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parlons graphiques

Lívia Madureira, Lee-Ann Sutherland, Pierre Labarthe, Monika Beck and Pierre Triboulet

The Privatisation Paradox of Contemporary Agricultural Advice in Europe Le paradoxe de la privatisation du conseil agricole contemporain en Europe Das Privatisierungsparadoxon der gegenwärtigen landwirtschaftlichen Beratung in Europa

The AgriLink project assessed the role of advisory services in on-farm innovation adoption across Europe. We interviewed 1,080 European farmers and 170 advisory service suppliers. The samples targeted a range of experiences and were not therefore 'representative', but are helpful for identifying European-level trends.

The research identified a number of paradoxes. First, there is a clear shift towards reinvestment in agricultural advisory services at the European level, whereas many national policies are still shaped by long-term trends towards privatisation of advisory service provision. For example, Measure

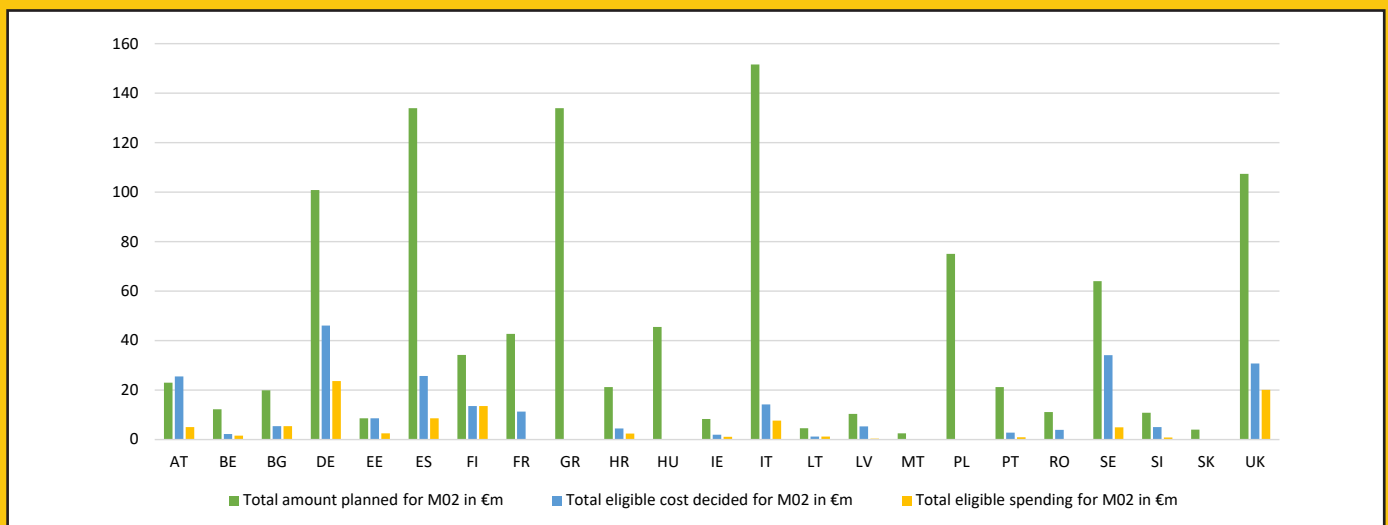
M02.1 of the Rural Development Plans aims to support farmers' access to fee-for-advice services for public good issues. Not only did Member States opt to allocate considerably less funding to Measure M02 than they originally proposed in 2015, but most Member States appear unlikely to spend even this allocation (Figure 1).

Second, privatisation was supported by economic theories that markets would lead to 'demand-driven' advice (Knutson, 1986). European policies are still largely shaped by such models, aiming primarily to compensate for market failures in farm advice provision.

AgriLink found that the notion of 'demand-driven' advice is inconsistent with triggers to innovation. Overall, advisors were identified as important triggers by only 14 per cent of farmers surveyed. The innovations triggered by advisors were typically minor, such as changes to field management or pest control. Major innovations like adoption of robotic milking were more commonly triggered by family events such as succession (Figure 2).

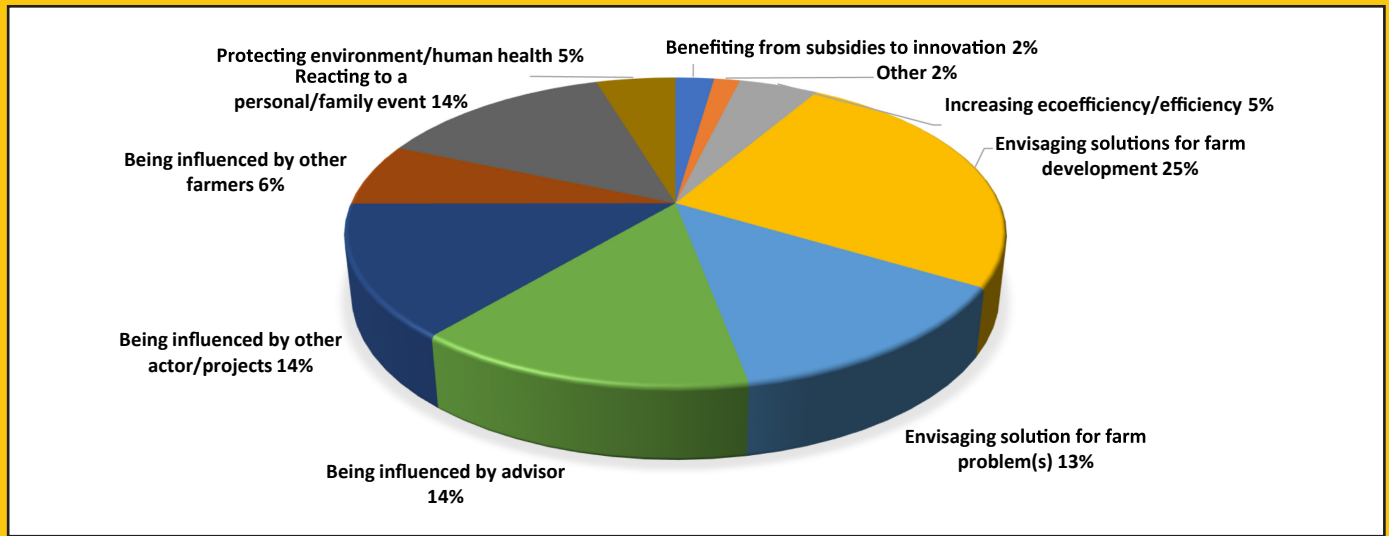
Farmers in the AgriLink study were not obtaining advice from a huge diversity of sources, as was expected with privatisation. As demonstrated in

Figure 1: Planned M02 expenditure in 2015 in preliminary planning of the CAP 2014–2021; Actual budget agreed; and Actual expenditure as of 2020



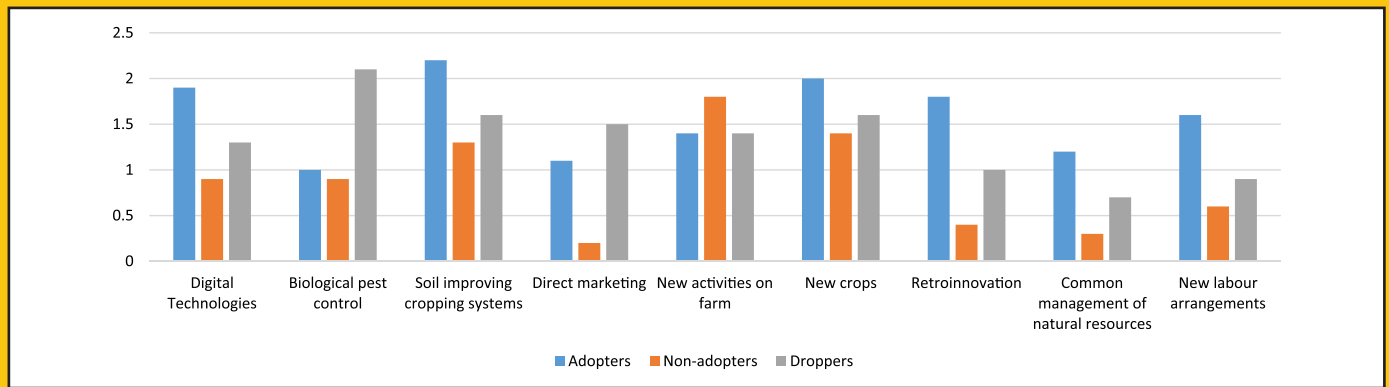
Source: AgriLink and ADE 2020.

Figure 2: 'Triggers' for on-farm innovation



Source: AgriLink Survey Data.

Figure 3: Number of different sources of advice when assessing an innovation



Source: AgriLink Survey Data.

Figure 3, most farmers reported only one or two sources of advice. 'Droppers' (who had ceased to implement or use the innovation) often had the smallest number of advice sources.

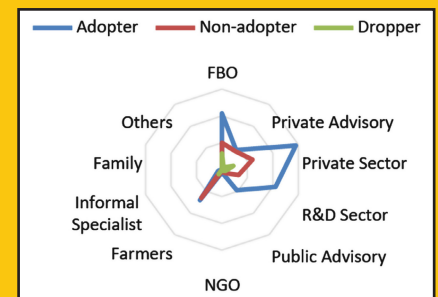
Many advisors identified by farmers would not traditionally be considered 'advisors' (i.e. public or private independent advisors). They were often linked to the provision of services (e.g. input supply, financial services). For example, Figure 4 shows that the private sector (particularly machinery suppliers) were most commonly identified by farmers as important sources of advice on technological innovations (e.g. precision-farming, robotic milking). Public advisory services play a very weak role, with the exception of Poland, where local public advisory services complement other sources of advice. Farm business organisations (FBO) were particularly important in France.

Few of these advisors formally charge their services to farmers. Instead, costs

of advice provision are covered by other trade activities, farming organisation subscriptions and subsidies: fee-for-service advice has not been developed in response to farmers' direct market demands for advice. This is true for both independent and linked advisors.

The call for European farmers to innovate uncovered the failure of privatising farm advice. Privatisation did not trigger the supply of professional pluralistic farm advice demanded by innovation. As shown by AgriLink, innovation advice tends to be scarce and provided by

Figure 4: Sources of advice on technological innovations



non-formal sources. Also, it appears to be limited to farmers able and willing to pay for knowledge-intensive advisory services.

Further Reading

- AgriLink project reports: www.agrilink2020.eu
- Knutson, R.D. (1986). Restructuring agricultural economics extension to meet changing needs. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 68(5): 1297-1306.

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