms that are not classified as “family managed” remains small at around 3 per cent of the total, but they are on average over 15 times larger than family run holdings and therefore occupy close to half of all farm land (Eurostat 2016).

Smallholder farmers, and those who promote smallholder farming futures, everywhere confront the question of where the next generation of farmers will come from, and whether there is a future for smallholder farming. The similarities in both the challenges older farmers face in organising generational transmission, and those that young people face in being or becoming farmers in different agricultural contexts, in the Global North as well as the Global South have inspired this collection. This introductory article and the four case studies1 that follow will focus on the reproduction of smallholder farming in late capitalist2 contexts. Analytically, the collection makes the case for examining succession from the perspective of both older farmers (those facing potential succession issues) and young people (the potential next generation of farmers) using an intersectional approach drawing on agrarian studies and youth studies.

The average age of farmers in late capitalist countries is increasing, with few under the age of 35 (see, for example, for Ireland and the USA respectively, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine 2011; US Department of Agriculture 2017a). Japan provides the most extreme example, with farmers’ average age now 70 (Rigg, Salamanca, and Thompson 2016, 129) and only 10 per cent of all farmers under 40 years old (McGreevy, Kobayashi, and Tanaka, this issue). In fact, many of the world’s ageing farmers appear to have no successor, leading to questions about the future of smallholder farming. One aspect of this problem is their children’s apparent aversion to farming futures, which has been noted in many regions (Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Proctor and Lucchesi 2012; White 2012); it is a consistent finding of several recent multi-country studies on “aspirations” of rural youth (Elias et al. 2018; Leavy and Hossain 2014; Melchers and Büchler 2017; OECD 2017).

However, research data on young rural people’s “aspirations”, or older farmers’ hopes and fears about succession, are not reliable indicators of actual futures (Chiswell 2014). Aspirations are produced “relationally” (Appadurai 2004, 67), and young people’s reported aspirations (the result of formal survey interviews or focus group discussions) tend to emerge through social acceptability filters, reflecting dominant norms about acceptable or “worthy” futures (Zipin et al. 2015, 236). When the same young people are asked what might make farming a possible option, the responses are also consistent: land and inputs must be available, there must be good market prospects for the farm’s produce, and farming must be combined with other income sources. Those young people potentially interested in farming express clear understandings of the generational and other constraints which make access to land and other resources needed for successful farming difficult or impossible, at least while still young (White 2018, 23).

This points to the need for renewed attention to problems in the social reproduction of agrarian communities, and in particular, the intergenerational transfer of agrarian resources and opportunities. The four articles in this collection build on and contribute to the literature on intergenerational transmission of farm land (or more broadly, agrarian
resources), both within families and through non-family transfers. They are based on rich, original, qualitative research in four countries: Australia, Austria, Ireland and Japan. Each study offers insights into the process of succession, based on in-depth enquiries into a specific aspect of succession or transfer. By focusing on how the next generation of farmers is created, the articles in this collection underline that while succession may be challenging, many young adults are willing to embark upon farming as a career. The four studies provide insight into the problems and process of both “normative” farm succession (from parents to their male child or children) and “non-normative” transmission (to newcomer farmers, or to daughters in contexts where patrilineal succession is the norm).

Succession, whether intra- or extrafamilial, is not an easy process, entailing challenges for both transferors and successors. Not all potential successors want to be farmers, while those who wish to be farmers may not be seen as successors in their particular contexts. Two articles in this collection examine the dynamics and problems of within-family farm succession: Cassidy (2019) examines the case of daughters as non-normative successors in Ireland and Santhanam-Martin, Bridge, and Stevens (2019) focus on succession in dairy farming in Australia. The other two articles explore the pathways into farming of a generation of “newcomer” farmers from outside the family. Korzenszky (2019) provides a good segue between intra-family and extrafamilial succession, outlining a 10-step process around farming succession. As Korzenszky’s case from Austria and McGreevy, Kobayashi, and Tanaka’s (2019) from Japan highlight, the search for and matching with a potential successor outside the family happens only in the absence of a successor from within the family or due to a lack of interest among legal successors, and requires some degree of external facilitation. In all the cases the successors are young adults.

### Intergenerational relations and transfers: frameworks and guiding concepts

In exploring and comparing intergenerational relations in rural societies and the processes by which young people enter into (or are excluded from) farming, we need to combine core concepts from the interdisciplinary fields of agrarian studies and youth studies.

By “family farming” and “smallholder farming” we refer not to the size (acreage) of the farm unit, but to the manner of its operation, where owners or tenants themselves manage and work on the farm, often with the help of family members but not ruling out the use of hired workers. Use of the term “family farm” does not involve any assumption that such farms were acquired, or will later be passed on, through intra-family mechanisms. This is a departure from commonly used definitions such as Gasson and Errington (1993, 39); in our view the shift in definition is justified by the greater diversity in succession pathways that we now see.

To understand how young people are included in or excluded from entry into farming, we first need to understand the widely differing ways in which access to agrarian resources (“ownership” and “access”) is structured and their transfer regulated in different societies, with or without contestation. As Eric Wolf observes in his classic monograph Peasants:

> Each replacement of the older generation by a member of the new calls into question the existence of the peasant household as previously constituted. Of special importance are the rules governing inheritance, regulating the passage of resources and their control from the old to the young. (Wolf 1966, 73)
Classic studies and debates on intergenerational transfers in agrarian societies have focused mainly on Europe and sub-Saharan Africa – in particular, under the influence of the work of Jack Goody and his peers in the 1970s (Goody 1971; Goody 1976; Goody, Thirsk, and Thompson 1976). Resource transmission through inheritance is the last phase in a longer process of transfer from one generation to the next. Goody (1976) calls this longer process (which includes transfers made before death) “devolution”; however, in this collection we have preferred the more everyday terms “succession” and “transmission”. Devolution takes a bewildering variety of forms around the world. First, the nature of the rights transferred (various kinds of ownership-like and use-rights) differs from place to place, and over time. Second, although transfers are generally carried out in a vertical rather than lateral direction (looking for one or more heirs in the next generation, rather than among siblings or cousins in the same generation), there are multiple ways of regulating who in the next generation is eligible as heir(s): patrilineal, matrilineal and ambilineal, partible and impartible (and within the latter, primo- or ultimo-geniture, or simply handing the property to a selected heir regardless of birth order).

In looking at these patterns of inheritance or devolution we must carefully distinguish “law”, “custom” and actual practice, and be aware that all of these may change over time. This is well illustrated in Cole and Wolf’s classic study comparing German- and Romansch-speaking communities in the same region of Italy’s southern Tyrol, more than half a century ago. Impartible inheritance with male primogeniture was both ideal and actual practice among the German speakers, as it was among Bavarians across the border (Wolf 1970), while just a short distance away, among the Romansch speakers, inheritance was partible with sons and daughters inheriting equally (Cole and Wolf 1974). Revisiting the German speakers of St. Felix two decades later, Cole was surprised to find the inheritance system transformed from male primogeniture to female ultimogeniture, “and villagers told the ethnographer this had always been their custom” (Hann 2008, 151 citing Cole 2003). In a similar vein, Bina Agarwal underlines the need to distinguish between “legal” and “social” recognition of claims to land, between recognition and its enforcement and between land ownership and effective control of land. By “control” she understands women’s ability to take decisions regarding the use and disposal of land, to manage its cultivation themselves and to dispose of its products: “none of these forms of control is guaranteed to a woman by virtue of legal ownership alone” (Agarwal 1994, 19 and 292).

A key concept in youth studies is youth as generation – a social category defined, like class and gender, in relational terms. We thus need to take a relational approach to studying young people’s experiences in farming, the social organisation of relations between younger and older generations and their role in the social reproduction of agrarian communities (Archambault 2014; Berckmoes and White 2014). Youth studies also view youth as identity (Jones 2009), mindful that young people are not only young, they are young men or women (gendered) and also in most rural contexts “classed”. Youth and generation must therefore be seen as “intersecting” with other important social categories (Hajdu et al. 2013; Jones 2009; Nayak and Kehily 2013; Wyn and White 1997). Intersectionality is therefore an essential concept in youth studies, and in this collection. It refers to the coexistence and interaction of multiple forms and relationships of subordination, inequality and identity – for example, class, gender and generation (Alanen 2016). This can also
be grounded in political dimensions where the decision to farm is connected to lifestyle choices such as a desire to engage in alternative food production strategies such as Community Supported Agriculture (Dreby, Jung, and Sullivan 2017).

Youth studies also sees youth as actors, rather than passive objects of adult control and socialisation (Jones 2009). At the same time, actor-oriented approaches need also to recognise the power of structural environments, which limit young people’s room for manoeuvre; like all other social groups they exercise “constrained agency” (Long and van der Ploeg 1994). We need, therefore, to understand inter-generational farm transmission (or its failure) as a two-way process which both older and younger generations can influence, but which neither fully controls.

The generational replacement of agrarian households and farms involves the transmission between generations (or, the blockage of such transfers) of land and other agrarian resources, including agricultural knowledge and skills. It also is a moment and an opportunity for changes in farming styles and practices. Research has shown that the transfer of land from one generation to the next increases farm diversification by up to 10 per cent for each offspring who stays on the farm (Barbieri, Mahoney, and Butler 2008). The succession process also acts as a stimulus for on-farm investment and activity by the current generation of farmers. As Mann, Mittenzwei, and Hasselmann (2013) note, where there is a successor the older generation has an incentive to invest in the farm and its activities and the younger farmer is motivated to increase the outputs of the farm through, for instance, increasing the size of their holding (see also Potter and Lobley 1996).

Having set out the need for a youth and generational perspective in understanding farm transmission, the rest of the article will draw out key issues surrounding the inter-generational transfer of agrarian resources.

**Intergenerational relations and pathways out of and into farming**

The generational dimension and related intergenerational tensions have been common themes in European agrarian history and contemporary studies of agrarian change. Succession laws and practices are crucial mechanisms of intergenerational reproduction. Much of the focus in succession literature is on the norm of linear, intrafamilial transition from one generation to the next – typically in a patrilineal manner. Usually this is based on the idea of a childhood spent on the farm, developing a growing attachment to the land while building an apprentice-style relationship with a parent and eventually succeeding to the title and identity of the farmer. While this type of transfer of land from one generation to the next is important we also need to take into account those pathways which do not fit within this norm. The following illustrations, in which young people themselves talk about their involvement in farming and rural life, give an idea of the great variety in patterns of young people’s involvement in, exclusion from and sometimes aversion to, farming and rural life. For the purpose of this article, we limit ourselves to contemporary examples from late capitalist countries.

In modern Britain, girls and boys in a village in Northamptonshire (English Midlands) express their complete alienation from the land, rural life and land owners:

[What’s it like here?] Boring. It’s pretty quiet … you need transport to get out of the village … There’s no jobs, like, going in the village. You need transport to get out of the village to get a job … (Girl, aged 15)
We can’t go there [a field on the edge of a new housing development] … There’s a big sign up saying KEEP OUT, TRESPASSERS PROSECUTED. We went there once and this guy comes out and starts giving us some verbal … (Boy, aged 13)

I was walking along with me mates down by the little stream and this old geezer starts shouting at us “GET OFF MY LAND” … Stupid old fool, who does he think he is! It’s just a path by a house … (Girl aged 14) (Matthews and Tucker 2011, 97–99)

A contrasting example is a young Canadian couple with no rural or farming background who have found a pathway into farming:

After completing her degree, Steph and her partner found themselves a small piece of land close to his family in Amherst, Nova Scotia. They have been there now for almost four years, growing an acre of hops which they sell directly to local breweries. In addition, they rent land from a neighbour to grow 2.5 acres of certified organic vegetables, sold through a CSA […]

Neither Steph nor her partner had any experience with farming prior to starting their farm. To facilitate their early years, both worked part-time on another organic vegetable CSA farm in the area. This opportunity not only provided them with valuable practical skills, but has also connected them with older, established farmers who continue to be looked to as mentors. To supplement their farm income, Steph and her partner have additional jobs during the off-season. (Haalboom 2013, 26–27)

The complex nature of young people’s relationships with agriculture and the idea of succession to a family smallholding is also demonstrated in the following quote from a participant in an Irish study. Although this farm youth self-identified as the successor, he had enrolled in university and had conflicting feelings about taking on ownership of the land in future:

[I] love the land, love the place, but I couldn’t see myself living there. It’s a rural Ireland thing as well, I really couldn’t see myself living back there … [If] you’re a young, single guy or girl I think with any ambition it’s a nursing home, like it’s a retirement home like I see it as anyway. Nothing else there unless you’re raising a young family or something or you’re retiring or something … kick back and enjoy it. Trying to go places I think it doesn’t help as such. (Cassidy 2013, 278)

The final example, from the fertile Saïss plateau of Morocco, is a well educated young man (with a degree in agriculture), eager to take over and modernise his father’s farm but frustrated by his father’s authority.

Driss (29 years old) sees his future self as an independent farmer, responsible for his own farming project and up-to-date with the newest crops and technologies. [But currently] he farms with his brothers on his father’s land and under his authority. They cultivate three hectares of irrigated onions and potatoes, and the remaining ten hectares are cropped with rainfed cereals. ‘If my father says that we have to cultivate four hectares of onions, I cannot refuse or contradict him.’

In 2009, he succeeded in convincing his father to install drip irrigation […]: ‘I rented one hectare from my father and also paid him for the water to irrigate the tree seedlings.’ Driss had hoped to transplant the 9000 tree seedlings to the rest of the land. He was not, however, able to convince his father of this and was forced to sell the seedlings. He had thus run up against the will and authority of his father. This situation deeply frustrates him: ‘I want to go to another region (…) I’m so fed up with this situation. I just want
something for myself, something I can rely on. My own project, my own money.’ (Bossenbroek, van der Ploeg, and Zwarteveen 2015, 344–345 and 347)

One key distinction among young farmers that needs to be explored further is that between “continuers” (who take over their parents’ or other relative’s farm) and “newcomers” (those not from farm background who find a pathway into farming). We should also make a distinction between early continuers and late continuers, the latter being those who first leave the parental farm to engage in other work (in the village or beyond it) and return to farming later in life for a variety of reasons. In a recent study in Canada and Spain, more than half of the young farmers in both countries were in fact “newcomers” (Monllor 2012), which underlines the need to move beyond a narrow focus on the children of existing farmers. This issue’s articles by Korzenszky and McGreevy, Kobayashi, and Tanaka focus on the entry of newcomers into farming. Based on their case studies on beginning farmers in Kyoto and Nagano prefectures, McGreevy, Kobayashi, and Tanaka arrive at a typology of five distinct pathways into farming. “Heritage” pathways (involving children of farming families) include two groups: those who move straight into farming, launching a farming career immediately after completing school, and “U-turners”, those who have first been away to urban areas for education and career and return to their family farm lands later in life, often embracing a pluriactive farming lifestyle. “Non-heritage” pathways are of three kinds. “Early converters” typically continue to agricultural school after high school and then are employed in a farm enterprise. “Entrepreneurial I-turners” typically are those who enter farming after having established a career in another field, mostly learning farming through apprenticeships at farming schools while others are self-taught, while “lifestyle I-turners” are mostly self-taught, and generally have small farms of less than 1.0 hectare with the aim of providing safe organic food for their families. All non-heritage farmers in this study found access to land and housing a major hurdle; Japanese villagers are generally reluctant to sell their houses and farmland, and the newcomers can often lease land only for short periods of one to two years.

**Intergenerational conflicts and tensions over land**

While young people can exert their own agency in the life strategies they develop, in many countries and regions it is difficult for them to move into independent agricultural production without being designated as a successor by their parents. One reason why young people express reluctance to farm may not be because of aversion to farming as such, but the long waiting period before they would have a chance to engage in independent farming. In situations like this, when access to agrarian resources is barred, one mode of young people’s agency is to migrate in search of other work and livelihoods, thus withdrawing their labour from the parental farm. Yet this can clash with a personal and familial desire to retain the landholding in the family, which can cause dilemmas for young people as they negotiate and navigate their life path (Cassidy 2013). This underlines the importance of a life-course perspective in the study of young people’s aspirations and their move out of, or into, farming. In any case, young people’s out-migration should not automatically be assumed to reflect a permanent abandonment of rural life and agriculture; it can equally be part of a cyclical life-course trajectory.
Intergenerational tensions regarding the transfer of land or other assets from one generation to the next are not new. The older generation juggles various competing priorities, which may include: the desire to transfer the farm as an intact whole while at the same time giving equal (or at least “fair”) treatment to all heirs; the fear of losing authority in the family once land is transferred; the need for security and old-age support; and a desire to keep some degree of involvement in farm operations. The tension between the desire of ageing parents to keep the household together under their authority by retaining control of family assets, and the desire of children to receive their share of these assets, form their own independent households and attain the status of economic and social adulthood, is a common feature of agrarian societies. We can find a number of examples in European agrarian history.

In the rural areas around fifteenth-century Florence, “[M]ost old men kept a firm grasp on the management of the family farm until they became senile or died. This meant that young potential heirs had to wait around until they were 45 or 50 before they could come into their inheritance” (Watts 1984, 59). Elderly people who retained control of the means of production were thus in a position to frustrate the ambitions of youth. Not surprisingly, then, young people regarded their elders with ambivalence. But the attitude was also mutual. When elderly peasants did transfer control of land to their children, they felt it necessary to safeguard their position against the loss of power and livelihood, often in written contracts. In seventeenth-century Calenberg in Lower Saxony, Germany, if legal transfer of the farm to the heir was made during the lifetime of the parents, they made a contract called leibzucht: “The retirement contract usually stipulated that the heir would provide a defined amount of food, shelter and clothing for the retired parents, and it guaranteed them the produce or income from certain parts of the farm” (Berkner 1976, 78).

Arensberg and Kimball observed in rural Ireland in the 1930s that “even at forty-five and fifty, if the couple have not yet made over the farm, the countryman remains a ‘boy’ in respect to farm work and in the rural vocabulary”. This is understandable in view of the alternative, since “at the transfer of land, all vestiges of strict parental control are destroyed … parents can no longer demand the services of their children” (Arensberg and Kimball 1968, 40). They also found that, after their sons’ marriage and transfer of the land, many elderly couples were moved to the “west room” and out of the main social domain of the home. To overcome parental fears, legal agreements were often drawn up that stipulated that the old couple would receive care for the duration of their life in return for handing over title to the land (Arensberg and Kimball 1968, 40).

Contemporary research reveals that the situation has not changed much, as we saw in the example from Morocco above. The hesitation of most farmers to begin thinking about retirement often stems from an inability to see themselves not farming in some capacity. In an international study on farm succession in 10 countries Lobley, Baker, and Whitehead (2010, 57) found that the decision to retire and step back from a career that is “often characterized as a ‘way of life’, and one in which much of an individual’s and family’s social, cultural, and economic history and identity is conjoined, is not always an easy decision to reach.” In a survey of 225 farmers in Manitoba, Canada, Wasney (1992) found that the retiring generation normally has five goals in succession planning: they would like enough wealth or income to support their desired lifestyle during retirement; they want to ensure the continuation of the family farm; they want to maintain good
family relationships; and they want to provide financial assistance to both farming and non-farming children. These goals are not always compatible, and the dramatic rise of farmland values, in part driven by institutional ownership of farmland (Desmarais et al. 2017; Holtslander 2015), has created further incompatibilities across these goals.

Socialising into farming succession

When governments everywhere are focused on making agriculture globally competitive, farmers’ concern with succession may be about maintaining the farm within the family or at least retaining it as a farm, but it is also about preserving farming as a way of life (Korzenszky; Santhanam-Martin, Bridge, and Stevens in this issue). In earlier times, succession was undertaken largely as a family obligation, but today it is also defined by personal choice – lifestyle or political. Korzenszky notes that while some of the aspiring newcomer farmers in her study were motivated by personal experience of growing up in an agrarian culture, others were prompted by lifestyle choices such as the desire to connect with nature and grow their own food. A turn to farming in many regions stems from the quest for a good life, autonomy, building community, a commitment to ecological values and food sovereignty (Haalboom 2013; Lafarge 2016; Leonard 2015; Lobley, Baker, and Whitehead 2010). At the same time, many young people who seek to farm are keen to create personal space and time away from farming (Cassidy 2019 [this issue]; Parent 2012).

Several studies of young people’s choice to farm bring the focus back to questions of the economic viability of farming. A Canadian Parliamentary committee which interviewed 132 farmers in four major agricultural provinces found that “young farmers showed their love for farming; they appreciate the lifestyle. Nevertheless, this passion alone is not sufficient to convince them to set up in agriculture. They consider it first and foremost as a business that must be profitable” (Government of Canada 2010, 7). This is perhaps one of the main reasons why many older farmers dissuade their children from pursuing farming or taking over the farm, and often inheriting huge debts (Martz and Brueckner 2003).

Writing about farm succession in Canada, Brown (2011, 164) noted that when a farm is transferred without a formal succession plan “either immediately or within a few years [of the farm transfer, there] is one less farm reported in the statistics”, yet a significant number of farmers have no succession plan at all (Earls 2017; Statistics Canada 2017).

The starting point for all four articles in the collection is that succession is not merely a moment, or an outcome, but a process that is drawn out and challenging. They show that succession is indeed changing, with increasing numbers of transmissions involving non-normative successors and “non-heritage” newcomer farmers, and this change generates optimism for the future of farming. Socialisation – before and during the process of succession – emerges as a critical aspect to facilitate smooth intergenerational transfer of resources and knowledge. The strong interconnection of family, land and business in the agricultural holding sets serious challenges for both the transferors and the successors (Korzenszky). While farmers and farm families actively think and plan for their succession (Korzenszky; Santhanam-Martin, Bridge, and Stevens) they often do not openly talk about it with their potential successors (Cassidy; Santhanam-Martin, Bridge, and Stevens). Being able to discuss the future of their farm in a non-threatening way helps to break the taboo
around issues of intra-family or extrafamilial succession, and transfer of immovable and movable property, knowledge and managerial control to the successor.

Given the weakening of the moral obligation to take over the parental farm and the departure from gradual apprentice-type training (Cassidy), socialisation into farming is necessary in intra- as well as extrafamilial succession. Korzenszky and McGreevy, Kobayashi, and Tanaka discuss ways in which the socialisation plays out in extrafamilial succession, involving seeking out, matchmaking, apprenticeship, acceptance of the successor, and the gradual transfer of farm and responsibilities. An example is the Dutch website *Boer zoekt boer* (“farmer seeks farmer”), run by the Netherlands young farmers’ organisation NAJK, which provides a platform for ageing farmers without successors to come into contact with people who may be interested to take over the farm. Often the young would-be farmers begin by helping on the farm while the elderly farm couple gradually reduce their activities. In extrafamilial successions, Korzenszky notes that socialisation in a farming family, agricultural education and work experience appear to improve the chances of being selected as a successor. Training and sharing knowledge and skills in an apprentice-type process, and opting to farm part-time alongside the successor could secure the well-being of both generations and the survival of the farm itself. In fact, the mediation of an external party may be preferred, as evident in the initiatives in Australia, Austria and Japan that are showcased in Santhanam-Martin, Bridge, and Stevens; Korzenszky; and McGreevy, Kobayashi, and Tanaka (all this issue).5

**Gender and structural exclusion in farm succession**

Gender is a key mechanism of structural exclusion from succession in many countries. Women continue to be overlooked, not only in the family farming or smallholder discourse but also in academic research, as few studies are available on this group in late capitalist contexts. In most countries, tradition rather than suitability or aptitude is the basis for succession decisions (see, for example, Agarwal 1994; Deere and Leon de Leal 2003). In modern-day Britain, “women suffer extreme prejudice in succession and inheritance; they are likely to succeed only when ‘normal’ systems for intergenerational transfer of property rights break down” (Symes 1990, 280). In eastern Twente in the Netherlands, farmers maintained a system of impartible inheritance long after state law had decreed equal rights for all siblings (de Haan 1994). In Ireland fewer than 13 per cent of officially registered farmers are women with only 10 per cent of agricultural land in female ownership (Mulhall and Bogue 2013). In Norway, despite a change to inheritances laws to allow for the eldest child, regardless of gender, to inherit the landholding, only 14 per cent of farm owners are women (Logstein 2012, cited in Heggem 2014).

Often, government policies and laws have worked in tandem to reinforced and reproduced exploitative gender relations. The Canadian Census of Agriculture did not recognise multiple farm operators until 1991, which meant that women were only recognised as farmer’s wives, despite their involvement in both work and management on the farm (Forbes-Chilibeck 2005, 27). In another example of how “the process of rendering women farmers invisible has been assisted by official sources”, Australia’s Victorian Parliament in the 1890s determined that women in “unwomanly” occupations should not be included in official census statistics. Women working in agriculture were then removed from the statistics (Alston 2003, 164).
Despite wider socio-economic changes in how farms are managed, globally the norm of male succession continues to dominate. For instance, a study of German-heritage farmers in the Midwestern United States noted that although the cohort was grounded in tradition and the concept of “cultural legacies”. These could be applied flexibly in individual cases. However, this flexibility largely related to farm diversification or decisions around expanding operations and did not appear to include a shift towards greater gender equality in succession plans (McMillan Lequieu 2015).

Cassidy’s study in this issue focuses on women successors in the Irish patrilineal context where successors are preferred and assumed to be male; in the other articles, both women and men were included in the study. Typically, it is only where there are no sons or if for some reason they are not in a position to take over a farm that daughters are considered as successors. This model of succession is closely linked to the way farm labour is organised and roles allocated during childhood, with particular attention given to socialising sons into deeper involvement with the farm in the belief that this will produce a successor who can fulfil the role of the farmer both culturally and workwise (Cassidy 2013; Silvasti 2003). Although cultural norms place male successors in a deeper relationship with the landholding, it should not be assumed that daughters are less attached to the land than sons. Research in the Netherlands has showed that women maintained deep attachments to the farm they grew up on long after they had moved away (de Haan 1994; also Cassidy, this issue).

The barriers to young women’s entry into farming may be material, institutional and ideological, including the “gendering of farming” in discourse and agricultural politics. Liepens (1998) provides a model of discourse analysis of gender narratives surrounding agriculture in Australia and New Zealand. Ni Laoire (2002) has described the “emergence (or resurrection) of a more open and flexible type of masculinity” among young Irish farmers which in turn potentially allows for greater scope for a reimagining of female participation in farming. The “resurrection” qualification may be important.

In many societies, efforts to promote new constructions of the independent woman farmer are in fact re-asserting elements of rural women’s autonomy that were eroded in earlier processes of formalisation (of land titles, farm credit channels, and circuits of agricultural knowledge). In studies conducted in Australia (Elix and Lambert 1998), the Netherlands (Commandeur 2005) and the USA (Trauger et al. 2010) women were found to be less constrained by traditional expectations around farming practices and more open to innovative approaches and agri-enterprises. Similarly, in this collection, Santhanam-Martin, Bridge, and Stevens highlight discrepancies between farming couples over readiness to retire from farming – with women seeming to prefer retirement more than their partners. McGreevy, Kobayashi, and Tanaka (2019) note that newcomer farmer households where women were also engaged in farming were more likely to have access to various forms of local knowledge than households without a woman farming. Comparing Canada-wide farmer surveys conducted in 1982, Martz (2006) argues that the on-farm roles adopted by women influences the behaviour of their children: women with more on-farm decision-making power were more likely to support their daughter’s aspirations to be the primary successor. Interestingly, Ainley (2013) reports that Ontario farmers increasingly view daughters as better potential successors than sons since they are more willing to work collaboratively and can thus make succession easier when the older generation wants to stay involved on the farm and not retire completely.
Schwarz’s (2004) study of gendered farm succession practices in Germany sums up the situation well:

We have lived through centuries of deciding farm succession mostly on grounds of tradition rather than suitability or aptitude. Maybe now is the time to draw on and reward all the families’ resources and that means counting in the daughters. (222)

Support for inter-generational succession

As discussed above, young people identify access to land, followed by access to capital, markets and agricultural training as key areas where support is needed to facilitate the inter-generational succession process. The role of support networks cannot be underestimated. The Australian case in Santhanam-Martin, Bridge, and Stevens (2019) focuses directly on the support needed for a successful succession among dairy farmers. The other articles in the collection highlight diverse sources and forms of support throughout the succession process, from community, family, friends, relatives, government agencies and NGOs, to fellow farmers.

The female successors in Cassidy’s study were encouraged by their mothers towards an education while their fathers, even if they were keen on their succession, did not discuss it openly with them (except in one case). Having grown up in a farm family and on a farm, the women in the study pursued non-farm education and developed their own ideas on what to do with the farm.

Korzenszky clearly demonstrates how each of the 10 steps of the succession model is supported by social networks of and between transferors and successors. Friends, relatives, the agricultural chamber, state or private advisors may all be of help. Several national institutions and civil society organisations have developed advisory materials including methodologies and useful tools. Other farmers involved in extrafamilial farm succession can share their positive and negative experiences regarding the transmission process. Tapping into these resources helps farmers to identify potential successors; likewise successors need to be linked into relevant networks in order to connect with farmers who are looking for a successor. During the probation and subsequent stages, successors demonstrate their skills and knowledge, while simultaneously learning from the senior farmer about locally adapted agricultural knowledge and practices that go back generations. Senior farmers can also benefit from intergenerational learning, from innovations applied by the successor. When senior farmers decide to retire from farming, the successor and his or her family take care of their well-being.

McGreevy, Kobayashi, and Tanaka’s article is set against the Japanese government’s policy to shift the agricultural sector toward global competitiveness through high value-added niche production, innovative technology and market expansion to revitalise and re-agrarianise rural areas. This involves training newcomer farmers, often youth from urban areas, followed by matchmaking between hamlets and farmer trainees through “speed dating” events. The farming community takes on a trainee, providing land and housing. As McGreevy, Kobayashi, and Tanaka (this issue) point out:

How well newcomer farmers are able to navigate these social spaces will ultimately factor into how autonomous they can be and how effectively they exert control over resources, two key elements necessary in pursuing a peasant mode of farming.
Evidence from elsewhere confirms that new entrants, lacking the hands-on training and tacit knowledge of those who grew up on a farm and lacking access to family members who could act as farm mentors, must purposefully invest in practical farmer training and consciously seek out mentors (Epps 2017). Young farmers who use alternative practices emphasise hands-on learning through farmer-to-farmer education (internships, field days) rather than formal education or government extension services, which are not geared to the needs of small-scale organic farming (Knibb 2012; Laforgé 2017). Indeed, the popularity of unpaid internships on alternative farms in Canada may be a response to the need for practical hands-on training, and a result of the lack of formal programmes specialising in alternative agriculture at educational institutions (Ekers et al. 2016; Ekers and Levkoe 2016). These findings reinforce the importance of the local alternative agricultural community as a source of information and training for young farmers engaged in alternative agriculture.

An important support for young women interested in farming are voices that challenge the framing and perception of farming as a male activity, especially in light of the increasing number of women engaged in agriculture (Laforgé 2016; The World Bank 2018). While the use of machinery and heavy lifting on farms is frequently cited as an obstacle for women, interviews with young women farmers have shown that technological advances and the emergence of modern farming techniques have dispensed with much of the heavy lifting. For example, a 24-year-old in New Zealand notes that physical strength is now “almost irrelevant” (Borrowdale 2017), and another young woman farmer explains that “modern machinery has taken away the need for heavy lifting, giving us girls a better opportunity” (Ashworth 2018).

Conclusion

While the research in this collection is based in late capitalist contexts, the articles reveal some universal challenges facing young people who wish to pursue farming. With their examination of inter-generational transfer of agrarian resources and opportunities in both intra- and extrafamilial contexts, these articles contribute empirically and analytically to understanding farm succession from a youth perspective. Young people across different contexts are keen to pursue farming and seek the resources to do so. There is evidence to suggest that the number of newcomer farmers in late capitalist countries will increase and many of them will be young and female. Their desire to pursue farming is often a response to the economic, social, and environmental processes underpinning agriculture as it is practiced today, and support for their aspirations is vital to the process of “re-peasantisation” (van der Ploeg 2008).

Notes

1. The papers were originally presented at a panel, Becoming a young farmer, organised at the 14th World Congress of Rural Sociology, Toronto, 10–14 August 2016.
2. We use “late capitalist” to refer to the varieties of contemporary capitalism marked by increasing commodification of the various aspects of human life and increasing domination of financial capital. “Late” does not imply – whatever we may like to think – that it will some time come to an end.
3. Of the 14 farm cases discussed by Santhanam-Martin, Bridge, and Stevens (2019), two involved non-familial succession pathways.
5. That families in diverse contexts can and need to be coached into undertaking succession planning is evident in the number of professional services (including some offered by banks) that come up in a web search for “farming succession coach”.

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