

Support programmes and the diversity of young farmers in Thailand: A good match?

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Abstract

Many countries have programmes to help young people start farming. However, some of the programmes have been criticized for not providing enough support, particularly because they do not adequately account for the diverse profiles of young farmers. The present study analyses the profiles of young farmers in Thailand and to what extent they benefit from support programmes. Eighty-four farmers under the age of 40 were interviewed in Chiang Mai and Prachinburi Provinces, along with 15 staff members of support programmes for young farmers. Five types of young farmers were identified, who differed in their motivation, farming systems and engagement in farming. Some farmers focused on economic profitability, while others considered environmentally sustainable farming practices to be important or were actively engaged in other activities at domestic or village level. This wide range of goals and situations entailed varying constraints during the first years of farming. The support programmes helped farmers overcome their lack of farming knowledge and helped them integrate into rural communities, but the support they provided in accessing land and capital was sometimes limited, and often non-existent. To improve support for young farmers in Thailand, the diversity of young farmers' profiles should be accounted for not only in capacity-building activities but also to help them access other types of resources.

Keywords

Farm diversity, farmers' needs, support programmes, Thailand, young farmers

Introduction

Around the world, programmes have been created to support young people and new entrant farmers (i.e. those who have not farmed before and whose parents are not and were never farmers) in starting their own farms. The extent to which these programmes promote certain farm models rather than providing flexible support appropriate for the diversity of young or new farmers' profiles and needs remains an open question. Recent academic studies in economically advanced countries and in North Africa provided different answers to this question. Well-endowed programmes to support young farmers or new entrants have been implemented in many economically advanced countries, including Japan, South Korea, the European Union and the United States (Faysse et al., 2019). These programmes do not always officially promote specific types of farms and in some countries, young people can get support irrespective of their farming project. For instance, the Farm Service Agency of the US Department of Agriculture offers long-term loans to new entrant farmers (Dodson and Koenig, 2007) but leaves the choice of the farming enterprise up to the applicant.

In the European Union, comprehensive packages exist to support young farmers, including capacity-building, subsidies, loans and access to land (Faysse et al., 2019). These

packages do not officially promote specific farming systems (Zagata et al., 2017). However, some of these packages indirectly encourage certain types of applicants through their eligibility criteria. For instance, in France, to obtain support from public organizations, young farmers are required to have a diploma in agriculture, to be less than 40 years old, and to submit a business plan demonstrating that they can earn an income above a defined threshold (Facchini and Magni Berton, 2010). This often means working full time on the farm. However, in recent years, young farmers with very different profiles have begun to emerge, and many of these young farmers do not meet these criteria. For instance, some young farmers do not have an agricultural diploma, while other entrants start farming when they are over 40. Other young people want to

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start small-scale organic projects or to farm on a part-time basis, and their business plans consequently do not foresee an income above the required threshold (Ceriani-Baillif and Djouak, 2018). Accordingly, only one-third of the people who started farming in France in 2009 had access to the full support package (Rogerieux, 2011).

There have recently been several calls for more flexible and differentiated programmes in these economically advanced countries. In Japan, McGreevy et al. (2019) and Hisano et al. (2018) argued that programmes supporting young farmers should stop focusing only on the promotion of agricultural entrepreneurs and should also support others, including those who farm part-time. In the European Union, Zagata et al. (2017) reported proposals to provide stronger support to new entrants who want to start organic farming. In France, in particular, a debate has started about how to change support programmes to ensure they match the diversity of young and new entrant farmers (D'Allens and Leclair, 2015). This is the context in which some French non-governmental organizations have started supporting young farmers who do not meet the criteria required to obtain public support (Le Blanc, 2011). All these studies argue that existing programmes should pay more attention to the diversity of young farmers' profiles and needs, especially recently emerged new profiles. Moreover, the European Court of Auditors (2017) expressed concern that the main type of support provided as part of the Common Agricultural Policy (financial subsidies) did not fully meet the needs of young farmers (particularly concerning access to land and knowledge).

In North Africa, there are several public initiatives to support young farmers, some of which provide land and financial resources to young people (e.g. see Gharbi et al., 2018). These initiatives often have the same key goal: to provide a stable source of employment to young, often educated, rural people who cannot find a job in the city. However, these initiatives generally take place at the local level and on a case-by-case basis, and the match between young farmers' goals and needs and the type of support provided by public organizations depends on available support opportunities and interactions between local stakeholders (Abdellaoui et al., 2015; Bouzidi et al., 2015a). These initiatives are not based on a structured assessment of the diversity of young farmers' profiles and needs. Amichi et al. (2015) argued that most young farmers remain by and large 'invisible' to the state and find their own solutions to the problems they face when starting farming.

In newly industrialized countries in Asia, the number of young farmers has declined rapidly over at least the last two decades (Ji et al., 2017; Moya et al., 2015; Susilowati, 2014). However, the debate on how best to support young farmers started only recently and programmes to support young farmers are still in their infancy (FFTC-RDA, 2014). No studies have yet been conducted on the diversity of young farmers and how to support programmes account for diversity in the countries concerned. The decline in the involvement of young people in farming in the last 15 years has been spectacular in Thailand. According to agricultural

censuses, farm holders under the age of 45 decreased from 2.6 million to 1.4 million over the 2003–2013 period, that is, a 46% decrease. The Thai Government considers this decline to be a serious policy problem as the presence of young farmers is seen as a key to maintaining agricultural production and ensuring sufficient products are supplied to the industries that depend on them (Office of Agricultural Economics, 2017). In response, since 2008, the government has launched two major programmes to support young farmers along with several local initiatives. However, since these programmes began, the few studies focused on young farmers in Thailand (Tapanapunnitikul and Prasunpangsri, 2014) have not analysed to what extent young farmers have benefitted from state support.

The main aim of the present study was thus to identify the diversity of profiles of young farmers in Thailand and to what extent public programmes help these diverse young farmers overcome the difficulties they face when they start farming. The other aim of the study was to analyse the match between the range of different needs of young farmers and support programmes in a newly industrialized country like Thailand compared with the situation in economically advanced countries and in North Africa. The size of farms and the farming conditions differ considerably in these countries, but this does not necessarily lead to clear a priori expectations about possible differences in the match between young farmers' needs and support programmes. The questions this study intended to answer with regard to this second aim were thus: Do support programmes in Thailand promote a single or several types of farm models, based on policies that in practice exclude some emerging profiles of young farmers – as is the case in the European Union? Are Thai support programmes implemented on a case-by-case basis with no general orientations at the national level, as is the case in North Africa? Or is the way support programmes in Thailand match the needs of young farmers different from that in economically advanced countries and in North Africa? To enable our comparison, we reviewed available literature on the diversity of young farmers in these countries.

Diversity among young farmers

Studies that analysed the diversity of young farmers in economically advanced countries and in North Africa used typologies based on their goals, how they started farming, and their modes of farming. The range of young farmers' goals has been explored mainly in economically advanced countries. In Austria, Quendler (2012) and in Japan, McGreevy et al. (2019) proposed a typology of young farmers based on criteria such as the interest they have in controlling the marketing of their produce and the extent to which they see farming as either a 'way of life' or as a profession. In Japan, for example, some young people started farming as a lifestyle choice to get away from consumerism and productivism (Hisano et al., 2018; Rosenberger, 2017). Young farmers may also decide to only farm part-time, as a complementary source of income, because neither non-farming activities nor farming activities

provide sufficient income alone, or as a way to keep the farm in the family. Both choices have been reported in France (Ceriani-Baillif and Djouak, 2019) and in Japan (McGreevy et al., 2019). Finally, Monllor i Rico and Fuller (2016) identified a link between the origin of young farmers and their motivations. They argued that relatively more new entrant farmers in Spain and Canada aimed to develop innovative forms of farming (e.g. based on pluriactivity and multifunctionality) than young farmers who took over their parents' farm.

Concerning the different ways in which young people get started as farmers, considerable attention has been paid to how they solved the problem of access to land. Typically, they either received land from their parents, took over from a retiring farmer, rented land, obtained access to land with support from a public organization or started farming activities that do not require access to land, for example, beekeeping. These strategies have been identified in Morocco (Bouzidi et al., 2015b), Austria (Korzenszky, 2018) and Japan (McGreevy et al., 2019). Bouzidi et al. (2015a) identified three main strategies young Moroccan farmers use to become autonomous in terms of income and to find a social position in rural communities: by introducing new farm practices in the family farm, by developing a farm project and obtaining public subsidies and by becoming a leader for the rural development of the territory in which they live.

The third dimension of diversity is what van der Ploeg (2008) refers to as modes of farming. In particular, he defined an entrepreneurial mode characterized by agricultural production processes disconnected from ecosystems, specialization and dependence on markets. By contrast, the peasant mode of farming is characterized by attempts to limit off-farm agricultural inputs, diversity of production and limited engagement with markets. McGreevy et al. (2019) in Japan and Petit et al. (2018) in Morocco characterized the activities of young farmers often as blends of the entrepreneurial and peasant modes. Among these studies, none specifically addressed how diversity among young farmers affects their need for support or the most appropriate types of support that should be provided.

Method

We created a typology to help characterize the diversity of young farmers in our two study areas based on a survey. We then identified the constraints faced by young farmers who had no support when they set up. Finally, we assessed the match between the farmers' objectives and needs and support programmes in three ways. First, we compared the orientations of the programmes with the main objectives of each category of young farmers. For each category of young farmers, we checked if the main objectives of farmers corresponded to the type of farm promoted by each programme (if they promoted any type in particular). Second, we compared the category (or categories) of farmers who, based on the previous comparison, would theoretically benefit most from a particular programme, with the categories of farmers who actually did benefit from the

programme. Third, we compared the benefits mentioned by farmers who had participated in support programmes with the main constraints faced by those who had not. In doing so, due to the small size of our sample, we could not characterize the match (or lack of a match) that specifically linked one support programme to one category of farmers. The study was conducted in Chiang Mai Province (Northern Region) and in Prachinburi Province (Central Region). These two provinces were selected as they cover the two main types of farming systems in Thailand: small diversified farms in the Northern Region and comparatively larger irrigated farms often focusing on rice production in the Central Region.

The Thai Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives implements two national programmes with the stated objective of providing support to young farmers: the New Farmer Development Programme managed by the Agricultural Land Reform Office and the Young Smart Farmers Programme managed by the Department of Agricultural Extension (Faysse et al., 2019). These two programmes define 'young' farmers as being aged less than 45. In Chiang Mai Province, Maejo University implements the Volunteer Return Home Programme, which also focuses on supporting young farmers. First, we interviewed 15 staff members of organizations, which implement programmes to support farmers in Chiang Mai and Prachinburi Provinces. These included the three above-mentioned programmes and other programmes, which support farmers in general: (1) three programmes supporting organic farming run by non-governmental organizations in Chiang Mai Province and (2) two programmes supporting self-sufficiency farming and rice production run by public organizations in Prachinburi Province. The interviews focused on the programmes' goals, priorities and actions.

Second, 84 young farmers, aged less than 40, were interviewed (67 in Chiang Mai Province and 17 in Prachinburi Province), 33 (40%) of the interviewees were women. The average age of the interviewees was 31. They farmed alone or with their parents, and either full- or part-time. Interviewees were deliberately selected to try to cover the diversity among young farmers, as a result, the sample is not representative. Forty-five of the interviewees were currently or had previously been involved in at least one support programme (these people were identified by the support organizations): 6 were beneficiaries of the New Farmer Development Programme, 8 benefitted from the Young Smart Farmers Programme and 11 benefitted from the Volunteer Return Home Programme. Additionally, 25 had received support from programmes, which did not specifically focus on young farmers (some young farmers benefitted from more than one programme). Thirty-nine interviewees had not been involved in any program – they were identified through village heads. Approximately, half the interviewees farmed full-time.

The interviews covered the following topics: (i) the interviewee's background (level of education, complementary income-generating activities before farming or as a parallel activity, the goals they wanted to achieve with their farm); (ii) farm characteristics (size, type of

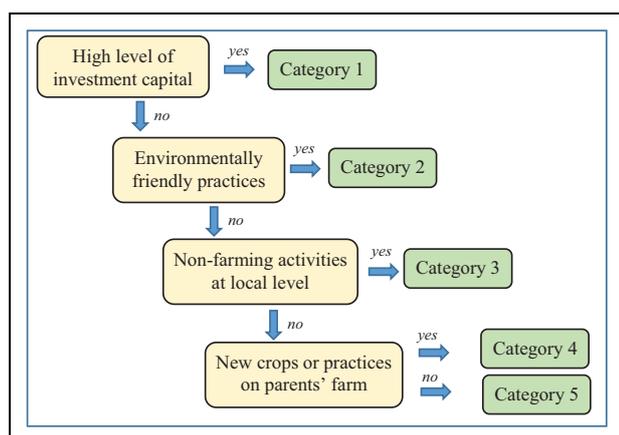


Figure 1. Criteria used to classify young farmers.

agricultural production, income generated); (iii) the main constraints faced when the interviewee started farming; and (iv) their participation in support programmes, and how they benefitted from these programmes. The interviews were held in Thai in October 2017 and in April 2019 and lasted approximately 1 h. They were recorded and then transcribed in English.

The survey showed that the 84 young farmers we interviewed took four main initiatives to set up their farms, in terms of their farming system and in terms of their involvement in non-farming activities: (1) they invested a lot of money in their farm to make it a profitable business activity, (2) they adopted environmentally friendly practices, (3) they actively engaged in non-farming activities at local level and (4) they farmed on their parents' farm but introduced new crops or farming practices. These four types of initiatives were used to classify the farmers in five categories (Figure 1). Statistical differences between categories were characterized in terms of young farmers' age, farm size and income obtained from farming using Wilcoxon tests.

Results

Typology of young farmers

Table 1 lists the characteristics of the young farmers in each category. Data on farm size and monthly income are provided only for farmers who were relatively autonomous, either because they had their own farms or because they were in charge of a specific plot or animal production in the family, and had direct control over the income from it.

Category 1 includes nine interviewees who had developed innovative farming systems and had required a high level of capital investment. For instance, they had greenhouses equipped with drip irrigation or used hydroponic techniques. They had chosen to start farming because they thought it would provide them with a good income. Seven had graduated from university with a bachelor's or master's degree and all had previous work experience outside farming. Their main sources of funding when they started farming were their own savings and bank loans. Their farming activities were fully independent of those of their parents.

They planned to continue investing and to expand their farm as a business.

One category 1 interviewee was 27 years old and had graduated with a bachelor's degree in economics. After graduation, he worked for 3 years in a major agribusiness company. He decided to quit his job because he often had to travel for business and wanted to spend more time with his family. He started farming on 0.6 ha given to him by his parents. His training in economics helped him understand the market and how to write a business plan. His main agricultural activity was growing mushrooms in greenhouses. He earned a net income that he considered satisfactory (about 53,000 Baht¹ per month). Another interviewee in this category had started organic farming, but in contrast to the category 2 farmers described below, the main reason was because he thought it could be profitable.

Category 2 groups 27 interviewees who used environmentally friendly practices, that is, organic agriculture or chemical-free agriculture, on part of or on their whole farm. They mainly grew fruits and vegetables and sold their products through specialized channels, such as organic or chemical-free markets or through organic sales groups. For them, being an organic farmer was a desirable 'way of life' before being a business opportunity. Their main goal was to stop using any chemical inputs at all on their farm (if they had not already done so).

Category 3 includes 16 interviewees who, in addition to farming, were actively engaged in non-farming activities at home or in their villages. Nine of them had another business (e.g. a shop or a bed and breakfast), and seven were involved in processing or packaging or in a sales group, which acted as an intermediary between the villagers and the markets. They did so because they wanted to play an active role in community life and development, or because they felt that farming alone could not provide sufficient income (but in the latter case, they wanted to find a complementary income that would allow them to remain in their village). Some also tried to promote local culture and knowledge sharing among the villagers. More than half the farmers in category 3 interviewed had graduated from university and all had previous non-farming work experience.

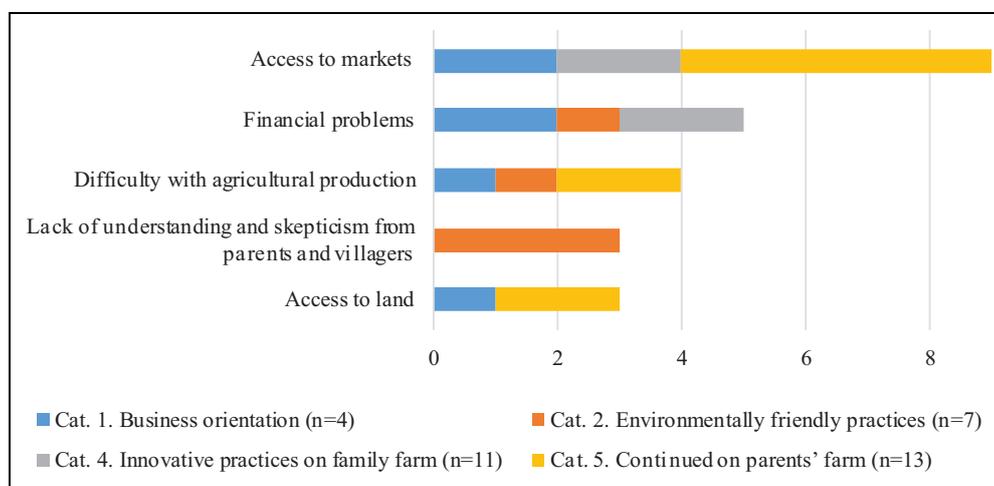
Category 4 includes 14 interviewees whose parents were farmers, but who practised farming differently than their parents (e.g. they produced vegetables, flowers, insects for consumption, etc.). These interviewees were diversifying their farming systems because they wanted to increase their income or because they wanted to increase home consumption to reduce their cost of living. The interviewees in this category who worked with their parents sometimes had to persuade them that the new activities they wanted to undertake would be profitable. One said:

My mother mostly grows shallots, corn and pumpkins. In my opinion, the price of these crops is very unstable and we have no control over their sales price. In the first year after I returned from town and started working on the farm with my parents, I wanted to change things. In the beginning, my mother did not trust me, she said she had been farming her

Table 1. Characteristics of young farmers and of their farms per category.

Category	No.	No. of female farmers	Average no. of years of post-elementary school education	Average age (years)	Those who farm their own land (alone or as part of the family farm)		
					No. within the type	Average field size (ha)	Average net monthly income from farming (THB) ^a
1. Business orientation	9	2	10	33.6	9	7.0	61,000
2. Environmentally friendly practices	27	15	8	30.6	16	1.3	8800
3. Multiactivity	16	4	8.4	33.9	11	1.1	8000
4. Innovative practices on family farm	14	4	7	32.2	12	1.1	5700
5. Continued on parents' farm	18	8	6	31.3	11	3.5	12,500

^aInvestment required to acquire land and farm equipment were not taken into account.

**Figure 2.** Main problems faced by young farmers, who did not benefit from support programmes.

whole life and she knew better. Eventually, she gave me 0.16 ha of land so that I could try whatever crops I chose. This year, I started to grow soursop, rambutan, mango, coffee, and avocado.

Category 5 includes 18 interviewees whose parents were all farmers, who farmed part of the family farm and who produced the same agricultural products as their parents. They worked either with their parents, separately, or after having inherited the farm. Apart from one, they had not continued their education after secondary school. They had no plans to change their farming system. Some obtained what they considered to be sufficient income from farming, while others had another job outside their village (typically, in factories).

The groups differed quantitatively in two ways. First, categories 1, 2 and 3 farmers had an average of 8.5 years of education, which was significantly higher than categories 4 and 5 farmers, who had an average of 6.3 years ($p < 0.01$; Wilcoxon test). Second, category 1 farmers farmed significantly more land ($p < 0.05$) and earned a significantly higher average income than the farmers in the other categories who farmed their own land ($p < 0.001$).

Initial challenges

The 39 interviewees who had not received any support mentioned various problems when they started farming (Figure 2), mainly marketing problems. They considered they did not get fair prices and had difficulty finding alternative marketing channels. They also mentioned financial problems (e.g. difficult access to credit) and problems with agricultural production (e.g. unexpectedly low yields, for instance, due to insufficient farming skills or natural hazards). Access to land was not mentioned as a major concern by the interviewees. Among the 84 interviewees, 26 worked with their parents and did not farm independently. Forty-eight obtained land from their parents: they worked on that land, possibly renting land as well, but some continued to work on family land at the same time. Nine farmers rented in all the land they farmed. They rented from relatives and neighbours and did not worry that their rental contracts would not be renewed. The other seven had purchased land or obtained it from development organizations. All these young people thought they had secured access to at least part of the land they farmed.

Among the 39 interviewees who had not received any support, the four farmers in category 3 did not report any problems. They had taken time to prepare their installation and had an income from non-farming activities. Some of the category 2 farmers faced scepticism from parents and villagers when they innovated. For instance, a category 2 farmer said: 'I started organic farming mainly for health reasons since my parents use a lot of agrochemicals, but my parents couldn't understand why I had chosen organic farming which requires a lot of work. After 2 years, I proved I could make a living from farming. Some villagers still look down on me for being an organic farmer, but I don't care because I believe organic farming is the right way to have a better life'.

Support programmes

The New Farmer Development Programme was launched in 2008 (Faysse et al., 2019). This programme provides young farmers with training and sometimes access to small plots. In the two provinces we surveyed, few beneficiaries had received plots because limited land was available for distribution. In Chiang Mai Province, the programme allocated land to only 21 farmers between 2008 and 2016, and each farmer received on average 0.3 ha. Many of the plots distributed were in remote areas and the soil was of poor quality, access to the plots by road was difficult and no irrigation water was available. Seven farmers benefitted from the programme in Prachinburi Province between 2008 and 2012 and obtained an average of 0.7 ha, after which no more land was available for distribution. The other national programme is Young Smart Farmers, which provides training and networking to young farmers who are already established, and promotes entrepreneurship (Faysse et al., 2019).

In addition to these two national programmes, the Volunteer Return Home Programme run by Maejo University in Chiang Mai Province promotes organic farming among young people. The programme wants the young farmers it trains to also become 'social entrepreneurs' and plays an active role in the development of their community. Approximately 15 young farmers are trained every year. Programme beneficiaries receive training in organic farming, food processing and marketing, and on leadership over a period of 6 months. The beneficiaries start farming on land provided by their parents. They receive financial support (6720 Baht per month) for 3 years. The first several cohorts failed due to their neighbours' lack of understanding and scepticism. For this reason, the programme later began to promote networking between young farmers and better social insertion.

Interviewees also received support from a wide range of programmes, which did not specifically target young farmers. These programmes mainly provided training in agricultural production, sustainable farming practices and farm management. Various programmes trained farmers in organic farming practices. In Chiang Mai Province, such programmes were implemented by the Ministry of

Agriculture and Cooperatives, the Provincial Public Health Office and by local non-governmental organizations.

The support programmes catered to some extent to the wide range of farmers' objectives in terms of capacity building. The Young Smart Farmers Programme supported young farmers who prioritized profitability. This corresponds to individuals in category 1 and to a lesser extent in categories 4 and 5. Several programmes provided training in environmentally sustainable farming practices. This matched the orientation of category 2 farmers. Finally, the Volunteer Return Home Programme's training of 'social entrepreneurs' addressed the ambitions of category 3 farmers. However, even though the diversity of young farmers' profiles was broadly covered, the organizations that promoted each support programme did not explicitly acknowledge the wide range of goals envisaged by young farmers. Rather, the organizations pursued their own objectives and promoted their own vision of what young farmers should be doing (e.g. being an entrepreneur or a leader for local development or an organic farmer). The attention they paid to the objectives expressed by the young farmers was limited. As a consequence, there was not always a 'good match' between the objectives of each category of young farmers and the programmes. Only one of the 11 beneficiaries of the Volunteer Return Home programme was in category 3, and only half the eight beneficiaries of the Young Smart Farmer programme were in categories 1, 4 or 5.

Farmers who participated in support programmes underlined the benefits of capacity building and networking (Figure 3). However, support programmes provided limited support in overcoming the main constraints faced by young farmers in the beginning, that is, access to markets, financial problems and difficulty with agricultural production. The Volunteer Return Home programme, however, did offer support to help young farmers deal with the lack of understanding and scepticism shown by parents and villagers.

The match between farmers' objectives and needs on the one hand, and what programmes offered to their participants on the other, appeared limited. This explains why 26 young farmers among the 39 who had not participated in any programme said they had not participated because the programmes they knew about were not useful (the 13 others did not participate because they were not aware of the programmes).

Discussion

Similar farm orientations but differing views of the key constraints

The typology of young farmers proposed here shares some similarities with those identified in studies of young farmers in economically advanced countries and in North Africa. Category 1 interviewees shared some traits of the entrepreneurial mode of farming described by van der Ploeg (2008), including deep involvement with markets. However, they also diverged from the archetype in that

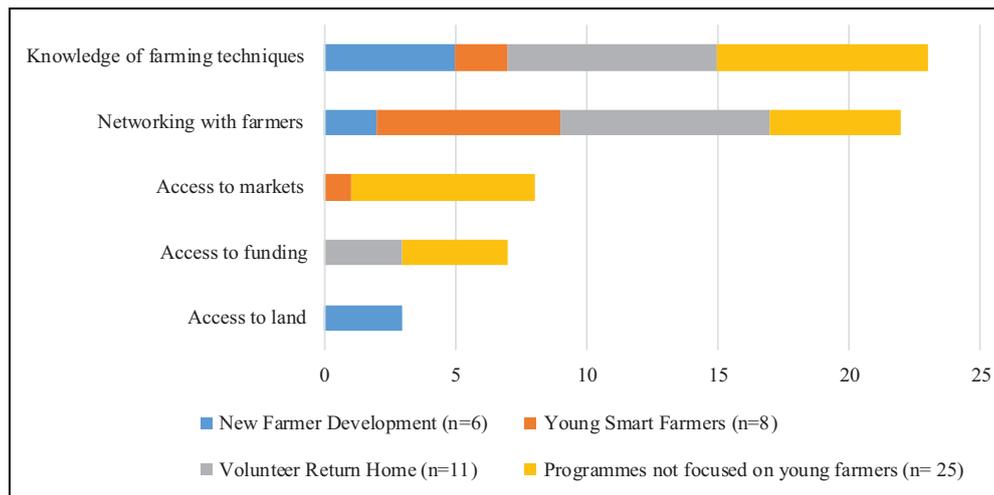


Figure 3. Main benefits mentioned by interviewees, who participated in support programmes.

they often produced a variety of products. Their mindsets corresponded better to the definition of entrepreneurs proposed by Pindado et al. (2018), which focuses on the importance of business opportunities. Farmers in category 2 practised the peasant mode of farming, as defined by van der Ploeg (2008), in that they aimed to limit their dependence on markets and to use on-farm resources as much as possible. Finally, farmers in category 3 resemble those identified in Morocco by Bouzidi et al. (2015a), who aim to play an active role in the development of their communities.

The similarity between farmers' profiles did not lead to the same way of viewing the key problems occurring when the farmers set up their farm. First, the young farmers we interviewed did not consider access to land to be a major problem. This differentiates them markedly from young farmers in some parts of North Africa (Bouzidi et al., 2015b) and in Europe (Šimpachová Pechrová et al., 2018; Zondag et al., 2015). This said, 33% of the Thai agriculture students interviewed by Filloux et al. (2019) did say that acquiring land was a major constraint to starting farming. Similarly, 64% of young rural people from Prachinburi Province interviewed by Ruiz Salvago et al. (2019) considered that they would need support to access land to be able to start the kind of farm that they would be willing to run. Thus, the assessment made by the farmers interviewed in the present study does not mean that accessing land is not an issue in the provinces we surveyed, rather, the farmers we interviewed had only considered starting farming once they knew how to deal with the problem of accessing land. By contrast, many young farmers in North Africa and Europe start farming even though they have not fully solved the land access problem, either the size of the farm or the conditions controlling access to land (e.g. security of land rent).

Second, young farmers in the present study identified access to market, financial problems and difficulty with agricultural production as the key problems they faced when they started farming. In the survey of young farmers of the European Union by Zondag et al. (2010), young

farmers mentioned financial problems as a key constraint, but not access to markets, and mentioned problems related to agricultural production only indirectly. Young European farmers generally considered that improving their farming and marketing skills was important, but they felt they were able to deal with this issue themselves, in contrast to the land issue.

Specific challenges in matching support programmes and farmers' needs

The match between the profiles and needs of young farmers and support programmes in Thailand appears to be quite specific compared to that in economically advanced countries and in North Africa. It applies to the structure of the programmes, the farm types they favour, and the support actually provided. At least some of the support for young farmers in Thailand are supplied within the framework of nationwide programmes, which have official objectives. This contrasts with North Africa where programmes to support young farmers are often developed locally on a case-by-case basis.

These public programmes provide a wide range of capacity building activities which, on paper, match the needs of the various categories of young farmers. No official choice has been made in terms of supporting one type of farm rather than another one. The programmes particularly support farm models aimed at high profitability alongside others based on a self-sufficiency approach. This reflects the increasingly dual view that public policies have of the farms in Thailand (Faysse, 2017). The choice made in Thailand contrasts with the situation in the European Union and in Japan, where public programmes have been criticized for mainly promoting farm models focused on profitability (D'Allens and Leclair, 2015; McGreevy et al., 2019). However, several development projects in North Africa (Ftouhi et al., 2015; Gharbi et al., 2018) and European Union policies designed to support young farmers provide wide-ranging support, which often includes support to access land and capital as well as capacity

building. By contrast, in Thailand, the support provided to access land and capital is generally very limited.

Conclusion

The goals of young farmers in two provinces of Thailand for their farms were varied. Thus, despite the marked decrease in the number of young farmers in Thailand, the range of development trajectories of the young people who decide to farm appeared to be quite wide. This can be a major asset for the future of the agricultural sector in Thailand. However, the match between farmers' objectives and needs and support programmes appears far from perfect, because many of their beneficiaries did not have same goals as the goal promoted by the support programmes and because support was generally not sufficient to help farmers address key constraints such as access to capital and marketing.

Finally, the challenges to supporting young farmers in Thailand are not so much tied to acknowledging the diversity of their profiles and needs (as argued in the European Union and in Japan). Rather, the challenges are providing more support so the young people can access the resources they need to start farming and giving them more leeway in to choose the support programme that best suits their own objectives. More generally, if newly industrialized countries in Asia wish to implement programmes to support young farmers, they will need to ensure the types of farms the state wants to promote (as part of its vision of the future of the agriculture sector) are the types of farms that young people want to run.

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Note

1. In December 2018, 1 USD = 32.8 Thai Baht (THB).

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