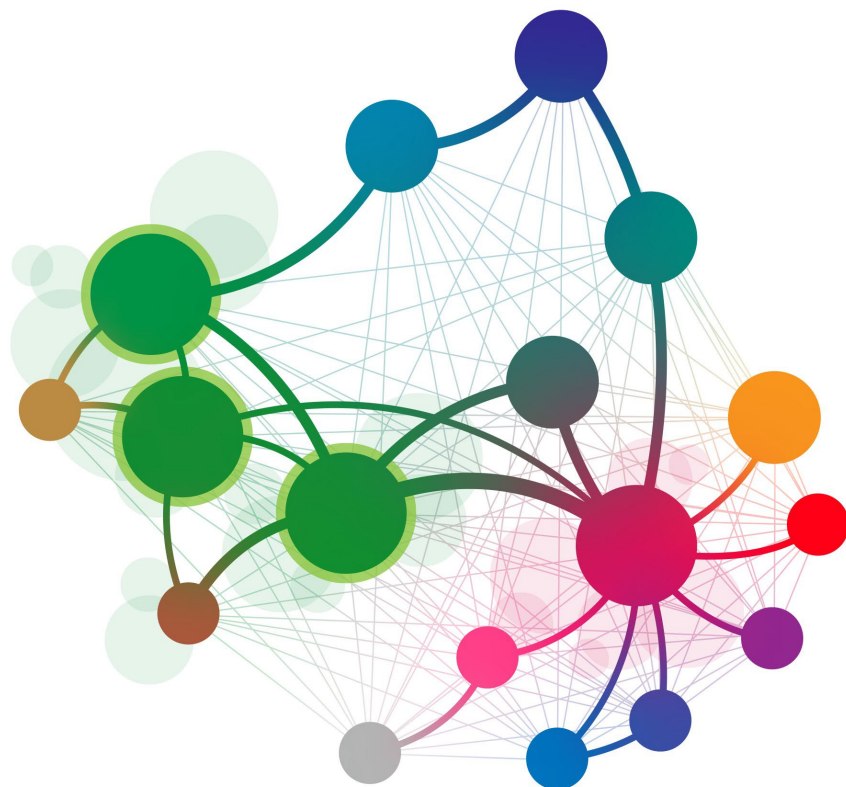


Is farming an attractive job? Some sociological considerations

Teagasc, IE

17th May, 2024



Overview

- Features of farming as an attractive career: from farmers' perspectives
- Changes and shifts: the profile of 'farmer' (and farm employment)
- Opportunities: for policy, extension, education & lifelong learning

Farmers?

- Family owner-operators
- Family members/workers
- Hired workers
- Seasonal workers
- Hired workers from local regions
- Casual employees
- Unremunerated workers (family/local)
- Migrant/'foreign' workers
- Transient workers
- Indigenous peoples
- Women
- Youth
- Older farmers
- New entrants
- Professional farm personnel
- Farm managers
- Qualified farm personnel
- Cooperative/organisation personnel
- Contractors
- Farm advisors

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‘Attractiveness’ of farming

- The socio-cultural meaning of farming
 - While farmers are not homogenous, ‘Farming is a socio-cultural practice, not simply an economic activity’ (Vanclay, 2004)
 - Attachment to farmer identity, land, animals
 - Patriarchal and patrilineal
 - Relationship between farming and resilience (willingness to dedicate work and ‘sacrifice’)
- (Macken-Walsh et al., 2020)

Signs of change...

- Change occurring in socio-cultural context in which and within which farming occurs
- Esteemed identity of farmer occupation under threat
- Farmer protests: society/farming/ecology interface
- Mental health and health and safety on farms (SafeHabitus, 2024)
- Traditional family structures outdated or reconstituted (women and youth)
- Issue of ownership conflated with status of 'farmer'

Impacting attractiveness...

- Change occurring in **socio-cultural context** in which and within which farming occurs
- **Esteemed identity** of farmer occupation under threat
- Farmer **protests**: society/farming/ecology interface
- Mental health and **health and safety** on farms (SafeHabitus, 2024)
- Traditional **family structures** outdated or reconstituted (women and youth, Byrne et al., 2014)
- Issue of **ownership** conflated with status of 'farmer'

Most significant 'skills mismatch' and gaps: the future

- 'Large mismatch between the *needs* of the agriculture sector and the *supply* of labour and skills...in the face of **technological change**'
- **Skills mismatch**: either absent, over (qualified) or under (qualified)
- Looking to future skills and competencies - 'the typology of skills has changed in the context of the **green and digital transition**'

(OECD, 2023)



Future jobs/skills in agriculture

- ‘The World Economic Forum (2016) estimated that 65% of children starting primary school will end up in **professions that do not currently exist**, illustrating the radical technology-related changes expected in the workplace’ (OECD, 2023. 14)
- ‘**Tech-savvy, hyper-connected** millennials will comprise 75% of the workforce by 2020’ (Block et al., 2023)
- ‘By 2030 about one-third of all new jobs will be **technology related**’ (KPMG, 2019)

Most significant gaps, challenges

- The largest skills gaps are: **social skills and teamwork, problem solving, quality control** and **equipment maintenance** (OECD, 2023, 6)
- The **relational** context of change, and technological change

Example of Ireland:

- ‘Entering the occupational category of farmer’: the vital **role of education** in underpinning legitimacy of new roles, and fulfilling new roles on farms (Deming et al., 2019)
- ‘Effective communication and task delegation; building trust and fairness in new farm **employment relationships**’ (Lawton et al., forthcoming; c.f. FAO, 2007).
- The role of Producer Organisations and other organisations in providing **diverse employment relationships - involving farms** (Macken-Walsh, 2001)



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- Cooperative/organisation personnel
- Contractors
- Farm advisors
- Non rural actors

Attractiveness?

- The inter-connected challenge of:
 - Respecting, valuing and investing in **traditional family farming** (and its capacity for resilience)
 - Finding and leveraging **room to manoeuvre** to increase prospects for all
 - Build **prestige, social connectedness**, with greater society
 - **Diversify** and create greater connections within the 'workforce'
 - Invest in the '**employment relationship**'

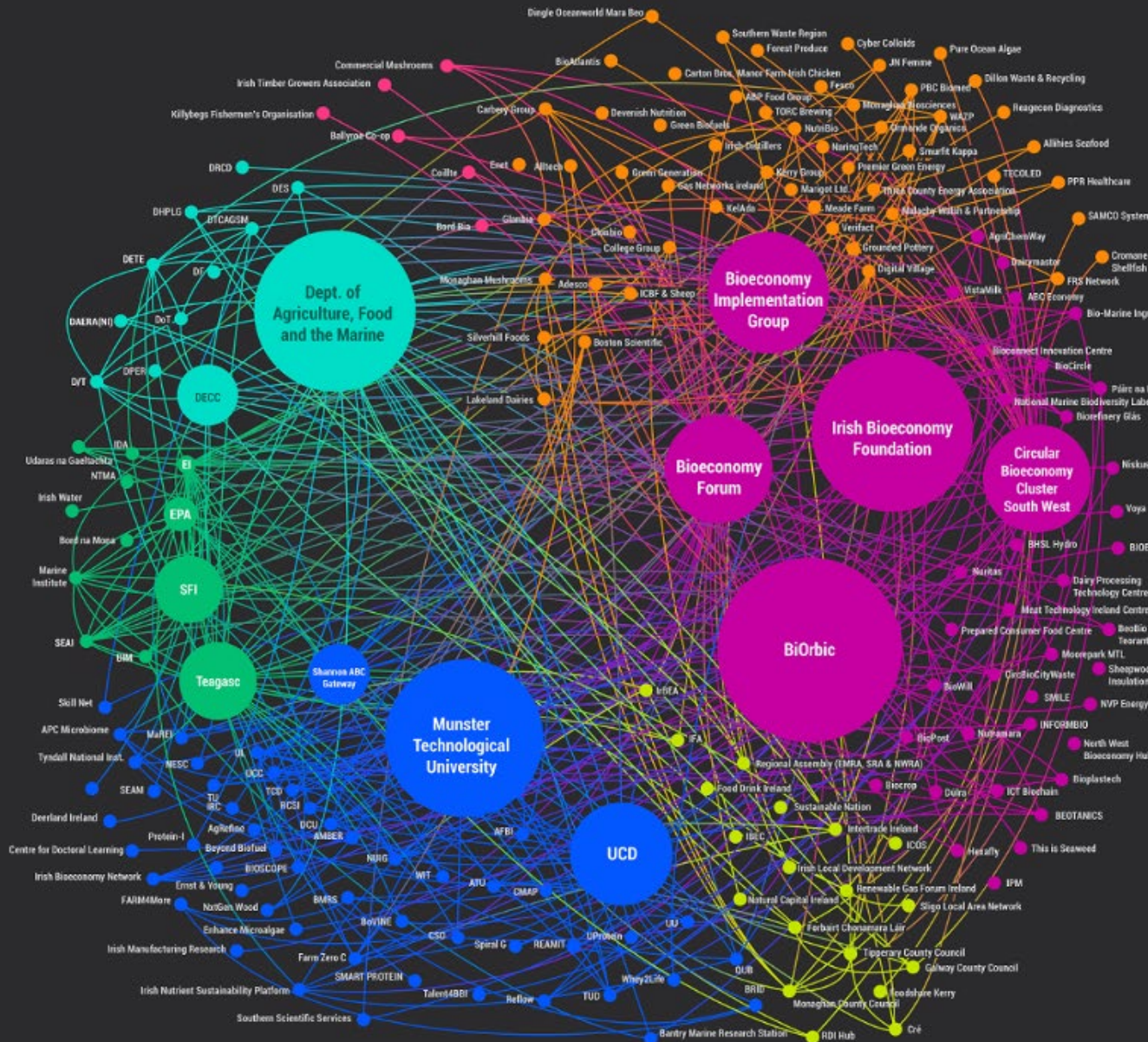
An inspiring example...

A nascent economy:

Ireland's Bioeconomy

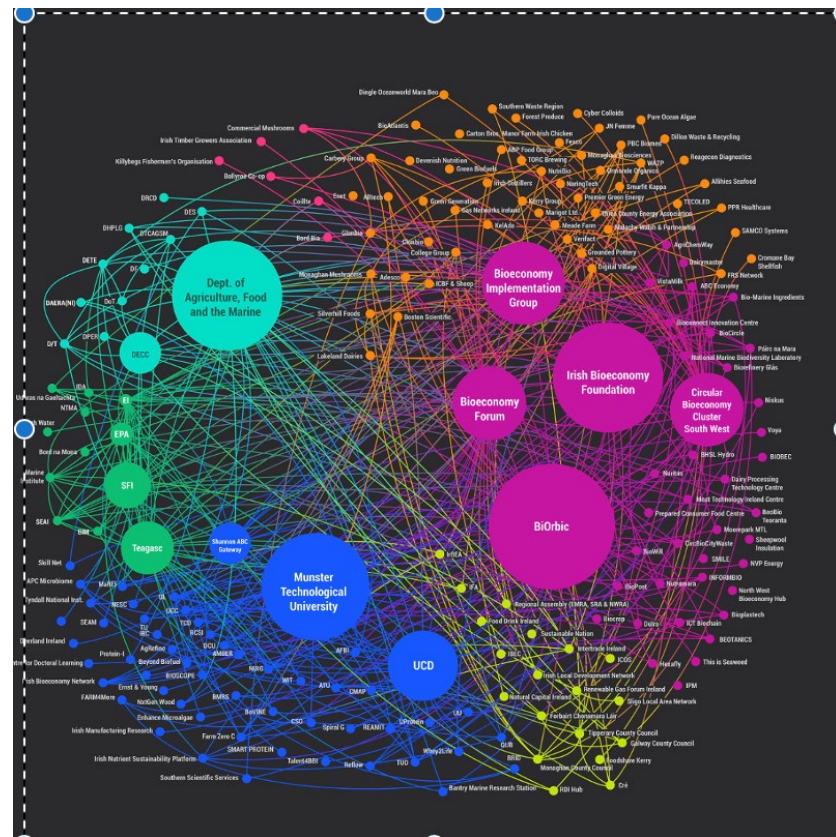
Network Analysis Diagram | July 2022

Sectors



Diversifying the AKIS: EU policy enablers & levers

- Farmers
- Advisors
- Innovation brokers
- Training providers
- Managing Authorities
- Farmer and forester organisations
- Vocational Education & Training (VET)
- CAP Strategic Plans
- EIP-AGRI Operational Groups
- Horizon projects
- National Support Units (CAP Networks)
- Researchers



Harrahill et al., 2022



Thank you