

“DEATH WITH BOOTS ON”: Challenges Faced by Elderly Farmers in the Process of Retirement and Family Succession

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ABSTRACT

The rural population and the managers of agricultural production units are aging and the generational renewal in the countryside is finding it difficult to be carried out. One of the central aspects of this difficulty lies in the resistance of older farmers to hand over property management to younger ones. The objective of this study was to analyze and understand the weaknesses and problems faced by elderly farmers in the face of the succession process and their withdrawal from the management of rural properties. Methodologically, bibliometric research was carried out, followed by an in-depth systematic review. Scopus was used as a database considering the following keywords “retirement” AND “succession” AND “farm”. From the search and refinement of the documents, 34 documents were analyzed. It was found that older farmers have difficulties leaving the management and activities of the rural property, that is, they do not retire. Such problems exist, above all, because of the symbolic capital that the rural property represents for the older farmer and the negative social weight or judgment for those who withdraw because socially there is a consensus that good farmers do not retire. Such behavior has negative consequences in the context of the succession process, rural properties, and the development of agriculture. Government assistance through the payment of subsidies to elderly farmers or young successors would help with the intergenerational transfer of agriculture as well as semi-retirement.

Keywords: Resistance to retirement; succession in agriculture; bibliometric analysis; belonging.

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INTRODUCTION

The aging of the agricultural workforce has become a central issue in various countries around the world. This factor raises concerns regarding the survival, continuity, and future of agricultural production, as well as the sustainability of rural society as a whole (Conway *et al.*, 2022). This is largely because aging in the countryside brings about various problems, notably hindering improvements and growth of rural properties compared to what would be achieved if managed by qualified young individuals (Rogers *et al.*, 2014). Older farmers do not plan for the future as effectively and swiftly as young farmers, thus it is argued that the absence of young individuals may lead to periods of stagnation, productivity decline, and technological lag (Conway *et al.*, 2022; Wheeler *et al.*, 2012; Page, 2012; Gha, 2012; Kararach;Kobena; Frannie, 2011; Mbeine, 2012).

As a result, the aging of the rural population and its consequences highlight the need to increase the workforce (both operational and managerial) of young individuals through generational succession (Conway *et al.*, 2022; Breitenbach; Foguesatto, 2023), which depends on a set of factors (Matte *et al.*, 2019; Breitenbach; Corazza, 2020). Among them: are economic performance (Bertoni; Cavicchioli, 2016; Foguesatto *et al.*, 2020); farm size (Aldanondo Ochoa; Casanovas; Almanza Sáez, *et al.*, 2007; Glauben; Tiete; Weiss, 2009); level of agricultural income (Wheeler *et al.*, 2012); education of potential successors (Beecher *et al.*, 2019; Glauben; Tiete; Weiss, 2006); their involvement in agricultural activities (Breitenbach; Foguesatto, 2023); affinity for the activity (Lago *et al.*, 2022); a dialogue between parents and potential successors (Conway *et al.*, 2017; Pitts *et al.*, 2009).

The importance of “rejuvenation” in agriculture is also rooted in the contemporary business structure in which agriculture operates, driven by technology, global trade, and market competition. In this context, aging farmers struggle to navigate both the macro world of business and the traditional routes of agriculture (Rogers *et al.*, 2014).

The most common way to operationalize this renewal and “rejuvenation” in agriculture is through the intergenerational succession process (Breitenbach; Corazza, 2019). With a planned succession process, there is a transfer of land, knowledge, and management from older to younger farmers or from one generation to the next, increasing the chances of future prosperity in the agricultural sector and, in the long term, food production (Conway, 2022; Mishra *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, succession planning is an imperative component of a family’s risk management strategy for their agricultural business, as it aims at ensuring the continuity of the property management team (Mishra *et al.*, 2010).

In this sense, the succession process in agriculture is marked by challenges and conflicts of various kinds (Urban; Nonkwelo, 2022). Among them, intergenerational conflicts stand out, as well as the special difficulty for older farmers to relinquish property management and entrust this work to their successor(s) (Breitenbach; Corazza, 2019).

This context brings to light a recurrent but often neglected issue in research on generational succession in agriculture, namely: the senior generation, the elderly farmers of the agricultural community, do not retire. In other words, farmers continue to manage, make decisions, and work on the operational aspects of the property for as long as possible (Mishra; El-Osta; Shaik, 2010; Conway *et al.*, 2021). Farmers decide to remain in the activity until their health

allows, and the idea of “stepping away” from agriculture and being “retired” is difficult for them to accept (Conway *et al.*, 2021).

Supporting these claims, O’Callaghan and Warburton (2017) affirm that agriculture has never been an easy profession, as farmers are professionals who work long daily hours and weekends. Furthermore, there is no predefined age for retirement for these professionals, and agricultural workers traditionally “die with their boots on” (O’Callaghan; Warburton, 2017).

However, despite the persistent desire not to “retire,” the physical nature of agriculture, combined with the context of demands for technological innovation in the sector, make it increasingly difficult for elderly farmers to maintain their properties’ productivity independently, without the assistance of a successor (Breitenbach; Corazza, 2019). Therefore, the aging process has important implications for the health, well-being, and safety of older farmers in the agricultural context (Rogers *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, according to Stoffel (2013), a specific analysis of children, youth, women, men, and the elderly provides insight into succession and continuity opportunities in family farming.

Given this, the research question presented in this study is centered on the evidence of the social and economic benefits of allowing young individuals to become involved in the management and work of rural properties and why, despite this evidences, there is resistance from elderly farmers to retire. Therefore, it is questioned what difficulties elderly individuals encounter in the succession process of their agricultural production units that impact their withdrawal from management and operational activities and what explains this resistance of farmers to retirement. To answer these questions, the objective of this study is to analyze and understand the weaknesses and problems faced by elderly farmers in the face of the succession process and their withdrawal from the management of rural properties. The following sections will detail the materials and methods, results, and final considerations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study utilized bibliometric analysis and literature review as research methods. This type of research is commonly used as it allows analyzing the state of the art of a particular topic through theoretical research. Bibliometric analysis involves three basic phases: data collection, data analysis, and data visualization and reporting (Bawach *et al.*, 2022). Thus, this study began with data collection, followed by their analysis, and finally, interpretation.

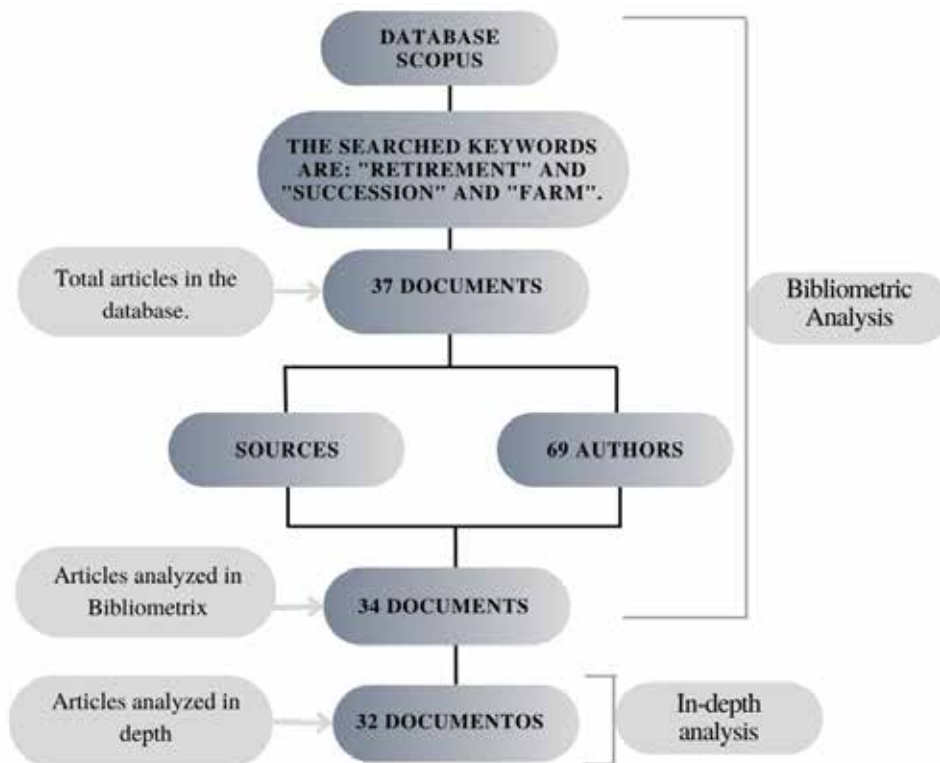
For the research, a set of previously published data on the topic of retirement or withdrawal of older farmers from rural properties and its relation to the succession process was considered. The research took place in July 2022, and the references used were consulted in the Scopus database. This is considered the largest database of abstracts and citations of peer-reviewed literature, with bibliometric tools to track, analyze, and visualize research (Scopus..., 2022).

As a criterion for selecting works, the search was conducted for publications without a defined time limit and preferably scientific articles published in peer-reviewed journals and book chapters. The search for publications was conducted using the keywords: “retirement” AND “succession” AND “farm,” aiming to find them in the title, abstract, and keywords, considering documents at any publication time.

The search initially returned 37 documents, including articles and book chapters from the period between 1991 and 2022. These documents were evaluated for the relevance of the theme, considering the title, abstract, and keywords. After this analysis, three documents were excluded for not being relevant to the studied theme. Therefore, 34 documents remained for bibliometric analysis.

Bibliometric analysis was performed with the assistance of the Bibliometrix Software for reference data. Bibliometrix, compared to other tools, is a comprehensive program with a wide range of analyses and has been widely used due to its ease of application (Moreira; Guimarães; Tsunoda, 2020). Of the 34 documents analyzed, access to the full text was obtained for only 32, for which a systematic analysis was conducted, constituting the second phase of the study, as visualized in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Document Selection on the Scopus Platform



Source: Authors' own elaboration (2024).

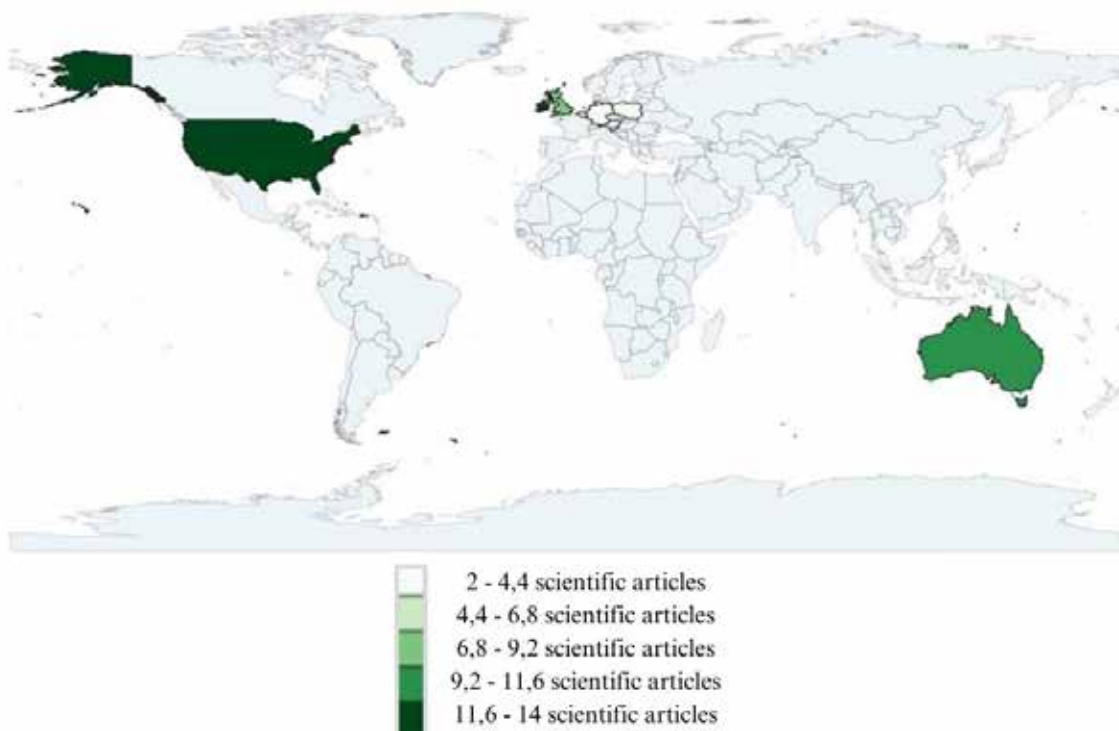
The literature review aimed at enhancing and updating knowledge through a scientific investigation of previously published works. In the literature review, the goal was to read, reflect, and write about what was understood as relevant in each of the 32 documents, to reconstruct the theory and enhance the theoretical foundations. This analysis was aimed at addressing the objectives proposed by the research. The results considered the authors' perceptions regarding the retirement and succession process theme.

Bibliometric Analysis of the Topic

In this section, the results of the bibliometric analysis of the selected articles in the Scopus search database will be presented. The theme studied, difficulties encountered by the elderly in the retirement and family succession process in agriculture, has been on the agenda for approximately 31 years. Of the 34 selected documents, there were 31 articles, 1 book, 1 book chapter, and 1 review article published in 24 different sources.

The first bibliometric indicator outlined in the research objective was to measure the main countries that have published the most on the research topic, as presented in Figure 02. As illustrated, Ireland and the United States lead the ranking with 14 publications each, followed by Australia with 11 and the United Kingdom with 8 publications. Additionally, Germany has 4 publications, Austria and Poland have 3 publications each, and Belgium, Czech Republic, and Slovenia have 2 publications each. Most of the countries highlighted in the publications are geographically located in Europe.

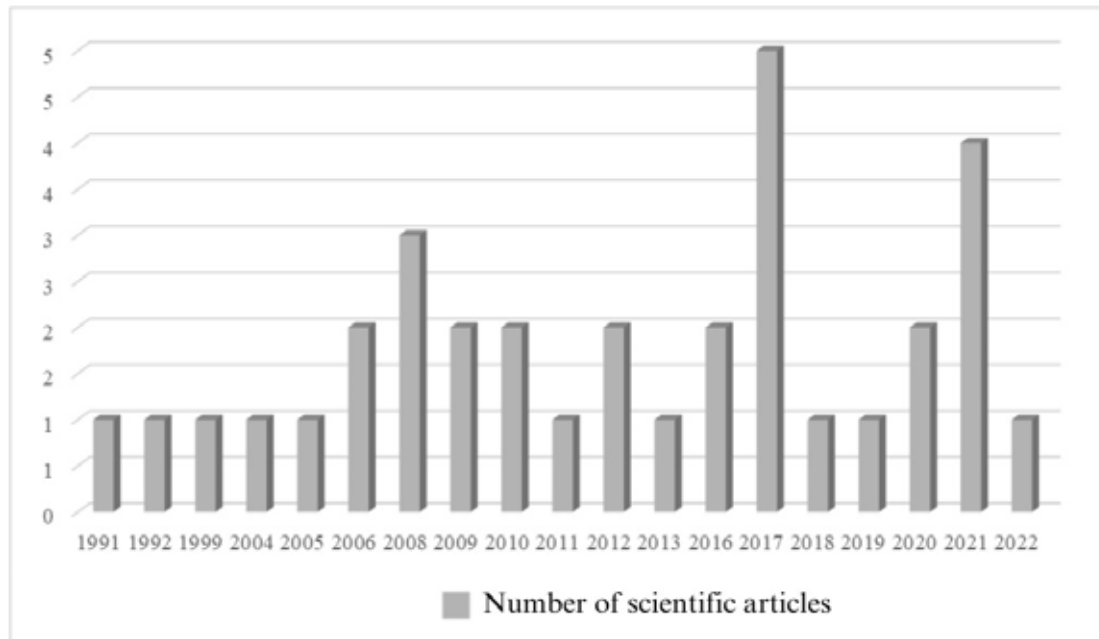
Figure 2 – Scientific Productions by Country



Source: Bibliometrix - RStudio Software (2024), elaborated by the authors.

Another analyzed data refers to the annual production of articles, as evidenced in Figure 3, which presents a temporal analysis and evolution of the studies.

Figure 3 – Annual Production of Articles



Source: Bibliometrix – RStudio Software (2024), elaborated by the authors.

It can be observed that the number of publications reached its highest peak in the year 2017. Regarding the journals that published the most on the topic (Table 1), the Journal of Rural Studies and Sociologia Ruralis stand out, with 5 and 3 articles published respectively.

Table 1 – Main Journals that Published on the Topic

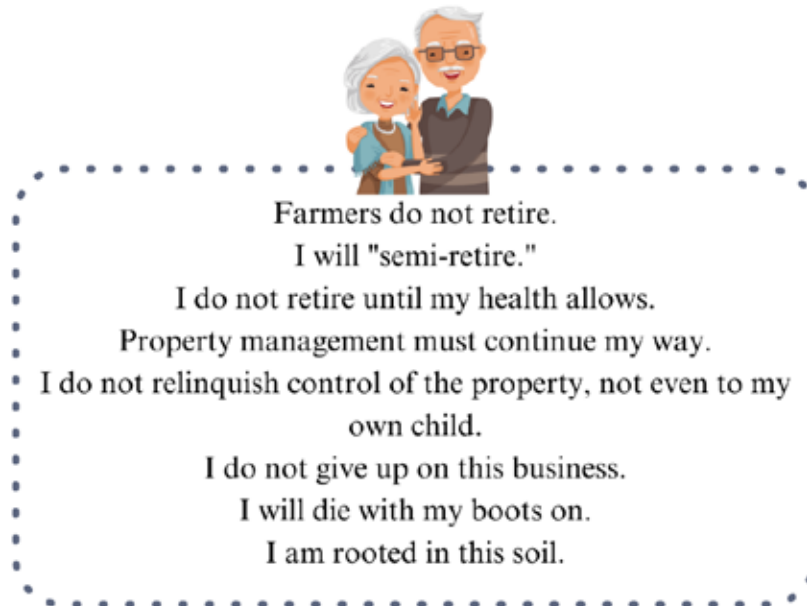
Sources	Articles
Journal of Rural Studies	5
Sociologia Ruralis	3
Keeping it in Rhe Family: International Perspectives on Succession and Retirement on Family Farms	2
Land Use Policy	2
Rural Society	2
Sustainability (Switzerland)	2

Source: Bibliometrix - RStudio Software (2022), elaborated by the authors.

Generational Transition in Agriculture: Challenges in the Retirement of Experienced Farmers

In the second phase of this research, which involved a thorough analysis of the articles resulting from the literature search, the main results were obtained. The first and most important finding, unanimous among the analyzed articles, is that elderly farmers face difficulties or a lack of interest in retiring from agricultural activity to allow a successor to take over. Even when they are of retirement age and should initiate the succession process, these farmers choose to continue in the managerial and operational control of their rural properties. This challenge is presented in different forms of manifestation and positioning, as visualized in Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Synthesis of the difficulties encountered by the elderly in retirement and withdrawal from management of rural properties



Source: Developed by the authors (2024).

It has been observed, therefore, that the world is undergoing a dramatic population aging, and this demographic trend is reflected in the agricultural sector, where the number of older farmers is increasing dramatically (Downey *et al.*, 2017). In addition to the aging problem, difficulties are found in the acceptance of retirement by these elderly farmers (Petrick; Weiss, 2009). Therefore, regardless of the country, research indicates that farmers do not accept retirement, do not see reasons to leave the property, and intend to continue on the property until their age and health allow.

Thus, agriculture occupies the minds of the elderly, in addition to the feeling of belonging and being useful to society, which nullifies strategies for early succession (Petrick; Weiss, 2009; Conway *et al.*, 2018). It should be noted that this research addressed articles that evaluated specific realities, and motivations may vary depending on the country analyzed. For example, between developed and developing countries, which culminates in a risk for the generalization of these results.

Although farmers are aging, they wish to remain rooted on their farms “until death do them part” (Conway *et al.*, 2018). In this way, these farmers have the desire, stemming from a sociocultural construction, to keep the property in the family. However, there is also a reluctance on the part of the elderly to relinquish control and ownership, choosing not to retire (Conway *et al.*, 2016b). In other words, research indicates that the older generation faces difficulties in giving up managerial control and property rights, even about their children, seeking to maintain the status quo of the management structure existing on the family property (Conway *et al.*, 2018; Conway *et al.*, 2017).

There is no contradiction in wanting to maintain land ownership and, at the same time, not retiring, as access to and maintenance of land control are not limited only to productive reasons and functions. Land control can represent the maintenance of a way of life and complex

and fundamental sociocultural practices. Therefore, it is important not to evaluate the situation only from the perspective of productivity, ignoring a constellation of other elements, which would weaken and limit the analysis.

It was evident, therefore, that in rural areas, the idea that “farmers do not retire” is recurrent among farmers (Downey; Threlkeld; Threlkeld, 2016; Holloway *et al.*, 2021). These individuals usually remain professionally active, which is inconsistent with traditional retirement models (Marcoux; Hébert, 2020). Most farmers never mention retirement during their lifetime and do not even imagine retiring; moreover, most retirees through the pension fund still work (Hautaniemi; Gutmann, 2006).

The concept of a ‘retired farmer’ is therefore rejected by the agricultural community, which associates full retirement with the loss of the lifestyle and independence that agriculture provides (Downey; Threlkeld; Threlkeld, 2017). It is worth noting that research has shown that female farmers are more interested in retirement than men (Downey; Threlkeld; Threlkeld, 2017), which may be a consequence of the double workload and the incessant and endless demands of domestic tasks (Breitenbach; Foguesatto, 2023). Given these findings, the reasons for farmers operating in this way deserve to be further explored, as well as the psychological and family issues arising from them (Marcoux; Hébert, 2020), a topic that will be discussed in the next section.

Factors Hindering the Withdrawal of Elderly Farmers from Property Management

From the in-depth analysis of the articles, it was possible to identify that there is a set of reasons why elderly farmers have difficulties in leaving their property. These reasons have been mapped and classified into two categories: a) Difficulty in finding a successor and finding a qualified successor; and b) Difficulty in relinquishing the social and emotional benefits of the profession. The synthesis of these aspects is presented in Table 1, and they are discussed subsequently.

Table 1 – Summary of Factors Affecting the Retirement of Elderly Farmers

Why Elderly Farmers Don't Retire from Agriculture? Central Causes	
1. Difficulty in finding a successor and finding one who is qualified.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It is not always easy to attract a successor (Haydenm <i>et al.</i>, 2021). – Farmers without successors reduce their business and investments and, at the end of the life cycle, sell the property (Calus; Huylenbroeck; Lierde, 2008; Glauben; Tiete; Weiss, 2006; Ingram; Kirwan, 2011). – Properties without successors have reduced market value (CALUS <i>et al.</i>, 2008). – The timing of succession is affected by the administrative capacity of the successor (Petrick; Weiss, 2009).

<p>2. Difficulty in giving up the social and emotional benefits of the profession.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If they have good health, they see no reason to retire (Petrick, Weiss, 2009). – Offering experience to the young generation (Ingram; Kirwan, 2011). – Fear of loss of personal identity, independence, self-esteem, and status as skilled and active professionals in their agricultural communities (Conway <i>et al.</i>, 2016b; Haydenm <i>et al.</i>, 2021; Jansuwan; Zander, 2021; Rogers <i>et al.</i>, 2014). – Agriculture places them in society, and retirement would exclude them, leading to a loss of direction in life (Conway <i>et al.</i>, 2016a). – Sustaining their positional dominance as heads of family farming (Conway <i>et al.</i>, 2016b; Downey <i>et al.</i>, 2017). – They enjoy agriculture, which brings well-being, health, a sense of doing meaningful work, and a feeling of responsibility (Jansuwan; Zander, 2021). – They feel environmentally and financially unable to make changes; risk aversion; maintaining agricultural income to supplement pension (Hautaniemi; Gutmann, 2006; Jansuwan; ZANDER, 2021). – The agricultural community believes that a good farmer does not retire, and giving up farming is a sign of failure (Conway <i>et al.</i>, 2016b; 2021; Rogers <i>et al.</i>, 2014; O’Callaghan; Warburton, 2017). – Symbolic role of rural property, emotional connections with agriculture, being “rooted in the land” (Conway <i>et al.</i>, 2016 ; Rogers <i>et al.</i>, 2014; O’Callaghan; Warburton, 2017). – Since they did not inherit the land and property management early, they do not intend to pass it on early (Duesberg; Bogue; Renwike, 2017).
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Source: Developed by the authors (2024).

a) *The challenges faced by elderly farmers in finding a successor or finding a qualified successor to take over the management of the rural property.* The existence of a successor and their qualification is a determining factor for the retirement and withdrawal of farmers. In many cases, retirement does not occur because elderly farmers have no one to pass the property to, or the chosen successor lacks the necessary qualifications.

It is reiterated that succession and retirement are interconnected and reflect the life cycles of both the family and the agricultural business. The phases of growth, consolidation, and exit of a company overlap with the phases of retirement and succession within a family (Mishra; El-Osta; Shaik, 2010). Therefore, retirement and family succession decisions on rural properties are inseparable, meaning that when succession occurs, the farmer should retire (Kimhi; Lopez 1999).

For the older farmer, it is gratifying when the young individual continues on the rural property, providing an opportunity to pass down their skills and experiences in farming (Ingram; Kirwan, 2011). When this young individual is a family member, succession becomes even more symbolic and important (Petrick; Weiss, 2009; Mishra; El-Osta, 2008). When succession takes place, the young successor assumes the management of the property, bringing a sense of satisfaction to the older farmer by seeing a young person remain on the farm and share agricultural experiences (Ingram; Kirwan, 2011). Retirement and succession allow rural properties to be passed down through generations, providing valuable social and familial interconnections and experiences that impact the sense of belonging (Holloway *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, the sustainability of agriculture depends on effective succession (Pechrová; Šimpach, 2020).

However, attracting an agricultural successor is not always easy, requiring the preparation of young individuals to encourage them to stay in rural areas (Haydenm; McNally; Kinsella, 2021). Elderly farmers without successors lack the incentive and motivation to further expand the business and accumulate capital in old age, which is more likely in smaller properties. Having a successor provides an incentive to generate higher agricultural income (making it appealing to the next generation) through investment and adoption of capital-intensive production technologies, increasing production efficiency and thus income and family succession opportunities (Mishra; El-Osta; Shaik, 2010; Glauben; Tiete; Weiss, 2006; Calus; Huylensbroeck; Lierde, 2008; Potter; Lobley, 1992 ; Petrick; Weiss, 2009). Additionally, there are situations where the young successor lacks good managerial skills, further delaying succession and retirement (Petrick; Weiss, 2009).

b) The challenges faced by the elderly in relinquishing the socioemotional benefits offered by their profession. From the standpoint of the symbolic power embedded in this profession, the older generation faces challenges in relinquishing managerial control and property rights of family farming, even concerning their children. This reluctance stems from the difficulty of surrendering control of a business they have overseen for many years (40 or 50 years) (Conway *et al.*, 2021). In such cases, senior generations of farmers may resist succession planning and retirement as a means to sustain their positional dominance as heads of family farming (Conway *et al.*, 2016a).

However, there are also social and well-being factors at play. Rural property holds significant symbolic importance and brings emotional considerations for elderly farmers, with the inevitable challenges and changes brought about by the intergenerational transfer of family farming (Conway *et al.*, 2016b). For these farmers, continuing their activities is crucial for maintaining their identities (Alcântara, 2016; Haydenm; McNally; Kinsella, 2021; Rogers *et al.*, 2014). The personal identity of these farmers is deeply rooted in the land, as they believe that giving up farming signifies failure (Conway *et al.*, 2016a). Indeed, these farmers are so steeped in narratives of hard physical labor, attachment, and belonging to the land that they struggle to envision an alternative map for the future (O’Callaghan; Warburton, 2017).

This is why farmers develop strategies to protect this identity, including resisting behavioral change and refusing retirement (Downey; Threlkeld; Warburton, 2017). Thus, farmers’ identity and self-esteem are intertwined with their occupation, and transferring managerial control of the farm and retiring is a difficult concept to accept, leading farmers to resist such a transfer (Conway *et al.*, 2016a; O’Callaghan; Warburton, 2017). In other words, there is an elevation of self-esteem, sense of place, and belonging that makes them feel deeply connected to their properties, helping to maintain their status as skilled professionals and active members of their agricultural communities (Jansuwan; Zander, 2021). Additionally, there is pleasure in cultivation, being active in agricultural activities, and keeping farmers healthy (Jansuwan; Zander, 2021).

Life in rural areas provides a sense of well-being, a healthy feeling, and a sense of engaging in meaningful work with responsibility. For these reasons, older farmers insist on not relinquishing management of the property (Jansuwan; Zander, 2021). Few other enterprises create the emotional connections that agriculture does, as it is where the entrepreneur and their family reside, raise their children, connect with the community, and generate their family memories (Conway *et al.*, 2021).

Other aspects influencing the decision not to retire are the socially accepted concepts of what makes a good farmer, a habitus deeply rooted in agricultural society. The elderly farmer is locally recognized and valued for their work, and remaining visibly active, busy, and productive are principles considered central to aging well (O’Callaghan; Warburton, 2017). In this case, agriculture integrates them into society, and retirement would exclude them (Conway *et al.*, 2016a). This situation reflects the farmers’ sense of belonging, which acts as a shield against the fear of being unnecessary, unvalued, and insignificant in their agricultural environment (O’Callaghan; Warburton, 2017).

Related to this, Conway *et al.* (2021) introduce the concept of “agricultural habitus.” For these authors, this habitus represents a system of socially constituted individual schemes and structured dispositions, acquired through practical experiences and constantly oriented toward the functions and actions of daily life. The so-called habitus of the older farmer, often an unconscious process related to the internalization of cultural norms, as well as the emotional and social issues involved in their agricultural work, distort and dominate the older generation’s decisions about the future trajectory of the property (Conway *et al.*, 2021). In other words, retiring goes against the flow of the older farmers’ habitus, instinctively seeming ‘wrong’ to them, as well as incompatible with what is required to gain recognition as a ‘good farmer’ within the agricultural community (Conway *et al.*, 2021).

Habitus is a key concept in Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological theory. It refers to a set of durable and embodied dispositions that shape how individuals perceive and respond to the social world around them. Habitus is acquired through socialization and experience and is fundamental to the formation of an individual’s social and cultural identity, as well as one of the main ways in which social structures are reproduced over time (Bourdieu, 1982; 1992). This concept aids in understanding the behavior of older farmers and aligns with the findings of the other mentioned authors.

Another reason farmers delay retirement is related to financial concerns. Many choose to remain active due to a sense of environmental and financial incapacity to make changes in their lives (Jansuwan; Zander, 2021). One of the biggest fears of older farmers considering retirement is the concern that pension benefits will not be sufficient to guarantee their survival (Hautaniemi; Gutmann, 2006).

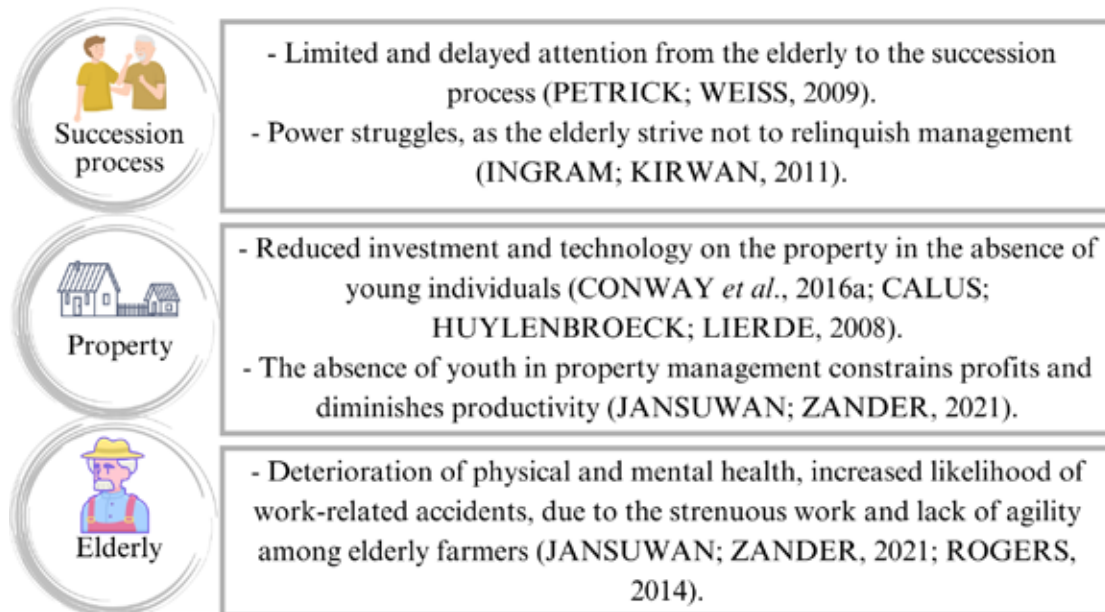
Finally, some farmers choose not to retire because, just as they did not inherit the land and property management at an early age, they have no intention of transferring them prematurely to successors. This represents an attempt to replicate their life trajectory (Duesberg; Bogue; Renwike, 2017).

Adverse impacts of senior farmers not retiring and strategies to mitigate them

As highlighted in the preceding sections, elderly farmers opt not to retire in agriculture for various understandable reasons. However, this behavior entails adverse consequences, both for the older farmers themselves and for their production units, as well as for the intergenerational succession process. These negative repercussions have been synthesized in Figure 5 and will be further elaborated on later.

Figure 5 – Synthesis of the negative consequences of non-retirement by elderly farmers.

Negative consequences of non-retirement among elderly farmers include:



Source: Developed by the authors (2024).

The negative consequences of the succession process stem from late succession or its absence, resulting, among other factors, from the resistance of older farmers to relinquishing control of the rural property (Ingram; Kirwan, 2011). This reluctance leads the elderly to become involved late and often inefficiently in the succession process (Petrick; Weiss, 2009). Their desire to maintain power generates conflicts with the younger generations, being one of the common tensions on rural properties (Ingram; Kirwan, 2011).

Without proper succession planning, an unintended effect occurs: the entry of young farmers into the business progressively decreases, while land ownership concentrates in older hands. Consequently, there is a lack of land mobility, leading to a reduction in the number of agricultural transfers (Conway *et al.*, 2016a). It is important to note that succession intentions begin to influence agricultural investment decisions about 10 years before the property is transferred (Calus; Huylbroeck; Lierde, 2008).

On the other hand, the negative consequences for rural property are related to lower investments in properties where succession does not occur (Calus; Huylbroeck; Lierde, 2008). Agriculture demands “fresh blood,” as the elderly agricultural population is likely to be less competitive in the current market because it is slower to adopting new agricultural technologies (Conway *et al.*, 2016a; Breitenbach; Foguesatto, 2023). Additionally, financially sound and well-managed family properties may collapse and fail slowly because the older generation is unable or unwilling to reconcile the conflicting desires of seeing the next generation succeed (Conway *et al.*, 2016a).

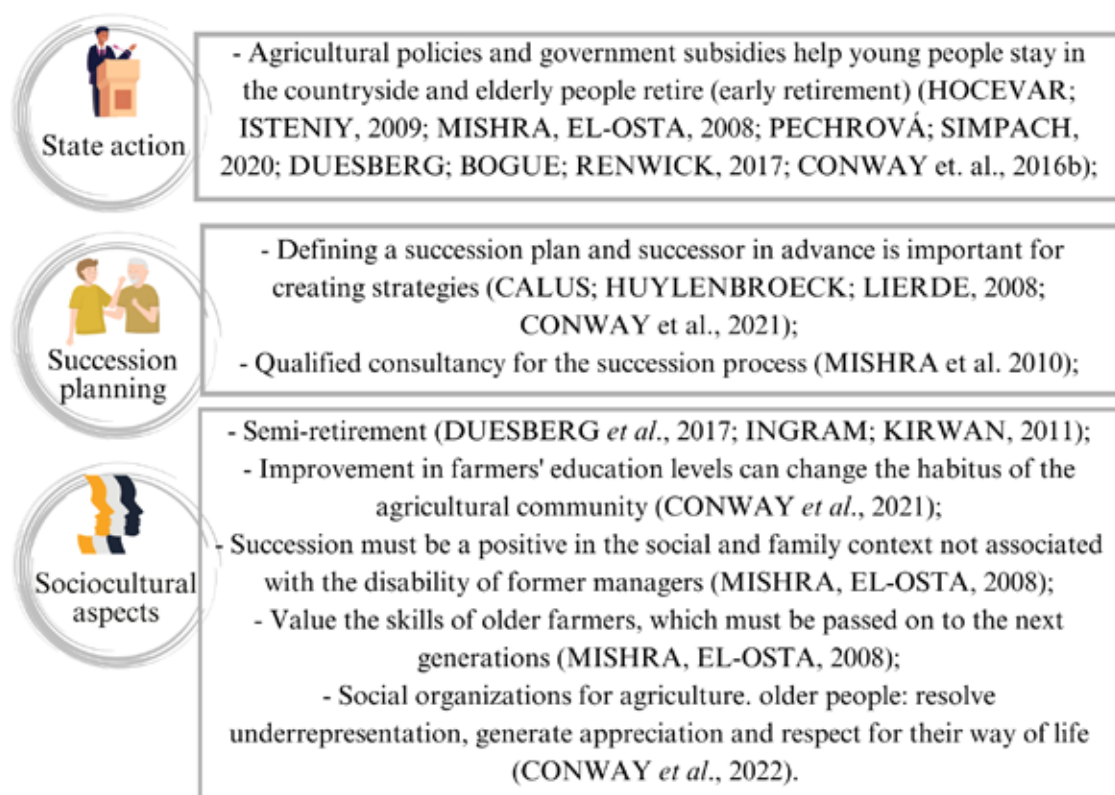
Finally, there are negative consequences for the elderly farmers themselves. The need to maintain the good identity of the farmer is impacting the mental health of these individuals as they age, which may affect important age-related decision-making (Rogers *et al.*, 2014). Suicide

rates among elderly farmers, for example, are higher than the average of rural and metropolitan populations (Rogers *et al.*, 2014). Rogers *et al.* (2014) study was conducted in the Australian territory, which may limit generalizations.

As the adverse ramifications of the non-retirement or withdrawal of elderly farmers from management and work on rural properties were identified, strategies to mitigate these negative effects were also identified. These strategies have been synthesized and classified into three spheres of action, as visualized in Figure 6.

Figure 6 – Synthesis of actions to minimize the negative consequences of non-retirement of the older farmer

Actions to minimize the problem of non-retirement by elderly farmers



Source: Developed by the authors (2024).

One sphere of action lies with the government, which, through subsidies and agricultural policies, can help alleviate concerns among the agricultural population by using methods to encourage intergenerational transfer of family-owned properties (Conway *et al.*, 2016a; Petrick; Weiss, 2009). Receiving retirement benefits or subsidies aids in retaining young individuals in agriculture and provides more hope for them to continue in farming (Istenič; Hočevár, 2009), as farmers can maintain a more organized succession plan (Mishra; El-Osta, 2008). These financial incentives encourage early retirement from agriculture, shifting attitudes toward intergenerational farm transfer (Conway *et al.*, 2016b).

Early retirement through subsidies, in turn, allows for the continuation of agricultural activity, ensuring that the activity develops with new perspectives and a youthful, energetic, and innovative outlook (Conway *et al.*, 2018). However, there is no guarantee that the new

generation will indeed innovate to the extent of generalizing this statement. Furthermore, for older farmers, early retirement schemes are significant as they provide financial incentives to retire prematurely, stepping away from property management and transferring agricultural activities to younger farmers (Kontogeorgos; Chatzitheodoridis; Tsampra, 2015; Duesberg; Bogue; Renwike, 2017).

The second sphere of action lies within the production units and focuses on choosing a successor plan, accompanied by succession strategies (Mishra; El-Osta, 2008). However, a succession plan does not guarantee the total success of succession, as, in the meantime, the young individual may decide to pursue another profession. However, initiating the process early reduces these risks (Conway *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, family properties can seek assistance from extensionists and financial advisors who provide consultancy to family-owned agricultural properties, from general business issues to the development of succession planning strategies (Mishra; El-Osta; Shaik, 2010).

Another commonly used strategy to minimize the negative impacts of elderly individuals on property management is what is called semi-retirement, where the farmer does not fully withdraw from the property (Duesberg; Bogue; Renwike, 2017). Semi-retirement involves the gradual withdrawal of older generations from physical work, management, and decision-making, resulting in a final stage of land transfer to younger generations, with older farmers remaining on the farm or in the vicinity of the town but maintaining a relationship with the farm until death (Downey; Threlkeld; Warburton, 2017). In these cases, innovative actions are created so that older farmers do not completely lose control of their businesses (Ingram; Kirwan, 2011).

This topic opens up space for a third sphere of action, which must take into account the socio-cultural aspects of the farmer. In this case, family succession must be correlated with a positive factor rather than the invalidity of former managers (Mishra; El-Osta, 2008). As access to university-level qualifications grows in agriculture, such principles are being restructured. Formal knowledge is one way in which collective behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions among members of the agricultural community regarding the succession process can be influenced over time to bring much-needed changes in attitudes toward succession (Conway *et al.*, 2021). In other words, as this topic is discussed at the academic level and this knowledge becomes accessible to farmers, cultural aspects surrounding succession give way to technical and managerial actions, reducing the weight of agricultural habitus on agricultural management.

Authors' remarks on the consulted references

As authors of this article, we reaffirm that the information presented throughout the text is grounded in the consulted references and documents resulting from bibliometric research. However, it is important to note that not all statements made are entirely supported by our concurrence. For this reason, this section is dedicated to clarifying some important aspects and conflicting points.

The consulted documents often point to an underlying tension between, on one hand, the young, modernization, efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity; and, on the other hand, the elderly, outdated, unproductive, and incapable. This approach requires caution as it represents a utilitarian perspective that disregards the knowledge accumulated by the elderly and their fundamental contribution to the quality of agricultural production. Many consulted

authors seem to assume that the new generation will bring exclusive benefits to the properties. However, this premise cannot be accepted automatically, as it is somewhat based on the idea that the knowledge accumulated by the elderly is simply dispensable and replaceable, as are they themselves.

It is important to remember that these views are stereotypes, and each individual should be assessed on an individual basis and not based on their age. Moreover, it is essential to recognize the contribution and experience of the elderly to society and to value generational diversity as a cultural wealth. There are highly qualified, experienced, and productive elderly individuals in various fields, just as there are young people who may face challenges in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. Valuing and respecting the elderly is fundamental for an inclusive and just society. It is important to recognize the contribution that the elderly can make, both in terms of knowledge and experience and in terms of skills and unique perspectives.

Therefore, there is a risk of being contaminated by ageism when considering the incapacity of the elderly to keep their properties active and productive. With technological advancements present in agriculture, perhaps the maintenance of the elderly does not represent a decline in the productivity and vigor of the property. This is an aspect that demands investigation.

In this perspective, one also questions what would be the negative consequences of the presence of young people on the property, such as the disregard for traditionally established knowledge over time. This is because, often, young people bring new ideas and perspectives, which can lead to the rejection or forgetting of traditional practices and knowledge. In addition to this, young people may not have the same experience and practical knowledge as the elderly. This can result in errors and inadequate decisions, negatively affecting the productivity and outcomes of the property.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

At the end of this study, it was found that older farmers have a resistance towards the succession process, especially retirement. In other words, older farmers do not retire and prefer to “die with their boots on.” This occurs due to a set of motivations, with emphasis on the difficulties of leaving the socioemotional benefits offered by the profession and finding a qualified successor to take over the management of the rural property.

The study also revealed some actions that can minimize the problems encountered by elderly farmers, notably governmental assistance through the receipt of subsidies to assist in succession and early retirement of farmers. Additionally, the assistance of rural extensionists would be important for developing a succession plan, coupled with the possibility of older farmers adopting semi-retirement, gradually withdrawing the older farmer from the property.

In concluding this study, it is important to highlight that the results were not presented to criticize the analyzed category of farmers but to problematize the issue and the negative consequences of non-retirement. By understanding the motivations and rationalities of older farmers, possibilities for action to minimize the problem are also evident, which can be at the managerial level of properties, as well as initiatives from the state, rural extension, and agricultural representations. Changing some harmful habits for the agricultural sector and rural population would be fundamental for agriculture, older farmers, and young successors.

However, it is recognized that this change takes time and encompasses multiple cultural, social, and economic factors.

Based on these results, the approach adopted by some of the consulted research is questioned. In certain cases, this approach minimizes the relevance of the accumulated knowledge of the elderly, considering it dispensable and replaceable, while overestimating the importance of the youth, attributing to them the exclusive role of being responsible for the success of family properties. In this context, the limitations of the research stand out. The first is that, given the low quantity and diversity of studies on the retirement of older farmers, the findings could not be linked to a specific territorial scope, resulting in a generalization of specificities, which normally vary from one country to another. Land issues, struggles in the field, infrastructure conditions, financing, life expectancy, etc., when disregarded, can limit generalization.

Another limitation is the lack of confrontation between the theoretical data of the analyzed documents and empirical data and field research in a specific territory. While this limitation was identified, possibilities for future studies are also evident, which could compare the results of this research with different agricultural realities and gather the opinions of older farmers and organizations related to agriculture.

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