

**Challenges for future farming in Norway:
The role of place for farm succession**

Agnete Wiborg og Hilde Bjørkhaug

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Agnete Wiborg, University of Bodø, Norway

Agnete.Wiborg@uin.no

Hilde Bjørkhaug, Centre for Rural Research, Norway

Hilde.Bjorkhaug@Bygdeforskning.no

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Agnete Wiborg, University of Bodø, Norway

Agnete.Wiborg@uin.no

Hilde Bjørkhaug, Centre for Rural Research, Norway

Hilde.Bjorkhaug@Bygdeforskning.no

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Abstract

A central aim for agricultural policy in Norway is to maintain a living and active agriculture in all parts of the country. In order to maintain active farms, it is vital that family farms achieve successful successions. This is of great importance for the future of agriculture, not to mention small places in rural areas. Approximately 80% of agricultural properties are transferred to a family member. Agriculture is a place bound production, with significant regional differences in agricultural output. Regional variations also play a part in the amount of people who wish to use their allodial right. In this paper we therefore want to explore different dimensions of the role of place/locality in family farm succession. A reduction of motivation among holders of allodial right and a lack of potential successors can result in a gradual reduction and eventual shutting down of farm production. Farms can still remain in the family but instead of being active they become a place to live, a second home, or are even left in a state of disrepair. Discontinuance of agricultural activity in rural areas and in particular regions is a challenge for an agricultural policy of food security, based on having agricultural activity in all regions of Norway. Based on a preliminary analysis of interviews with farmers, farming bureaucrats and statistics about farms and farmers, we argue that in order to understand challenges for family farm succession it is necessary to understand the interplay of different dimensions and meanings of place; the *geographical*, the *social* and the *cultural/symbolic*¹. The interplay of these factors constitutes the context for the farms and farmers and influences the attractiveness of taking over a farm in a particular locality.

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Succession – a critical process for the future of agriculture

In Norway the dominant form of farming is the family farm, understood as a farm which is owned and managed by the farmer who also lives at the farm with his or her family (Bleksaune 1996). Achievement of successful successions on family farms, including taking over by sale, is crucial for the maintenance of active farms and for the future of agriculture and also for many small places in rural areas. A great deal of the challenges related to succession that farmers and farms are faced with, are similar across many Western countries (Gasson and Errington 1993, Silvasti 2003, Crockett 2004, Calus, Van Huylenbroeck and Van Lierde 2008). Agriculture, particularly conducted as family farming, has had and still has an important role in many rural communities as a basis for economic activity, local social organization and as a way of life. A central aim for agricultural policy in Norway is to maintain a living and active agriculture in all parts of the country, as well as contributing to the employment situation and development of rural areas (NOU 2004). In this way development of agriculture is also linked to general challenges faced by rural areas. In recent years there has been a gradual reduction in the number of farms, but agricultural production has been relatively stable at the regional level with the size of farms having increased. The question is whether production levels will be maintained at their current level if farm numbers are further reduced. Our interviews indicate that there might be an additional risk for a reduction in production in the more marginal and vulnerable regions.

As in many other countries there has been a considerable reduction in the number of farms in the preceding decades. In 1959 there were almost 200 000 farms in Norway but today this number is reduced to less than 50 000 active farms. During the last 20 years there has been a 50% reduction in the number of farm units in production (Andgard, Elby, Hillestad, Klem 2009). This reduction has been most noticeable in northern Norway where 42% of farms went out of production between 1999 and 2009. One reason is that many of these farms have been relatively small in size. The decrease in the number of farms in northern Norway is 10 % higher than the Norwegian average (Statistics Norway 2011a), and there are no indications that this development will stop. Another challenge for the future of active farming, is that succession of family ownership on farms is not synonymous with succession and continuation of the agricultural production.

As a resource based production, agriculture is connected to place/location in many ways; geographically/spatially, socially and culturally. The geographical aspects refer to materiality such as natural resources and topography, and geographical position in relation to other localities and the labour market. Places are also shaped by political factors, through the geographical distribution of services in the welfare state, and regional and economic policy, which includes agricultural policy. The social aspects of the locality are related to demographic factors, social organization and social networks/social capital. Culturally the place is related to history, traditions, norms and values, and symbolically connected to belonging and identity. Agriculture, traditionally a household based production, is closely tied to families and to family history. This close link between the farm, family and place, between identity, kinship and farm, is a central issue in studies of agriculture and farming (Thorsen 1993, Haan 1994, Gray 1998, Daugstad 2001, Johnsen 2003). This relationship influences the

succession processes and the development of agriculture. In Norway this relationship is expressed in the allodial law which represents a central mechanism for regulating succession on family farms in Norway. The purpose of the allodial law has been to secure the farming family the property right to the entire farmed land, and the transfer of this to the next generation where the eldest child is given priority before other siblings and relatives according to line of heritage. An important question is how this influences family farm succession today, in different local contexts, and in combination with other aspects of place.

Pros and cons for family farm succession

The majority of farms in Norway are not big enough to support two families, often not even one family without additional income. Therefore succession is central for getting the new generation into agriculture; the older generation has to be replaced by the younger generation through succession, which is the most common way, or by sale. Important questions concerning family farm succession are; when and to whom the farm is going to be transferred, and when and how these questions are clarified. This has implications for decisions made on the farm related to investments and possibilities for future production. For the successor, questions concerning the farm as an economic activity, including type of production and profitability, are of crucial importance.

According to a study of potential new farmers, the three most important reasons for not wanting to take over the farm are: that it will cost too much economically and in terms of work and effort compared to the expected income (25 %, men to a greater extent than women), choice of work and education is not compatible with taking over the farm (24%, men and women equally) and lack of interest in agricultural work (16%, women to a greater extent than men) (Angard et.al 2009). In addition not wanting to live where the farm is located was mentioned by 11% of respondents. In a study of holders of allodial right in 2002, the economic factors are reported as a more important reason compared to a study in 1996 (Kvendseth 2003). According to Angard et.al (2009) 70% of potential new farmers consider economic considerations to be the main challenge. This corresponds to the economy related reasons present farmers give for a lack of successors; low profitability and a wish for a better paid job, and there is also a lack of interest for agricultural work (Logstein 2010). The increased attention to the economic aspects can be related to the changes in agriculture where there are more demands for investments, particularly for certain types of production, such as dairy, and therefore an increased focus on the profitability of the investments.

The three most important factors which motivate holders of allodial right to take over the farm are; interest for farm work (32 %, men to a greater extent than women), interest for living at the farm (26%, women to a greater extent than men), and not wanting the farm to go out of the family (15%, women to a greater extent than men) (Andgard et al. 2009). When they are asked to specify the aspects that are important for choosing the farm as a place to live, three factors are emphasized; social network and belonging, good conditions for children to grow up, and the availability of good jobs. This shows the interconnection between the farm as an occupation and source of income, as a place to live and lifestyle, and the symbolic aspects of the farm related to identity, belonging and tradition.

The economic aspects seem to be the most central reason behind people not wanting to take over a farm. At the same time, the marked regional differences in motivation among people with allodial right indicate that the spatial or regional aspects also play a part in this. According to surveys among holders of allodial right, there is a reduction of those who want to use their right. In a survey of 2009, 54% had decided to take over, or thought that they would take over the farm (Andgard et al. 2009). This is a reduction from 1996 where 67% responded the same. Here we also find regional differences; in the eastern (and central) parts of Norway, 66% are planning to take over the farm, while the number in the more rural northern Norway is only 37%. In the eastern part only 21% thought negatively about succession while in northern Norway this figure was 41% (Andgard et al. 2009). Because of these regional differences we will now have a closer look at the different meanings of place in relation to agriculture.

Theoretical framework - The meaning of place

Place, space, and geographical imaginations have become commonplace topics in a variety of analytical fields, and across different disciplines the study of space, place and location has undergone a profound transformation, according to Warf and Arias (2009). The increased attention to place/space/locality has been described as ‘the spatial turn’ (Warf and Arias 2009). An important reason for this increased attention is that the different aspects of the globalization processes have challenged previous conceptions about the relationship between people, places, culture and society. The development of technology has facilitated increased mobility of people, products, capital and ideas. The globalization processes have changed the meaning of place and geographical distance and put place on the agenda in new ways. From being more represented as a context and geographical setting for studies of other topics, place has come to the foreground as a topic in its own right (Gieryn 2000; Norbye 2010).

The increased attention towards the changing relationship between people and places has been related to issues concerning the importance of home and belonging versus individual choices, identity and mobility. Instead of roots, concepts like disembedding (Giddens 1991), deterritorialization (Appadurai 1990), and multi-local version of identity formation (Marcus 1992), are used to describe people’s relation to space in modern society. In addition, mobility can be described as one of the characteristics, values, and ideologies of modern society (Giddens 1991, Bauman 1998, Friedman 1997). Globalization, however, does not preclude an emphasis on the local, and attachment to place (Friedman 1997, Olwig 1994), possibly the contrary (Gieryn 2000, Olwig and Hastrup 1997). From the Norwegian context, Gullestad (1996) claims that it is important for modern people to ‘belong’ in the present by means of feelings of ‘roots’ in the past. There is also a notion that a person wants to identify with the home place and express loyalty towards it. However, this sense of attachment and belonging to the home place can be expressed and cultivated independently of the place you live (Wiborg 2004).

Kinship and place attachment are elements that are often connected, so that kinship relations to a place become a symbol of attachment to the place itself. Kinship concerns both relations to the past, to social networks in the present, and to potential relations through children in the future. The allodial law represents a central mechanism for regulating how succession on family farms is carried out in Norway and links place, farm and family. The purpose of allodial law has been to secure the property rights of the farming family for the entire farmed land, and the transfer of this land to the next generation in 'one piece' to the first born child. As such, it has also hindered accumulation of huge amounts of land into few families or firms and that farm land becomes a capitalistic good on the market. About 80 % of farms are transferred to new farmers in the next generation through use of this Act (Jervell 2002), either through their own family rights to the farm (74 %) or through their partners' (8 %) (Logstein 2010). The Allodial Act can in this way be described as a juridical expression of this connection between kinship and attachment to place.

The meaning we ascribe to a place has implications for the identity we ascribe to people from these places and vice versa; places can be ascribed identity and meaning through association with the kinds of people who live there; a farming community, a fishing community, an industrial community or a commercial town, urban or rural/countryside (Creed and Ching 1997, Shields 1991, Thuen 2003). In this way, places give ground for collective ascriptions of identity to its inhabitants, and at the same time, places can be associated with certain activities and values which can be important for construction of individual and collective identity. The identity of people and places can therefore be considered as a mutual process, including processes of inclusion and exclusion (Cloke and Little 1997). At the same time places are characterized by structural and material conditions connected to geographical location, demography, the labour market and access to private and public services. In addition, national politics influence the framework conditions for different regions and localities. Climatic and topographic aspects are also important for how places appear and are experienced. Places are therefore constructed in a multifaceted way. In this paper we would like to explore further how these aspects influence family farm succession in different ways.

Methodological approach

In order to discuss the spatial aspects of farming and the consequences for family farm succession, we have used a variety of sources, such as public statistics of agriculture, and surveys among farmers and holders of allodial right. Historical sources are used as a background for describing a spatial pattern of agriculture. In addition, we have conducted interviews with farmers' organizations, agricultural bureaucrats, and farmers from one municipality in each of three regions in Norway; Northern Norway, Mid-Norway and Eastern Norway, which differ according to motivation for family farm succession, geographic conditions, and the historical position of agriculture. In the paper we will present a preliminary analysis in order to explain some of the patterns we find in the quantitative material.

The farmers we interviewed were selected on the basis of information from the municipal agricultural administration where we asked for farms that were in, had recently been involved

in, or had recently finished a succession process. The farmers were then contacted. The interviews with the farmers were carried out on their farms. Some interviews were only with the farmer, other interviews involved their partner and others involved both generations. The interviewed farmers represent 10 farms with different kinds of production; grain, sheep and milk and meat production. They are also in different phases of the succession process. Some have recently taken over the farm, other farmers are in the middle of the process of leaving the farm to their children, and some are in a process of considering leaving the farm to their children or renting out the land. The interviews will therefore illuminate different aspects of the succession process. In addition the farmers have different connections to their farm; some of the farms have been in the family for several generations, others have been only two generations and one of the farms had been bought by the farmer. The interviews were semi structured and the main themes were the background of the farm and farmer, the production, organization and economic situation on the farm today, considerations and challenges in relation to the succession, relation to the locality, and how they considered the situation and challenges for agriculture locally. In the interviews we also got many stories about succession processes on other farms in the area. We therefore collected information about a greater number of farm successions than the number of farms we visited. This information was very useful in order to find patterns of succession processes and challenges. In addition it helped give us an understanding of how these issues were talked about locally. We also interviewed representatives for the agricultural authorities at both the county level and municipal level in each of our three regions in order to get a general overview over the challenges related to agriculture at these levels.

The case areas

The three case areas subject for interviews, differ from one another regarding nature and climate and therefore in their conditions for farming. They also differ in regards to their economic sector, labor market, and infrastructure.

Case area one is situated in the county of Nordland, in northern Norway. It is located about 230 km (3.5 hours' drive) from the nearest city Bodø. The area is coastal with about 3000 inhabitants in the municipality. Despite a general population growth in Norway, Nordland is losing inhabitants (-1.2% last ten years) and the case area has lost more than 10% in the course of the last 10 years (Statistics Norway 2011b;c). The area characterizes agriculture, aquaculture, and fisheries to be its backbone industries. There are about 100 active farms left in the area (650 farm properties)(SLF 2011). Half of these are dairy farms, and most farms are occupied with animal husbandry (pig, sheep and/or cattle).

Case area two is located in mountainous terrain, approximately 120 km (1.5 hour drive) from the city of Trondheim, in Sør-Trøndelag county, in the mid-Norway region. Trondheim can be accessed by car, railway and bus. The area also has its own town, with around 6500 residents. The area has experienced positive growth regarding inhabitants with 5% growth during the past 10 years. The area is a popular tourist destination during both summer and winter, and has experienced massive growth in the building of second homes for residents of the surrounding regions. There are around 250 active farms (approximately 600 farm properties)

(SLF 2011). One third of these are dairy farms, with more than half holding sheep. Both tourism and the building industry supply farmers with options for off farm work.

The third case area is in the center of southern Norway, roughly 60 km (1 hour drive) from the capital of Norway, Oslo. This area has experienced a population growth of around 10 percent in the latter 10 years (Statistics Norway 2011b;c). The region is a popular settlement area with good infrastructure towards Oslo and other cities in the region. About half of the agricultural properties are active farms, the majority being involved in grain production. There is little dairy or husbandry, but to a growing extent horses (SLF 2011).

Place as geographic locality and materiality

There are large regional differences both in production, conditions for production and also in motivation for farm succession across Norwegian agriculture. Agriculture is an economic activity where the use of land in particular places/localities is the basis for production. Agricultural production involves engagement with the land. Therefore the qualitative aspects of the land are relevant economic assets. The soil, temperature/climate, topography etc. have an effect on the outcome of production. Some regions have natural advantages and disadvantages for certain types of agricultural production, so productivity will therefore vary regionally. In Norway these natural regional differences are connected to a system of regional specialization of production which is reflected in economic incentives and policies. In Northern Norway the production of meat and milk is the dominant production, and productions like grain, forestry and horticulture are more common in the southern part of Norway. The agricultural subsidies are also differentiated according to natural advantages and disadvantages through the agricultural agreement (Jordbruksavtale 2010-2011). In 2010 these were divided into price subsidies that vary between 10 different geographical zones in Norway. The regional differences in price reflect a pattern, with lower prices in more productive areas and higher prices in less productive areas. Milk production in arctic, mountain areas and some coastal/island areas receives the highest price subsidy on milk. The same pattern is found in regional price subsidies on meat.

The historical background for agriculture in the different regions also influences on the current situation for succession at a regional level. The agricultural system in northern Norway (and also in northern Finland) has historically been described as a female agriculture and the agriculture has been small scale and primarily subsistence production (Fyhn 1988). Due to the climate the growing season is short and the temperature influences on what can be produced. Modernization towards more specialized and commercialized farming did not start until after the Second World War. Before that the economic basis for households was a combination of income and subsistence production from agriculture in combination with income from other sources like fishing, construction work, logging and mining. The majority of farms were therefore small. Women were responsible for the everyday work on the farm and home (Saugestad 1980), while men combined work on the farm with external income (Brox 1966). The economic specialization towards more commercial farming started around 1950. During the 1960's the process of masculinization of agriculture started. Bjørklund, Drivenes and Gerrard (1994) describe the process in this way: "When the technology came to

the farm, the man entered the cowshed”. The increased use of technology is also connected to increased commercialization and capitalization of agriculture. In this process, many of the smaller farms disappeared because they were too small to generate enough income and/or to economically justify investments. Some of the farms were shut down, others hired out the land to neighbouring farms. This process has continued, resulting in a major reduction of the agricultural activity in many of the municipalities in the county of Nordland. A representative for the regional agricultural administration describes today’s situation in this way:

There are 5-6 municipalities which have natural conditions for intensive agriculture and then you have the other 40. (...) We actually have municipalities without agriculture and some on the “red” list.

Those on the red list are municipalities where the number of farms is very low and the prospect for future farming is dismal. Even in some of the municipalities where there are relatively many active farms, the number of farms has been halved during the last ten years. Only the municipalities that have natural conditions that are very favorable for agriculture still have active farming communities.

The situation in mid-Norway and eastern Norway is different. The topography and the climate are in general more suitable for agriculture compared to northern Norway. And more of the farms are relatively large and old, but in some areas the farms are also relatively small. Some of the farms in mid-Norway, where we conducted interviews, could trace their history back to the 17th century and the ownership to the farm had been limited to only a few families.

The regional differences in production are also related to differences in motivation for holders of allodial right to take over the farm. Holders of allodial rights on farms with production of milk and meat are among the most negative towards taking over the farm and in contrast, holders of allodial rights on farms with production of grain are the most positive (Kvendseth 2003, Andgard 2009), as Table 1 shows:

Table 1: Expected succession on farm by main production. Percent. (N=1548)

| | Family successor | No successor | Don't know |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------|------------|
| Milk | 60 | 12 | 28 |
| Livestock husbandry | 59 | 12 | 29 |
| Grain | 73 | 7 | 20 |
| Horticulture/fruit | 57 | 7 | 36 |
| Forest | 76 | 3 | 21 |
| Other | 58 | 16 | 26 |
| total | 67 | 11 | 27 |
| n | 967 | 164 | 417 |

Pearson Chi-Square 29.084, df 10, sig .001

Source: Trender i Norsk landbruk 2010.

Some of these differences can be related to differences in production which concern both organization of labour, the intensity of labour, and economic factors. The various kinds of

production are also linked to certain political measures and economic incentives and they are related to different production 'regimes' regarding requirements of organization and means of production. Whether a farmer produces vegetables, fruit, milk, eggs, corn, have sheep, cows, pigs etc. or various combinations of differing types of production, each form of production requires different kinds of input of labour, both daily and seasonally. Intensive farming like milk and meat production require for example the presence of the farmer every day the whole year around. In contrast, extensive farming like grain production is concentrated to a few hectic months a year. Whether the production is intensive or extensive influences both the possibility for off farm work and opportunities for vacation and leisure. The younger generation is more concerned about having time for leisure, and in agriculture, lack of leisure time and holidays is something many farmers find unsatisfactory (Kvendseth 2003, Melberg 2002). This can partly explain why fewer of those with allodial right are motivated for taking over the farm in regions dominated by labour intensive production like many of the farms found in northern Norway. According to a farmer we talked to, certain forms of labour also tie them to the farm during the day and make it difficult to combine with other jobs, therefore all their income must come from agriculture. And in order to generate a decent income from agriculture, the level of required financial investment is another factor to be considered, with milk production being among the more capital intensive forms of production.

The level of necessary economic investment and the burden of being tied to the farm are reasons why one of the farmers, Ørjan, who recently had taken over a dairy farm, is therefore planning to change his farms production from dairy to sheep. In order to continue with milk production, he would have had to invest more than he wants to. Instead, he can relatively easily convert the buildings to suit the purpose of keeping sheep and cattle for meat production. Not being so tied to the farm work, is another argument for changing the production because he says he wants to have a life outside the farm and agricultural work. In addition he will still work occasionally as an electrician to supplement the income from the farm. Having sheep gives more freedom and flexibility in his everyday life. The organization of the various kinds of production, requirements for investments and the possibilities for changes on a farm seem to influence the motivation for taking over the farm.

Regional differences are also related to the possibilities in the labour market. In rural areas the public sector is particularly important as a supplementary source of income for farmers' households. In a succession process, the local labour market can represent an important economic buffer in a transition and investment phase. Living in the area and having a job in the local labour market prior to taking over seem to make the process of taking over easier. For Ørjan, keeping his job as an electrician was a condition for taking over the farm. His wife also works in the local labour market within the public health care sector. His dream is to have all his income from the farm when he has changed the production and developed the farm. On another farm in mid-Norway the parents let the younger generation take over partly because they could have supplementary income from the local labour market. This meant that they did not have to invest much on the farm in the first phase, when they were finding out whether they would continue with milk production or change the production in another direction. The possibilities in the local labour market were also a reason why they already

lived in the locality before they took over the farm. Therefore the choice of taking over the farm was only a choice concerning change of work and income. It did not involve a question of moving (back home) or not.

The labour market is important not only for supplementary income, but also for attracting or finding a partner for the farmer. Finding a partner who is willing to settle down and live in a particular place, presents a challenge, particularly in Northern Norway, with living on the farm as a bachelor being mentioned as a very unattractive situation. One of the farmers, Geir, commented on the issue of bachelor farmers and said that he had been lucky, because he had found his partner locally. She had come from eastern Norway because she wanted to work for a year in the local health care, so she already lived there when they met. But without a partner, Geir said that he had been skeptical about taking over and investing so much on the farm.

The material and structural aspects of the locality influence the attractiveness of the farm and the locality as a place to live, and influence therefore family farm succession. The geographical position influences production and profitability in different ways; conditions for various kinds of production and the kinds of productions which dominate the region. The structural conditions related to the labour market have implications both for the possibility of finding a job outside the farm and for potential new farmers to live in the locality before they take over the farm. However, the material and structural aspects of a place and farming must be interpreted and given meaning to by people in order to influence their decisions about taking over a farm.

The social aspects of place

The social aspect concerns the social relations and networks between people connected to the locality as a place to live and the professional milieu for farmers. The general development in agriculture has resulted in a reduction of farms with a certain kind of production in each locality. The result is an increase in the distance to the professional, but also social networks (Fjeldavli and Bjørkhaug 2000). In a study of young farmers, Villa (1999) points to the problems they talk about related to being a professional minority in the rural localities and also about the lack of a professional local network. Particularly Norwegian farmers in dairy production have been found to lack a professional network and feel lonely at work (Fjeldavli and Bjørkhaug 2000).

For potential new farmers the attractiveness of the farm can therefore be related to the professional environment the farm is part of. This can be illustrated by Tore, a young farmer who is very content after buying a farm in a particular locality in his home region. He had first considered buying a farm in another locality in a neighbouring municipality.

I am actually very glad I got this farm, because the milieu is much better here, more farmers and stuff, and that means a lot.

How is the milieu; do you have a meeting place?

We don't actually have a meeting place, we don't have a farmer's pub or anything like that, but you meet farmers all the time. ...There is a store, a kind of farmers' store, there you meet many farmers and you can have a discussion, or if you are at the pub in the weekend, then you also meet farmers. It means a lot that you are not alone. You have to have some colleagues to talk with, you need that.

The professional milieu of farmers this dairy farmer talks about, is an informal milieu of farmers who meet in different settings. Because there are many farmers in the locality, being a farmer does not mean being part of a minority, which can be a problem in other places.

Kristian and other farmers tell about the importance of having neighbours who can help or give advice in different situations like calving, use and repair of equipment etc. Kristian says that it is crucial to have people nearby that he can ask for professional help.

When I think about how useful, practical, and pleasant it has been for us three farmers living close by to one another during the years; problems with calving and such things – there was hardly ever any need to call for the vet, instead you called for the neighbour. Even if it was in the middle of the night then he would come. If there was a calf who laid the wrong way, it is usually not necessary to call the vet, but there is a need for some extra force, because it needs to be got out quickly. So usually we can handle such things, we don't need a vet, but you need someone together with you.

For this farmer calling for the vet in these cases would be almost impossible because of the distances to the nearest vet and also because of the expenses. These farmers have also helped each other with other practical tasks related to agriculture. This network represents a kind of social capital because the help they provide to each other can be converted into economic capital (Bourdieu 1986, Sutherland and Burton 2011). The help is given as a kind of gift with the expectation that they will receive help in similar situations later. However, due to a gradual reduction in the number of farms in this area, the social and professional milieu among the farmers is vulnerable. Kristian continues:

And we see that if we continue with the development of the large farms then the milieu of farmers and producers will be impoverished and there will be a big farmer on each farm and with a long distance to the neighbour and nothing in between ...

Areas with few farms can therefore be less attractive for potential new farmers for both professional and social reasons. Without this social network of farmers Kristian is not sure that he would advise his son to consider taking over the farm.

When many people in an area are connected to the same economic activity, like agriculture, industry or fishing, it influences the sense of place. One aspect concerns how the community/locality is described; an agricultural community, or a fishing community. If the community is described this way, it affects how people who live in these areas think about

themselves and the activities they are involved in. Thuen (2001) describes it as the identity of the place. It also influences the organization of social life.

Kristian who is planning or hoping that his son in his early 20s will take over the farm reflects about the importance of a social milieu in affecting this decision:

We see that young people today demand... a social milieu and such things. You can't get that among other people who have a different rhythm of the day and who have time off every weekend.

This concerns both professional and social aspects. As Nils commented;

As long as there are still many farmers then the community reflects this. At the local school here in this agricultural area there are no meetings which start before eight in the evening; that is after milking time. There are hardly any meetings where they expect farmers to attend which start between five and eight in evening.

The farmer said that an indicator of how central farming was for people in the community could therefore be related to the considerations taken for the farmers' working schedules when planning other social activities. The identity of the place is related to the identity of the people and this locality and municipality is described as a farming community. In farming communities the people who live there are predominantly farmers or connected to farming and much of the local life is therefore dominated by farming.

Farmers in this municipality talk in positive terms about how the municipality still is described as a farming community and how being a farmer doesn't mean that you are in the minority. This means that they can go to the local shop, meet other farmers and get informal information and practical advice:

So, if you meet someone at the store you easily begin talking about things like; well this part of the tractor wouldn't work; have you any idea about what it could be? At the Farmer's store there is a lot of this sort of conversation. (Tore)

In one of the municipalities, the local store for agricultural equipment is presented as another important informal meeting place, where farmers can exchange information and advice concerning agriculture, and of course for agricultural equipment.

Many different studies emphasize social capital as important for future farms, particularly when related to social networks in the locality, which can, in different ways, influence the information, ideas and help the new farmer can receive (Johnsen 2003, Borch and Førde 2010, Rønning 2008, Andgard 2009, Vergunst and Shucksmith 2009). Johnsen (2003) shows the importance of the local social and cultural context for how farmers manage different challenges in agriculture in her study from New Zealand. She shows how differences in how the local social networks provided help and social support, made a difference for farmers in

handling a difficult situation for the farms. The local social and cultural conditions, can in this way be considered as factors which influence the attractiveness of taking over a farm, because they will in different ways impact on the economic and social outcome for the farm. The importance of this form of network is illustrated by the interviews with representatives of the agricultural administration, in the municipality of Trøndelag, who described localities where there had been a domino effect of farms that had shut down. When one farm had closed down, the motivation for the neighbouring farmers was reduced. The farms were shut down instead of being taken over by a new generation.

It is not only the professional milieu, but also the other social networks which can make places attractive for settling down and taking over the family farm, which Geir's story illustrates. Geir lived for 6 years in the nearest town and worked as an electrician before deciding to return home. It wasn't only his desire to be a farmer that brought him back. He also missed the place itself. He didn't feel at home in the city and says that it was difficult to establish a social network there. In his home locality he describes the social situation in quite different terms:

I don't know what it is, but we really keep together in Strand. If anything happens here, it doesn't leave Strand. It is very I don't know. I don't know how to say it, but we have always had something special here in Strand.

There is a very active local club here, with all the voluntary work that that entails. When there is voluntary work, everybody is given a task. It depends on of what kind of projects it is. If there is cleaning in the spring, then everybody comes when it suits them, some people make waffles, others paint... (...) Here in the locality we have a common boat shed everybody can use, and we also have a common barbeque shed... We have actually achieved/accomplished quite alot here.

For Geir these social aspects of the locality have influenced his decision for taking over and making investments on the farm.

The social aspects of the locality influence the attractiveness of family farm succession related to the locality as a place to live and as a place to be a farmer. These aspects also concern the identity of the place. With a gradual reduction in the number of farms in different areas, more localities will be vulnerable to dropping below the critical mass of farmers necessary to maintain the necessary professional and social milieu. This could have a negative impact on the attractiveness of taking over the family farm. However, people can also be attached to a place and a farm in other ways.

The symbolic aspects of place

The family farm can be regarded as a material and symbolic expression of the family's local belonging and identity (Thorsen 1993, Haan 1994, Daugstad 2001, Johnsen 2003). Therefore the farm can represent not only individual belonging, but also belonging in a more historical context to the place and to a larger kin group. In a study from a rural locality in Norway,

Daugstad (2001) argues that the interest for farms and family farm succession far exceeds the material value and she discusses the importance of the farm as a symbol of kinship, belonging and identity. The significance of agricultural properties for feelings of home and belonging is emphasized in a study of smallholdings by Flemsæter (2009) who shows how people are reluctant to sell these properties out of the family. This value related to the continuity of ownership on family farms is emphasized in studies from both Finland (Silvasti 2003) and in Sweden (Gulliksen 1999). The continuation of the production on the farm is another issue and relates to other aspects of the place.

The allodial right represents both an economic and social linking to the farm and to the land/locality. This kind of attachment to the place will vary, partly depending on how long the family has been represented on the farm, but also how the value of the farm and heritage is talked about, both in the family and locally. When a family has a long history connected to the farm, it might be used as a strong argument and/or incentive for keeping the next generation on the farm. Holders of allodial right might feel an obligation to continue the family's presence on the farm, particularly on larger farms. Two thirds of Norwegian farmers feel it is a duty to continue farming (Logstein 2010), while on the other side, 59% of the holders of allodial rights describe it as a privilege to be in that position (Andgard et al. 2009). Feeling a duty to the continuation of the family farm is therefore not a one-sided negative experience for the farmers. For some, taking over the farm represents particular values when it has been passed on through many generations, like Helge explains:

It is something that is in your blood. Your grandma and grandpa have told you about earlier generations, how they did things, how the house was built at that time, and how it was your great granddad who built it. As you get older you get a different perspective on those things, I think. That is how I experienced it. (...) And you get that feeling that it is important, bringing the heritage further. And when you get children you become that way yourself; telling the children that their grand and great grandparents have worked the land here.

When the farm has been in the family for many generations, the farm can be seen as a material expression of the family and the family history. By taking over the farm this farmer expresses a feeling of being part of something important and valuable by bringing the heritage and the family's connection to the land further. The decision about taking over the farm has implications for both the former generation and the next generation.

Maintaining the farm can be seen partly as a tribute to former generations. Affection, feelings for the family farm, and a moral commitment towards the family is embedded in many farmers (Heggem and Bjørkhaug 2009). These feelings are legitimate factors for choosing to farm and to transfer the farm to a successor of the same family (Daugstad 2001). However, it can be difficult to distinguish clearly between interest, duty, social pressure and sense of belonging, and there might be ambivalence concerning taking over the family farm. Interests in farming might be part of the socialization of holders of allodial right, and expectations from people in the locality. Morten, who had the allodial right to the farm, talks about this below.

I was duly reminded by people around me that I had the allodial right ... “Yes, you are the boy with allodial right”, I heard that throughout my childhood. But I was frustrated because it was expected that I should take over the farm and become a farmer.

However, he says that he has never thought of not taking over the farm, but he had to think it through. His parents expressed very clearly that the allodial right is a right, not a duty even if the farm had been in the family for many generations. But at the same time Morten says: “*I think they would have been disappointed if I had come home and said; no, I will not run the farm*”. Morten’s decision to take over the farm can therefore be seen as motivated by a mixture between cultural values related to free will, expectations, duty and right. He has been socialized to be a farmer and is interested in farm work, therefore it does not feel a duty to take over, but more a privilege.

It is not only positive emotions and feelings of belonging that hinder the sale of farms, according to a representative for the municipal agricultural administration in mid-Norway. Helge says that it can be regarded as shameful to sell family agricultural property.

I think that if I said; I want to move and sell the farm; it has been in the family for 13 generations, but I want to sell it, then I think it would have been hard for my parents to swallow. I am sure that they would have given in, but it would have resulted in a lot of gossip, because you just don’t do such things. I think it is better now than earlier, but I think for many it still feels a bit shameful to sell the property out of the family.

Other farmers also talk about the gossip a sale of a family farm with long traditions would result in, and that these issues are a kind of taboo and are avoided in discussions among farmers.

This way of thinking and talking about the shame connected to selling a family farm, could be described as a cultural script. Vanclay and Enticott (2011:260) define a cultural script as a “culturally shared expression, story or line of argument, or an expected unfolding of events that is deemed to be appropriate or to be expected in a particular socially defined context and that provide a rationale or justification for a particular issue or course of action”. The values and arguments related to taking over a farm can therefore also be described as cultural scripts. However, there might exist local variation of these scripts.

When the successors do not want to run the farm, instead of selling the farm, a common strategy/solution that farmers talk about is to rent out the land. In this way the family’s link to the place is maintained, but the farm’s economic activity is reduced to the renting of land to the neighboring farm, in order to help maintain their active farm. For the farmer who rents out the land, this could be a good solution, because in this way the family can stay on the farm. Moving away from the house is often not an attractive solution, because people can be closely attached to the place even if they do not continue farming. The symbolic significance of

keeping the farm as a family house or family place seem to more important than keeping the farm as a place of production. The house represents the continuity and the history of the family, while the production changes in accordance with economic requirements. Many times not only the farmer, but the siblings, their families and other relatives have interests in the farm property. It can represent an ancestral place, and be a place where relatives who live in different parts of the country meet. Kristian talks about how the farm has become a central meeting place for the family, and he has done a lot of maintenance work on the house. His sister has offered him financial help in order to maintain the place. She is very interested in keeping the farm, or at least the farm house, in the family. The farm house is in this way not considered as a strictly private house for Kristian, but also as a house which other relatives have the right to use on certain occasions.

The importance of the family farm seems not primarily to be connected to the farming, but more to the locality and the house. By only renting out the farm land, other rights like hunting and fishing are also kept in the family, and these rights can be very important, as one of the farmers emphasized. These rights can give privileged access to outdoor activities in the uncultivated land; mountains and woodlands in the municipality, and can be a symbol of belonging. Therefore renting out the farm could be a good alternative for farmers who do not have successors and who want to quit farming without moving from the place.

The allodial law secures family succession and ensures not only a right, but also a duty to farm (Heggem and Bjørkhaug 2009) but this could be accomplished by renting out the land. The “duty” to inherit the farm may also hamper sale of farming properties, as was the intention of the law. This experience of a duty to keep the ownership in the family, and connectedness to the place, is found to be so embedded in farming families that it hinders in addition the sales of properties that are too small or marginal to be included in the allodial law (Flemsæter 2009). When the allodial law was revised it was expected that many farms could be ‘released’ for sale. This did not happen. Instead the unintended effect for many properties is that the properties are still owned by the farming family, farm land is leased out or lies fallow, and buildings are used as second homes. In his study of smallholdings, Flemsæter (2009) found that emotions connected to the family property and the place prevented sale. This indicates that norm, traditions and emotions might be stronger than laws when it comes to succession of farms. The time perspective seems in this context to be an important aspect of the relation to place. Like Helge said:

I think it must be harder to say no to taking over a farm when it has been in the family for generations than a property which has been in the family for only 100 years.

Even if 100 years might be regarded as a long time for some farms, the point is that with shorter family history, it might seem easier not to take over the farm. And having bought the farm, even if it is within the family, seems to loosen the ties to the farm and family house. This can be illustrated by the story of Simon who bought a farm together with his father from his aunt, when his uncle died. Now Simon’s daughter and her partner are planning to take over the farm, and Simon is worried about the practical and economic challenges the young

people will face related to the milk production on the farm. He doesn't want them to be trapped into something they will not be satisfied with. Therefore he says:

Simon: Even if this is a family farm, then I have to say that if they don't enjoy being farmers, then they just have to sell. I don't have any other advice. I don't think that agriculture can survive on traditions.

I: Wouldn't that be a bit hard, selling it?

Simon: No, I have bought it myself when my father bought it back from his brother's widow.

Simon is not emotionally attached to the farm house; therefore it is relatively easy for him and his wife to move to another house close by when the young couple takes over the farm. From Simon's perspective, there is no point in keeping a farm if they are not interested in farming, and do not find it profitable enough. He also mentions that there are young people locally without allodial right, but with a lot of interest in agriculture, and therefore he argues that they should have the possibility to get access to a farm.

Having bought the farm the way Simon has, seems to make him less committed to the farm regarding the next generation's decisions. The act of having used money when taking over the farm, and not just having received it as a kind of "gift" from former generations, appears to give Simon a freer position concerning how to handle the future of the farm. The young farmer in our material who bought his farm without any family relations, also bought it from a farmer who himself had bought the farm earlier. This farm had therefore a history of being on the market. In these cases the economic aspects seem to have reduced or substituted the importance of the symbolic aspects of belonging to the particular place of the farm.

There seems to be a form of ambivalence concerning the role of family traditions and family succession. On the one hand the parents want their children to make their own decisions and do what they want, and to not feel a duty or obligation to take over. On the other hand, the parents are happy if one of their children does want to take over. In this way the value of keeping the farm in the family and not selling it outside of the family, still seems to be part of a local discourse about family farm succession. However, there appears to be added a new element to the script concerning the allodial right and family succession on farms, which emphasizes the importance of the potential new farmers' interest in taking over the farm and an emphasis on the allodial right as a right, not a duty.

Conclusion

Succession on family farms is a crucial element for the future of farming in Norway as the large majority of farms are transferred through family relations. Even if economic considerations are often used as reasons for why farms are closed down and for young people not wanting to take over, research has questioned this causal link between profitability and propensity as a reason for involvement in farming (Bjørkhaug 2007, Burton et.al. 2008, Flemsæter og Setten (2009)). We have argued that place plays a central role in understanding challenges for family farm succession, and we maintain in this context that it is necessary to

understand the interplay of different dimensions and meanings of place; the geographical, the social, the cultural and the symbolic. Agriculture is embedded in places, as agriculture concerns the use of land at a particular place. The natural conditions related to the locality represent important premises for the production and for the income. As farm families are dependent on income from other sources, the interplay between the production and income on the farm and the distance to, and possibilities in, the local labour market influence the household's economy and work situation. For potential new farmers, the possibility for flexibility and adaptability related to production and sources of income seem valuable. In addition agriculture is embedded in the multidimensional meaning of place including the social and cultural aspects. The connection to the place through social networks and the symbolic meaning of the farm as an expression of the family's history and belonging, seem to be central elements influencing the transfer of the agricultural property to the next generation for those who want to take over. The allodial right, not only as right but also as a value, still influences the decisions concerning family farm succession. The element of duty is reduced in the discourses about family farm succession. However, the value related to belonging, and the family's relation to the farm/ place in combination with the life style which connects farmers to the land, has an impact on decisions concerning family farm succession. Whether there is succession on a family farm is a result of individual choices and a complex process and interplay of different factors. The potential for succession on a family farm is related to the possible new farmer's (and partner's) expectations and motivations and how these can be met at a particular place. Therefore taking over a farm does not represent the same challenges or opportunities for all. However, a common denominator for agriculture is the embeddedness in a particular place.

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