

Keeping it in the Family: International Perspectives on Succession and Retirement on Family Farms

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Part of Ashgate's *Perspectives on Rural Policy and Planning* series, *Keeping it in the Family* represents an edited collation of 13 chapters drawing upon international perspectives, research and experiences of retirement and succession across the globe. The result is a well-researched book that has been thoughtfully edited, with chapters 1 and 13 respectively providing an overview and discussion which draws together the main themes. For anyone with a personal or professional interest in farmer retirement and succession, this will provide considerable insight, both in terms of what can be gained to ensure more balanced and planned retirement and succession, but also to place in context the commonality of the issues that run through the book as it draws on its international experiences. Much of the research draws upon the international FARM TRANSFERS programme, drawing upon, and developed from, the late Professor Andrew Errington's research. This provides real context to the overall messages that emanate from the book, such as the issue of the aging farmer being reluctant to hand over the reins, the lack of planning for both retirement and succession, the emotional attachment to land and family businesses, the conflict arising from inter- and intra- generational expectations, and the difficulty for new entrants and successors in securing capital to engage in commercial agriculture on scale sufficient to provide a family income.

Chapter 1 sets the scene for the book, discussing the definition of the family farm, the policy support for the family farm and giving an overview of the FARM TRANSFERS project. Australian agriculture is the focus for Chapter 2, noting that whilst Anglo-Saxon traditions remain, Australian farmers are more likely to view the farm and land as a commodity to support retirement, with climatic and economic pressures forcing a realisation that leaving the family farm to the next generation is neither viable nor desirable in some contexts. Australia also forms the basis for Chapter 3, but within the specifics of Australian Woolgrower farms. Drawing upon a case-study based approach, this chapter explores the lack of succession in the sector, driven by poor financial returns, contrasted by new-entrants to woolgrowing who bring in outside capital. In Chapter 4, succession and retirement in Japan brings the reader characteristics of Japanese agriculture and food production; new entrants in Japan are frequently over 60 years old, albeit that off-farm income plays a major role in supporting the small-scale farming activities in the country. Switzerland forms the basis for Chapter 5 and highlights include the influence of social security payments on retirement and succession

decisions and planning, together with the influence of successors *wanting* to take over, rather than feeling under an obligation to do so. Chapter 6 has a large focus on patrilineal transfer (from father to son), set in the context of Northern Ireland. This chapter focuses upon the wider social context of farm transfers, titled "keeping the name on the land" aspects of gender and non-succession sibling interaction and acceptance of patrilineal transfers provide fascinating insights.

Chapter 7 provides a different perspective, focusing upon new entrants to farming from non-farming families, drawing upon experiences from the County Farm Estates, largely in Eastern England, and the Fresh Start initiative in Cornwall; social factors, lack of capital and rural housing all raise to the fore in the challenge of enabling new entrants in to the sector. Chapter 8 provides international perspectives again drawing upon the FARM TRANSFERS results, highlighting the need for communication, planning and decision making about succession outcomes. Following a similar approach, Chapter 9 presents findings from Nebraska, additionally providing a four-phase succession plan. Staying with the USA, Chapter 10 provides aspects of the (potentially) retired farmer perspective, noting that there are more farmers citing a desire to 'never retire' than 'fully retire' – a result not confined to Nebraska, but also common in other countries. New Zealand provides the focus for Chapter 11, placing retirement, succession and new-entrant aspects in context of a country that underwent radical agricultural policy change in the mid-1980s. The chapter discusses new-entrant arrangements not often seen in other countries, exploring various share-farming agreements that have arguably brought innovation and a source of rejuvenation to New Zealand agriculture. Chapter 12 represents the final subject-specific chapter, and provides an in-depth academic exposition of retirement and succession planning.

Given the nature of the book, there are instances of several chapters drawing upon similar literature providing the reader with a sense of repetition, however, this is only apparent when reading the book in entirety and for readers wishing to dip in to a few chapters, this should not detract from its overall quality. Key messages from the book come out very strongly - farmers not wishing to retire or even plan for retirement, lack of communication in farming families despite the importance of succession as an issue, lack of capital for new entrants and challenges of family succession with respect to equity of treatment for all the farm family children. At the very heart of the book are the emotional ties, commitment and desire from both the retiring farmer and the successor to keeping the land and farming business in the family. The inseparable nature of family ties to business activities in these cases, coupled with the emotional and economic difficulties that farmers face when considering retirement, make this book both a valuable academic contribution that will be of interest to range of subject areas, and also a fascinating insight to this complex issue as faced by thousands of farm families across the globe.

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