

Research report commissioned by
National Co-op Farm Relief Service

With the support of the
Golden Jubilee Trust

Undertaken by
**Broadmore Research
& Consulting**

A photograph showing four people walking in a field. From left to right: a man in a flat cap and brown jacket, a young man in a dark vest, an older man in a flat cap and dark jacket, and a young boy in a red jacket. They are walking on a dirt path with a metal fence in the background.

Attitudes of Young Farmers to Agricultural Co-operatives

July 2019

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NCFRS CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

Agricultural Co-operatives have made an enormous contribution to Irish farming over the years. Thousands of farmers have given outstanding and dedicated service to their co-operatives as board and committee members. The leadership and vision of these very board members has resulted in the growth and development of Agricultural Co-operatives. While the Dairy Co-operatives and Co-operative Marts may be the better known and more high profile, several other services are provided to the farming community through the Co-operative model. IFAC, Farm Relief Services, Group Water Schemes, AI Stations, Specialist Breed Societies and various Rural Development Co-ops have all made a major contribution to the farming sector and to Rural Ireland in General.

It is imperative that young farmers become involved in the Co-op movement both as shareholders and as board and committee members. The board of NCFRS are concerned that not enough is being done to encourage such involvement and hence our decision to undertake this study. We are very pleased to read that overall young farmers have a positive attitude to Co-operatives, but they have confirmed our view that they need to be actively encouraged to become more involved. Every Co-op has a role to play in promoting the Co-op Model, in actively encouraging share transfer to younger active farmers and nurturing the interest of young farmers in board participation.



FRANCIS FITZGERALD
NCFRS CHAIRMAN

NCFRS CEO'S STATEMENT

National Co-op Farm Relief Services Limited (NCFRS) are pleased to launch this report on the Attitudes of Young Farmers to Agricultural Co-operatives. I want to thank the Golden Jubilee Trust for their financial support of this very important research project and their very positive response to our proposal.

It was a pleasure working with Pat Bogue of Broadmore Research and Consulting in compiling the questionnaire and carrying out the research. Pat's knowledge of the Agricultural sector, together with his research expertise, has resulted in a very comprehensive report with excellent interpretation and recommendations.

My sincere thanks on behalf of NCFRS to all the respondents to our questionnaire for taking the time and the interest not just to answer the closed questions but also for adding some very useful and personal comments which indicate their level of interest in the Co-op movement.

Finally, my thanks to the Board and Staff of NCFRS for their support of this project. Having worked with several FRS board members both at National and local level, I truly appreciate the enormous time and commitment they have given in a voluntary capacity to the FRS organisation over the last 40 years. I take a great sense of comfort from this research project that such commitment will be forth coming from our present day young farmers, but we need to take positive steps to encourage and support them to become actively involved in their local co-operatives both as shareholders and board members.



PETER BYRNE
NCFRS CEO

GOLDEN JUBILEE TRUST CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

Golden Jubilee Trust is delighted to support this excellent initiative of FRS. The long term future of the Co-operative Movement in Ireland is in the hands of the young Farmers of today. New ideas and talents are essential to continue to develop the co-operative movement so that it remains core to the needs of the Farming Families of the future.

This work will inform the co-operatives on how to engage with young farmers so as to build on the past to create an excellent future for farmers in Ireland.



DR. SEAN BRADY
TRUST CHAIRMAN, GOLDEN JUBILEE TRUST



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Co-operatives continue to play an important role in Irish agriculture, however the level of involvement in co-operatives among young farmers is variable. Many young farmers trade/engage with co-operatives but are not shareholders and are not actively involved in the running of them (not serving on boards or committees). There appears to be a slow rate of transfer of shares in agricultural co-operatives to young farmers and more shares are being transferred to/inherited by non-farmers.

National Co-op Farm Relief Service (NCFRS) is concerned about the:

- Transfer of shares to younger farmers and non-farmers;
- Low level of involvement of young farmers in co-operatives;
- Proportion of young farmers who are shareholders in co-operatives; and
- Pool of people available in the future to serve on co-operative committees and boards.

NCFRS received funding from the Golden Jubilee Trust to research this issue. The focus was on conducting research among young farmers to determine their attitude to Co-ops, Co-op shareholding, Co-op Boards and possible future involvement in Co-ops. NCFRS engaged Broadmore Research & Consulting to work with them in undertaking the research. The research data was collated primarily by way of an online survey questionnaire, complemented with paper questionnaires. The survey questionnaire was developed by NCFRS and Broadmore Research & Consulting. The survey was circulated directly to a contact list prepared by NCFRS and promoted to the members of Macra na Feirme, students in Agricultural Colleges and Third Level Colleges, Nuffield Ireland network, members of the Group Water Scheme Co-operatives and participants at the Positive Farmers Conference. The survey was also promoted by way of the agricultural and social media. A total of 655 completed responses were received.

The most important findings to emerge from the research included:

- 94% of survey respondents considered that agricultural co-operatives were important for the *'future of Irish farming'* and 87% considered that agricultural co-operatives were important for their *'own future in farming'*;
- 55% saw a benefit/possible benefit to be a shareholder in a co-operative with which they traded/engaged with;
- Shares in agricultural co-operatives were transferred to the respondent or other family members in one quarter of farm families;
- Transfer of shares in agricultural co-operatives had been discussed within the farm family of one in five respondents;
- The main ways suggested for encouraging share transfer included: discounted shares; incentives to encourage transfer; education; and information;
- Two-thirds indicated that they were interested in purchasing agricultural co-operative shares within the next 5 years;
- 55% of respondents knew a board member of a Dairy Co-operative;
- 44% were definitely/possibly interested in future membership of a Dairy Co-operative Board and 33% were definitely/possibly interested in future membership of a Co-operative Livestock Mart Board;
- One quarter believed that agricultural co-operative boards were *'open and welcoming'*;
- Two-thirds of respondents were interested/possibly interested in training on the role of co-operative boards; and
- The most important attribute of co-operatives identified by respondents was that they were *'farmer owned/controlled'*.

The conclusions from the research can be summarised as follows, young farmers:

- **Appreciate the importance** of agricultural co-operatives;
- Are **engaging with** agricultural co-operatives on a regular basis;
- Have a **low level of share ownership** and have had **limited shares transferred** to them by parents/family members;
- Had **limited discussion about the transfer** of shares with parents/family members;
- But are **interested in purchasing** co-operative shares in the future;
- **Appreciate the attributes** of co-operatives but are **not convinced about the benefits** of being a shareholder of co-operatives which they trade/engage with;
- Believe that **financial insecurity and fear contribute to the delay** in share transfer;
- But are **not unduly concerned about the slow/delayed transfer** of shares or the transfer of shares to non-farmers;

- Believe that **incentives and information are critical** to encourage share transfer;
- Are potentially **interested in becoming involved** in co-operative boards but will need to be encouraged;
- As there is a level of **scepticism about the extent to which co-operative boards are open and welcoming**.

The recommendations from the research can be summarised as follows:

- The research **findings should be considered** by co-operatives and reviewed in the context of their own situation;
- Farmers need to be **informed, advised and convinced** about the importance of holding shares and getting actively involved in co-operatives;
- Farmers engaging with agricultural co-operatives need to be **encouraged to become shareholders and be actively involved**;
- Share transfer and purchase need to be **actively facilitated and encouraged**;
- The potential interest in future involvement in **boards and committees** needs to be nurtured;
- Boards need to ensure that they are **'open and welcoming'** to new members; and
- Innovative approaches to **demonstrate the role, function and importance** of co-operatives should be developed.

MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

An overview of the main survey findings is provided in this section.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

- 48.5% were agricultural students;
- 48% working on family farm;
- 35% farming own land (owned/leased);
- 23% working in agriculture related job;
- Main enterprise: dairying - 49%; suckling - 13%; mixed farming - 12%; drystock - 8%; and sheep - 5%;
- Male - 86% and female - 14%; and
- Age profile: 18-25 yrs - 60%; 26-35 yrs - 18%; and over 35 yrs - 21%.

INVOLVEMENT IN ORGANISATIONS

- 57% involved in a sports club/community/charity (32% actively and 7% office holders);
- 38% involved in IFA/ICMSA/ICSA & 37% involved in an agricultural co-operative;
- 36% involved in Macra na Feirme & 29% involved in FRS (12% working for FRS);
- Level of involvement was highest among dairy farmers; and
- Level of involvement increased with age and farm size.

PERCEPTION OF IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES

- 94% considered that agricultural co-operatives were important for the *'future of Irish farming'*; and
- 87% considered that agricultural co-operatives were important for their *'own future in farming'*.

TRADE/ENGAGE WITH CO-OPERATIVES

- 79% traded/engaged with Co-operative Livestock Marts (25.5% weekly/monthly & 54% a few times per year);
- 62% traded/engaged with Dairy Co-operatives (52% at least monthly);
- 42% traded/engaged with Farm Relief Service (including those working for FRS); and
- Factors which impacted on the extent of trading/engagement included enterprise, farm size, age and gender.

SHARE OWNERSHIP IN AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES

- The level of share ownership was: Dairy Co-operative - 31%; Co-operative Livestock Mart - 12%; Other Agricultural Co-operatives - 8.5%; & FRS - 2%;
- Factors which impacted on share ownership included enterprise, farm size, age and gender;
- 45% stated that parents/other family members owned shares in a Dairy Co-operative & 21% had shares in a Co-operative Livestock Mart;
- One third identified that there was a benefit to be a shareholder in a co-operative with which they traded/engaged with & 22% believed that there was possibly a benefit;
- Dairy farmers were most likely to see a benefit to be a shareholder in a co-operative; and
- 16% identified drawbacks to not being a shareholder in a co-operative with which they engaged/traded with, while a further 22% stated that there were possibly drawbacks.

TRANSFER OF SHARES IN AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES

- 17% of respondents and 9% of other family members received shares from parents/other family members;
- In 42% of cases, nobody received shares while 32% of respondents did not know if any shares had been transferred;
- Of the shares transferred, 85% were in Dairy Co-operatives & 28% were in Co-operative Livestock Marts; and
- 22% had the transfer of co-operative shares discussed with them or other family members.

REASONS FOR THE DELAY IN TRANSFER OF SHARES

- Main reasons for the delay in transfer of co-operative shares to younger farmers included: financial security - value of shares (27%); fear of family argument (14%); not bothered (13%); complicated process (12%); young people not interested (11%); shares forgotten about (9.5%); fear of favouring one family member (9%); and shares not valuable (9%).

CONCERN ABOUT THE TRANSFER OF SHARES

- 32% concerned about transfer of shares to non-farmers, while 39% were not concerned;
- Concern increased with age from 30% (<25 years) to 45% (35+ years);
- Main consequences to the transfer of agricultural co-operative shares to non-farmers included: lack of understanding of farming/agriculture business; focus on a return rather than on the wider needs of shareholders; and fear that non-farming shareholders would be willing to sell off the business;
- 25% concerned about delay or slow transfer of shares; and
- Most significant consequence of delayed or slow transfer of shares in agricultural co-operatives was that slow transfer of shares results in young people not getting involved and boards dominated by older farmers.

ENCOURAGEMENT OF TRANSFER OF SHARES TO YOUNGER FARMERS

- 37% of respondents made suggestions for actions which agricultural co-operatives could take to encourage the transfer of shares to younger active farmers; and
- Most significant suggestions included: discounted/bonus shares for young farmers; incentives to transfer shares; education on co-operatives and transfer of shares; more information/advice on transfer of shares; & incentives for older and younger farmers.

INTEREST IN PURCHASING SHARES IN AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES

- Two thirds interested in purchasing shares in agricultural co-operatives in next 5 years; and
- Interest in purchasing shares: Dairy Co-operative - 43%; Co-operative Livestock Mart - 18%; & FRS - 17% (when specifically asked about purchasing FRS shares, 21% said that they were interested & 41% possibly interested).

KNOWLEDGE OF CO-OPERATIVE BOARD MEMBERS

- 55% knew a board member of a Dairy Co-operative & 45% knew a board member of a Co-operative Livestock Mart & 21% knew an FRS board member.

INTEREST IN FUTURE CO-OPERATIVE BOARD MEMBERSHIP

- Definite/possible interest in future membership of a: Dairy Co-operative Board - 44%; Co-operative Livestock Mart - 33%; and FRS - 29%.

ENCOURAGING INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG FARMERS IN CO-OPERATIVES

- 39% made suggestions for encouraging young farmers to become more involved; &
- Most significant suggestions included: increase awareness of co-operatives; financial incentives; training; young farmer boards; opportunities for young people to get involved.

OPENNESS OF CO-OPERATIVE BOARDS

- 25% agreed that co-operative boards were '*open and welcoming*' to new people while 34% believed that they were not '*open and welcoming*'.

INTEREST IN CO-OPERATIVE TRAINING

- 30% stated that they were interested in training and a further 35% possibly interested.

IMPORTANCE OF CO-OPERATIVE ATTRIBUTES

- The predominant attribute identified was '*farmer ownership/control*' (57%) while 14% identified '*fair price on products*'.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions from the research are presented in this section.

INVOLVEMENT IN ORGANISATIONS

- Farmers/those working in farming were slow to engage with organisations - minority actively involved and/or members of boards/committees;
- As farmers get older, they were more likely to get involved in organisations and more actively engaged in the running of organisations;
- Females were less convinced about the benefits of co-operatives and less involved; &
- Challenge for co-operatives to convince farmers about relevance and to get them involved.

PERCEPTION OF AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES

- Young farmers perceived agricultural co-operatives as being important for both their own future and that of the industry; and
- They appreciated the potential role of co-operatives which provides the opportunity to inform and encourage them to get more involved.

ENGAGEMENT WITH CO-OPERATIVES

- High level of engagement with Co-operative Livestock Marts and Dairy Co-operatives.

SHARE OWNERSHIP

- Except for Dairy Co-operatives, share ownership among young farmers was very low; &
- Share ownership was particularly low among: those farming the smallest area; under 25 years; females; and students.

BENEFITS TO SHARE OWNER

- Young farmers not as certain that there were benefits associated with being a shareholder in a co-operative with which they traded - remain to be convinced about the benefits; and
- As farmers got older, their appreciation for the benefits to be a shareholder increased.

SHARE TRANSFER

- Share ownership and transfer were typically not discussed and therefore, not a priority for the younger or older generation of farmers;
- Shares in Dairy Co-operatives were most likely to be transferred, driven by the obligation to own a level of shares in their milk processor;
- That a minority of younger farmers owned shares in agricultural co-ops or had discussed the transfer of shares, highlights that share ownership and transfer is not a priority;
- The financial security provided by shares to the older generation may be delaying transfer;
- There was a significant level of perceived fear among the older generation relating to the transfer of shares - family arguments, favouring members of the family, complicated and expensive process; and
- Young farmers were not unduly concerned about the transfer of shares to non-farmers or the slow rate of transfer or delayed transfer of shares.

ENCOURAGING SHARE TRANSFER

- Younger farmers believed that the primary approach to encouraging the transfer of shares was to provide incentives to both the older and younger generation;
- Education on co-operatives, shareholding and the importance of both also important; &
- The provision of incentives to encourage share transfer may not actually increase the appreciation for the role of co-operatives and the importance of an active membership.

PURCHASING OF SHARES

- Younger farmers were showing an interest in purchasing shares in the future and it will be important to encourage them to become active shareholders.
- Agricultural co-operatives need to appeal, be attractive and relevant to young farmers for them to consider purchasing shares; and
- Important to promote the option of share purchase to them to ensure that they follow through on the purchase of shares.

KNOWLEDGE OF BOARD MEMBERS

- Considerable knowledge of agricultural co-operative board members which indicates that younger farmers have an awareness of the co-operative representative structures.

INTEREST IN FUTURE BOARD MEMBERSHIP

- Young farmers were favourable towards future involvement in co-operative boards;
- The challenge is to foster and encourage that interest to a stage where younger farmers offer themselves for selection/election onto boards and committees;
- Also critically important that co-operatives are proactive in reaching out and inviting, encouraging young people to get involved;
- Building knowledge and awareness of co-operatives will be key to achieving a higher level of involvement in co-operatives by younger farmers; and
- Co-operatives should consider the provision of specific seats/positions for young farmers on boards or the establishment of specific young farmer boards.

PERCEPTION OF CO-OPERATIVE BOARDS

- Scepticism about the extent to which co-operative boards were open and welcoming; and
- Needs to be addressed to encourage greater involvement by younger people in co-operatives.

ATTRIBUTES OF CO-OPERATIVES

- Main attraction of co-operatives is the fact that farmers own and control them and have the power as a shareholder of having a vote on decisions;
- Provision of a fair price on products is also important; and
- Lack of appreciation for the importance of the co-operative ethos is a concern.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are made by the author based on the research findings. Individual co-operatives and the wider industry should review the findings and develop their own conclusions and specific actions.

CONSIDERATION OF FINDINGS BY CO-OPERATIVES

- Highlight the extent to which young farmers appreciate the role of co-operatives and are willing to get involved.
- The survey findings should be reviewed by agricultural co-operatives and the extent to which they relate to them assessed.
- Agricultural co-operatives should undertake a self-assessment of: their share register for active and dormant shares; young farmer shareholding; involvement in committees/boards; female involvement; share transfer; non-farmer shareholding; & actions to involve younger farmers.
- Agricultural co-operatives need to determine the extent to which there are tangible benefits to be a shareholder and promote this to young farmers.

ADVICE AND INFORMATION

- Wider industry and individual co-operatives need to inform, advise and convince young farmers about the importance of holding shares in co-operatives and getting actively involved.
- A programme of information, advice and guidance on the transfer of co-operative shares should be developed with elements specifically focused on older (existing) shareholders and younger (potential future shareholders) farmers. Particular efforts need to be undertaken to allay the fears of older farmers regarding share transfer.
- There is a need for a comprehensive programme of information, advice, education and training on the importance of active involvement in co-operatives.

ENCOURAGING INVOLVEMENT IN CO-OPERATIVES

- There is a need for agricultural co-operatives to consider how they can encourage those farmers who are trading/engaging with them to become shareholders and more actively involved. This should involve the exploration and implementation of innovative approaches.

ENCOURAGING TRANSFER & PURCHASE OF SHARES

- The proposals identified in the research for encouraging the transfer of shares (including: discounted/bonus shares; incentives; education; information/advice; reducing cost of transfer; making process of transfer simpler) should be considered by agricultural co-operatives and specific actions developed if appropriate.
- Agricultural co-operatives need to review the process in place for transferring shares and ensure that it is clear and uncomplicated and communicate this to existing and potential shareholders.
- There is a need to review the process in place in agricultural co-operatives for the purchase of shares to ensure that appropriate opportunities exist for younger farmers to purchase shares.

INVOLVEMENT IN CO-OPERATIVE BOARDS

- The potential interest among young farmers to get involved in boards and committees should be built upon. Efforts need to be undertaken to ensure that all those potentially interested are supported and encouraged. Consideration should be given to the proposals identified in the research for encouraging the involvement of younger farmers (including: increasing awareness of co-operatives; financial incentives; training; young farmer boards; opportunities to get involved; discounted shares; provision of information).

- The current initiatives to engage new members in committees/boards should be reviewed and further approaches developed if necessary.
- Agricultural co-operatives need to specifically examine the extent to which their board is '*open and welcoming*' to new members.

PROMOTION OF CO-OPERATIVES

- Innovative and effective approaches to demonstrate the role, function and importance of agricultural co-operatives should be developed. ICOS could potentially play a role in coordinating the public engagement and promotion of agricultural co-operatives at agricultural events.

FURTHER RESEARCH

- Further research should be considered on this issue specifically in identifying and documenting successful initiatives undertaken by agricultural co-operatives which have encouraged young farmers to become shareholders and involved in boards/committees.





RESEARCH

1 RESEARCH

Co-operatives continue to play a significant role in Irish Agriculture. The level of engagement by farmers in co-operatives varies from high level, board membership to members in 'name only' and farmers with no involvement even though they may trade with co-operatives. The main agricultural co-operatives are those involved in milk processing (and associated services) and livestock trading. National Co-op Farm Relief Service (NCFRS) has its origins in labour provision but now provides a wide range of services.

Traditionally, farmers who traded/engaged with agricultural co-operatives were shareholders in those co-operatives. In the past co-operative shares transferred to the farm successor along with the farm business. Whether there were rules in past relating to shareholding or not, many farmers saw it as accepted practice that they held shares and got involved in their local co-operative. Currently, there are many young farmers who trade/engage with agricultural co-operatives but who do not hold any shares. In addition, many young farmers may not have given any consideration to the issue of share ownership or the benefits of being a shareholder. The shares are typically held by parents or other family members who have not yet been transferred or even discussed their transfer within the farm family.

Members of co-operative committees and/or boards are elected from within the shareholders. Therefore, the first step to active membership in a co-operative is being a shareholder. If young farmers do not become involved in committees/boards, then their energy, enthusiasm and ideas are not being captured for the benefit of the co-operative. Indications with the industry suggest that the proportion of non-shareholder farmers who are trading/engaging with agricultural co-operatives is increasing. In addition, shares are becoming dormant and/or transferring to non-farming relatives who have less appreciation for them and limited knowledge of the industry. A lack of involvement in co-operatives also potentially contributes to a decline in the appreciation of the role and contribution of co-operatives.

1.1 RESEARCH FOCUS

NCFRS has several thousand farmer shareholders many of whom have held their shares since the formation of the FRS co-ops in the early 1980s. A significant proportion of these shareholders are now reaching retirement from active farming. However, there was concern in NCFRS that the transfer of shares to the next generation is not a priority for shareholders. Young farmers are the future shareholders of the NCFRS and should provide the pool of future board members. However, if shares are not transferred to younger farmers and if younger farmers are not applying for shares, then the number of shareholders will shrink and there will be a limited pool from which to draw board members to guide and lead the co-operative.

The main concern of NCFRS is that the lack of young farmer shareholders in NCFRS and other agricultural co-operatives has the potential to undermine the future shareholding and boards of co-operatives. The lack of new and younger shareholders will impact on the capacity of co-operatives to operate and on strategic decision making within co-operatives.

This concern about the involvement of young farmers in agricultural co-operatives prompted National Co-op Farm Relief Service to apply to the Golden Jubilee Trust for funding to conduct research on this issue. The focus was on conducting research among young farmers to determine their attitude to Co-ops, Co-op shareholding, Co-op Boards and possible future involvement in Co-ops.

1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

NCFRS engaged Broadmore Research & Consulting to work with them in undertaking the research. The research data was collated primarily by way of an online survey questionnaire, complemented with paper questionnaires. The survey questionnaire was developed by NCFRS and Broadmore Research & Consulting¹ (see Appendix 1). The survey was circulated to a contact list prepared by NCFRS and promoted to the members of Macra na Feirme, students in Agricultural Colleges and Third Level Colleges, Nuffield Ireland network, members of the Group Water Scheme Co-operatives and participants at the Positive Farmers Conference². The survey was also promoted by way of the agricultural and social media.

¹ The input of Peter Byrne, John Brosnan & Jane Marks, NCFRS contributed significantly to the design, promotion and outputs of the research.

² The co-operation of all those who participated in the survey and who promoted the survey is acknowledged with gratitude.



RESEARCH FINDINGS

2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings from the research survey are presented in this section. Cross analysis was undertaken to determine the exact nature of factors impacting on the results (cross analysis findings are only presented where there was a significantly significant relationship). As part of the presentation of the research findings, individual quotes from respondents are interspersed in the findings. A total of 655 completed responses were received, these were analysed using the SPSS package.

2.1 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Almost half (48.5%) of the respondents were agricultural students while the same proportion (48.4%) were working on the family farm (Table 1) (there was an overlap in the occupational status e.g. student could also be working on family farm and/or in other job). One third (34.7%) of respondents were farming their own land owned/leased) and almost one quarter (23.1%) were working in an agricultural related job. Half (51.6%) of respondents earned 75% or more of their total income from farming, while one in five (19.8%) earned less than 25% of their income from farming.

CURRENT OCCUPATION*	%
AGRICULTURAL STUDENT	48.5
WORKING ON FAMILY FARM	48.4
FARMING OWN LAND (OWNED/RENTED/LEASED)	34.7
WORKING IN AGRICULTURAL RELATED JOB	23.1
WORKING ON ANOTHER FARM	16.5
FARMING IN PARTNERSHIP/COLLABORATIVE ARRANGEMENT	13.3
WORKING IN NON-AGRICULTURAL JOB	5.5
OTHER	3

* Respondents could select more than one occupational status.

TABLE 1 OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS (N=655)

The area farmed (owned and/or leased) is presented in **Figure 1**.

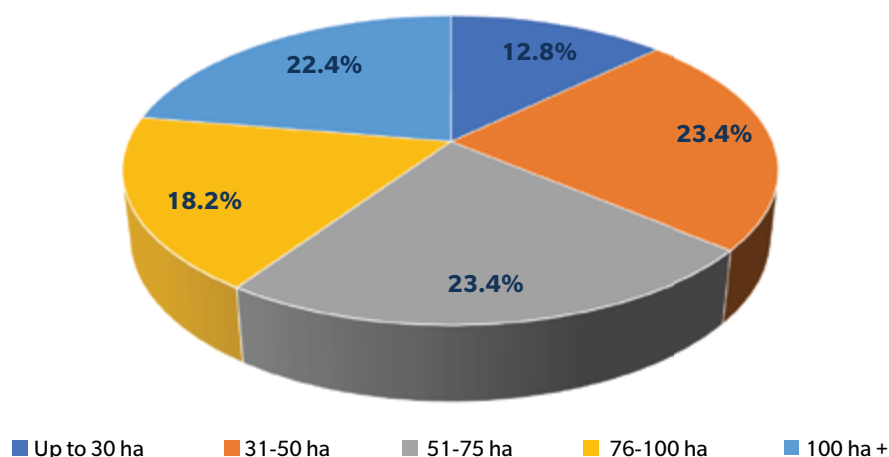


FIGURE 1 AREA FARMED (OWNED AND/OR LEASED) (N=595)

Half of the respondents identified dairying as their main enterprise³, while suckling was the main enterprise for 13.3% and beef drystock for 8.4% (Figure 2). Some 12.1% identified mixed farming as their main enterprise and for 5% it was sheep.

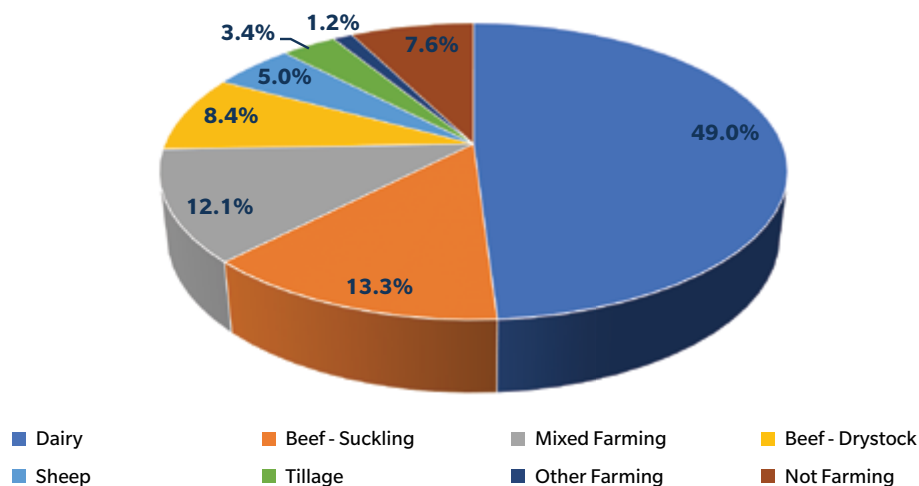


FIGURE 2 MAIN FARM ENTERPRISE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS (N=655)

Some 14.1% of the survey respondents were female and 85.9% male. The focus of the research was on young farmers and therefore, 60.3% of the sample were aged between 18 and 25 years, 9.4% between 26 and 30 years, 9.4% between 31 and 35 years and the remaining 20.8% aged over 35 years.

Almost half (48%) of the respondents were currently undertaking agricultural training/education (Figure 3). One fifth (21%) had completed Level 5/6 training in agriculture.

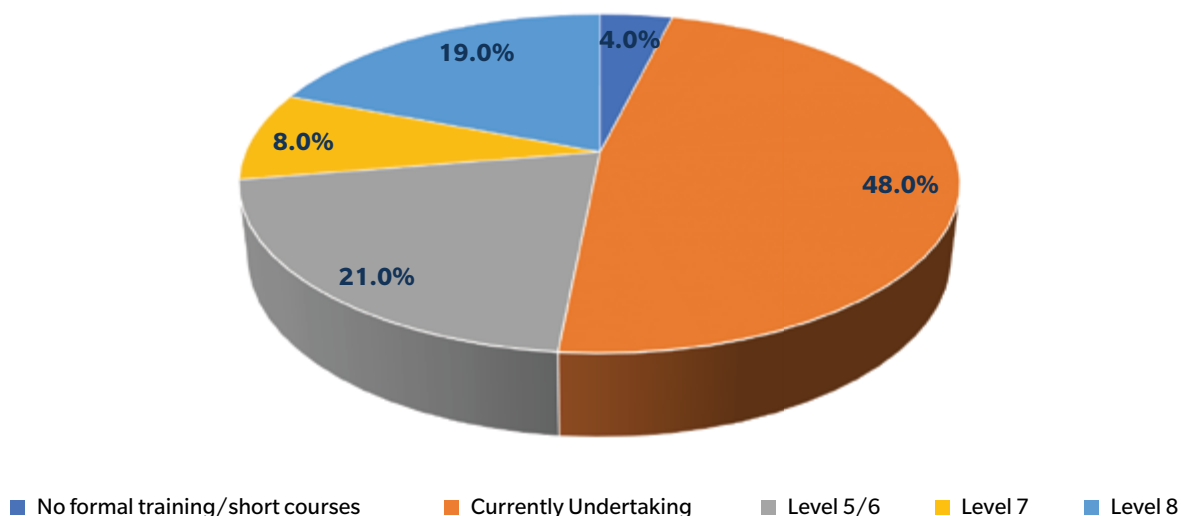


FIGURE 3 LEVEL OF FORMAL AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS (N=648)

³ All respondents, including students identified a main farm enterprise. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, dairy farmers are those who identified dairy as their main enterprise even though they may be full-time students (and similarly for the other enterprises).

2.2 INVOLVEMENT IN ORGANISATIONS

Some 56.8% of respondents were involved in a sports club/community/charity organisation (32.1% were actively involved, 6.7% were office holders, 10.8% had low level involvement and 6.8% were members in name only) (Table 2).

Almost two out of five (38.3%) respondents were involved in IFA/ICMSA/ICSA (4.7% were office holders, 7.5% were actively involved, 27.7% had a low-level involvement). Some 37.4% of respondents were involved in an agricultural co-operative (4.4% were office holders, 7.5% actively involved, 9.9% had low level involvement and 13.3% were members in name only). Just over one third (35.8%) of respondents were members of Macra na Feirme.

Some 29.1% of respondents were involved in the Farm Relief Service, however less than one percent (0.6%) were office holders and 2.7% were actively involved (12.2% were working for FRS) (the level of involvement among the general farming population would be much lower if the employees were excluded).

ORGANISATION	OFFICE HOLDER %	ACTIVELY INVOLVED %	LOW LEVEL INVOLVEMENT %	MEMBER IN NAME ONLY %	WORKING FOR %	NOT INVOLVED %	NO COMMENT %
Sports Club/ Community/Charity Organisation	6.7	32.1	10.8	6.6	0.6	41.4	1.8
Agricultural Co-op	4.4	7.5	9.9	13.3	3.5	58.8	3.8
IFA/ICMSA/ICSA	4.7	5.6	10.8	16.9	0.5	59.4	2.3
Macra na Feirme	4.6	9.9	8.2	12.5	0.6	60.2	4
Farm Relief Service	0.6	2.7	5.6	7.8	12.2	68.5	2.4
Other Agr Related Organisation	2.3	7.6	8.1	4.3	1.1	73	3.7
Pedigree Breed Society	1.2	4.9	4.3	6.9	0.3	79.2	3.2
Non-Agricultural Co-op	1.1	3.5	4	2	0.5	85.2	3.8
GROUP WATER SCHEME CO-OP	2	1.4	2.1	3.5	1.1	87.3	2.6

TABLE 2 EXTENT OF INVOLVEMENT OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL ORGANISATIONS (N=655)

Some of the factors influencing involvement in organisations include:

FARM RELIEF SERVICE

- High level involvement⁴ (office holder/actively involved/working for) - tillage farmers (23%), beef drystock farmers (22%), suckler farmers (17%), dairy farmers (16%);
- High level involvement declined as farm size increased;
- No involvement - sheep farmers (88%), mixed farmers (84%);
- Involvement increased with age (18-25 year olds (20%), 26-35 year olds (40%), over 35 year olds (43%);
- 13% of students were involved compared to 46% of others (9% of students had high level involvement compared to 21% of others);

⁴ Level of involvement in FRS influenced by participation of FRS contractors in the survey.

AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES

- 53% of dairy farmers were involved (21% had high level involvement);
- 27% of beef, tillage and mixed farmers, 18% of sheep farmers;
- Involvement increased with farm size – farming less than 30 ha (30% involved); over 100 ha (51% were involved);
- Involvement increased with age - under 25 years (26%), 26-35 years (51%), over 35 years (64%);
- 33% of 35+ year olds were office holders/actively involved/working for;
- 24% of students were involved compared to 52% of others (10% of students had high level involvement compared to 20% of others);

FARM ORGANISATIONS

- Highest among dairy farmers (52%) - suckler farmers (35%), drystock farmers (29%), tillage farmers (27%);
- Involvement increased with farm size - under 50 ha (32%) and over 100 ha (50%);
- 23% of those under 25 years were involved in farm organisations (7% high involvement) compared to 70% of those aged over 35 years (19% high involvement);
- One third (33%) of students were involved compared to 53% of others;

SPORTS CLUB/COMMUNITY/CHARITY ORGANISATION

- Involvement increased with age - under 25 years (50% involved - 39% high involvement), 26 and 35 years (59% involved) and over 35 years (71% involved - 46% high involvement); and
- Half of students were involved compared to three-quarters (73%) of others.

2.3 PERCEPTION OF IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES

Over nine out of ten (94.2%) respondents considered that agricultural Co-operatives were important for the ‘future of Irish farming’ (62.3% very important). While 87.3% considered that Co-operatives were important for their ‘own future in farming’ (53.3% very important).

2.4 TRADE/ENGAGEMENT WITH CO-OPERATIVES

Four out of five (79.3%) respondents stated that they traded/engaged with a Co-operative Livestock Marts (9% on a weekly basis, 16.5% monthly and 53.7% a few times per year) (Figure 4). Three out of five (61.9%) respondents traded/engaged with a Dairy Co-operatives (51.8% at least monthly). Some 42.4% of respondents traded/engaged with Farm Relief Services⁵.

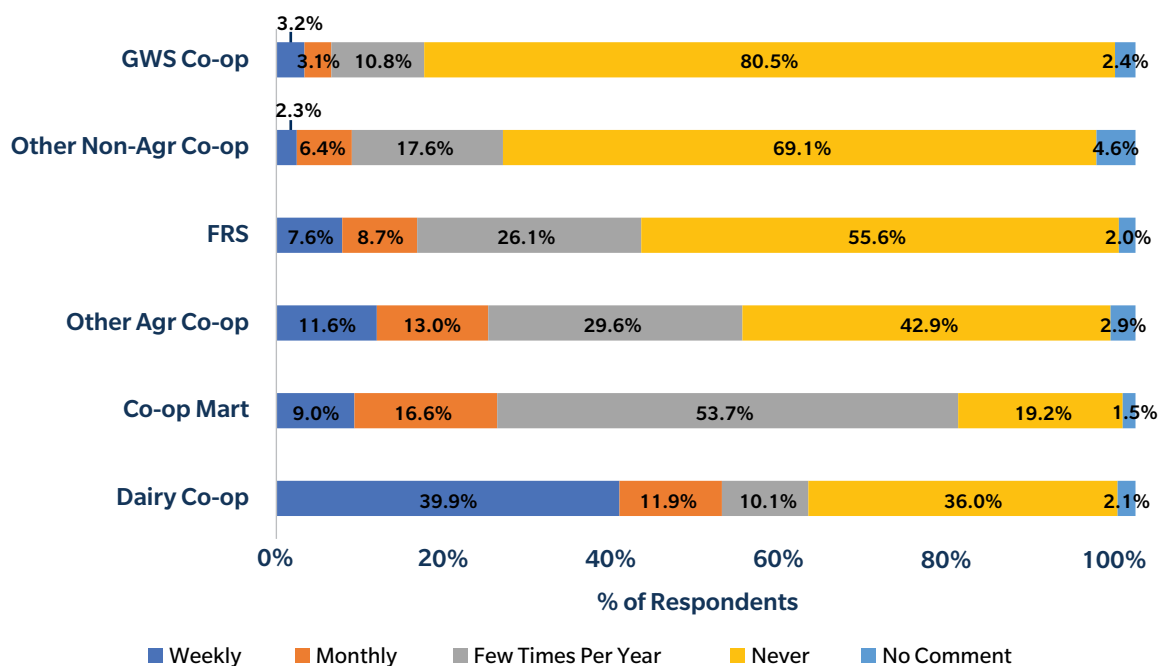


FIGURE 4 EXTENT OF CURRENT TRADING/ENGAGEMENT WITH AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES FOR SURVEY RESPONDENTS (N=655)

⁵ Influenced by participation of FRS contractors in the survey.

Some of the factors which impacted on the extent of trading/engagement with co-operatives included:

DAIRY CO-OPERATIVE

- 82% of dairy farmers traded/engaged weekly/monthly;
- Level of trading increased with farm size – under 50 ha (49%) and over 100 ha (76%);
- 52% of those aged under 25 years compared to 78% of those aged over 35 years;
- 37% of females compared to 54% of males;
- 48% of students traded/engaged (40% weekly/monthly) compared to 75% of others (63% weekly/monthly);

CO-OPERATIVE LIVESTOCK MART

- Suckler farmers (90% traded/engaged with- 35% weekly/monthly), sheep farmers (88% traded/engaged with - 33% weekly/monthly), drystock farmers (85% traded/engaged with), dairy and mixed farmers (83% traded/engaged with);
- 32% of students engaged on a weekly/monthly basis compared to 20% of others;

FARM RELIEF SERVICE (LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT)

- Dairy farmers (60%), tillage farmers (32%), suckler and mixed farmers (26%) and drystock farmers (23%);
- Under 25 years (31%), 26 to 35-year-olds (57%) and over 35 years (63%); and
- One quarter of students compared to 59% of others (9% of students on a weekly/monthly basis compared to 23% of others).

2.5 SHARE OWNERSHIP IN AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES

Some 30.7% of respondents owned shares in a Dairy Co-operative, while 12.1% owned shares in a Co-operative Livestock Mart and 8.5% owned shares in other Agricultural Co-operatives (Figure 5). Only 2.1% of respondents owned shares in the Farm Relief Service.

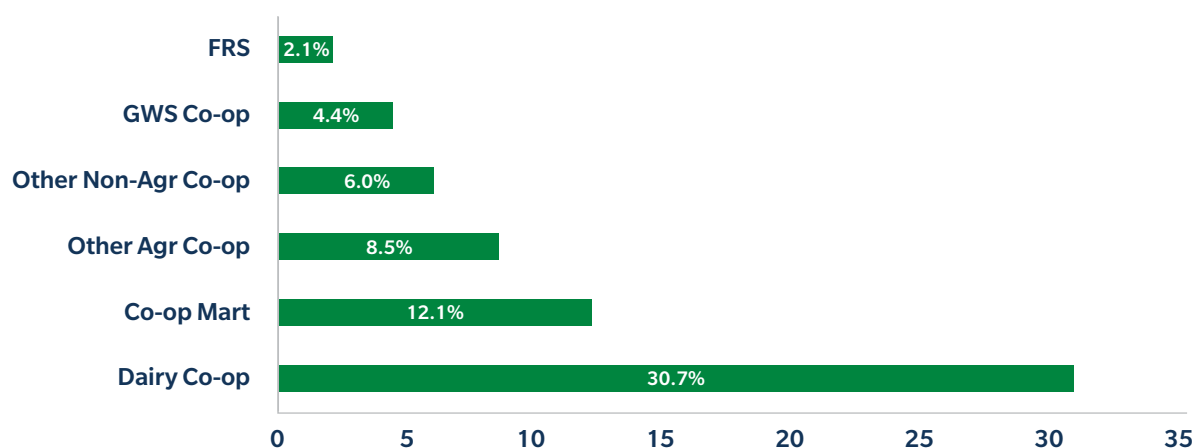


FIGURE 5 EXTENT OF SHARE OWNERSHIP IN CO-OPERATIVES BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS (N=655)

Some of the factors which influenced the ownership of shares in co-operatives included:

DAIRY CO-OPERATIVES

- Dairy farmers (52%), mixed farmers (25%) and beef farmers (7%);
- Under 50 ha (20%) and over 100 ha (50%);
- Under 25 years (15%), between 25 and 35 years (39%) and over 35 years (67%);
- One fifth (19%) of females compared to one third (33%) of males;
- 13% of students owned shares compared to 47% of others;

CO-OPERATIVE LIVESTOCK MARTS

- Dairy farmers (19%), sheep farmers (9%) and beef farmers (7%);
- Under 25 years (5%), 26-35-year olds (9%) and 33.3% of those aged over 35 years;
- 5% of students compared to 19% of others;

FARM RELIEF SERVICE

- 4.4% of dairy farmers; and
- No other farmers had shares.

Some 46.9% of respondents stated that their parents/other family members owned shares in a Dairy Co-operative and 20.9% had shares in a Co-operative Livestock Mart (Figure 6). Some 3.4% of respondents indicated that parents/other family members owned shares in the Farm Relief Service.

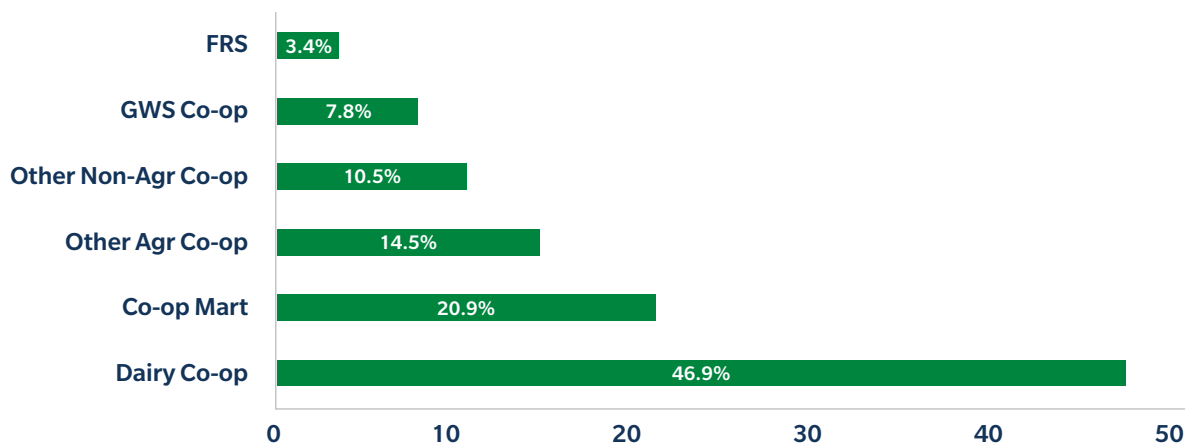


FIGURE 6 EXTENT OF SHARE OWNERSHIP IN CO-OPERATIVES BY PARENTS/OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS (N=655)

Some of the factors which influenced the ownership of shares by parents/other family members in co-operatives included:

DAIRY CO-OPERATIVE

- Dairy farmers (72% had parents/other family members who owned shares) compared to mixed farmers (35%) and beef farmers (21%);

CO-OPERATIVE LIVESTOCK MARTS

- Dairy farmers (27% had parents/other family members who owned shares), drystock farmers (20%), mixed farmers (17%), sheep farmers (15%) and sucklers (13%); and
- Under 25 years (5%), 26-35-year olds (9%) and over 35 years (33.3%).

2.5.1 BENEFITS OF SHARE OWNERSHIP IN CO-OPERATIVES

One third (33.3%) of respondents identified that there was a benefit to be a shareholder in a co-operative with which they traded/engaged with, while a further 22% believed that there was possibly a benefit to be a shareholder (Figure 7).

‘as a shareholder, you can attend meetings, have your say, maybe contribute and influence the direction of the co-op for the good of the members’

‘you can shape how the business is run’

‘hard to quantify if there is a benefit or not’

‘see no benefit, looked after better if not a shareholder e.g. gets better deal on inputs’

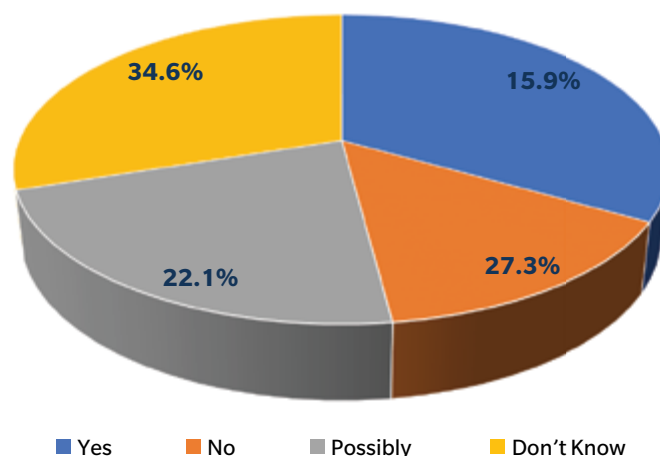


FIGURE 7 BENEFITS OF BEING A SHAREHOLDER IN A CO-OPERATIVE WITH WHICH RESPONDENTS ENGAGE/TRADE WITH (N=655)

Male respondents were over twice as likely as female respondents to consider that there was a benefit to be a shareholder in a co-operative with whom they engaged (36% compared to 16%) There was greater uncertainty about the benefits among female respondents (45% don't know) than male respondents (28% don't know).

'being a shareholder lets you be more actively involved'
'benefits for members in milk supply agreements and trading bonuses'
'it gives the farmer a little more power'

Dairy farmers were most likely to see a benefit (49%) compared to 32% of tillage farmers, 24% of mixed farmers and 22% of drystock farmers. Only 9% of sheep farmers saw a benefit to be a shareholder in a co-operative with which they traded.

'buying from a business that I have an interest in'

The proportion of farmers who saw a benefit to being a shareholder in co-operatives with which they engaged/traded with increased with age and the proportion who 'didn't know' decreased - 22% of those aged less than 25 years saw a benefit (41% of those aged under 25 years did not know if there was a benefit) compared to 53% of those aged over 35 years. One in five (21%) students saw a benefit to be a shareholder compared to 45% of others.

'gives you a sense of ownership and a vested interest in the co-op'
'without livestock marts, I would not be able to buy or sell stock'
'when you are a shareholder, you become more interested in the business'

Some 30% of respondents commented on the benefits or otherwise of being a shareholder in the co-operatives with which they engaged/traded with. The most significant comments made included (in order of priority):

1. Having a vote/an opportunity to influence decisions/engage in the running of the business/ 'a sense of ownership';
2. Opportunity to avail of bonus payments/schemes and bonus shares;
3. Increasing net worth of the farmer; as the shares appreciate over time;
4. Discounts for shareholders on purchases;
5. Mandatory for dairy farmers to be shareholders of their milk processors;
6. Avail of dividends on shares;
7. Greater interest in the business when a shareholder;
8. Access to services such as soil testing, silage testing etc;

9. Access to information/advice; and
10. Price supports when product prices are low.

2.5.2 DRAWBACKS OF NOT BEING A SHAREHOLDER

Some 15.9% of respondents identified drawbacks to not being a shareholder in a co-operative with which they engaged/traded with, while a further 22% stated that there were possibly drawbacks (Figure 8).

'cannot vote at meetings'
'do not receive shareholders bonus on sales or discounts on fertiliser or feed'
'don't lose any money by not being a shareholder'

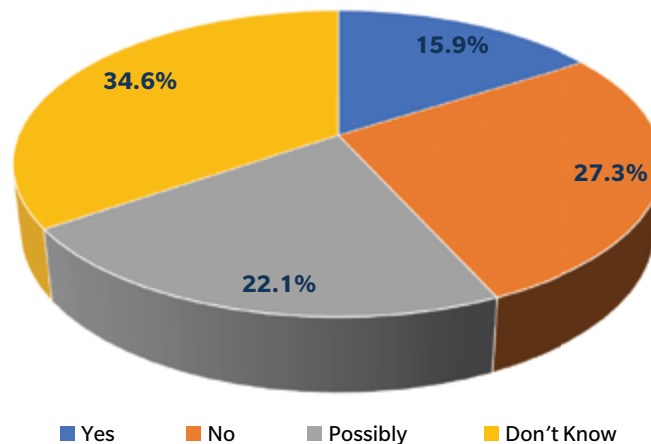


FIGURE 8 DRAWBACKS TO NOT BEING A SHAREHOLDER IN A CO-OPERATIVE WITH WHICH RESPONDENTS ENGAGED/TRADED WITH (N=655)

One quarter (24%) of dairy farmers and 18% tillage farmers did not see any drawbacks to not being a shareholder in co-operatives which they engaged/traded with. While 7% of under 25-year olds did not see a drawback, it was 29% for those aged over 25 years. Some 7% of students saw a drawback to not being a shareholder compared to one quarter of others.

'don't have a say or know what is happening'
'don't have any influence/say in the policies or direction of the co-op'

The main comments made on the drawbacks of not having a shareholding in a co-operative which they engaged/traded with included (in order of priority):

1. Not being able to vote at meetings;
2. Having no say in the running of the co-operative;
3. Not being able to receive bonuses/participate in schemes;
4. No knowledge of what is happening in the business;
5. Not receiving any discounts;
6. Lose money by not being a shareholder; and
7. Not receive any top-ups on prices.

'if not supplying a product, no point in being a shareholder'
'by not being a member, you have no right to vote and no way of directing a co-operative'

2.6 TRANSFER OF SHARES IN AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES

Some 17% of respondents received shares from parents/other family members, while 9.2% identified that other family members received shares (Table 3). In three-quarters of farm families, shares had not been transferred or there was no knowledge of transfer which highlights a high level of indifference towards share transfer and ownership.

RECIPIENT OF SHARES*	%
RESPONDENT	17
OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS	9.2
NOBODY	42.4
DON'T KNOW	32.4

* Shares could be transferred to both respondents and other family members.

TABLE 3 EXTENT TO WHICH PARENTS/OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS HAVE TRANSFERRED SHARES IN CO-OPERATIVES (N=655)

Where shares were transferred, 84.6% of those shares were in a Dairy Co-operative while 27.6% of shares were in a Co-operative Livestock Mart (Figure 9).

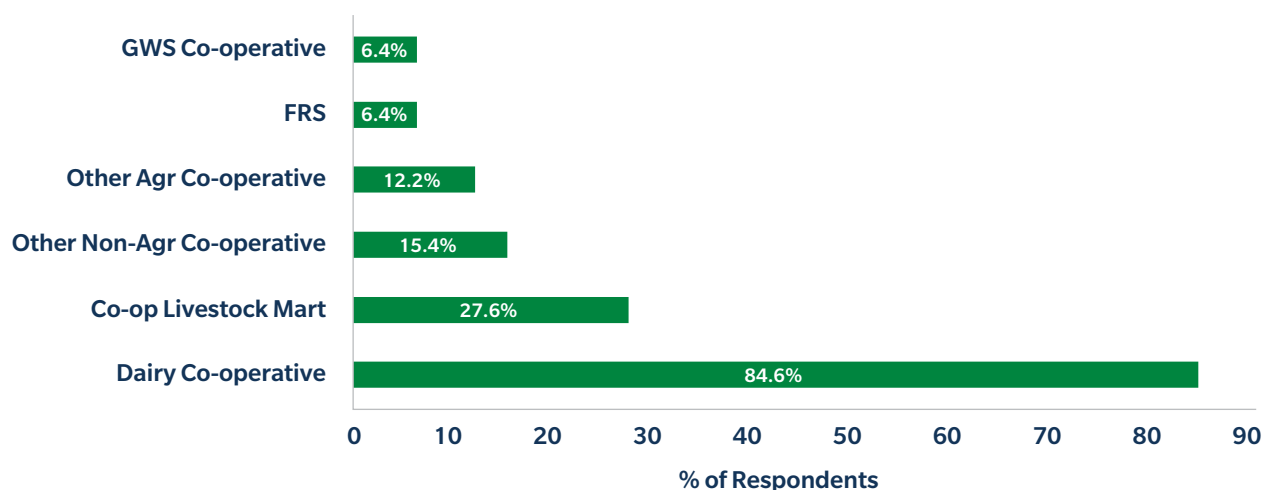


FIGURE 9 SHARES WHICH HAVE BEEN TRANSFERRED TO RESPONDENTS/ OTHERS BY PARENTS/OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS (N=156)

Only one in five (21.7%) survey respondents had the transfer of co-operative shares discussed with them or other family members by parents/older family members while a further one fifth (21%) were uncertain if the issue had been discussed within the family.

Dairy farmers were most likely to have discussed the transfer of shares (28%). While 21% of mixed and 18% of tillage farmers had discussed the transfer of shares. In contrast only 11% of drystock farmers had discussed share transfer. Some 15% of students had discussed the transfer of shares compared to 28% of others.

2.7 REASONS FOR THE DELAY IN TRANSFER OF SHARES

The main reason identified by respondents for the delay in the transfer of co-operative shares to younger farmers was that the value of shares provided a level of financial security to the older generation (Table 4). Some 14.4% thought that it was due to a fear of potential family arguments resulting from the transfer of shares that was causing a delay in transfer. No interest in transferring shares, perception of the transfer process being complicated, young farmers not being interested in shares and shares forgotten about were other important factors.

‘any delay could cause young people to lose interest’

‘when new thinking is not introduced, staleness sets in and opportunities are lost’

MAIN REASONS FOR DELAYING TRANSFER OF CO-OP SHARES	%
FINANCIAL SECURITY - VALUABLE SHARES	27.2
FEAR OF FAMILY ARGUMENT	14.4
NOT BOTHERED ABOUT TRANSFERRING	12.8
COMPLICATED PROCESS	11.8
YOUNG PEOPLE NOT INTERESTED IN SHARES	10.7
SHARES FORGOTTEN ABOUT	9.5
FEAR OF FAVOURING ONE FAMILY MEMBER	9
SHARES NOT VALUABLE	8.7
EXPENSIVE PROCESS	6

TABLE 4 MAIN REASONS IDENTIFIED BY RESPONDENTS FOR THE DELAY IN THE TRANSFER OF CO-OPERATIVE SHARES TO YOUNGER FARMERS/FAMILY MEMBERS

‘older generation are entitled to keep shares which they have built up... hard to think that they should be forced to relinquish these shares even if it benefits young farmers’

2.8 CONCERN ABOUT THE TRANSFER OF SHARES

One third (32.4%) of respondents were concerned about the transfer of shares in agricultural co-operatives to non-farmers, however, 39.3% were not concerned (Figure 10). The level of concern about the transfer of shares to non-farmers increased with age, 30% of those aged under 25 years were concerned about it compared to 45% of those aged over 35 years.

‘loss of control and direction of the co-op’

‘non-farmer shareholders don’t understand farming’

‘future decisions might not be made in the best interest of farmers’

‘might not understand the issues that affect farmers and their business’

‘co-ops become controlled by shareholders who are not active in the business’

The main consequences identified by respondents to the transfer of agricultural co-operative shares to non-farmers included: lack of understanding of farming/agriculture business; focus on generating a return rather than on the wider needs of shareholders; and fear that non-farming shareholders would be willing to sell off all or a portion of the business. Other consequences included: farmers losing control of co-operatives; lack of appreciation of the co-operative ethos; farmers left without shares; lack of knowledge or experience of agricultural co-operatives; and possible decline in the value of shares.

‘new entrants left without shares’

‘dilutes active farmer involvement in the running of the co-op’

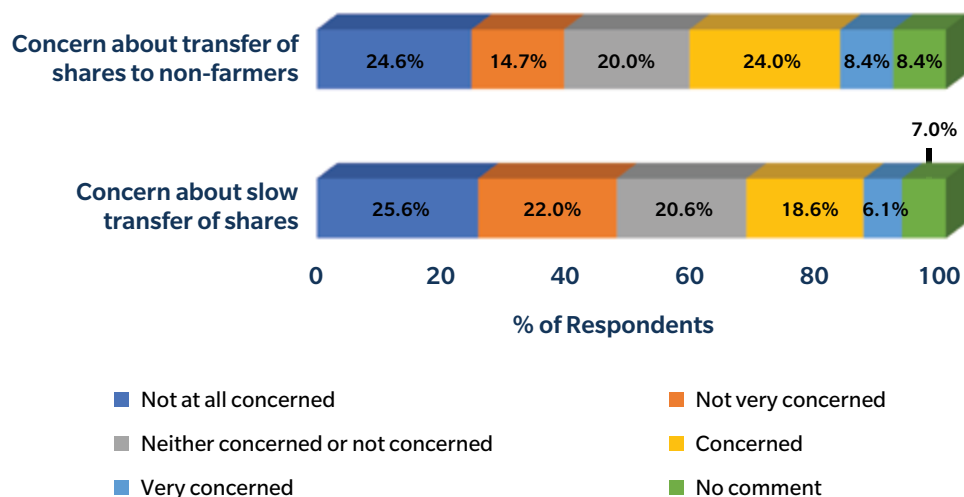


FIGURE 10 LEVEL OF CONCERN AMONG RESPONDENTS ABOUT THE SLOW TRANSFER OF SHARES AND TRANSFER OF SHARES TO NON-FARMERS (N=655)

‘the older generation continue to control the co-ops and its future with very little input from young farmers’

One quarter (24.7%) of respondents were concerned about the delayed or slow transfer of shares in agricultural co-operatives (Figure 10).

‘a lot of older farmers are not bothered to vote at meetings on important decisions e.g. mergers - these votes affect the next generation who may not have votes’

The most significant consequence identified by respondents of delayed or slow transfer of shares in agricultural co-operatives was the fact that slow transfer of shares results in young people not getting involved and boards were dominated by older farmers with a lack of new ideas and limited connection with the needs of young farmers. Other comments included that shares could become forgotten about by older farmers. Without shares and an opportunity to exercise their voice, younger farmers lose interest in co-operatives.

‘lack of youth and new ideas’

‘less likely to have loyalty and interest in the co-op’

‘older shareholders do not like change’

‘older shareholders have little incentive to invest in the future of the co-op’

2.9 ENCOURAGEMENT OF TRANSFER OF SHARES TO YOUNGER FARMERS

‘there should be an age limit on voting rights’

‘co-ops need to engage with farmers and educate them on what the co-op can do for them’

‘give older farmers incentives to pass on shares’

‘have more discussion about the transfer of shares’

Some 37% of respondents provided suggestions for actions which agricultural co-operatives could take to encourage the transfer of shares to younger active farmers. The most significant suggestions are presented in order of priority:

1. Provision of discounted/bonus shares to young farmers;
2. Incentives for older farmers to encourage the transfer of shares;
3. Educate young people (e.g. in agricultural colleges and other similar opportunities) about co-operatives and the transfer of shares;
4. More information/discussion/advice on the transfer of shares;
5. Provision of incentives (no specific suggestions on the nature of the incentives);

6. General encouragement of younger farmers to engage with co-operatives;
7. Reduce the cost of share transfer;
8. Reduce the tax burden on share transfer;
9. Make the process of share transfer easier/simpler;
10. Limit share ownership/voting rights to active farmers;
11. Provide financial incentives to encourage transfer of shares;
12. Attach discounts on purchases to share ownership;
13. Introduce upper age limit on share ownership/board membership/voting;
14. Provide more opportunities for younger farmers to get involved; and
15. Operate share transfer schemes.

‘create junior boards which allow them to overcome the barriers placed in their way of getting involved’

‘give share top-ups to younger farmers who receive shares from family members’

‘make the process as simple as possible, reduce the costs to a minimum’

‘offer benefits to young people to become shareholders - give bonus shares on transfer’

2.10 INTEREST IN PURCHASING SHARES IN AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES

Two thirds (65.5%) of respondents indicated that they were interested in purchasing shares in agricultural co-operatives within the next 5 years (Figure 11). Some 43.2% of respondents were interested in purchasing shares in Dairy Co-operatives and 18.3% in Co-operative Livestock Marts. Some 16.6% indicated that they were interested in purchasing shares in the Farm Relief Service. When specifically asked about purchasing shares in FRS in a subsequent question, one fifth (21.2%) said that they were interested and some 40.9% were possibly interested⁶.

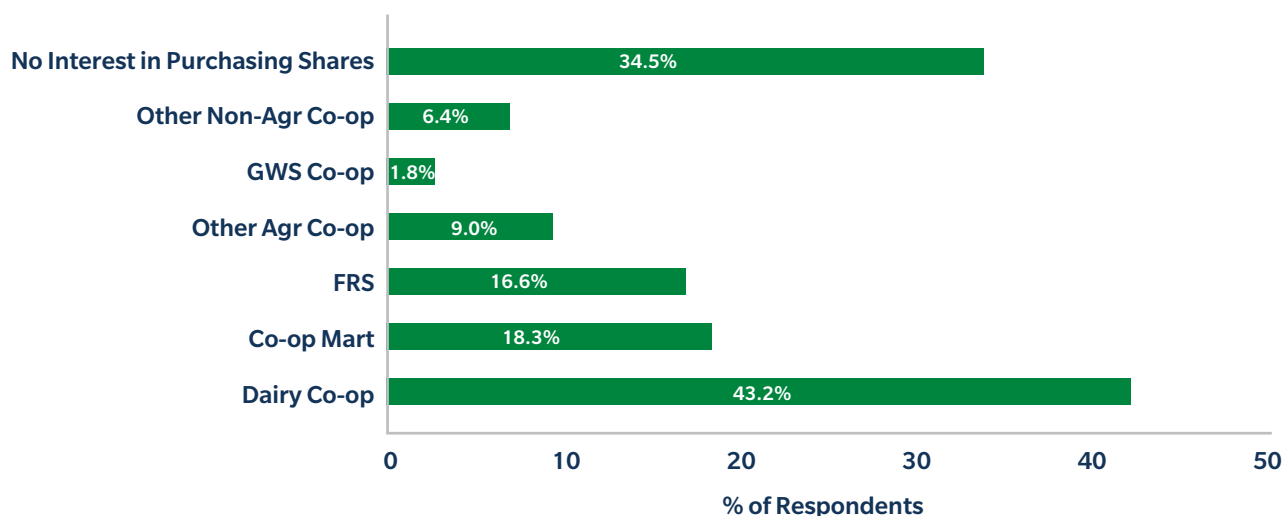


FIGURE 11 LEVEL OF INTEREST AMONG RESPONDENTS IN PURCHASING SHARE IN AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS (N=655)

Some of the factors which influenced the level of interest in the purchasing of shares in co-operatives in the next 5 years included:

DAIRY CO-OPERATIVE SHARES

- Males (45%) and females (32%) were interested;
- 61% of dairy farmers, there was a level of interest among other farmers: tillage farmers (32%); mixed farmers (28%); drystock farmers (26%); suckler farmers (23%);
- Increased with farm size - under 50 ha (35%) and over 100 ha (56%);

⁶ Proportion may be overstated due to the research being conducted by FRS.

- Increased with age - under 25 years (37%), 26-35 years (56%) and 35+ years (50%);
- 37% of students compared to 49% of others;

CO-OPERATIVE LIVESTOCK MARTS

- Sheep farmers (33%), suckler farmers (29%), drystock farmers (26%), mixed farmers (23%), tillage farmers (14%) and dairy farmers (13%);
- 23% of students compared to 14% of others;

NOT INTERESTED IN PURCHASING SHARES

- More likely to be female (48%) than male (32%); and
- Half of sheep farmers (48%), 40% of mixed and beef farmers, 28% of dairy farmers and 27% of tillage farmers.

2.11 KNOWLEDGE OF CO-OPERATIVE BOARD MEMBER

Over half (54.7%) of respondents stated that they knew a board member of a Dairy Co-operative while 44.6% knew a board member of a Co-operative Livestock Mart (Table 5). One in five (21.2%) respondents knew a board member of the Farm Relief Service.

CO-OPERATIVES	%
DAIRY CO-OPERATIVE	54.7
CO-OPERATIVE LIVESTOCK MART	44.6
OTHER AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVE	23.4
FRS/FARM RELIEF SERVICE	21.2
GROUP WATER SCHEME CO-OPERATIVE	15.7
OTHER NON-AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVE	15.1

**TABLE 5 EXTENT OF KNOWLEDGE AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS
OF BOARD MEMBERS OF CO-OPERATIVES (N=655)**

Some 57% of dairy farmers knew a board member of a Dairy Co-operative compared to 47% of mixed farmers, 36% of suckler farmers and 32% of tillage farmers.

Two out of five (41%) of farmers aged under 25 years knew a board member of a Dairy Co-operative compared to 70% of those aged between 26 and 35 years and 77% of those aged over 35 years. Half of dairy and suckler farmers knew a board member of a Co-operative Livestock Mart, while 40% of mixed, drystock and sheep farmers knew one. Similar to knowledge of Dairy Co-operative board members, the knowledge of Co-operative Livestock Mart board members increased with age (37% of those aged under 25 years, 51% of 26-35 year olds and 61% of those aged over 35 years).

With regard to the FRS, 30% of dairy and tillage farmers knew a board member (21% for drystock farmers, 15% of suckler farmers, 14% of mixed farmers). Some 15% of those aged under 25 years knew an FRS board member, while it was 38% of those aged over 35 years.

2.12 INTEREST IN FUTURE CO-OPERATIVE BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Some 44% of respondents were definitely/possibly interested in future membership of a Dairy Co-operative board, while one third (33.3%) were definitely/possibly interested in future membership of a Co-operative Livestock Mart board (Figure 12). Three out of ten (28.8%) respondents were potentially interested in becoming an FRS board member.

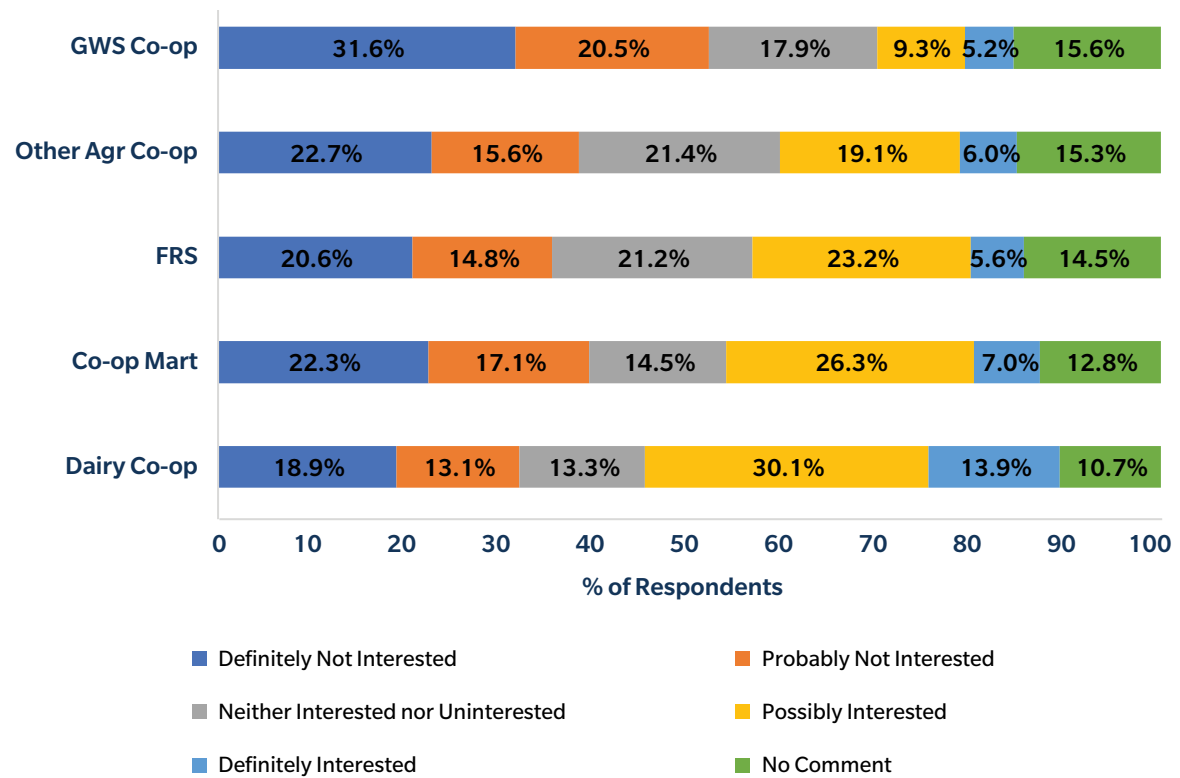


FIGURE 12 LEVEL OF INTEREST AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN FUTURE MEMBERSHIP OF CO-OPERATIVE BOARDS (N=655)

The proportion of different types of farmers interested/possibly interested in becoming a board member of a Dairy Co-operative included: dairy farmers (57%); mixed farmers (36%); drystock farmers (33%); suckler farmers (30%); tillage farmers (28%).

The proportion of different types of farmers interested/possibly interested in becoming a board member of a Co-operative Livestock Mart included: drystock farmers (51%); sheep farmers (46%); suckler farmers (44%); dairy farmers (27%); and tillage farmers (18%).

Some 38% of students were potentially interested in becoming a board member of a Dairy Co-operative compared to 49% of others. While for Co-operative Livestock Marts, 38% of students were interested in becoming a board member compared to 29% of others.

2.13 ENCOURAGING INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG FARMERS IN CO-OPERATIVES

‘next to impossible for a young farmer to beat a popular incumbent’

‘an election for a category of offices under the age of 40’

‘approach young farmers directly by phone, letters, neighbours’

Some 39% of respondents made suggestions for how young farmers could become more actively involved in co-operatives. The main suggestions included (in order of priority).

1. Increase awareness of co-operatives - provide more information on co-operatives, shareholding and benefits;
2. Financial incentives/perks;
3. Provision of training on co-operatives and involvement in co-operatives;
4. Establish young farmer boards in co-operatives;
5. Provision of opportunities to get young people involved/participate in co-operatives;
6. Provision of free/discounted shares to younger farmers;
7. Opportunities for employment/work experience in co-ops;
8. Information meetings/events/social activities for younger people;
9. Recruit/invite younger farmers to become involved; and
10. Teach more about co-operatives in agricultural college.

‘do not handpick those that suit the co-op agenda’
‘highlight the benefit of being a shareholder’
*‘get younger people to attend meetings, encourage them to stay coming
and promote them into a position’*

Several specific comments were made on the establishment of young farmer boards including:

- Election of a category of officers who are aged under 40 years (as it was commented that it was practically impossible for a younger farmer to win an election against an older long-established farmer);
- Should be a minimum number of younger farmers on all boards with a minimum of one seat for those aged under 35 years;
- A specific young farmer board could be a stepping stone onto the main board/committee;
- Should introduce quotas for different age categories: one seat for those under 35 years, one seat for those between 35 and 40 years, one seat for those between 40 and 45 years; and
- Young farmer board could provide a pool of possible replacements/candidates for the main board.

‘young people need to see that investing their time and money can be beneficial to their industry’
‘set up junior board which acts as a stepping stone’
*‘training and clear pathways to become involved - currently very hard for young people to get
elected at any local or regional level’*
‘young people do not know how to engage with co-ops’

2.14 OPENNESS OF CO-OPERATIVE BOARDS

‘too much local politics on boards which turns young people off’
‘young farmers, highly educated and experienced are not being listened to’

One quarter (24.9%) of respondents agreed that agricultural co-operative boards were ‘open and welcoming’ (8.1% were ‘totally open and welcoming’) to new people becoming involved (Figure 13). However, one third (34%) of respondents believed that agricultural co-operative boards were not ‘open and welcoming’ to new people becoming involved.

*‘young people feel as if their voices will not be listened to at these meetings, so a space must be created
for them to be heard’*
*‘often very hard to get anyone to listen to you at co-operative meetings, many farmers say
nothing even when they should speak up’*

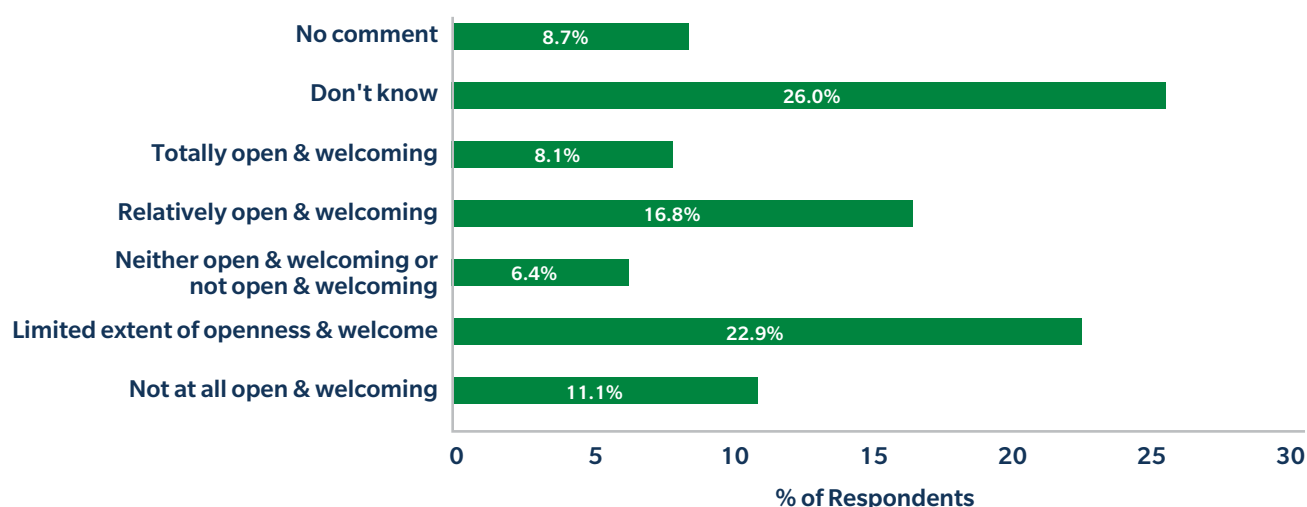


FIGURE 13 EXTENT TO WHICH BOARDS OF AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES ARE PERCEIVED TO BE OPEN AND WELCOMING (N=655)

While 24% of students considered that co-operative boards were not very open or welcoming, the proportion was 43% for others.

‘they voted for an old man with a few cattle instead of a young farmer like me’

‘an element of ‘wait your turn young fella’’

The most significant comments made about the extent to which agricultural co-operative boards are open and welcoming included (in order of priority):

1. Boards are closed shops - don't want anybody new coming in, controlling group;
2. Co-operatives are not seeking out new members - limited resources put into recruiting new members - co-operatives are not proactive;
3. Lack of transparency with boards - cronyism, jobs for the boys;
4. Fear of young people and new ideas;
5. Probably are welcoming but some are more open than others;
6. Older members do not want to step down, but they are a source of knowledge for young farmers;
7. Attending meetings can be intimidating for new/younger members;
8. Fear of change/slow to change;
9. Keep young people ‘waiting their turn’;
10. New members are often selected and hand-picked – not open to all;
11. Old and outdated views; and
12. Unwilling to relinquish control to younger farmers.

‘boards will not come looking for someone unless they show an interest’

‘generally, co-op boards do not want younger members as they feel threatened’

2.15 INTEREST IN CO-OPERATIVE TRAINING

Some 30.2% of respondents stated that they would be interested in a short information session/training on the role of co-operative board members, while a further 35.1% said that they would possibly be interested.

2.16 IMPORTANCE OF CO-OPERATIVE ATTRIBUTES

Respondents were requested to rank the attributes of co-operatives in order of priority to them, the ranking was as follows:

1. Farmer owned/controlled (57.1% ranked as No. 1);
2. Fair price on products produced (13.7%);
3. One person, one vote (3.2%);
4. Good governance (4.1%);
5. Member/shareholder focused (2.4%);
6. Co-operative ethos (2.7%);
7. Reinvestment of profits into business (1.1%); and
8. Return on shareholding (0.9%).

The ranking of the attributes of co-operatives identified by students and others is presented below:

STUDENTS

1. FARMER OWNED/CONTROLLED
2. FAIR PRICE ON PRODUCTS PRODUCED
3. ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE
4. REINVESTMENT OF PROFITS INTO BUSINESS
5. GOOD GOVERNANCE

OTHERS

1. FARMER OWNED/CONTROLLED
2. FAIR PRICE ON PRODUCTS PRODUCED
3. GOOD GOVERNANCE
4. MEMBER/SHAREHOLDER FOCUSED
5. ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE

6. MEMBER/SHAREHOLDER FOCUSED

7. RETURN ON SHAREHOLDING

8. CO-OPERATIVE ETHOS

6. CO-OPERATIVE ETHOS

7. REINVESTMENT OF PROFITS INTO BUSINESS

8. RETURN ON SHAREHOLDING

2.17 OTHER COMMENTS

Survey respondents were invited to make any further comments on their involvement and participation of younger people in agricultural co-operatives. Typically questions such as this at the end of a survey questionnaire deliver limited responses however, there was a significant level of response in this survey which indicates that young farmers were interested in sharing their views on agricultural co-operatives. The comments provide an insight into the thoughts of young farmers. However, many of the comments are negative which reflects the fact that those with a complaint/grievance are more likely to comment on questions such as this. The detailed responses are listed in Appendix 2.





RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

3 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

Following the presentation of the research findings, this section outlines key conclusions from the research.

INVOLVEMENT IN ORGANISATIONS

In general, except for sports/community/charity organisations, young farmers/those working in farming were slow to engage with organisations. When they did engage, there was only a minority who were actively involved and/or members of boards/committees. Young farmers need to be convinced about the relevance of various organisations/co-operatives to them. Agricultural organisations and co-operatives need to examine how they could convince young farmers about the importance and relevance of these organisations.

It is evident that as farmers get older, they were more likely to get involved in organisations and more actively engaged in the running of organisations. Females were less convinced about the benefits of co-operatives and less involved in them.

PERCEPTION OF AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES

Overall, young farmers perceived agricultural co-operatives as being important for both their own future and that of the industry. Therefore, they appreciated the potential role of co-operatives which provides the opportunity to inform and encourage them to get more involved.

ENGAGEMENT WITH CO-OPERATIVES

There was a high level of engagement with Co-operative Livestock Marts and Dairy Co-operatives which is to be expected as an outlet for milk and facilitating livestock trading.

SHARE OWNERSHIP

Except for Dairy Co-operatives, the level of share ownership among young farmers was very low, even when the age profile of the respondents was considered. Share ownership was particularly low among: those farming the smallest area; under 25 years of age; females; and students. However, even among the parents/older family members of respondents, the proportion who held shares was low.

BENEFITS TO SHARE OWNER

While young farmers, perceived that agricultural co-operatives were important to their future and that of the industry, they were not as certain that there were benefits associated with being a shareholder in a co-operative with which they traded. Many young farmers remain to be convinced about the benefit of being a shareholder. Dairy farmers were most likely to consider that there was a benefit to be a shareholder. As farmers got older, their appreciation for the benefits to be a shareholder increased which could be attributed to either more experience of co-operatives or more knowledge of the benefits.

SHARE TRANSFER

Given the low level of share ownership, it could be expected that there would be a low level of share transfer from parents/older family members. In most cases, respondents did not know whether shares had been transferred or not. Share ownership and transfer are typically not discussed within farm families and therefore, not a priority for the younger or older generation of farmers.

Following similar trends to share ownership, shares in Dairy Co-operatives were most likely to have been transferred, no doubt driven by the fact that milk suppliers were typically obliged to own a level of shares in their milk processor in order to supply milk.

The fact that only a minority of younger farmers owned shares in agricultural co-operatives or had the transfer of shares discussed with them further highlights the fact that share ownership and transfer is not seen as a priority by them.

The financial security provided by shares to the older generation may be delaying transfer and it will be difficult to address as it would provide uncertainty for the older generation.

There was also a significant level of perceived fear among the older generation relating to the transfer of shares - fear of family arguments, favouring members of the family, complicated and expensive process. These are all issues which could be addressed with information, advice and support.

It is interesting to note that young farmers were not unduly concerned about the transfer of shares to non-farmers or the slow rate of transfer or delayed transfer of shares. However, it was evident that the level of concern increased with age. The challenge is to increase the appreciation of the importance of share ownership at a younger age.

ENCOURAGING SHARE TRANSFER

Younger farmers believed that the primary approach to encouraging the transfer of shares was to provide incentives to both the older and younger generation to increase share mobility. However, education on co-operatives, shareholding and the importance of both was also important to increase the awareness of active engagement and shareholding in co-operatives and the timely involvement of younger people. While favoured by young farmers, the provision of incentives to encourage share transfer may not actually increase the appreciation for the role of co-operatives and the importance of an active membership.

PURCHASING OF SHARES

Younger farmers expressed an interest in purchasing shares in the future and it will be important to encourage them to become active shareholders. Agricultural co-operatives need to appeal, be attractive and relevant for young farmers for them to consider purchasing shares. However, it will also be important to promote the option of share purchase to them to ensure that they follow through on the purchase of shares. However, the indicated level of purchases may not actually occur unless young farmers are encouraged to purchase shares and are facilitated by a process which is straightforward.

KNOWLEDGE OF BOARD MEMBERS

There was a considerable level of awareness and knowledge of agricultural co-operative board members of which indicates that younger farmers were aware of the co-operative representation structures. However, it is likely that many would not be certain of the role of board members or how to get involved in roles themselves.

INTEREST IN FUTURE BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Given the low level of share ownership and the extent of involvement in local organisations, young farmers were quite favourable towards becoming involved in co-operative boards at some stage in the future. The findings confirm that there is a pool of young farmers who are willing to get involved in co-operatives in the future. The challenge is to foster and encourage that interest to a stage where younger farmers offer themselves for selection/election onto boards and committees.

It is also critically important that co-operatives are proactive in reaching out and inviting, encouraging young people to get involved in events/activities and to consider a role in the co-operative.

Building knowledge and awareness of co-operatives will be key to achieving a higher level of involvement in co-operatives by younger farmers. It was recognised that it was not always possible for younger farmers to get elected onto co-operative boards. Therefore, co-operatives should consider the provision of specific seats/positions for young farmers on their boards or the establishment of specific young farmer boards. However, the implementation of these proposals by co-operatives should only be considered if these roles have an element of responsibility, function and are not token initiatives to get younger farmers involved.

PERCEPTION OF CO-OPERATIVE BOARDS

There was scepticism among young farmers about the extent to which co-operative boards were open and welcoming. This perception will need to be addressed in order to encourage greater involvement by younger people in co-operatives. The extent of the comments provided by respondents highlights that it is a significant issue which needs to be addressed by co-operatives.

ATTRIBUTES OF CO-OPERATIVES

The attraction of co-operatives is the fact that farmers own and control them and have the power as a shareholder of having a vote on decisions. While the provision of a fair price on products is also important. Return on the actual shareholding is relatively unimportant to young farmers. However, the lack of appreciation for the importance of the co-operative ethos is a concern.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

YOUNG FARMERS

- Appreciate the importance of agricultural co-operatives;
- Are engaging with agricultural co-operatives on a regular basis;
- Have a low level of share ownership and have had limited shares transferred to them by parents/family members;
- Had limited discussion about the transfer of shares with parents/family members;
- But are interested in purchasing co-operative shares in the future;
- Appreciate the attributes of co-operatives but are not convinced about the benefits of being a shareholder of co-operatives which they trade/engage with;
- Believe that financial insecurity and fear are contributing to the delay in transferring shares;
- But are not unduly concerned about the slow/delayed transfer of shares or the transfer of shares to non-farmers;
- Believe that incentives and information are critical to encouraging share transfer;
- Are potentially interested in becoming involved in co-operative boards but will need to be encouraged;
- As there is a level of scepticism about the extent to which co-operative boards are open and welcoming.

A young man with a beard, wearing a red hoodie and a grey baseball cap, is smiling at the camera. He is standing in front of a blurred background that appears to be a farm or construction site, with a tractor and another person visible in the distance. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research was to determine the attitudes of young farmers to agricultural co-operatives and their level of current involvement. Taking account of the information collated in the research, some general and specific recommendations are made by the author in this section. However, it is suggested that the wider industry and each individual agricultural co-operative should review the findings, develop their own conclusions and specific actions relevant to their own situation.

CONSIDERATION OF FINDINGS BY CO-OPERATIVES

- There is a need to highlight the extent to which young farmers appreciate the role of co-operatives and are willing to get involved in the future.
- The survey findings should be reviewed by agricultural co-operatives to assess the extent to which they relate to them and assess if any of the critical comments could apply to them.
- Agricultural co-operatives should undertake a self-assessment of:
 - Their share register to determine the extent to which shares are active or dormant;
 - The extent of young farmer shareholding;
 - The extent of young farmers involvement in committees and boards;
 - Impact of the lack of young farmer involvement in the co-operative;
 - The extent of involvement of female farmers;
 - The rate of share transfer;
 - Specific barriers to or approaches which have encouraged transfer of shares;
 - The extent and involvement of non-farmer shareholders;
 - Impact of increase in non-farmer shareholders;
 - Extent to which they have taken action to encourage and support young farmer shareholding and active involvement;
 - Extent to which committees and boards are *'open and welcoming'*;
 - Extent to which they proactively communicate and engage with shareholders, potential shareholders and the wider farming community; and
 - Any specific initiatives/approaches undertaken in the past to encourage young farmer involvement and the success of those actions.
- Agricultural co-operatives need to determine the extent to which there are tangible benefits to being a shareholder and promote this to young farmers. They need to ask the question - why should a young farmer bother purchasing shares in their co-operative?

ADVICE AND INFORMATION

- Wider industry and individual co-operatives need to inform, advise and convince young farmers about the importance of holding shares in co-operatives and getting actively involved. Implementation & enforcement of trading rules (e.g. requirement to hold shares in order to trade with a co-operative) may encourage increased shareholding among young farmers but caution needs to be taken so that it does not become a barrier to or impede trading/engagement.
- A programme of information, advice and guidance on the transfer of co-operative shares should be developed with elements specifically focused on older (existing) shareholders and younger (potential future shareholders) farmers. Particular efforts need to be undertaken to allay the fears of older farmers regarding share transfer.
 - For older shareholders there is a need to focus on the importance of a vibrant co-operative and an active membership, the importance of share transfer, the consequences of delayed transfer of shares, the impact of transferring to non-farmers, the process for transferring shares and the ease of doing so.
 - For younger farmers (potential shareholders) there is a need to focus on the importance of a vibrant co-operative and an active membership, the importance of share transfer, the options for acquiring shares, the process for acquiring/transferring shares and the ease of doing so.
- There is a need for a comprehensive programme of information, advice, education and training on the importance of active involvement in co-operatives. This could be rolled out to co-operative members, within the community, in schools, third level colleges, Macra na Feirme and other farm organisations.

ENCOURAGING INVOLVEMENT IN CO-OPERATIVES

- There is a need for agricultural co-operatives to consider how they can encourage those farmers who are trading/engaging with them to become shareholders and more actively involved. They should also consider how to increase the level of involvement of existing shareholders, encouraging them to move from being '*members in name only*' to actively involved and serving on committees/boards. This should involve the exploration and implementation of innovative approaches if current efforts are considered as insufficient.

ENCOURAGING TRANSFER & PURCHASE OF SHARES

- The proposals identified in the research for encouraging the transfer of shares (including: discounted/bonus shares; incentives; education; information/advice; reducing cost of transfer; making process of transfer simpler) should be considered by agricultural co-operatives and specific actions developed if appropriate.
- Agricultural co-operatives need to review the process for transferring shares and ensure that it is clear and uncomplicated and communicate this to existing and potential shareholders.
- There is a need to review the process in place in agricultural co-operatives for the purchase of shares to ensure that appropriate opportunities exist for younger farmers to purchase shares (accepting that this may not be straightforward for co-operatives as rules may govern and limit the allocation of new shares).

ENCOURAGING INVOLVEMENT IN CO-OPERATIVE BOARDS

- The potential interest among young farmers to get involved in boards and committees should be built upon. Efforts need to be undertaken to ensure that all those potentially interested are supported and encouraged to get involved. The proposals identified in the research for encouraging the involvement of younger farmers (including: increasing awareness of co-operatives; financial incentives; training; young farmer boards; opportunities to get involved; discounted shares; provision of information) should be considered by agricultural co-operatives and specific actions developed if appropriate.
- The current initiatives to engage new members in committees/boards should be reviewed by individual co-operatives and further approaches developed if necessary. Care should be taken to ensure the focus is on actively encouraging the involvement of younger farmers rather than forcing or limiting the involvement of older farmers. A balance of youth and experience is important in all co-operatives. In particular the concept of specific young farmer positions or young farmer boards should be considered.
- Agricultural co-operatives need to specifically examine the extent to which their board is '*open and welcoming*' to new members. In doing so, they should consider the areas where potentially there could be challenges for new members and develop appropriate actions.

PROMOTION OF CO-OPERATIVES

- Innovative and effective approaches to demonstrate the role, function and importance of agricultural co-operatives should be developed. Particular focus should be placed on agricultural, community and social activities/events which engage young farmers. ICOS could potentially play a role in coordinating the public engagement and promotion of the importance of active involvement in agricultural co-operatives at large scale agricultural events.

FURTHER RESEARCH

- Further research should be considered on this issue specifically in identifying and documenting successful initiatives undertaken by agricultural co-operatives which have encouraged young farmers to become shareholders and involved in boards/committees.



APPENDIX 1

NATIONAL CO-OP FARM RELIEF SERVICES

RESEARCH SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE



1. What is your current occupational status? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Are engaging with agricultural co-operatives on a regular basis;
- ☐ Farming own land independently (owned and/or rented/leased)
- ☐ Farming in partnership/collaborative arrangement
- ☐ Working on family farm (full or part time)
- ☐ Working on other farm (full or part time)
- ☐ Working in agricultural related job (full or part time)
- ☐ Working in non-agricultural related job (full or part-time)
- ☐ Working in the home/carer (full or part-time)
- ☐ Agricultural student (full or part-time)
- ☐ Non-agricultural student (full or part-time)
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Other - please specify

2. If farming, what is your main farm enterprise? (select only one)

- ☐ Dairy
- ☐ Beef - Suckling
- ☐ Beef - Drystock
- ☐ Sheep
- ☐ Tillage
- ☐ Mixed Farming
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Not Farming

3. If farming, how many hectares are you currently farming (owned and/or rented/leased)?

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Up to 30 ha | <input type="radio"/> 31-50 ha | <input type="radio"/> 51-75 ha |
| <input type="radio"/> 76-100 ha | <input type="radio"/> 100 ha or more | |

4. What proportion of your total income comes from farming?

- ☐ Less than 25% ☐ 26-50%
- ☐ 51-75% ☐ 75% or more

5. Are you?

- ☐ Female ☐ Male

6. What age category are you in?

- ☐ 18-25 yrs ☐ 26-30 yrs ☐ 31-35 yrs
- ☐ 36-40 yrs ☐ 41-45 yrs ☐ 46+ yrs

7. What level of formal agricultural education and training have you completed? (select all that apply)

- ☐ No formal agricultural education/training
- ☐ Level 5/6 - Cert in Agriculture/Green Cert
- ☐ Level 7 - Diploma or Degree
- ☐ Level 8+ - Honours Degree or Higher
- ☐ Short Courses
- ☐ Currently Undertaking

8. To what extent are you currently involved in the following organisations?

ORGANISATION	OFFICE HOLDER	ACTIVELY INVOLVED	LOW LEVEL INVOLVEMENT	MEMBER IN NAME ONLY	WORKING FOR	NOT INVOLVED
FRS/Farm Relief Service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Agricultural Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Non-Agricultural Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group Water Scheme Co-op	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Macra na Feirme	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
IFA/ICMSA/ICSA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports Club/ Community/Charity Organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pedigree Breed Society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Agr Related Organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. How important are agricultural co-operatives (dairy, livestock marts, FRS/Farm Relief Service etc.)?

	NO IMPORTANCE	NOT VERY IMPORTANT	NEITHER IMPORTANT NOR UNIMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT
For the future of Irish farming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
For your own future in farming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. To what extent do you currently trade/engage with the following co-operatives?

	WEEKLY	MONTHLY	FEW TIMES PER YEAR	NEVER
Dairy Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-operative Livestock Mart	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FRS/Farm Relief Service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group Water Scheme Co-op	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Agricultural Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Non-Agricultural Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Do you own shares in any of the following co-operatives?

	YES	DON'T KNOW	DON'T KNOW
Dairy Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-operative Livestock Mart	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FRS/Farm Relief Service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group Water Scheme Co-op	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Agricultural Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Non-Agricultural Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Do your parents/other family members own shares in any of the following co-operatives?

	YES	DON'T KNOW	DON'T KNOW
Dairy Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-operative Livestock Mart	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FRS/Farm Relief Service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group Water Scheme Co-op	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Agricultural Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Non-Agricultural Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Is there any benefit to you (your business) to be a shareholder in the co-operatives you trade/engage with?

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Possibly

☐

Don't Know

Please explain your answer:

14. Is there any drawback to you (your business) from not being a shareholder in the co-operatives you trade/engage with?

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Possibly

☐

Don't Know

Please explain your answer:

15. To date, have your parents/other family members transferred any shares in any co-operative to? (select all that apply)

☐

You

☐

Other family members

☐

You and other family members

☐

Nobody

☐

Don't know

16. If shares have been transferred, what shares? (select all that apply)

☐

Dairy Co-operative

☐

Co-operative Livestock Mart

☐

FRS/Farm Relief Service

☐

Other Agricultural Co-operatives

☐

Group Water Scheme Co-op

☐

Other Non-Agricultural Co-operatives

17. To date, have your parents/older family members discussed the transfer of any shares in any co-operative to you or other family member?

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Don't Know

18. What are parents/older farmers delaying the transfer of co-operative shares to younger farmers/family members? (select all that apply)

☐

Financial security - valuable shares

☐

Not bothered

☐

Shares not valuable

☐

Young people not interested

☐

Shares forgotten about

☐

Fears of favouring one family member

☐

Fear of family argument

☐

Complicated process

☐

Expensive process

☐

Don't know

☐

Other

☐

If other, please specify

19. To what extent are you concerned about the delayed or slow transfer of agricultural co-operative shares from the older generation?

☐

Not at all concerned

☐

Not very concerned

☐

Neither concerned or not concerned

☐

Concerned

☐

Very concerned

What consequences do you see to delayed or slow transfer of shares in agricultural co-operatives?

20. To what extent are you concerned about the transfer/potential transfer of agricultural co-operative shares to non-farmers (including non-farming family members)?

- ☐ Not at all concerned
- ☐ Not very concerned
- ☐ Neither concerned or not concerned
- ☐ Concerned
- ☐ Very concerned

What consequences do you see to the transfer of shares in agricultural co-operatives to non-farmers?

21. What could agricultural co-operatives do to encourage the transfer of shares to younger active farmers?

22. Are you interested in purchasing shares (including addition shares if already owned) in any of these co-operatives over the next 5 years? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Dairy Co-operative
- ☐ Co-operative Livestock Mart
- ☐ FRS/Farm Relief Service
- ☐ Other Agricultural Co-operative
- ☐ Group Water Scheme Co-op
- ☐ Other Non-Agricultural Co-operative
- ☐ Not interested in purchasing any shares

23. Do you know any board member of any of the following co-operatives?

	YES	NO
Dairy Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-operative Livestock Mart	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FRS/Farm Relief Service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group Water Scheme Co-op	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Agricultural Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Non-Agricultural Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

24. How interested would you be to become a board member of a local co-operative in the future?

	DEFINITELY NOT INTERESTED	PROBABLY NOT INTERESTED	NEITHER INTERESTED NOR UNINTERESTED	POSSIBLY INTERESTED	DEFINITELY INTERESTED
Dairy Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-operative Livestock Mart	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FRS/Farm Relief Service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group Water Scheme Co-op	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Agricultural Co-operative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25. How could young people be encouraged to become more actively involved in agricultural co-operatives?

26. To what extent do you perceive the boards of Agricultural Co-operatives to be open and welcoming to new people becoming involved?

- ☐ Not at all open and welcoming
- ☐ Limited extent of openness and welcoming
- ☐ Neither open and welcoming or not open and welcoming
- ☐ Relatively open and welcoming
- ☐ Totally open and welcoming
- ☐ Don't know

Please comment on your answer:

27. Would you be interested in attending a short information session/training on the role of Co-op board members?

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Possibly

Please comment:

28. If you are not a shareholder in the FRS/Farm Relief Service, would you be interested in becoming a shareholder?

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Possibly

29. Please rank the following attributes of co-operatives in order of importance to you (1=most important to 8=least important):

Rank the following items from 1 to 8

☐

Dairy Farmer owned/controlled

☐

One person one vote

☐

Fair price on products produced

☐

Member/shareholder focused

☐

Return on shareholding

☐

Good governance

☐

Co-operative ethos

☐

Reinvestment of profits into business

30. Have you any further comments on the involvement and participation of younger people in agricultural co-operatives?

THANK YOU

A photograph of a man with short, light-colored hair, smiling and holding a large black plastic crate filled with ripe, yellow-orange tomatoes. He is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved plaid shirt and dark trousers. He stands in a lush green field, possibly a tomato field, with rolling hills and a clear sky in the background. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter.

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 2

Survey respondents were invited to make any further comments on their involvement and participation of younger people in agricultural co-operatives. Typically questions such as this at the end of a survey questionnaire deliver limited responses however, there was a significant level of response in this survey which indicates that young farmers were interested in sharing their views on agricultural co-operatives. The comments provide an insight into the thoughts of young farmers. However, many of the comments are negative which reflects the fact that those with a complaint/grievance are more likely to comment on questions such as this. The comments listed below are individual responses from those who replied to the survey and should not be taken as reflecting the views of the overall respondents.

- Board members can lack influence - executives still make the decisions - board members are powerless;
- Dairy processors are no longer co-operatives but large companies;
- As a young farmer, it is difficult to see any advantage of co-operatives to farmers;
- There needs to be a balance between youth and experience - there is a need for freshness on boards/committees, but experience is also important. Older people have contributed a lot, while younger people can only see what is ahead of them and not fully appreciate what the older people have achieved;
- Without young blood, co-ops will be dead within a generation;
- Worth examining what international co-operatives have done to get young people involved;
- Young farmers do not know how to get involved in co-operatives or how to purchase shares;
- Vitally important that co-ops attract and get young people involved;
- Many positive progressive young farmers do not engage in agricultural politics to the same extent as their predecessors and are not getting involved in co-op boards;
- Decisions made by co-ops today will impact on shareholders for 10-15 years in the future, when most of the current board members will no longer be farming;
- There is a strong disconnection and misunderstanding of the role of co-ops and how they operate compared to private companies;
- If young people don't get actively involved in co-ops soon, then we could end up with very few co-ops;
- Many young people are not supported or encouraged to be decision makers and as a result, they become cynical and negative about co-ops;
- Night time meetings do not suit many younger farmers with children - family time is important and will not easily give up this time. But time spent attending day-time meetings will need to be compensated for;
- Most young farmers are too busy running their own farm businesses to get involved in co-ops and don't see the value of their co-op to them;
- Young farmers are extremely busy, learning how to run their own business, possibly expand the business and are at a stage in their life where family and financial pressures are at their greatest. Unless they see a good return for their time spent, they will avoid meetings;
- Co-op boards/committees can be intimidating for young people- discouraged from asking questions at meetings;
- In order to encourage young people to become involved, they need to be provided with information on how the co-op operates, let them see how other co-ops operate and ask them for their opinion - too often the contributions of younger members are brushed off as the voice of inexperience;
- Need to identify young people with a genuine interest in the co-op and support and encourage them to get involved - invest in them. Expecting intelligent and ambitious young farmers to sit and wait their turn is not working, the people who end up on boards are those who like going to meetings, not necessarily the right people and then they don't rock the boat when selected;
- Young people have better things to be doing than unpaid work for the greater good of a co-op;
- Young people need to see how co-ops can benefit them;
- Young people think that they are too busy inside the farm gate to be bothered about outside the farm gate;
- Co-ops need to actively meet and connect with younger farmers - should create a national consultative forum between farm organisations and co-ops;
- Important to highlight the benefits and ethos of co-ops - by doing so, young people should be attracted into engaging with co-ops;
- Co-ops need to reach out and ask young people to get involved;
- Co-ops must attract young farmers to get involved or else, the co-ops have no future;
- Need older people as well to bring a wealth of maturity and stability to the table;

- More training should be provided for those who want to take on a role in a co-op;
- There needs to be a culture of change regarding the questioning of co-op board members - many of them believe that they are above questioning;
- There should be equal opportunities for young farmers to invest in their farms and their co-op(purchase shares);
- Link between farm gate price and strong co-ops has be continually demonstrated; and
- Active recruitment needs to be undertaken by committee and board members.





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