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NEWBIE Survey: report on closed-text responses

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New Entrant network

Business models for Innovation, entrepreneurship and resilience in European Agriculture

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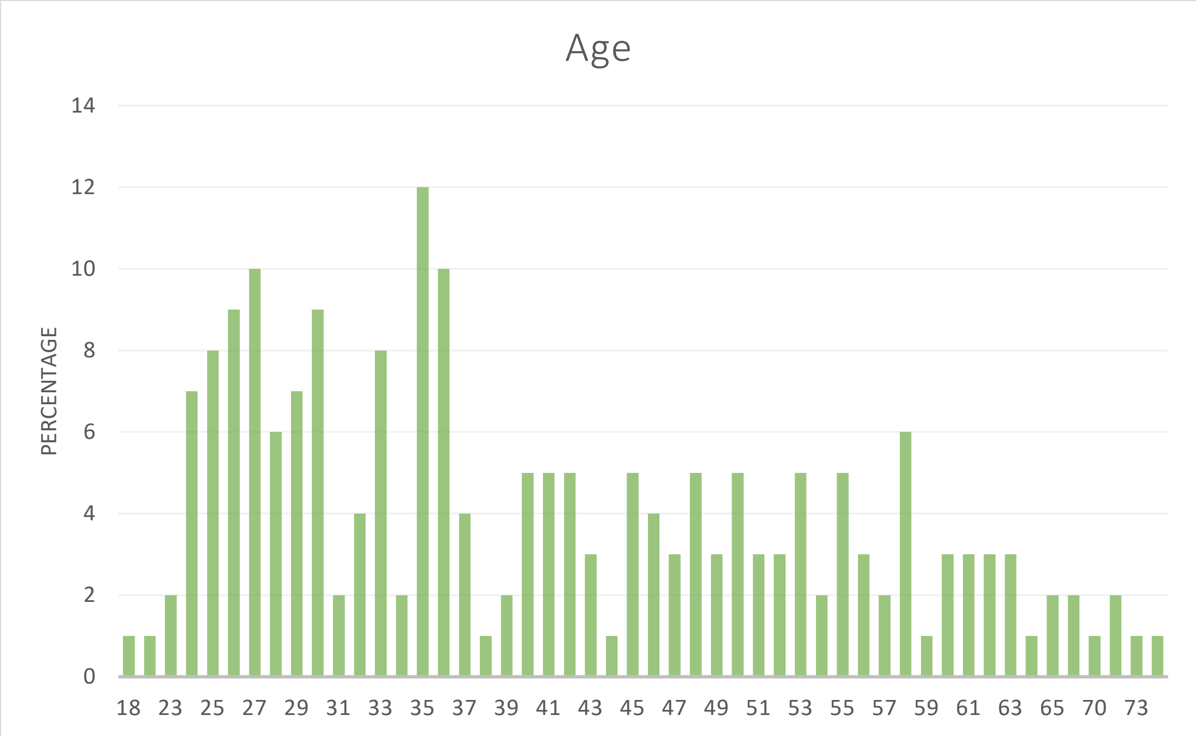
1. What is Newbie?

The Newbie project refers to the New Entrant netWork: Business models for Innovation, entrepreneurship, and resilience in European agriculture. This project is funded by EU Horizon 2020 and is a four-year project running between 2018 and 2021. The Newbie project consists of 10 partners from nine countries working together to create a network of new entrant farmers as well as creating innovative business models for future new entrant farmers. The main aim of the Newbie network is to increase innovation, entrepreneurship, and resilience in the European farming sector by enabling new entrants to successfully establish sustainable farm businesses in Europe. New entrants are defined by the NEWBIE network as anyone who starts a new farm business or becomes involved in an existing farm business. They include farmers with a wide range of ages, agricultural experience and resource access. The NEWBIE network offers a unique platform by bringing together new entrants, successors, advisors, researchers, important regional and national actors, and relevant stakeholders in national networks. Activities undertaken within the NEWBIE network(s) have included international exchanges, awards for new entrant farms, discussion circles, new entrant storytelling videos and a range of additional toolkits and learning materials.

2. Newbie survey

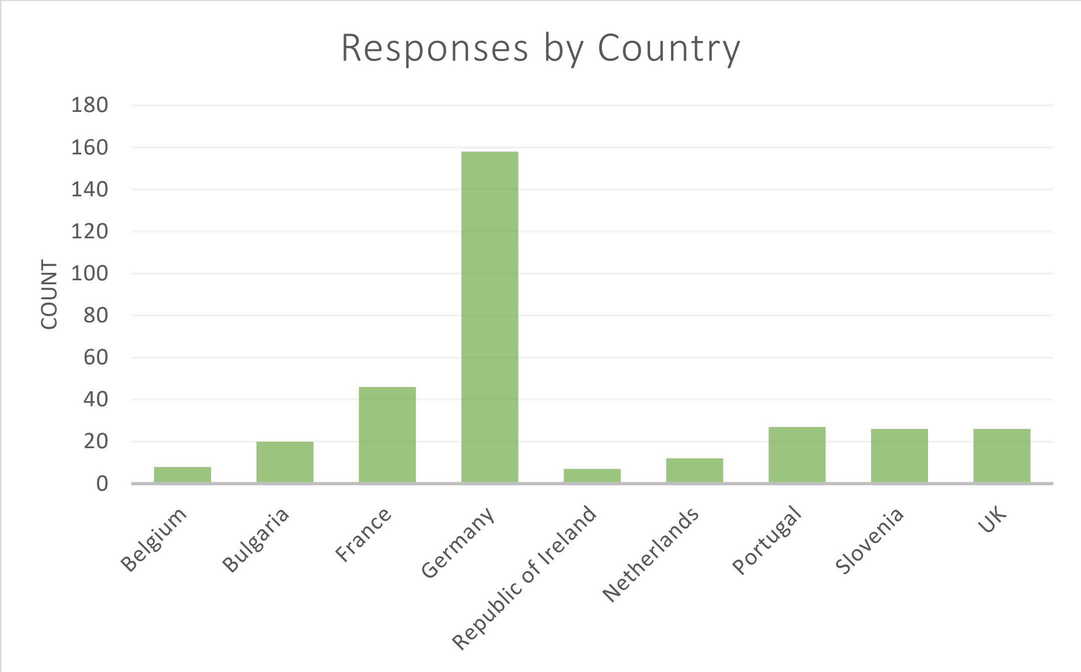
The aim of this survey was to gather information on the specific issues and barriers that new entrants face, as well as the potential support mechanisms that can help to reduce some of these barriers. The survey questions were devised by researchers at James Hutton Institute (NEWBIE UK partner) and University of Soest (one of the two German partners). The survey was distributed online across the existing Newbie networks by all 10 partners. Following this, the survey was also distributed across additional farming networks by Newbie partners to maximise reach. The survey was open to anyone involved in farming (i.e., all farmers, advisors and academics). The survey was produced and distributed using Qualtrics (online survey software) and was distributed in the national language of the member countries. The results include both closed response questions and open-ended questions. The closed response answers were analysed using SPSS to better understand the general responses as well as differences across countries and roles in farming. The open-ended questions were translated into English by the relevant Newbie partners before being analysed using NVivo. 364 responses were recorded, however, after removing incomplete responses the final sample size was 352 participants.

The number of responses varied across questions as some were left unanswered or only displayed based on previous answers. There was a relatively equal gender composition amongst participants (53% female and 43% male) and participants were relatively young as seen in the graph below.



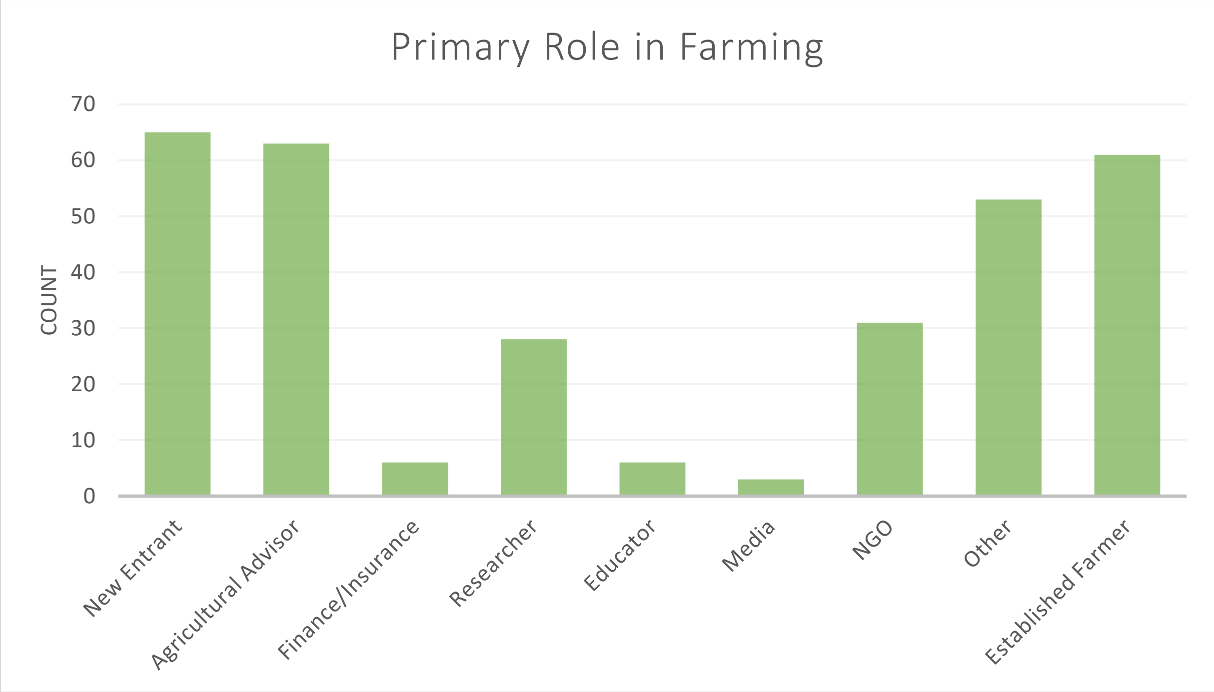
3. Country

The survey was distributed around all nine Newbie member countries. The distribution of responses by country is shown below. Germany received by far the largest number of responses with 158 participants. 46 respondents were from France, 27 were from Portugal and 26 respondents came from Slovenia and the UK respectively. Bulgaria had 20 respondents and the Netherlands had 12. The lowest number of responses came from Belgium (eight) and the Republic of Ireland (seven). As a result of the unequal samples from each country, these differences were controlled for during analysis, to allow for country comparisons.

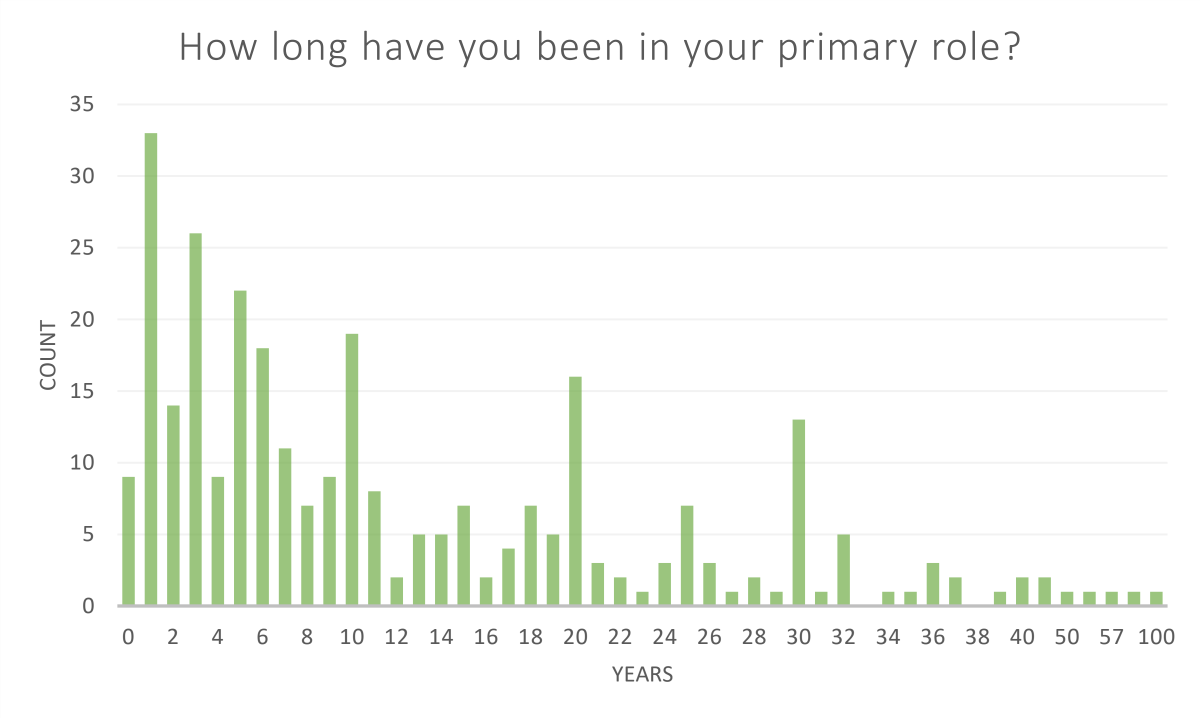


4. Primary Role

The majority of the participants identified themselves as farmers, either new entrants (65) or established (61). 63 respondents were agricultural advisors, 31 were members of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and 28 were researchers. Six participants were involved in finance/insurance, six in education and only three in the media. 53 respondents identified their primary role as ‘other’. ‘Other’ roles included policymakers and people who had previously worked on farms. The bar chart below illustrates the range of farming roles held by participants.



To highlight differences between roles, respondents were separated into three cohorts based on their primary roles: new entrants, established farmers and supporters of new entrants. Supporters of new entrants included all other agricultural roles. These cohorts allowed comparisons to be made between the responses of these groups and indicate how role in farming may impact participants' views on new entrants and new entrant support. As shown in the bar chart below, the majority of participants had been in their role for under 10 years. This may be due to the high number of new entrant respondents who may have only entered farming in recent years. When comparing new entrants and established farmers, respondents who identified as established farmers were much more likely to have been in their role for 10 years or more whereas respondents who identified as new entrants tended to report being involved in farming for less than five years.

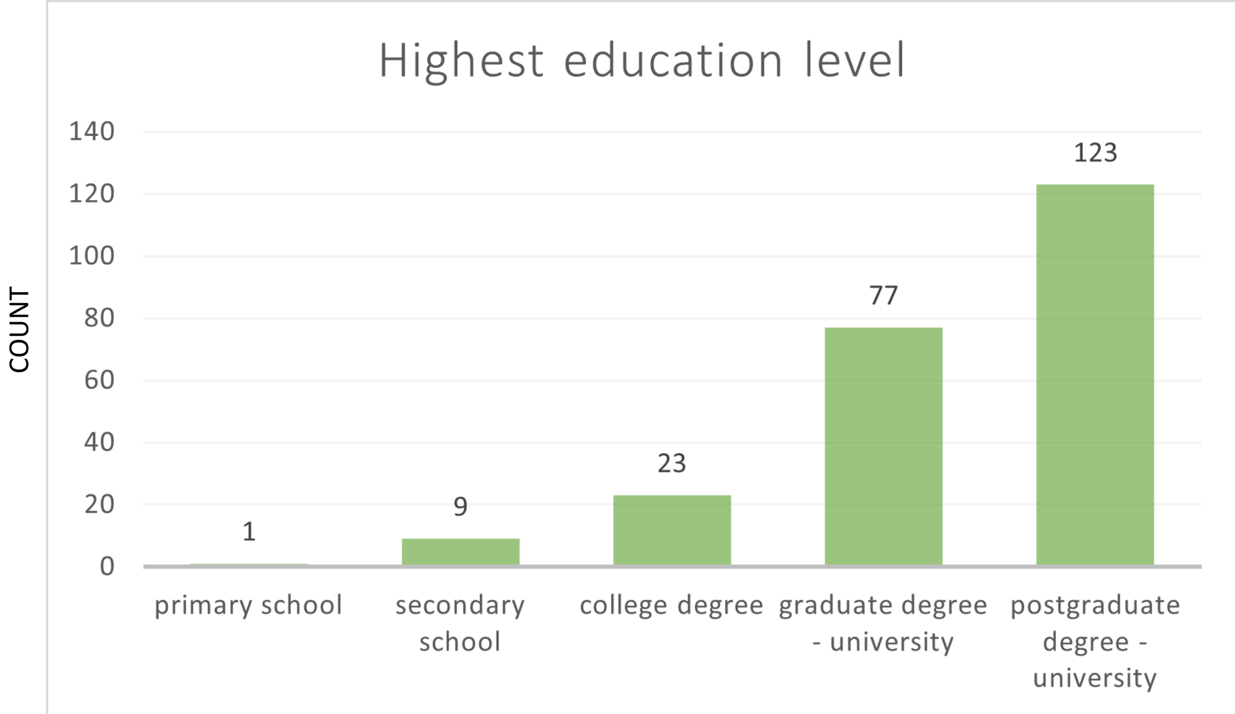


5. Secondary role

When asked about a secondary role in farming, 16% of participants reported no secondary role. 14.9% identified their secondary role as established farmer and 13.5% as new entrant farmer. 12% were agricultural advisors and 10.6% had a secondary role in education. 6% reported research as a secondary role and 5.4% were involved with NGOs. Only 2.9% and 1.7% identified a secondary role in finance/insurance and media respectively. 16.9% reported their secondary role in farming as 'other'. Examples of these include farming students, contractors and living/helping on a farm. For the purposes of analysis, the primary role was used as the key indicator of the respondent's role in farming. Despite this, it is interesting to note that a significant number of participants in the 'supporters of new entrants' category identified as having a secondary role as a farmer.

6. Education

The sample was highly educated in comparison to the general population, with a relatively high proportion of participants having a postgraduate qualification. 64.2% of those with a qualification had carried out this qualification in agriculture. Respondents who identified as new entrants were much more likely to have a degree, or a postgraduate degree compared to respondents who identified as established farmers, perhaps due to many new entrants reporting previous professions. New entrant respondents were also more likely to have a qualification related to agriculture compared to established farmers. Respondents in the supporters of new entrants cohort were the most educated cohort and the most likely to have a qualification in agriculture.

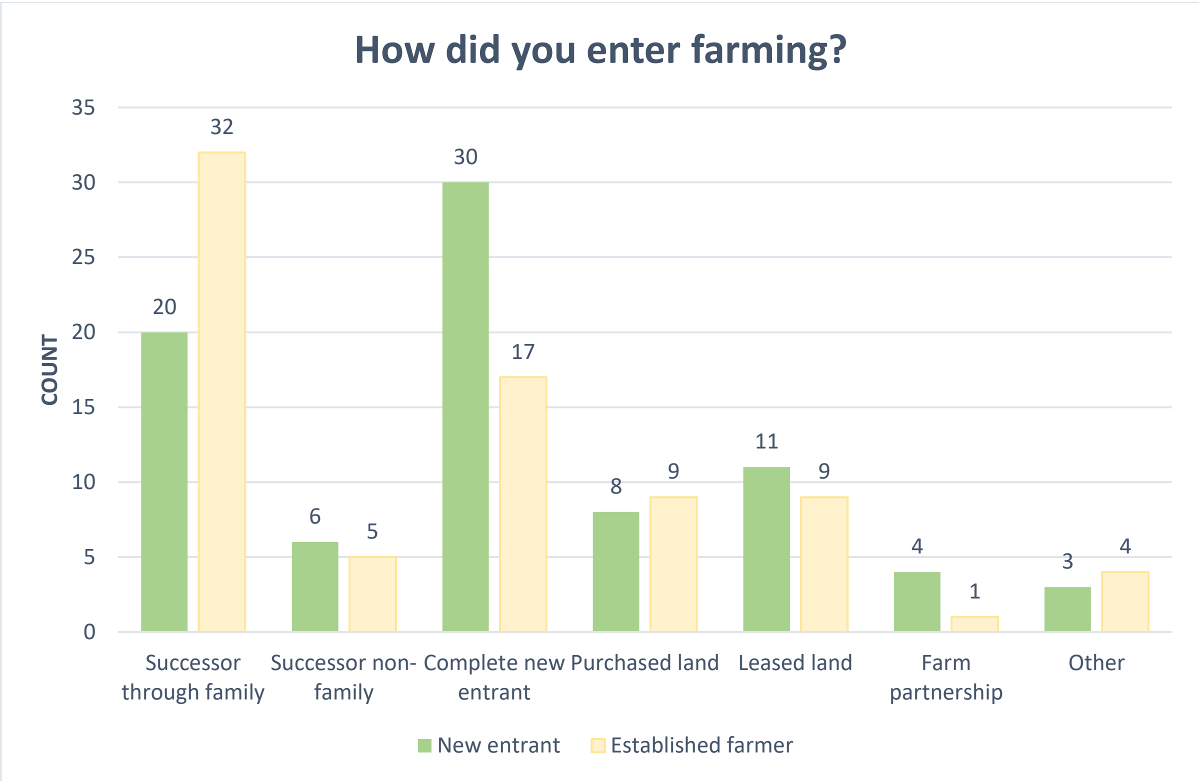


7. Previous Profession

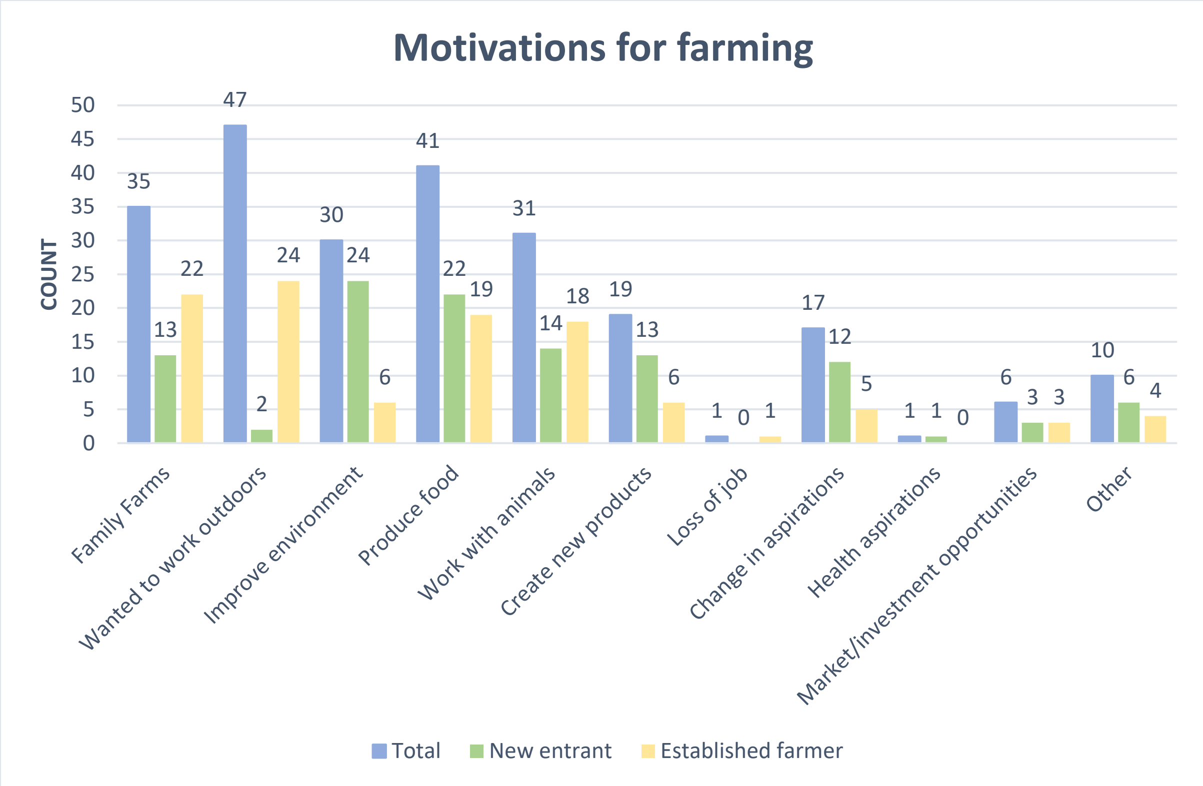
Participants who identified themselves as farmers were asked if they had had a previous profession prior to entering the farming sector. The responses were mixed, with 59 reporting ‘yes’ and 53 ‘no’. Responses were analysed to compare new entrant and established farmer respondents. 61% of those who identified as new entrants reported a prior profession compared to only 43.4% of those who identified as established farmers ($p<0.05$). This finding is perhaps typical of new entrants, who are less likely to have come from a farming background and therefore more likely to have a previous profession outside of agriculture (Hopkins et al, 2020; Sutherland et al, 2015) compared to established farmers.

8. How did you enter farming?

Self-identified farmers were asked how they entered farming. The most common response was successor through family connections (32.7%). 29.6% of the farmers reported entering farming as a complete new entrant. 12.6% entered through leased land, 10.7% through purchased land and a further 9.6% were successors through non-family connections. Only 3.1% reported entering through farm partnerships and 4.4% chose ‘other’. The graph below shows the differences in how participants entered farming between respondents who identified as new entrants and established farmers. As expected, new entrant respondents were more likely to report entering farming as a complete new entrant and less likely to be a family successor. Despite this, a significant number of new entrant respondents did report entering through succession. New entrant respondents were slightly more likely to have entered through leased land or a farm partnership compared to established farmer respondents.

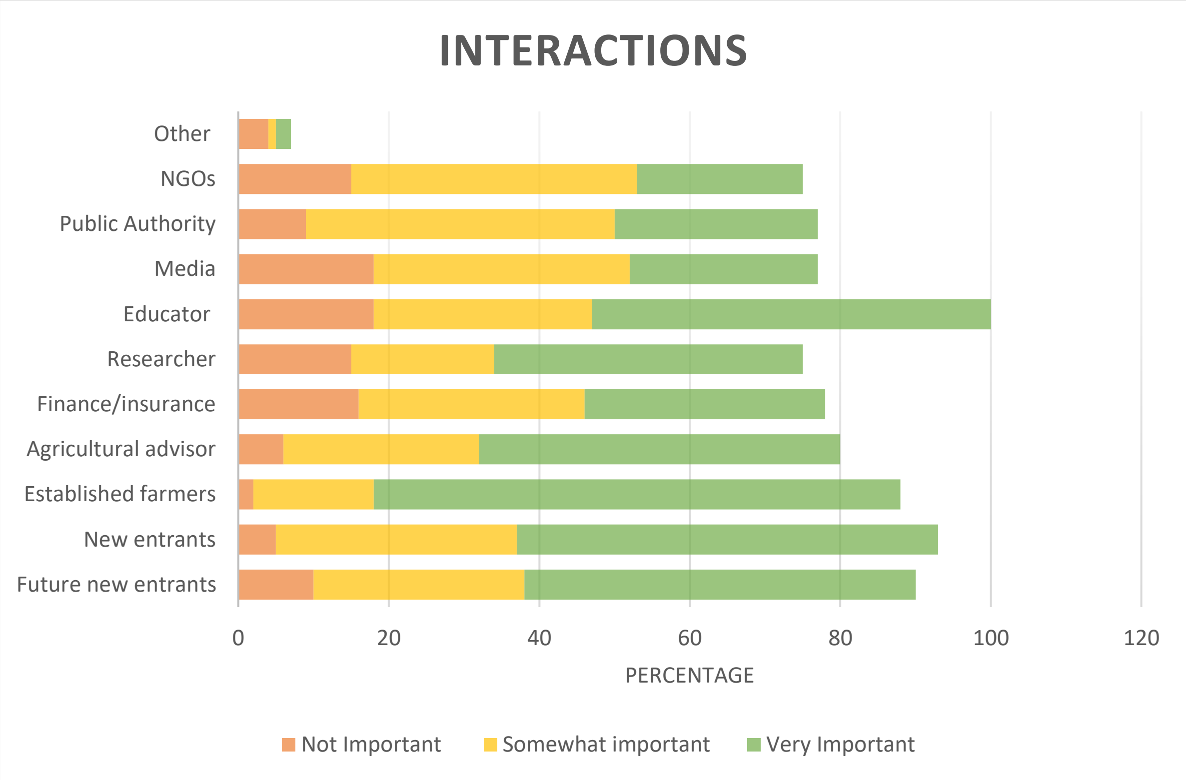


9. Motivation for farming



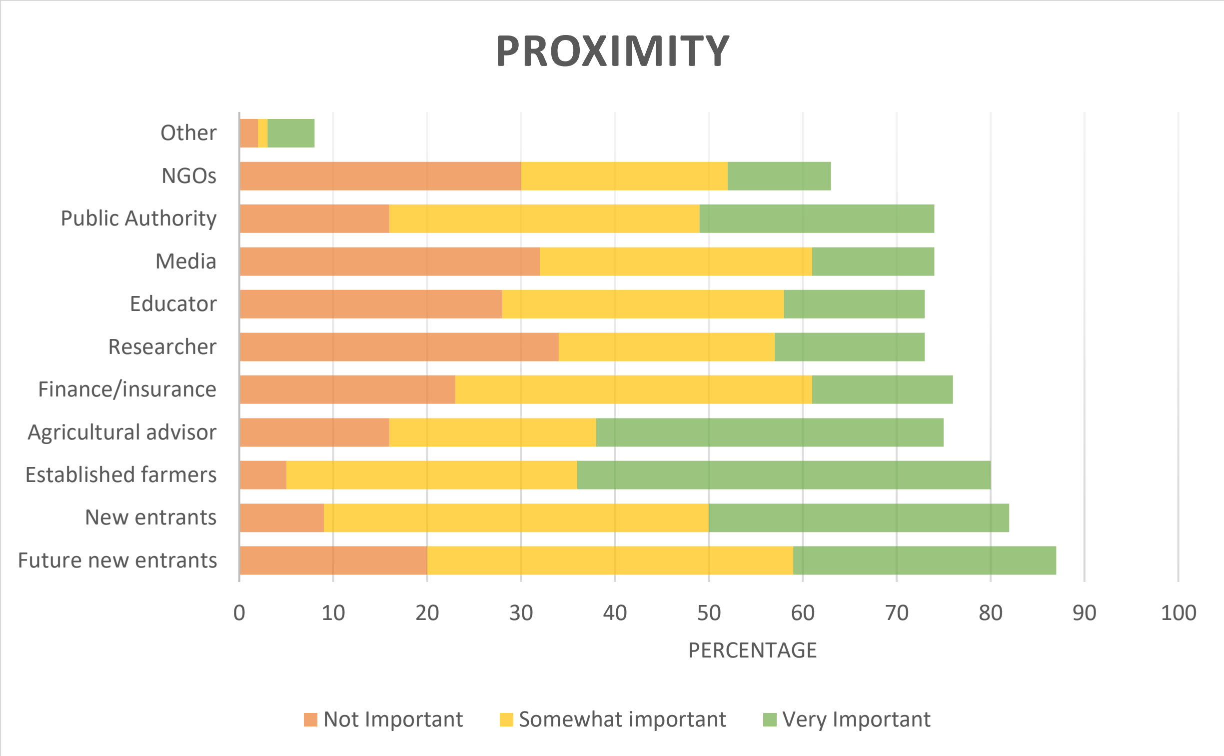
When asked their main motivation for farming, the most common answer amongst participants was a desire to work outdoors. The least common motivations were loss of job and health aspirations. The graph above shows the total responses to this question as well as differences between respondents who identified as new entrants and established farmers. Respondents who identified as established farmers were more likely than those who identified as new entrants to be motivated by their family farming. This supports the earlier finding that established farmers are more likely to have entered farming through family connections. Interestingly, the established farmers cohort was far more likely to be motivated by a desire to work outdoors, whereas new entrant respondents were motivated by their desire to improve the environment. These findings indicate that new entrant farmers may be more environmentally conscious and motivated to create more eco-friendly approaches to farming. Similarly, more new entrant respondents chose 'create new products' as their motivation to enter farming, suggesting that new entrant farmers may be more innovative in their approach to farming compared to established farmers. The graph shows that new entrant respondents were more likely to report a change in life aspirations as their motivation to farm, supporting the earlier finding that new entrant respondents were more likely to have had a previous profession, compared to the established farmer cohort. Both producing food and working with animals had a high level of total responses, indicating that participants still enter farming due to their interest in traditional farming activities.

10. Interactions



The above graph shows importance ratings of interactions with various stakeholders in farming according to the farmers surveyed. Interactions with established farmers were considered the most important across all respondents, followed by interactions with new entrants. Interactions with NGOs, the media and public authorities were rated the least important. When comparing by country, UK and France rated interactions with researchers lower than other countries. France similarly rated interactions with educators and the media noticeably lower than other countries. When comparing the responses of the new entrant cohort against the established farmer cohort, established farmers are more likely to rate interactions with other established farmers more important than interactions with new entrants. New entrant respondents considered these interactions to have equal importance. Established farmer respondents reported interactions with agricultural advisors as more important than new entrant respondents did, suggesting new entrants may not effectively utilise agricultural advisors, or advice may be geared towards established farmers. New entrant respondents considered interactions with researchers to be more important than considered by established farmer respondents. Although this may be a result of primarily sampling within the NEWBIE research network.

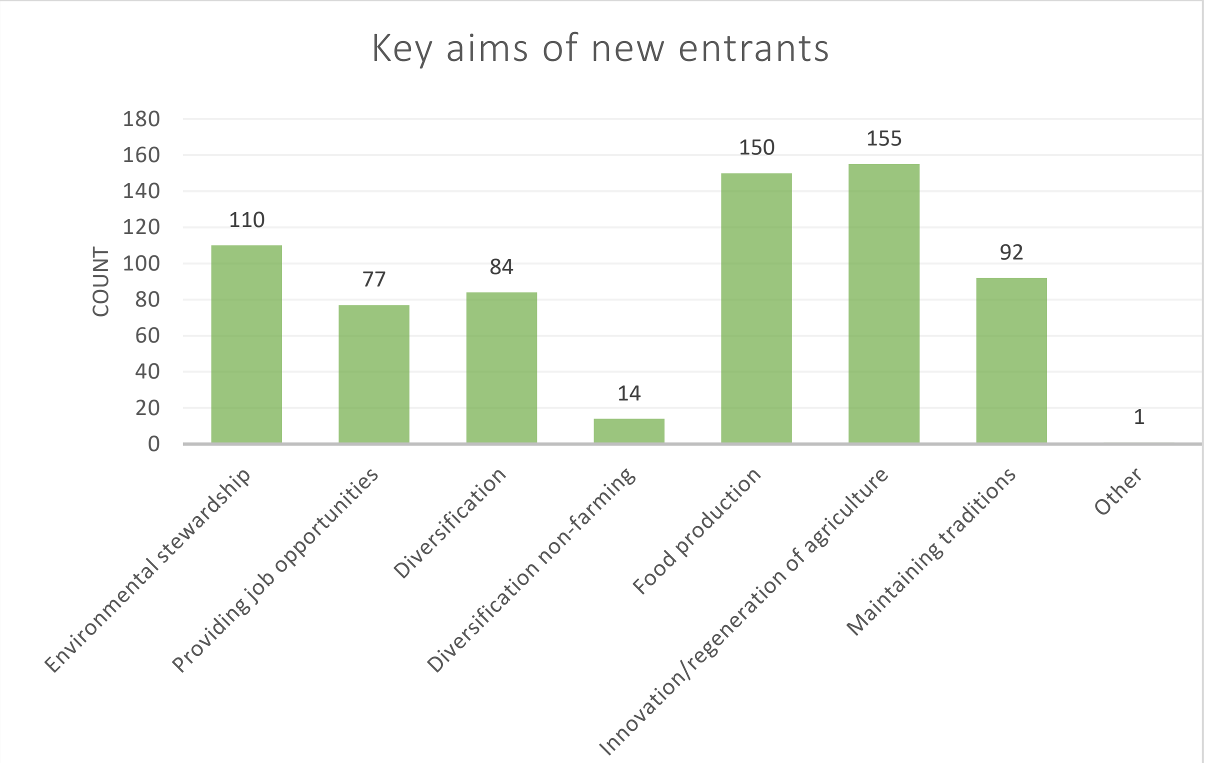
11. Proximity



In the following question, respondents were asked to rate the importance of physical proximity for the success of these interactions. Overall, proximity was seen as relatively unimportant for interactions with non-farmer stakeholders and more important for interactions with other farmers. There were minimal differences in responses between countries however respondents in France rated proximity with researchers and educators as much less important than other countries. This result is likely due to the earlier finding that French participants considered interactions with these groups to be less important than other countries. The established farmer cohort considered proximity to new entrant farmers and future new entrants to be more important compared to the new entrant cohort, suggesting that established farmers may prefer interacting with, and assisting, new entrants in their local area.

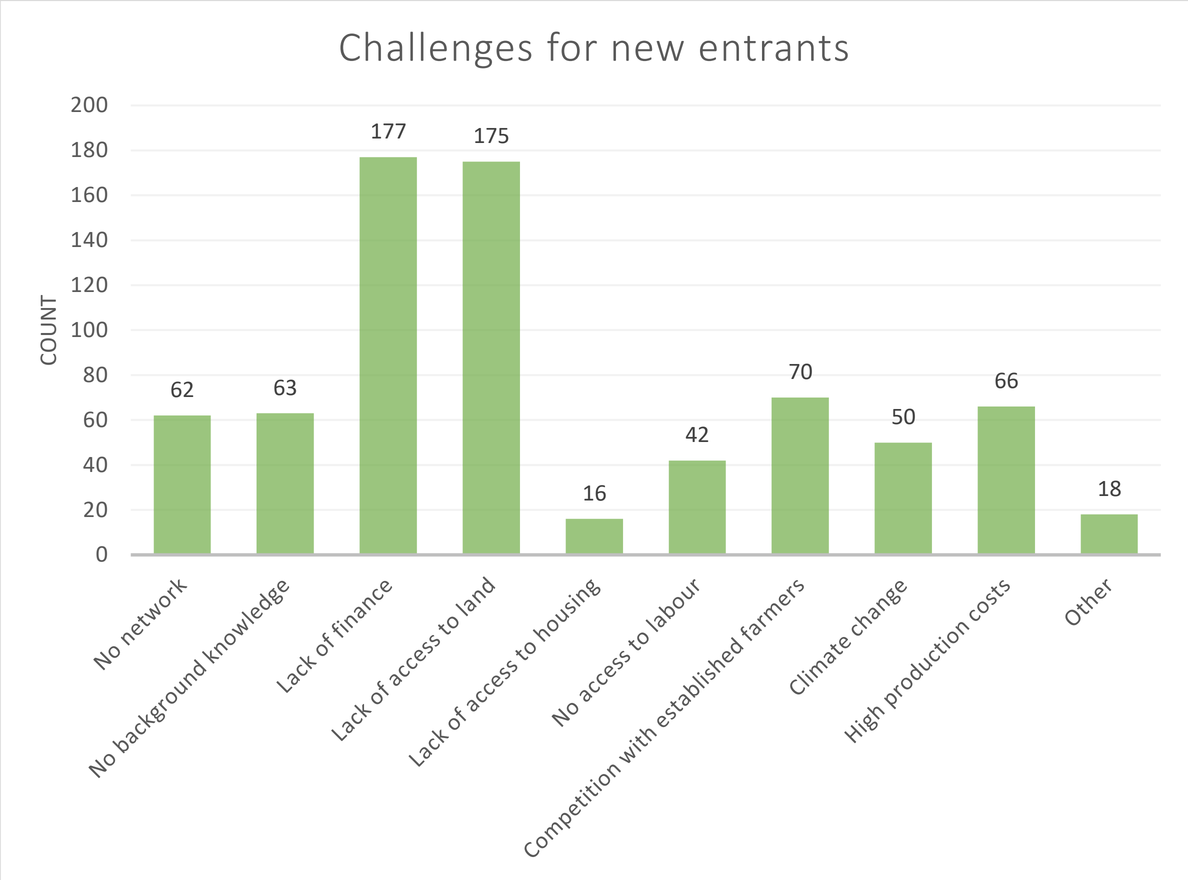
12. Aims of new entrants

The chart below illustrates the main aims of new entrant farmers according to the survey respondents. The most common aim for new entrant farmers was diversification into other farming activities (33.1% of participants selected this), followed by innovation/regeneration of agriculture (21.3%) and food production (21.3%). The least common answer was diversification into non-farming activities (2%), followed by providing job opportunities (11%) and maintaining traditions (13.1%). Comparing perceived aims of new entrants by the primary role cohorts revealed differences between the roles of participants and their view on the aims of new entrants. Respondents who identifies as established farmers were more likely to place importance on maintaining farming traditions compared to the other cohorts. The new entrant farmer cohort considered environmental stewardship to be more important than the cohorts of established farmers and supporters of new entrants did, but were less concerned with providing new job opportunities. The supporters of new entrants cohort felt food production was the most important aim for new entrant farmers. New entrant respondents placed more importance on innovation/regeneration of agriculture compared to the other two cohorts as 76.9% of new entrant respondents felt this was a key aim of new entrant farmers. This finding further indicates that new entrant farmers are perhaps more focussed on agricultural innovation and creating new environmentally friendly farming practices compared to established farmers.



13. Challenges faced by new entrants

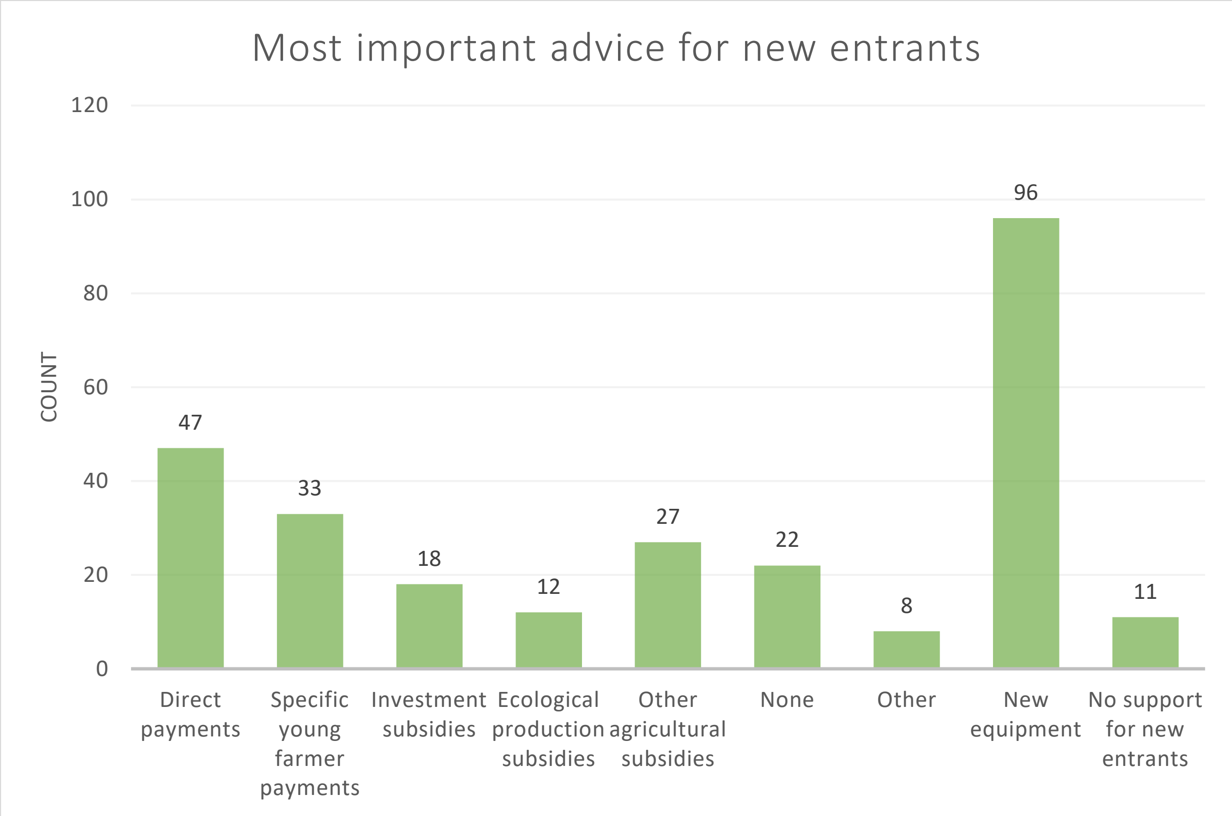
When asked about the main challenges faced by new entrants, by far the most common answers amongst participants were lack of access to finance and land. The least common answer was lack of access to housing followed by no access to labour. These findings support the main aims of the NEWBIE network, which aims to provide support for new entrants to overcome barriers to access to land and capital.



New entrant respondents were more likely to choose lack of access to labour as a key challenge compared to the other two cohorts, suggesting this may be a less known challenge for new entrants. Respondents who were established farmers were more likely to feel new entrants lacked background knowledge but less likely to see competition with established farmers as a key barrier compared to other cohorts. Respondents in the supporters of new entrants cohort were twice as likely to choose no network as a key challenge compared to the two other farmer cohorts, suggesting non-farmers may place more importance on network interactions than farmers. This question indicates there may be a disconnect between the perceived challenges of new entrants and the challenges that new entrants themselves experience.

14. Most important advice for new entrants

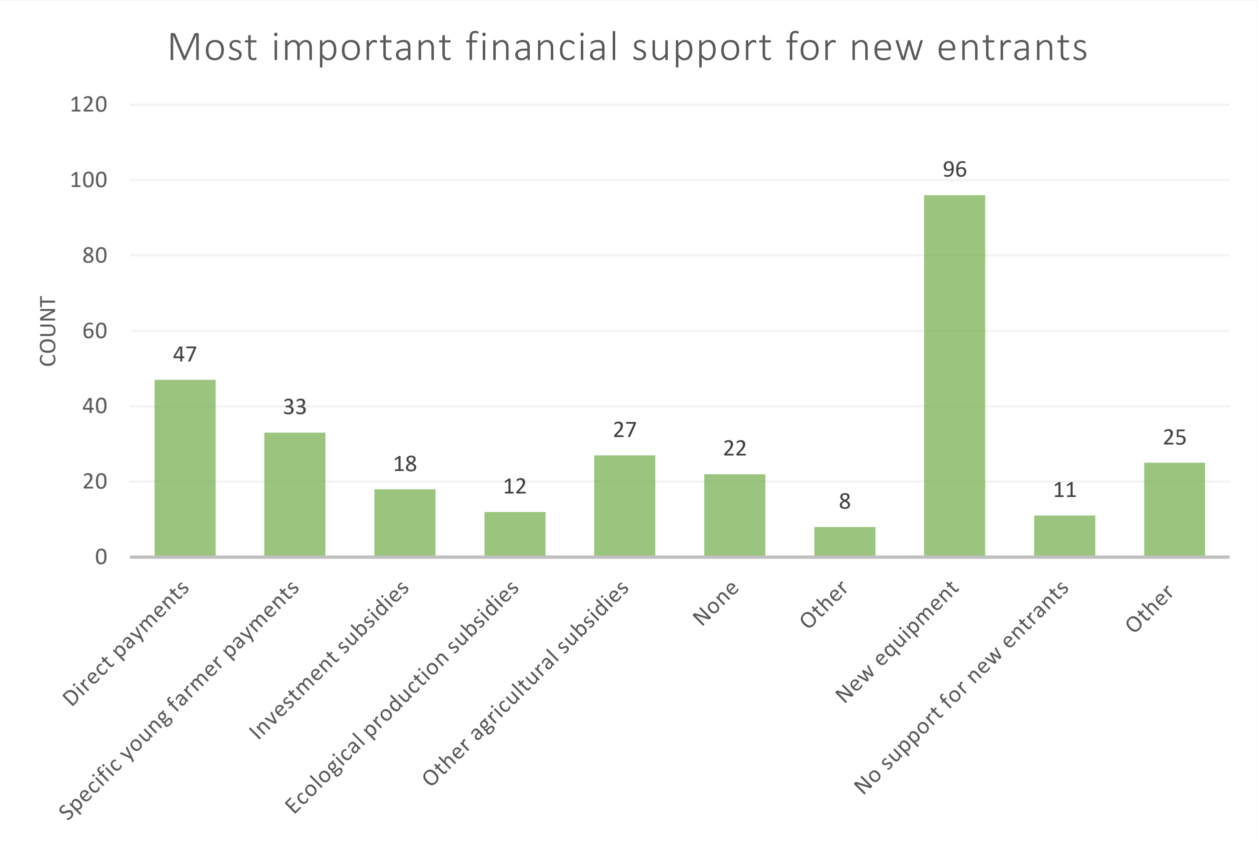
By far the most important advice for new entrants indicated by respondents was financial advice. This supports the previous finding that the key challenges for people entering farming are access to land and capital. The types of advice that participants felt were least important were mental health support, environmental care advice and advice around organic farming.



New entrant respondents rated diversification, organic and environmental care advice higher than the other cohorts, further supporting the finding that new entrant farmers tend to be more innovative and environmentally motivated. New entrant respondents were also more likely to choose legal advice as important compared to other cohorts. Respondents who identified as established farmers rated advice on livestock, arable or horticulture farming much higher than the other two cohorts and rated advice on organic farming as less important, indicating established farmers place more importance on traditional farming practices compared to new entrants. Supporters of new entrants were the cohort least likely to consider advice on diversification and environmental care as important. As this cohort consists of agricultural advisors, this finding suggests that advice available to new entrants may not align with the advice new entrant farmers feel is important.

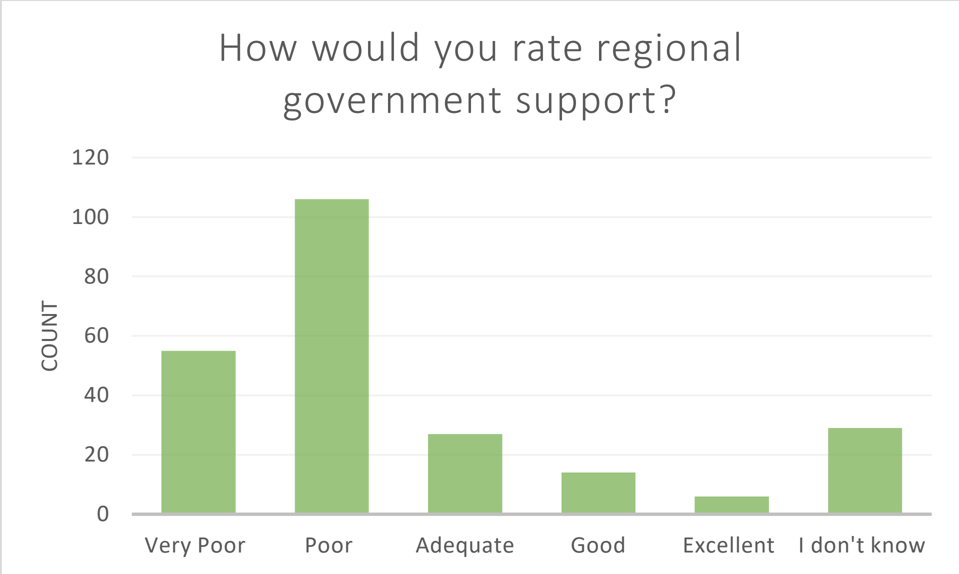
15. Financial support for new entrants

Respondents felt the most important forms of financial support for new entrant farmers were education and training, new equipment, and diversification into other farming practices. The least important forms of financial support were non-farming diversification and legal financial support. Only 1.7% of participants said new entrants should not receive any financial support. As found above, new entrant respondents considered legal and environmental support to be more important than other cohorts. They also considered new equipment and support for farm production to be more important than established farmer respondents and the supporters of new entrants cohort did. New entrant respondents did not feel education support or new technology were important compared to the other two cohorts. Respondents identified as supporters of new entrants considered legal support as much less important than other cohorts and thought support for education and training was more important. This again suggests that the advice and support available to new entrants is lacking in key areas and overproviding in others.



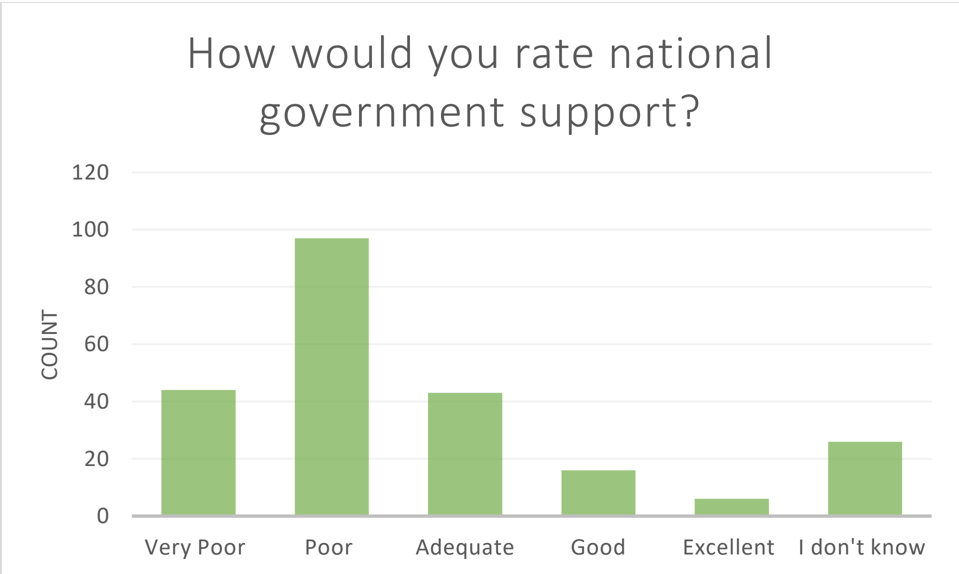
16. Rating government support

16.1 Regional



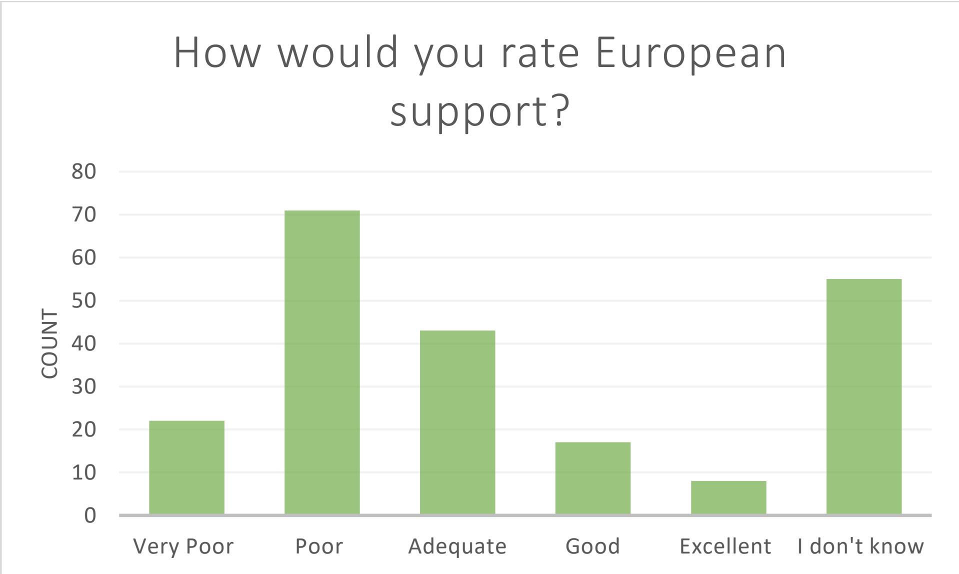
In general, participants felt that regional level government support for the generational renewal of farming was poor. Only 20 participants rated regional support as good or excellent.

16.2 National



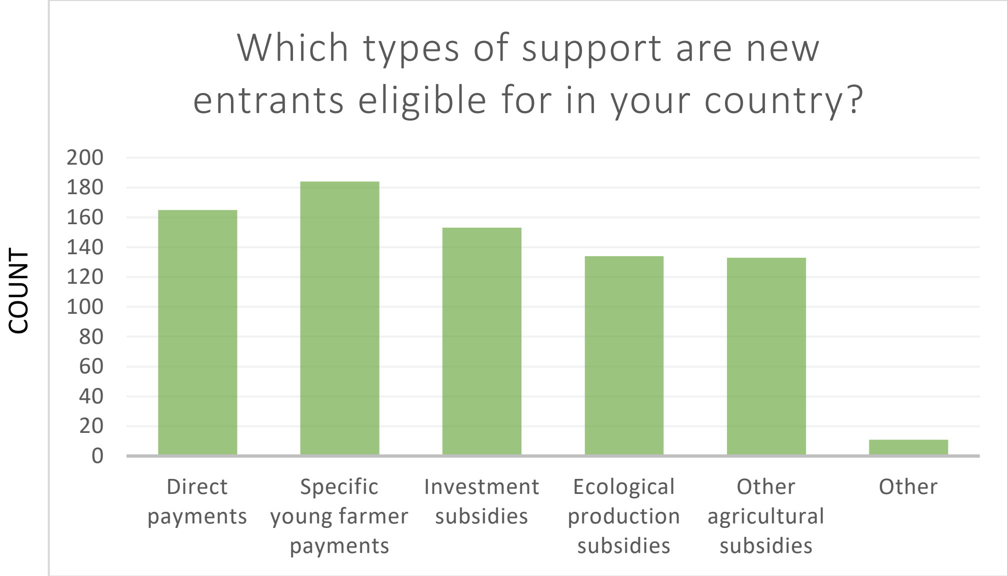
Respondents rated national government support very similarly to regional. Support was perceived to be poor at a national level with very few participants seeing national support as good or excellent. Ireland and Slovenia rated national support the highest whilst France and Portugal were most likely to rate national support very poor. New entrant respondents tended to rate national support worse than the other two cohorts and were twice as likely to rate support very poor compared to established farmer and supporter cohorts.

16.3 European



Again, European support was rated very low by respondents. Slovenia and Bulgaria rated European support highest whilst France, Portugal and the Netherlands rated it lowest. Interestingly, UK respondents did not rate European support noticeably low despite Brexit and reduced European support in the UK. As with national support, new entrant respondents rated European support lower than other cohorts. Overall, these responses highlight a lack of regard for governmental support for the generational renewal of farming across all levels of government, especially amongst respondents who identified as new entrant farmers.

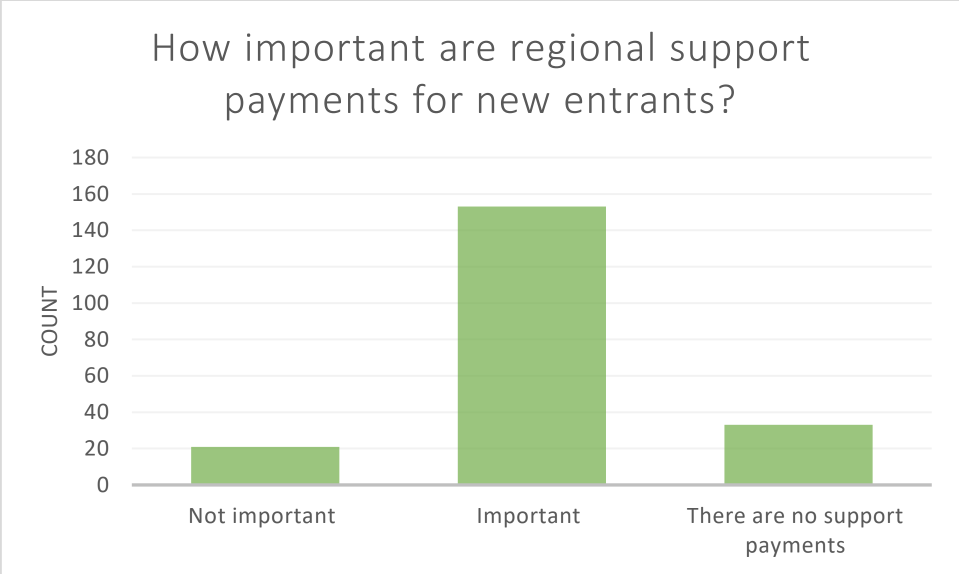
17. New entrant eligibility in your country



The most common form of support available to new entrants across the respondents was specific young farmer payments, followed by direct payments and investment subsidies. The least common forms of support were other agricultural subsidies and ecological production subsidies, however, as shown in the graph above, the differences between all forms of support listed were minimal. When comparing responses by country, UK and Bulgaria were significantly less likely to report new entrant eligibility for investment subsidies. Additionally, the Netherlands and the UK were least likely to report subsidies for ecological production. Whilst the rest of the countries surveyed gave consistent responses, only 40% of Portuguese respondents reported direct payments as available to new entrants compared to 70-90% of all other countries.

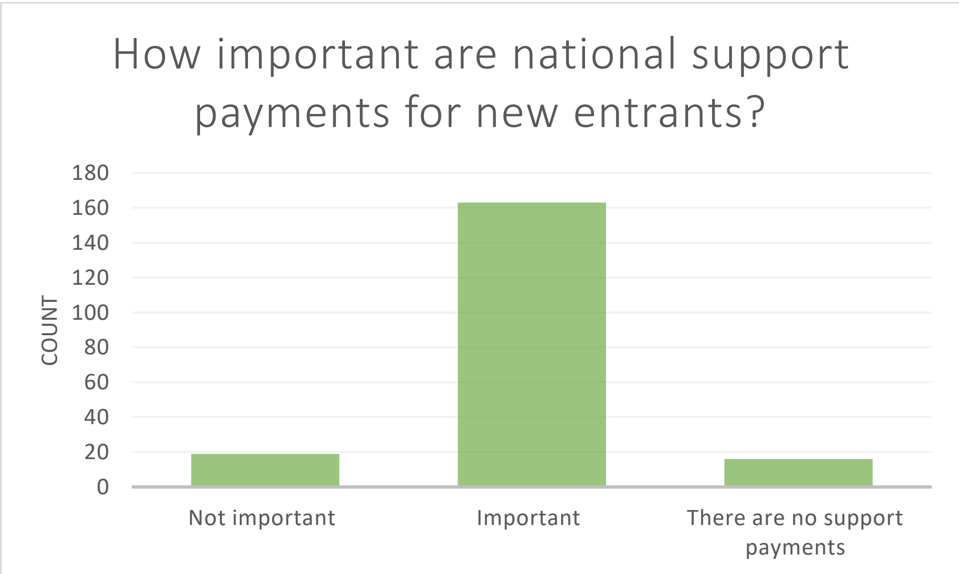
18. Importance of government support for new entrants

18.1 Regional



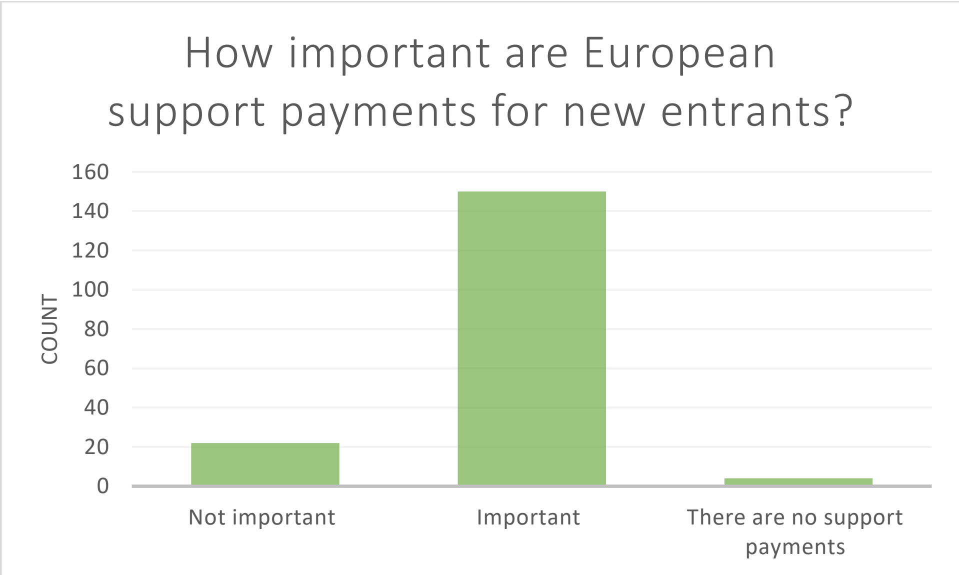
Despite the low regard for regional support payments discussed earlier, participants felt the payments were nonetheless important to new entrant farmers. The Netherlands was the most likely to report no regional support payments with 50% of responders reporting no payments. Germany and Portugal felt the payments were most important and Belgium felt they were least important (40% responded not important). Established farmer respondents were twice as likely to report no support payments compared to the other two cohorts and new entrant respondents regarded the payments as slightly more important.

18.2 National



National support payments were similarly regarded as very important for new entrant farmers. Belgium was most likely to state there were no national support payments (40%), and France rated national support payments as least important. When comparing by cohort, established farmers consider national support to be slightly more important.

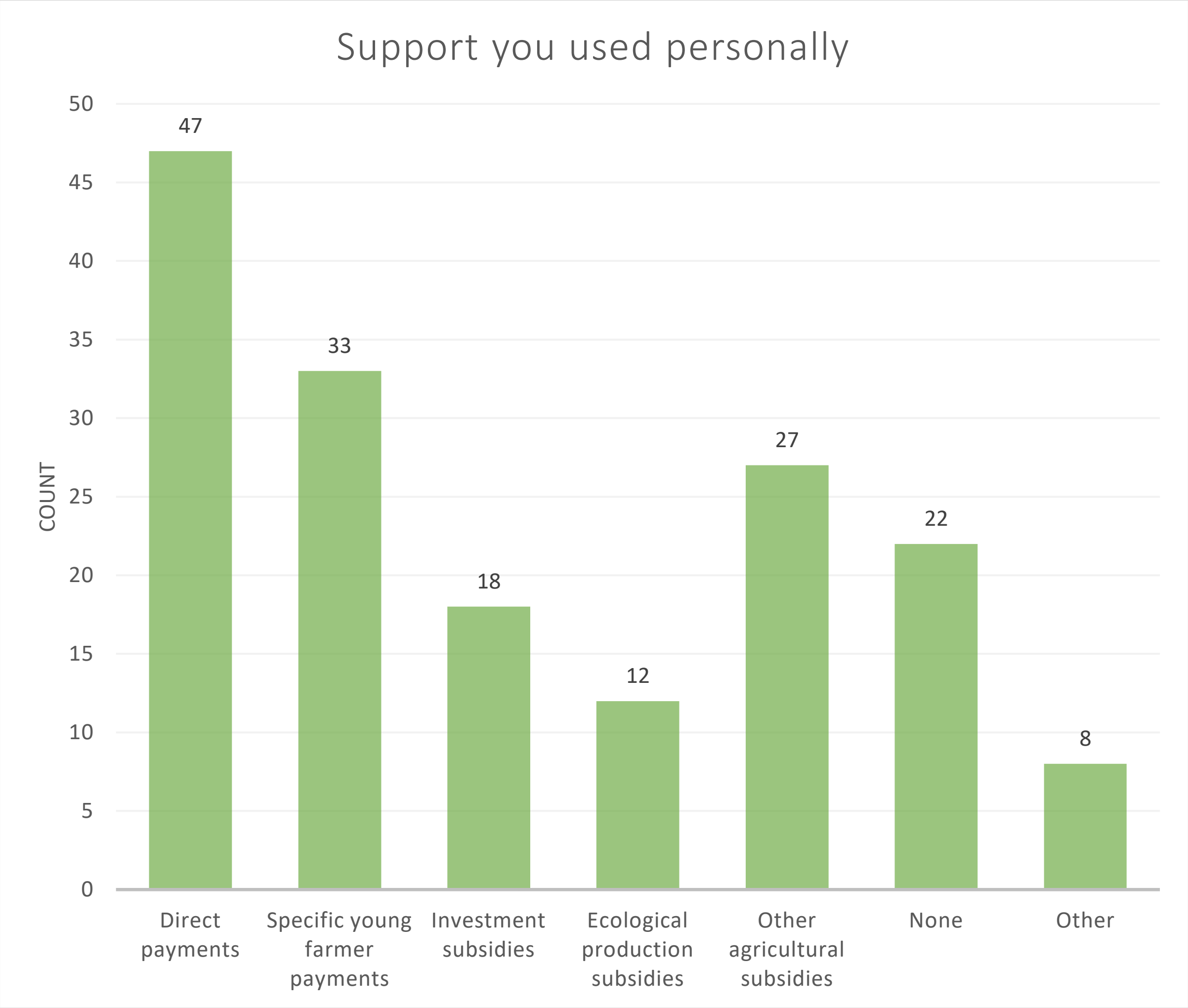
18.3 European



European support payments were seen by respondents as very important for new entrant farmers. Interestingly, Belgium had the highest response of 'there are no support payments' (25%), followed by the UK (13.3%), despite the UK no longer being an EU member state. Bulgaria (100%) and Slovenia (95%) thought EU payments were most important to new entrants, whilst France (33.3%) and Belgium (25%) thought EU payments were least important. The UK was more likely than EU member countries to report there are no European support payments, but EU members were more likely to report that they are not important. New entrant respondents considered European support less important than other cohorts whilst established farmer respondents saw it as most important. This question demonstrates that despite government support not being regarded highly by respondents, participants still felt they payments were important to new entrant farmers.

19 Support you used personally

The most common form of support used by farmers surveyed was direct payments (28.1%), followed by specific young farmers payments (19.8%) and 'other agricultural subsidies' (13.2%). The least common form of support amongst respondents was ecological production subsidies (7.2%). 13.3% of the farmers said they had not used any forms of support. Respondents who identified as established farmers were more likely to have used all types of support compared to those who identified as new entrant farmers.



The majority of the farmers surveyed (61.6%) felt these support payments were important to them as a new entrant.

20. Support you would like to see in future

91.1% of respondents stated they would like to see support for investment funding for new entrants in the future. All forms of future support were regarded highly by participants with 90.9% choosing expansion of education, 88.6% selecting social insurance subsidy, and 86.9% advocating networking support. The least popular form of future new entrant support was privileged access to land (66.5%), followed by tax concessions (79%), start-up bonus (86%), and funding of new business models (86.2%). Despite this, the majority participants supported all proposed future new entrant support types. Belgium was least likely to support privileged access to land and tax concessions with 75% and 50% of respondents disagreeing with these future forms of support respectively. For almost all other forms of future support the Netherlands displayed the strongest disagreement.

21. Conclusion

In conclusion, respondents to the survey were mostly new entrant farmers of some capacity. The main challenges to farming that respondents faced, or considered new entrants to face, were access to land and capital. Interactions with established farmers were of key importance to the majority of survey respondents, highlighting the importance of networks, and learning from other and perhaps more experienced farmers. The importance of networks is a positive finding for the NEWBIE project. However, diversification was also a key aim for many new entrant respondents, highlights perhaps the links to former alternate careers and new approaches to farming over and above traditional agriculture. Furthermore, in addition to education and training and support for new equipment, advice and support for diversification was of utmost importance to new entrants and their supporters. In terms of current and future financial support, this was also considered to be of strong importance, especially support which expanded education. Such support could potentially also be offered through a continued focus on networks of new entrants and their supporters. Further documents will follow giving more detail on the support mechanisms responses and on the open-text responses, which included an exploration of how respondents defined new entrants.

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