

Working Group Proposal

Title: Assessing and Interpreting Farm Workload: Pathways, Practices and Perspectives

Convenors

- Rita Saleh – Agroscope, rita.saleh@agroscope.admin.ch (*contact person*)
- Sarina Altermatt – Agroscope, sarina.altermatt@agroscope.admin.ch
- Emile Spahr – Agroscope, emile.spahr@agroscope.admin.ch
- Sabine Liebenehm – Agroscope, sabine.liebenehm@agroscope.admin.ch

Topic

Farm workload is a key determinant of social sustainability and decent work in agriculture, yet, its measurement remains inconsistent. Existing divergent methods (e.g., modelling workload, self-assessment, etc.) pose challenges for standardization, comparability, and contextual relevance. Beyond hours worked, workload includes intensity, seasonality, cognitive and emotional demands, predictability and control of tasks, recovery, and safety. These dynamics are shaped by farming activities (e.g., farm mechanisation level) and farms contexts (e.g., farm types, farm labour structure) climate change (peak loads under adverse conditions), outsourcing and specialization of agricultural services, and the growing importance of non-farm employment in farm households. Nonetheless, workload is central in debates regarding the attractiveness of farming, gender and generational roles, labour relations, and sustainability of farm livelihoods. This Working Group aims to explore diverse methods to assessing and interpreting farm workload, while also addressing questions of decent work, social sustainability and the future of farming. We invite contributions from researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to discuss conceptual, methodological and applied perspectives across different farming contexts.

Aims

1. Map existing and potentially new methods for assessing farm workload and evaluate their pros/cons on validity, comparability, feasibility, respondent burden and ethics.
2. Explore how workload is experienced in different contexts (farm type, gender, generation, labour structures, mechanisation/digitalisation, farm transformation, sustainability issues).
3. Discuss pathways for assessing workload as a farm-level social sustainability indicator given different farm contexts (e.g., farm types and labor arrangements, mechanization and digitalisation, etc.) and linking it to policy frameworks and profession attractiveness.
4. Build a collaboration network to develop an indicator set and a data-collection protocol, with a plan for joint research activities

Format

Two 90-minute sessions

Session 1: Workload indicators

-What are the pros and cons of the existing workload indicators?

- How can existing workload indicators be improved and what data and tools are necessary?

Session 2: Pathways and perspectives on workload and social sustainability

-How is workload experienced in different contexts by different relevant stakeholders (e.g., researchers, farmers, farm workers, policymakers, etc.)?

-How to apply workload assessment as a social sustainability indicator of farms and what data/tools are useful to do so?

→We plan to incorporate both traditional and creative modalities (e.g., World Café). The sessions will be organized based on the submissions we receive.