⊕ FARM LEVEL INDICATORS
FOR NEW TOPICS IN POLICY EVALUATION

The FLINT project (Farm Level Indicators for New Topics in policy evaluation) is an FP7-project, which recently presented their findings at the 11th Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP, which met in Brussels on 10 May 2017 and was attended by representatives from the Member States and the European Commission.

Changing policies and information needs

The principal objectives of evaluations are to improve decision-making, resource allocation and accountability[1]. As such, policy evaluations can help policy makers in the formulation and reorient-ation of policies. The evaluation of rural development policies is particularly challenging because of the broad set of objectives (e.g. innovation, sustainability, risk management, viability) and limitations in the available information on these aspects. Traditional agricultural statistics still have a strong focus on structure, productivity and income and do not satisfy the growing needs for data on the sustainability performance of agriculture.

FLINT

The FLINT project has investigated the feasibility of collecting data on the sustainability performance of farms[2]. The project has defined a list of relevant sustainability themes based on (emerging) policy needs and a literature review on initiatives to measure sustainability. 33 sustainability themes were identified (see figure), which have been translated into a list of data items to be collected at farm level. These data items were collected in connection to the normal data collection for the EU Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN).

List of indicators in the FLINT project

ENVIRONMENTAL			
	E1: Greening	E2: Ecological focus areas	E3: Semi-natural areas
	E4: Pesticide usage	E5: Nutrient balance	E6: Soil organic matter
	E7: Indirect energy use	E8: Direct energy usage	E9: On-farm renewable energy production
	E10: Nitrate leaching	E11: Soil erosion	E12: Use of legumes
	E13: GHG emission per ha	E14: GHG calculation	E15: Carbon sequestering land uses
	E16: Water usage, storage	E17: Irrigation practices	

ECONOMIC, INNOVATIVE			
	EI1: Innovation	EI2: Producing under label	EI3: Market outlet
	EI4: Farm duration	EI5: Efficiency field parcel	EI6: Modernization
	EI7: Insurance	EI8: Marketing contracts	EI9: Risk exposure

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY			
	S1: Advisory service	S2: Education and training	S3: Ownership management
	S4: Social engagement	S5: Working conditions	S6: Quality of life
	S7: Social diversification		

Source: FLINT 2017

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The defined data items were collected in 9 Member States (Ireland, Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Finland, Hungary, Greece, Spain and France) on 1,100 farms of different farm types[3].

Collection of sustainability data is feasible

Although some problems occurred, mainly due to the pilot project and first-year character of FLINT, experiences of data collectors and farmers were positive in terms of the collection of data on the sustainability performance at farm level. A crucial factor discovered was the relationship between the farmer and the FADN data collectors. Building trust is an important aspect in the willingness of farmers to share their data.

Value of sustainability data for policy analysis

The project has illuminated through examples how policy analysis can benefit from additional data on the sustainability performance of farms, by:

1. filling gaps in terms of research methodology (i.e. social performance, economic viability);

2. providing better understanding of the sources of sustainability performance (i.e. impact of land fragmentation, advisory services, age of assets);

3. contributing additional insights into challenges faced by farmers (i.e. trade-offs between environmental and economic performance); and

4. providing more precise recommendations for policy makers (i.e. effect of CAP subsidies on technical efficiency).

A crucial observation is that although the environment and other public values are the objectives of the policy, governments target a change in farm management. Therefore, policy analysis requires an integrated data set at farm level to understand choices made by farmers, including trade-offs between economic and (sometimes contradicting) environmental and social objectives.

Recommendations

The FLINT project has investigated options to upscale the results of the project from 9 to 28 Member States to create a representative panel of farm-level sustainability data[6]. The final recommendation is to collect sustainability data on a sub-sample of 15.000 farms in Europe, financed by additional resources or alternatively by a reduction of the current FADN sample. ■

Innovation and sustainability

One of the cases of the FLINT project is the state of innovation in European Agriculture[4]. Innovation is seen as one of the key drivers for competitive and sustainable agriculture. Innovation is influenced by numerous determinants. Due to a lack of data it has been very difficult to empirically evaluate the impact of innovation on the sustainability performance of farms. FLINT data allows for the analysis of the adoption of innovations, the characteristics that determine innovation (among other policy measures such as subsidies and advisory services) and the impact of innovations on the productivity and sustainability performance of farms. Research has focused on the adoption of innovations and show that farm type and farm size are likely to be the main determinants of process and organisational innovations[5]. Subsidies appear to have a positive effect on the adoption of process innovations. Farmer age and advisory contacts also have an impact. If data collection would be continued the evaluation of the impact of innovation on the sustainability performance would become feasible.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Visit the FLINT project website!

1. Terluin and Roza, 2010
2. Poppe et al, 2016
3. Vrolijk et al., 2016
4. Van der Meulen et al., 2016
5. Van der Meulen et al., 2016
6. Poppe and Vrolijk, 2017

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