

# Mapping the territory of youth careers in agriculture and food: pathways, junctures and experience

## Convenors:

Dr Catherine Waite, University of Melbourne, Australia, [cwaite@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:cwaite@unimelb.edu.au) (contact person)

Dr Michael Santhanam-Martin, University of Melbourne, Australia, [mpmartin@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:mpmartin@unimelb.edu.au)

Prof Ruth Nettle, University of Melbourne, Australia, [ranettle@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:ranettle@unimelb.edu.au)

Dr Fiona Williams, Harper Adams University, United Kingdom, [FWilliams@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:FWilliams@harper-adams.ac.uk)

Dr Conor Hogan, Teagasc, Ireland, [conor.hogan@teagasc.ie](mailto:conor.hogan@teagasc.ie)

AssProf Amy Cosby, Central Queensland University, Australia (CQU), [a.cosby@cqu.edu.au](mailto:a.cosby@cqu.edu.au)

Dr Callum Eastwood, DairyNZ, New Zealand, [callum.eastwood@dairynz.co.nz](mailto:callum.eastwood@dairynz.co.nz)

Dr Caroline Nye, University of Exeter, [cn293@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:cn293@exeter.ac.uk)

## Context:

With an aging workforce, the recruitment of skilled young people into the agriculture sector has been identified as vital to the future of the sector overall<sup>1</sup>. Yet the challenge of engaging young people in agriculture careers and jobs has endured as an intractable problem<sup>2</sup>. While education is a key domain in the discussion<sup>3</sup> a range of barriers to entry have been identified centring on negative perceptions about the sector<sup>4</sup> among parents and family<sup>5</sup> and within schools<sup>6</sup>, as well as structural barriers such as work-life balance, remuneration<sup>7</sup>, gender barriers<sup>8</sup>, or limited access to resources available in family farms<sup>9</sup>. Less is known about young people's experiences *specifically* regarding staying in the sector, or deciding to leave, even while research with the broader workforce has found that remuneration, training, a sense of meaning and recognition and robust human resource processes are important<sup>10</sup>. While youth attraction is a crucial element in the discussion about supporting a sustainable agriculture workforce, mapping the complex territory of youth careers in agriculture and food, experiences while in the sector and the various junctures shaping career decision-making throughout, represents an important contribution to the intractable problem of young people's attraction and retention in the sector.

## Topic:

Main conference topic: Theme 1: Attractiveness of work in the agri-food sector. Secondary themes include: decent work, knowledge skills and education, dynamics of work, health and safety and Agricultural workforce development systems.

---

<sup>1</sup> Binks, B., Stenekes, N., Kruger, H. and Kancans, R. 2018. Snapshot of Australia's Agricultural Workforce. *ABARES Insights, Issue 3, 2018*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences.

<sup>2</sup> Malcolm, B. 2010. Agriculture and Agricultural Science: Where Have All the Young People Gone? *Agricultural Science*, 22, 35-39.

<sup>3</sup> Cosby, A., Manning, J.K., Lovrica, K. and Fogarty, E.S., 2022b. The future agricultural workforce—is the next generation aware of the abundance of opportunities? *Farm Policy Journal*, pp.18-30.

<sup>4</sup> White, B. 2012. Agriculture and the generation problem: rural youth, employment and the future of farming. *IDS Bulletin*, 43, 9-19

<sup>5</sup> Unay-Gailhard, İ., Bavorová, M., Bednaříková, Z. and Ponkina, E.V., 2019. I Don't Want to Work in Agriculture! The transition from agricultural education to the labor market in Rural Russia. *Rural Sociology*, 84(2), pp.315-349.

<sup>6</sup> Cosby, A., Manning, J., Fogarty, E., McDonald, N. and Harreveld, B., 2022a. High school technology teacher's perceptions of agriculture and careers: an Australian perspective. *The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*, pp.1-22.

<sup>7</sup> Beecher, M., A. Ryan and M. Gorman, 2022. Exploring adolescents' perceptions of dairy farming careers in Ireland: views of students studying agricultural science in secondary school. *Irish Journal of Agricultural and Food Research*, 61(2), pp.255-270

<sup>8</sup> Beecher, M., Gorman, M., Kelly, P. and Horan, B., 2019. Careers in dairy: adolescents perceptions and attitudes. *The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*, 25(5), pp.415-430.

<sup>9</sup> Unay-Gailhard, İ. and Brennan, M.A., 2022. How digital communications contribute to shaping the career paths of youth: a review study focused on farming as a career option. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 39(4), pp.1491-1508.

<sup>10</sup> Nettle, R. (2015). 'More Than Workforce Shortages: How Farm Human Resources Management Strategies Will Shape Australia's Agricultural Future' *Farm Policy Journal* 12(2): 17-27 (Winter quarter)

**Broad theme:**

Youth in agriculture

- The unique challenges and experiences young people encounter at different life stages (ie. ages 15-18; 19-25; 26-35) in the context of agriculture training and education, jobs and careers.
- Young people's attraction and retention – for example, a focus on HRM, Job Quality, skill development, communication, Smart farming technologies, workplace structures and workplace design, family farming and succession, compliance and regulation
- Sustainable livelihoods; the role of decent work and impacts of mis-matched expectations between employers and employees
- Young people's experiences, challenges and exit pathways in agriculture and in agriculture-adjacent professions, including impacts of awareness and perceptions of the sector, and progression pathways.
- Young people's experiences and challenges with health and safety in agriculture workplaces
- Role of education (secondary, tertiary, vocational) as a mechanism to support attraction into agriculture jobs and careers.
- Policy interventions, impacts, relevance and scalability in the context of youth, agriculture and work

**Aims:**

To showcase recent scholarship and policy research on the follow points, with a view to soliciting academic dialogue, international collaboration and networking: 1) Empirical research of young people's engagement in agricultural work, training and careers, 2) Policy approaches shaping young people's work experiences in the sector, 3) Research building theory and policy

**Format:**

1) 15-minute paper presentations with Q and A, 2) Facilitated discussion with speakers of each session and audience members.