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Further Reading:

Conway S.F., Farrell, M., McDonagh, J., Kinsella, A. (2022) 'Farmers Don't Retire' Re-Evaluating How We Engage with and Understand the 'Older Farmer's Perspective. Sustainability, 14(5), 2533.
DOI: [10.3390/su14052533](https://doi.org/10.3390/su14052533)

Read More About:

The [Environment, Development, and Sustainability](#) cluster within the Whitaker Institute for Innovation and Societal Change.

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Creating an age-friendly environment in farming through 'Farmer's Yards', a social organisation for older farmers

Globally, policy aimed at stimulating generational renewal in agriculture tends to pay limited regard to the mental health and wellbeing of the older farmer, overlooking their identity and social circles, which are intertwined with their occupation and farm. This study, in probing this contentious issue, casts its net across what could be deemed as disparate literatures, namely connected to transferring the family farm and social gerontology. It investigates what steps could be taken at both policy and societal level to reassure older farmers that their sense of purpose and legitimate social connectedness within the farming community will not be jeopardised upon handing over the farm business to the next generation in later life. In doing this, the study sheds light on the potential of transforming farming into an age-friendly sector of society, in line with the WHO's Age-friendly Environments Concept.

Social Organisation for Older Farmers

This study recommends that the establishment of a social organisation for the older generation of the farming community called 'Farmer's Yards' is a key way in which policy can respond positively to the aging farming population. Designed to fit the older generation's aspirations, interests, needs and values, such an organisation, funded annually by the Government and through membership, would help ease concerns around the fear of the unknown upon 'stepping aside' and retiring from farming, by providing older farmers with an outlet to remain embedded 'inside' the agricultural sphere in later life. A social organisation for older farmers, with a network of clubs in every county (or similar geographic entity), would also promote social inclusion in farming by allowing the older generation to integrate within the social fabric of a local peer group of similarly aged farmers. Membership of such a group would provide opportunities to develop a pattern of farming activities suited to advancing age through increased collaboration with farmers at a similar stage of their lives. Despite the widely reported successful social and emotional wellbeing benefits of the Men's Sheds movement throughout the world, this study advises that this proposed social organisation for older farmers would be open to both men and women, thus helping to dismantle the patriarchal nature of farming identified in previous research.

Collaborating with the Livestock Mart Sector

This study proposes drawing on already existing conduits, namely that of the long-established livestock mart sector, consisting of 60 cooperative mart centres across Ireland, to facilitate the roll-out of the proposed social organisation for older farmers. In addition to their primary function as method of selling and guaranteeing payment for livestock, marts also provide a vital social facility for the farming community, some of whom have no other social outlet. Mart's existing positionality and reputation as a 'hive' of activity within the heart of rural communities, provides them with a ready-made platform and network to diversify their services and become 'Farmer's Yards' social hubs for the older generation of the farming community in their catchment area.