

Variety keeps Swiss farmers satisfied

March 16 2016

A project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation has found that Swiss farmers enjoy greater levels of job satisfaction than their counterparts in industrialised agricultural systems.

What impact do agricultural systems have on [job satisfaction](#) among [farmers](#)? This is the question that Agroscope researchers have been investigating with funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation. They compared Switzerland's agricultural system with the more industrialised northeastern German system, which is dominated by non-family farms. They concluded that farmers in Switzerland are generally just as satisfied with their work as their counterparts in northeast Germany.

Varied work a source of satisfaction

However, job satisfaction is generated differently between the two groups of farmers. Whereas financial factors have a significant impact on satisfaction levels among farmers in northeast Germany, farm size and the [financial situation](#) play a secondary role among their Swiss colleagues. "In fact, if you factor in the agricultural structures of both regions, you find that the Swiss farmers tend to be more satisfied," says Tim Besser, socioeconomist at Agroscope. "The Swiss system evidently exhibits qualities apart from economic return."

The researchers compared the two systems by surveying the job satisfaction levels of 3000 Swiss and 2000 northeast German farmers and asking them to rate their financial situation. Of the 5000

questionnaires sent at random, 1687 were returned. 1158 – 72 percent from Switzerland, 28 percent from Germany – were used to assess job satisfaction.

Additionally, the researchers found similarities. For example, being forced to take up paid employment outside agriculture seems to have a detrimental effect on satisfaction with agricultural work. On the contrary, diversification in the form of agritourism or running a farm shop increases job satisfaction.

Social role in rural areas

The researchers also investigated social networking levels among farmers in rural areas. They found that Swiss farmers generally had stronger local roots than their German counterparts and that the type of networking depended heavily on farm size. Besser assumes that: "An agricultural system based on small family-run farms could counteract negative population developments, such as the depopulation of peripheral areas." Based on the results Besser emphasizes: "When we discuss the changes that are taking place in the Swiss agriculture, we should remember that adopting an entirely economic perspective can have negative social consequences."

More information: T. Besser et al. Which farm characteristics influence work satisfaction? An analysis of two agricultural systems, *Agricultural Systems* (2015). [DOI: 10.1016/j.agry.2015.10.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.agry.2015.10.003)

T. Besser, C. Jurt, and S. Mann: Agricultural structure and farmers' interconnections with rural communities. *International Journal of Social Economics* (in press)

Provided by Swiss National Science Foundation

Citation: Variety keeps Swiss farmers satisfied (2016, March 16) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-03-variety-swiss-farmers.html>

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