

Adapting to Rural Demographic Change: Impacts, Challenges and Opportunities for Ageing Farmers in Prachin Buri Province, Thailand

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Abstract : Most people in rural Thailand still depend on agriculture. The rural areas are undergoing changes in their demographic structures with an increasing older population, out migration of younger people and a shift away from work in the agricultural sector towards manufacturing and service provisioning. These changes may lead to a decline in agricultural productivity and food insecurity. Our research aims to examine perceptions of older farmers on how rural demographic change affects them, to investigate how farmers may change their agricultural practices to cope with their ageing and to explore the factors affecting these changes, including the opportunities and challenges arising from them. The data were collected through a household survey with 368 farmers in the Prachin Buri province in central Thailand, the main area for agricultural production. A series of binomial logistic regression models were applied to analyse the data. We found that most farmers suffered from age-related diseases, which compromised their working capacity. Most farmers attempted to reduce labour intense work, by either stopping farming through transferring farmland to their children (41%), stopping farming by giving the land to the others (e.g., selling, leasing out) (28%) and continuing farming with making some changes (e.g., changing crops, employing additional workers) (24%). Farmers' health and having a potential farm successor were positively associated with the probability of stopping farming by transferring the land to the children. Farmers with a successor were also less likely to stop farming by giving the land to the others. Farmers' age was negatively associated with the likelihood of continuing farming by making some changes. The results show that most farmers base their decisions on the hope that their children will take over the farms, and that without successor, farmers lease out or sell the land. Without successor, they also no longer invest in expansion and improvement of their farm production, especially adoption of innovative technologies that could help them to maintain their farm productivity. To improve farmers' quality of life and sustain their farm productivity, policies are needed to support the viability of farms, the access to a pension system and the smooth and successful transfer of the land to a successor of farmers.

Keywords : rural demographic change, older farmer, stopping farming, continuing farming, health and age, farm successor, Thailand

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