

Pluriactivity as a Livelihood Strategy in Irish Farm Households and its Role in Rural Development

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The adoption of off-farm work by farm households is an important, well-recognized and growing phenomenon in Ireland and the European Union. During the last 30 years pluriactivity¹ has spread rapidly within Irish agriculture. Between 1972 and 1998, the percentage of Irish farm households engaged in off-farm activities rose from 30% to 44%. Projections indicate that by 2010 some 60% of farm household will be involved in some kind of off-farm work. The 'Celtic Tiger' economy has given an impetus to this process and, as the extent and type of pluriactivity undertaken by farm households increases, we need a better understanding of the role it plays in strengthening and maintaining rural communities and areas.

This article begins by reviewing some of the literature on pluriactivity, its relevance to rural development and the livelihood strategies adopted by farm households. After a brief overview of pluriactivity on farm households in the Republic of Ireland, we present the findings of recent field research in the west of the country and discuss the impact pluriactive farm households have in rural areas. Finally, we conclude by looking at the wider policy environment both at national and European level as it relates to pluriactivity amongst farm households. In doing so we pay particular attention to future policy directions.

Relevance to rural development

Since pluriactivity appeared on the research agenda in the late 1970s, it has become accepted as a structural phenomenon of late industrial society and one that is prevalent throughout the European countryside. In 1985, research carried out in the context of the 'Rural Change in Europe' project (Arkleton Trust 1985; Bryden et al. 1992; MacKinnon et al. 1991) showed that a large proportion of the farming population in every European country combines farming with other income generating activities. The project surveyed twenty-four study areas and the pattern that emerged showed that there was a great diversity of income strategies amongst farm households.²

Gaps in pluriactivity research

After the 'boom' in research in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the issue of pluriactivity gradually received less attention. However, several important questions still remain unanswered as far as the future and relevance of the phenomena is concerned. For example, to what extent is there proof of continuity and succession on pluriactive farms? The Arkleton study had suggested that "much of it (pluriactivity) is of a stable or at least persistent nature" (Arkleton Trust 1985), but in our experience the widely held 'common sense' opinion of farmers and policy makers is that pluriactive holdings are run by people who are 'on their way out of farming.' There are very few empirical studies available to support the presence of generational continuity on pluriactive farms (for exceptions see Gidarakou 1990 and Jervell 1999). Nevertheless, trends in national statistics leave no doubt that pluriactivity is more than a temporary and transitory phenomenon in the movement towards agricultural modernization. In the context of the rural development debate it remains largely an open question as to whether pluriactivity persists because it is a viable livelihood strategy in itself or because there is continuously a category of farms 'on its way out of farming.'

The extent to which pluriactivity contributes to the preservation of the landscape and rural nature has also to be looked at more closely. Research by Gasson (1988) suggested a positive relationship between part-time farming and the quality of nature and landscape, but the issue has not been studied empirically. Research by Munton et al. (1989) indicated that the implications of pluriactivity for the rural landscape are highly differentiated, ranging from a somewhat better performance with respect to hedgerow and shrub maintenance on some farms to other where efforts to intensify production have led to environmentally hazardous results. In addition, the fact that there is less labour available on pluriactive farms can result in the neglect of landscape elements that require active management. A recent Danish study (Primdahl 1999) makes it clear that part-time farms can also contribute to rapid, undesirable changes in the landscape: in this case the extensive planting of hedgerows in a highly valued and open landscape. However, there are also several examples of pluriactive farms that participate extensively in conservation schemes. One such example is the nature reserve known as the Drentse Aa in the Netherlands where more than half of the land is rented out to part-time and hobby farmers (Renting and Van Broekhuizen 1995)

The question of what motivates a farm household to adopt pluriactivity strategies also remains unanswered. For a long time, pluriactivity was analyzed as an economic adaptation strategy, adopted by rural households to help them combat increasingly harsh market conditions and, as such, was seen as an expression of poverty and 'insufficient agriculture' (Etxezarreta 1985). This approach, however, is inadequate to explain the perseverance and rationale of pluriactivity. Other authors have stressed the importance of socio-cultural motives in stimulating pluriactivity, describing "part-time farming as a life-style" (Barlett 1986) of farmers' children and rural newcomers. It is only recently that more attention has been paid to the importance of new rural identities in pluriactivity (see, for example, Eikeland 1999).

Closely related to the question of why farm households engage in pluriactivity is the issue of whether or not we can distinguish different strategies. Several studies

have focused on existing heterogeneity within the broader category of pluriactivity and classifications have been proposed (Kada 1980; Gasson 1988; De Vries 1993). However, whilst this approach is certainly promising, many of these categorizations continue to be based on economic criteria such as the share of income share derived from farming (hobby versus professional) or 'time-economies' (spare-time, part-time etc.) which again reduce pluriactivity to its economic dimension. More theoretically-founded criteria are needed in order to reach a better understanding of the implications of different strategies for the long-term impact and dynamics of pluriactivity.

Finally, there is the question of policy. Whilst it is clear that in the near future the majority of farm households in the European agricultural sector will be pluriactive, the implications of this for rural policy remain obscure. Much research on pluriactivity and policy does not go beyond the observation that there is *no* specific policy framework for pluriactivity and, as a result, pluriactive farming remains largely outside rural policies and institutions. There appears to be an urgent need for creative policy measures that address the specific characteristics of pluriactivity and facilitate the positive impact it may have on rural development.

Rural livelihood strategies

Taking Irish agriculture as our context, we will now address the questions and issues raised above. We situate pluriactivity and its relevance for farm households in the context of a rural livelihood framework. The concept of a *rural livelihood strategy* is primarily a product of the sustainable rural development debate (Chambers and Conway 1992; Scoones 1998; Carney 1998). It not only recognizes the importance of the interplay between human, physical, natural and social rural assets in farming but also the wider economic, political and technological climate in which they are situated. The role of government, private, and community bodies within this framework is seen as either encouraging or hindering the process of transforming livelihood assets into livelihood strategies.

The rural livelihood's framework presented in Figure 1 shows livelihood assets available at household level. They include physical infrastructure, financial resources, human capabilities, social networks and natural and political capital that are subsequently transformed into strategies and outcomes. This transformation is influenced both by formal public, private and community institutions as well as by less formal social networks. Farm households respond by turning their livelihood assets into livelihood strategies. In Ireland, these include full-time conventional farming, diversifying the farm enterprise, moving out of farming and taking up employment in another sector, or combining farm and off-farm employment i.e. pluriactivity.

The results of this process are reflected in the standard of living and quality of life of individual farm households. The extent to

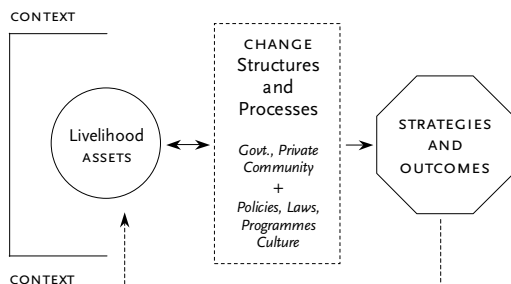


Figure 1: *Flows in sustainable rural livelihoods*

which the stock of household assets can be converted into desired outcomes will determine whether or not people choose to live from the countryside. Policy measures that impact on agriculture as well as rural infrastructure and services strongly affect the way these assets are transformed. This process is also influenced by the standard of living and quality of life desired by farm household members.

Changing policy environment: the Living Countryside agenda

The Living Countryside agenda for rural Europe that underpins the 1999 CAP reform outlines the contours of a new European agriculture model (European Commission 1996). This agricultural model distinguishes itself from previous policies in that it recognizes the multifunctional nature of rural areas and is more responsive to the broader societal concern for sustainability. Agenda 2000 is based on a model for change that is very different from those being pursued by the EU's competitors. It recognizes that seeking to be competitive should not mean blindly following the dictates of a far from perfect market (European Commission 1999). The twin pillars of the CAP reform are the creation of a competitive, sustainable, quality-oriented agriculture that meets environmental requirements and the elaboration of a new framework for rural development. Together they set the context for a European rural policy that is based on three principles: no rural development without agriculture; no agriculture and no farmers without other activities; and no other activities without the development of villages and small or medium-sized towns.

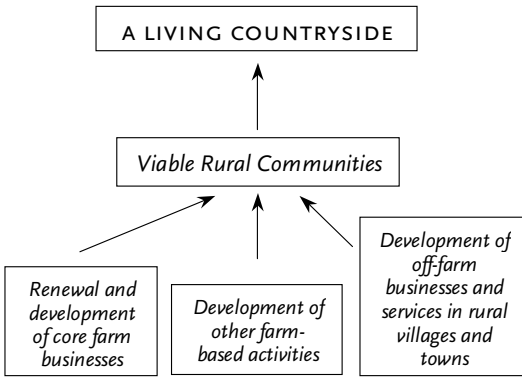


Figure 2: *The key components of a Living Countryside*

A major challenge is to create a supportive environment that will enable the development of a diversified rural economy based on the unique assets present in particular rural areas. This involves measures that allow both for the continued development of farming and the progressive emergence of a strong rural service and industry sector (Kinsella et al. 2000; Mannion et al. 2000). A multi-sectoral approach to the development of rural areas (see Figure 2) is

central to achieving the balance needed to secure a living countryside. This is highlighted by Kearney et al. (1994) who point out that the stability of the rural population as a whole requires a broader spectrum of activity than agriculture alone. Within the Living Countryside agenda viable rural communities are seen as the result of creating a satisfactory balance between the farm-based and off-farm enterprises on which so many farm households depend for their livelihood. It also involves the active construction of linkages between activities in different economic sectors. The future of pluriactivity within the Irish farm household has to be set against the background of the European Model of Agriculture and the Living Countryside agenda.

Pluriactivity amongst farm households in Ireland

The Irish economy has grown rapidly over the past decade with a growth rate that has far outstripped the performance of its European neighbours. Between 1993 and 1999 it earned the title 'Celtic Tiger' with annual growth rates that exceeded 8%. Between 1993 and 1998 employment grew by about 25%. While the Irish economy has grown rapidly and the number of people in employment has increased significantly, the position of farming within the economy as a whole has weakened and there has been a decline in the number of people employed in the sector. In the period 1993–1997, for example, the number of farms fell from 159,400 to just under 148,000, a decrease of 7%. It is predicted that this trend will continue and indeed accelerate. Predictions suggest that in 2020 there will probably be only 100,000 farms left (Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development 2000). Nevertheless, agriculture is still considered to be "the most important single industry in the economy of the Republic of Ireland" (Lafferty et al. 1999).

In 1998, the farming sector provided almost 130,000 full-time jobs, or 8.7% of total employment. If those who work part-time in the agricultural sector are included, the total number directly employed in agriculture is 275,100 (Sheehy and O'Connor 1999). In 1998, Irish farm families earned, on average, Euro 14,020 from farming, although there were large variations depending on both the size and system of farming. Forty per cent of all Irish farms had incomes from farming of less than 6,349 Euros, with mainly cattle and sheep production systems (Teagasc 1999). In 1995, it was estimated that only 53% of total farm household income was derived from farming (Sheehy and O'Connor 1999).

When compared to other EU member states, Ireland has a very high proportion of pluriactive farm households. In 1995, Ireland came second only to Germany which, at that time, had the largest proportion of farmers engaged in 'other gainful activities' (European Commission 1997). The situation has changed somewhat with the expansion of the EU. Today, Ireland is in fourth place behind Austria and Germany, and Finland tops the list (50.4% in 1995). In 1998, some 47% of Irish farm households were engaged in part-time farming, that is to say that either the farmer and/or spouse had off-farm employment. Since 1993 the number of Irish farm households engaged in part-time farming has increased by 13%. In 1995, 26% of farm operators and 15% of spouses had off-farm work. In 1998, these figures were 30% and 23% respectively.

The importance of part-time farming to Irish farm households is underpinned by the contribution that off-farm employment makes to total household income. The 1994–95 Household Budget Survey showed that the average income earned from non-farm employment by part-time farming households was just over Euro 15,200. In 1999, it was estimated that income from off-farm employment, on average, accounted for 40% of total household income. This represents a gradual increase from 19% in 1973 to 26% in 1980 and 35% in 1994–5.

It has been projected that by 2010, 60% of farm operators and/or spouses will be earning off-farm incomes (Sheehy and O'Connor 1999). It is likely that, in future, farming households will seek to combine off-farm and on-farm income generating activities in order to optimize their total income and establish a suitable balance between the amount of labour needed for farming activities and the labour required for non-farming activities.

Understanding pluriactivity as a livelihood strategy

For a better understanding of pluriactivity as a livelihood strategy we now turn to two areas in the west of Ireland. First, we focus on the household and local level using findings from recent research carried out in a rural parish in County Clare. Then we turn to the macro level and discuss the socio-economic impact of pluriactivity in County Roscommon.

Pluriactivity by farm households in Killanena, County Clare: the micro level

The rationale behind pluriactivity as a livelihood strategy for Irish farm families can be clearly seen from recent empirical data collected in the parish of Killanena, County Clare. Extensive fieldwork, consisting of in-depth interviews with pluriactive farm household was carried out between October 1999 and March 2000 (De Jong 2000).

Life in Killanena has a number of disadvantages: the parish is relatively remote from cities and towns and the local public transport service is poor. These difficulties are somewhat compensated by a beautiful and scenic landscape dominated by panoramic views over Lough (Lake) Graney which is located in the centre of the parish. Farming in the area is difficult. Soils are wet, the terrain is hilly and rainfall levels are high. Beef production is the main enterprise on local farms.

The parish has a population of some 650 people living in about 240 households. 138 households can be described as farm households although only 7 (5%) are being run as full-time farms. This means that 131 farm households depend on off-farm sources of income. Twenty-eight percent or 39 of the farm households depend on old age pensions and other types of welfare payments for their main income. The remaining 92 farm households (67%) have at least one member with a non-farming income and can be called pluriactive. In this parish pluriactivity is the rule and full-time farming the exception.³

In 54% of the pluriactivity cases only the farm operator had off-farm work. In one-third of cases both the farm operator and spouse worked off-farm and in 14% of cases it was only the spouse who had an off-farm job. Farm operators found off-farm work in the transport sector, in the contracting and building industry (32%), with the public authorities (26%) and to a lesser in factories and forestry. Spouses worked in shops and offices (52%), health care (24%) and factories (24%).

Motivations and types of pluriactivity

Many studies of pluriactivity distinguish push and pull factors that drive farm households to become pluriactive (Kada 1980; Etezareta 1985; Fuller 1990). In Killanena, there are many (mainly economic) factors that 'push' people out of farming. These factors have received considerable attention in Irish pluriactivity studies (e.g. Bogue 1995). Much less attention has been paid to factors that 'pull' farm households into pluriactivity. Barlett (1986, p.304) shows that there are socio-cultural factors that make pluriactivity an attractive choice:

We might ask what other evening and weekend activity gives outdoor exercise, provides a healthy contrast to weekday jobs, (sometimes) makes money, builds up a savings account for the future, provides children with meaningful responsibilities, enhances daily meals,

provides the excitement of gambling, and lays the foundation for a secure and profitable retirement? Add to this the preference for a rural residence and the means of continuing a valued parental tradition, and the part-time farming package becomes virtually unbeatable for people who were brought up on farms.

In a survey of 50 pluriactive households in Killanena all respondents mentioned socio-cultural motivations as the main reason for 'continuing' or 'taking up' farming. These included keeping the family farm going, staying home because of parents, and having an affinity with the nature of farm work. No respondent said they farmed because they earned an income from farming. However, 70% of those who took up off-farm jobs did so for income-related reasons, particular the need to cover daily living expenses. To a much lesser extent social motivations such as the nature of the job and meeting people were also given as reasons for working off-farm. Just over half (53%) of the respondents said they continued with both farming and off-farm work because together they ensured income security. Thirty-one percent gave more 'emotional' reasons for staying in farming such as 'not wanting to sell the family's land' or 'I like farming too much.'

Earlier research on pluriactivity has tended to base categories on differences in income contribution of farming activity, farm size, family and time organization, or type of activity. Our present research differentiates pluriactive farm households according to their historical development and dynamics over time.

Using detailed family case studies and family household life histories, it has been possible to identify three types of pluriactive farm household. Each household has its own unique 'life history.' Some were once full-time farms, others have been pluriactive for several generations, and there are those that have started fairly recently on purchased or inherited land. Without attempting to come up with a rigid typology of pluriactivity in Killanena, we have characterized the three broad groups as follows. First, the *old pluriactivity* group represented by farm households that have been engaged in off-farm employment for more than one generation. Second, the *modern pluriactivity* group where off-farm employment is a relatively new phenomena and finally there is the *new pluriactivity* group for whom farming is a new way of life and who have entered farming either through inheritance or by purchasing land. The following portraits are representative of the different types of pluriactivity found in Killanena.

Case A: Old pluriactivity

Michael and Eileen are in their fifties and have three teenage daughters. They have a 32 ha farm on which they run a beef enterprise. They also own a small pub and shop and Michael does some contract farm-work in the area. The pub and farm have always been in the family. Michael could have left Killanena in the 1960s, like his brother, but opted to stay at home. In the early 1970s he took over the farm and pub and married Eileen who was working as a secretary in the city. She quit her job when she married so she could work in the pub and house. Michael and Eileen consider themselves to have a reasonable income and standard of living. The pub is small but it covers the family's everyday living expenses; Michael's farm contract work is used to meet 'extra costs,' and the income from the farm is mainly re-invested in the farm. Michael and Eileen cannot envisage how the place will be in a few years time, they usually do not look that far ahead. However, they feel that their daughters will not want to farm because they do not like the farm-work. They intend to sell the farm when they reach retirement age, at which time their daughters will be working and independent.

Case B: Modern pluriactivity

James, aged 34, works in the local factory and also farms 35 ha of land. His wife Fiona is a part-time hairdresser in Ennis. They have two young children. James' parents still live on the farm, beside his own house. James started working in the factory after secondary school. He had a good time and enjoyed a good wage from the factory work while his father still worked the farm. Six years ago he married Fiona, who has no interest in farming. James never planned his future but had always envisaged himself living in the area and farming. He realized that farming was hard work and that the income from it was low. The income from the factory job is important and its close proximity means that if anything happens on the farm, he can be there in just 20 minutes. James does not know what the farm profit is. It would probably depress him if he worked out the returns exactly. In spite of this he never considers stopping farming or selling the land. Last year he was offered a good price for a piece of his land on the lakeside for a building development, but he did not sell. He said 'selling land is just not an 'Irish' thing to do unless you are desperately in need of money.' He feels they have enough money right now as he makes a good wage himself and his wife is also earning. James is positive about the future of his parish. He feels that people don't leave the area anymore and many young people are building new houses in the locality. Of the 140 workers in the factory, at least half of them also farm. James believes he is typical of farmers in the area. As long as they find other employment they will not sell their farms because of their 'emotional' attachment to the land.

Case C: New pluriactivity

Sean inherited his grandparents' farm a few years ago. He is 37 years old and, together with his wife Diana, decided to leave a busy life in England to build up a new one in Ireland. Sean's grandparents were farmers in the parish, but the farm did not make enough money to support the whole family. At the age of 14, Sean's father emigrated to Britain, where he later married and that is where Sean grew up. Sean learned a trade and worked as a builder in England. After marrying Diana, the newly-weds moved to Killanena where Sean spent all his time building up the 30 ha farm he had inherited. In the beginning it was hard because he knew very little of farming. Over time he managed to build up a good herd of 14 suckling cows as well as keeping geese, ducks, hens and a goat. The eggs are sold in local shops and the goat provides milk for home use. They also grow their own vegetables. Diana does not have much interest in the cows and beef enterprise and after the first year on the farm she got a part-time job in a local shop. Sean believes Diana has got used to the 'Irish way of life' and that they won't return to England. In the first years of building up the farm, Sean worked on a public work's scheme for the unemployed. Since Sean is an experienced builder, he gets offers for construction work all the time. However, he tries to keep away from it as long as possible, since a busy life is exactly what he moved away from in England. They will not be able to live from the farm alone in the future, but it will be very easy to take up cash-in-hand construction jobs when necessary. Sean is considering changing his beef enterprise to organic production. Both Sean and Diana feel it is much easier to make do with less in Ireland than in England.

Based on the above threefold classification, 44% of farm households in Killanena can be said to belong to the 'old pluriactivity' category; 42% were in the 'modern pluriactivity' category; and 14% were classified as 'new pluriactivity.' Farm operators in the 'old pluriactivity' category were, on average, relatively old. In some cases old pluriactive farms can be seen as a continuation of the traditional forms of pluriactivity that have been a part of Irish agriculture for years. In many cases off-farm businesses that generate income such as pubs, shops or garages, have been handed over from one generation to the next with the farm.

'Modern' pluriactive households in general are much younger, have taken over the family farm fairly recently and in many cases have young children. Partly because they are younger, they are more strongly influenced by modern socio-cultural values. They made a voluntary choice when they decided to take over the family farm, yet as a farm household they strive for a standard of living that is the same as that enjoyed by their urban contemporaries. Members of 'modern pluriactive' households hold jobs in factories or public institutions and it is common for spouses to have a career independent of their husband. Money earned from off-farm work tends to be used to cover the households' living expenses while farm income is re-invested in the farm business and used to help the family buy 'extras.'

'New pluriactivity' is another form of voluntarily chosen pluriactivity, mainly taken up by people who have lived away for some time and then purchased land or inherited a farm in the area. Farming and rural living offer all the benefits of a 'green and pleasant' land and allow newcomers to escape from the hectic routines of urban life. For these households, ideological considerations such as healthy food, a clean environment and 'breaking away' from the modern economy with all its pressures are very important. In this category families tend to be younger and their educational level is generally higher.

Continuity and future prospects

The survey results have shown that pluriactivity is a long established tradition in Killanena. This is reflected in the fact that 44% of the surveyed pluriactive households can be categorized as belonging to the 'old pluriactivity' group. On average, these farm operators have been farming for about 22 years and have been running pluriactive farms for 16 years. The members of the farm households surveyed were in no doubt that pluriactivity makes a positive contribution to the development of the area and 90% of them felt that the countryside would be 'unattractive to live in without part-time farmers.' In the present context pluriactivity is widely accepted as the only way to keep farming alive in the area and local people are fully aware that it plays an important part in maintaining the countryside.

Seventy-eight percent of pluriactive farm households planned to continue farming with an off-farm job until 2010. When asked more specifically about their plans for their farm, half of the respondents said they would 'leave it as it is' while 26% foresaw new investments and an expansion of farm business. The vast majority (90%) of those who stated they would not be pluriactive in the coming ten years said they would plant their farm with trees. Eighty-two percent of all farmers in the parish thought pluriactivity would continue amongst farm households for the next 10 years and felt all farmers would have off-farm work by the year 2010. Pluriactivity is clearly seen as a viable livelihood strategy able to offer sufficient prospects for the future. Ninety-four percent of all farmers in Killanena considered it 'normal' to combine an off-farm job with farming.

The continuity and prospects of pluriactivity depend heavily on the wishes of future generations, and the extent to which farming retains or develops a positive image and attractiveness for local people. In Killanena many teenagers are able to picture themselves living and working in the parish in the future. A questionnaire administered to a Leaving Certificate⁴ class of 30 students in a nearby town showed

that 70% of young people would rather live and work in the countryside than in towns and cities or abroad. When asked whether they felt their children would like to live and work in Killanena later, 4 out of every 10 farmers interviewed said their children would like to live and work in the parish while 2 out of 10 stated they were sure their children would not want to do so.

The impact of pluriactivity in County Roscommon: the macro level

The situation in Killanena, County Clare finds a parallel at a more regional level in County Roscommon. Roscommon is a predominantly rural county in the west of Ireland and 82% of its 52,000 inhabitants live in rural areas. Population statistics show that town populations in the county are increasing while many rural areas are in decline. There is a relatively high dependence on agriculture in Roscommon, and in 1996 the sector employed 25% of the local labour force. The county's relatively small manufacturing sector provides work for about 15% of the labour force, while professional services (16%), commerce (16%) and construction (8%) are the other main sources of employment.

Pluriactivity is particularly significant in Roscommon where factors such as the small size of farm holdings, relatively poor quality land and a predominance of beef and sheep rearing systems all contribute to low farm incomes. The combination of small farms and enterprises that require relatively little labour indicate high levels of under-employment on farms. Some of this labour is invested in off-farm work and almost 4,000 of the 7,800 farms in the county are involved in some form of part-time farming. A comparison of average total household incomes for full and for part-time farming households is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of average total household income and component incomes for full time and part time farming households in County Roscommon, 1998 (Euros)³

	Full-time farming household (n=57)	Part-time farming household (n=43)
Average total household income	11,805	34,194
Farm income (% total income)	70%	27%
Social welfare (% total income)	30%	14%
Off-farm income (% total income)	0	59%

Source: Whyte and Phelan 1998)

From this table we see that part-time farming households are heavily reliant on off-farm employment income for their livelihoods. The comparison shows that part-time farming households typically earn three times as much as full-time farming households when total income from all sources is considered. Clearly pluriactivity plays a major role in the livelihood strategies of Roscommon's farm households.

Assessing impact

Assessing the impact of pluriactivity at regional level presents us with several methodological problems because there is no clear agreement on the impact pluriactivity has on the wider development of rural areas. In addition, the relationship between

pluriactivity and rural development is itself a contested issue and forms part of the wider struggle and conflicts that surround the newly emerging model of rural development (Van der Ploeg et al. 2000). For some, pluriactivity indicates a movement away from viable farming and the fact that land and other resources remain in the hands of the pluriactive is seen as an obstacle to the creation of viable farm structures. From this 'competitiveness' perspective pluriactivity is the opposite of what is considered 'development.'

From another perspective, however, pluriactivity emerges as a factor that keeps people on the land, helps put a brake on the decline in farm numbers and, at the same time, strengthens the basis for local services. Within this view, pluriactivity is seen as a source of creative innovations that increases the strength and supports the diversification of rural economies.

While recognizing that the prospects and impact of pluriactive farms will be highly differentiated, it is possible to give some indication of the impact pluriactivity can have in rural areas. However, we must bear in mind that 'impact' is a relative concept. It does not only refer to the income and employment generated in a specific situation at a particular moment in time and space. It also implies comparison with a *reference situation* (see Knickel and Renting 2000). Below we explore the impact of pluriactivity in Roscommon based on the income and employment contribution it makes to the area. To do this we used two different reference situations⁶. First, we consider the impact of pluriactivity by comparing to a situation where the practice would not exist. We then go on to make a comparison with a hypothetical future situation in which there is no off-farm work and where all farms operate as viable, full-time units.

In 1998, the 4,000 pluriactive farms in County Roscommon produced an estimated farm income of Euro 36,900,000 and earned Euro 80,700,000 by off-farm work. Respectively these figures represent 54% of the total income earned from farming and 75% of the total family income generated on farms in the county. Income earned off-farm by pluriactive household can be viewed as a transfer of resources from urban to rural areas, and therefore as a strengthening of local economies. The extent to which this is the case depends on the share of off-farm income that actually finds its way into the rural economy. This might, for example, occur through money being spent in local shops or services. Another way in which off-farm income finds its way into the local economy is through investments made in machinery, buildings, livestock and other farm resources. The 1998 National Farm Survey data (Teagasc 1999) for Ireland showed that investments in the farm business, when considered on a per hectare basis and controlled for enterprise type, were similar for both full- and part-time farms. Evidence from a study of small-scale dairy farms in County Clare indicated that 65% of farm household income returned to the local economy (Kinsella et al. 1999). On the basis of this figure we estimate that pluriactive farm households invest almost Euro 89 million in the local Roscommon economy each year.

The impact of pluriactivity can also be compared with a shift of the land and resources presently used by pluriactive households to full-time farms⁷. In the past commentators have indicated that taking up off-farm work would result in a reduction in farm income and a decline in the technical efficiency of production. Data from Roscommon does not support this conclusion because the difference between

full-time farmers who earn an average of Euro 291 per hectare from farming, and part-time farmers who earn Euro 283 per hectare is negligible. This implies that, in regional terms, a hypothetical shift of land to full-time farms in Roscommon would have no effect on the total income derived from farming

In employment terms, however, the same shift would have substantial effects. If we consider the scale-enlargement necessary on farms intending to compete at world market prices, each economically viable cattle rearing unit would require about 65 hectares. Given the present acreage available County Roscommon would only be able to accommodate 2,400 viable farm units⁸ whereas at present there are 7,800 farms in the county. Such a shift, therefore, would mean the loss of 5,400 farms.

When compared to a scenario of full-time farming, pluriactivity clearly plays a considerable role in enabling farm households to continue farming and living in the rural areas. If there was no off-farm employment, the number of farms would fall drastically and this would seriously affect services such as schools, post offices, shops and public transport in the rural parts of the country.

It has to be stressed that the socio-economic impact of pluriactivity on rural development involves more than income and employment. Another important aspect is the maintenance of rural nature and landscape. Simple by 'farming the land' pluriactive farms contribute to the landscape. Participation rates for pluriactive farms in agri-environmental schemes are as high as the rates for full-time farm households (McEvoy 1999) highlighting the important role pluriactive farms have in nature and landscape conservation.

Finally, pluriactivity has several impacts that do not translate directly into income or employment gains, but which can be of crucial importance in longer-term and wider rural development. As well as being a strategy to secure family income and employment, pluriactivity is also an attempt by farm households to build up their livelihood by securing and revalorizing the assets they have available. The Killanena example indicates that pluriactivity is taken up by people who choose to live from the land and at the same time strive to lessen their vulnerability to the market place and the policy environment. As Marsden (1990) notes, "pluriactivity is one of the answers of households to the tightening web of exchange relations they are caught in, attempting to regain the control over skills, labour, land and other resources." By making the best of both worlds farm households minimize their dependence on external factors and take care that 'not all their eggs are in the same basket.'

Implications for policy and support

This article shows that pluriactivity is a structural phenomenon and is central to future developments in rural Ireland. As we have seen there are strong indications for the continuity and growth of pluriactivity. Moreover, pluriactivity has several positive effects on wider rural development. At the regional level, pluriactive farms in Roscommon generate over half the total income derived from farming in the county and three quarters of total farm family income. This inevitably has a strong stabilizing effect on the number of farms in the region.

The crucial role of pluriactivity and the need to adjust rural policy to its characteristics and dynamics is receiving increasingly recognition in Irish agricultural and rural policy. The Irish government in its recently presented White Paper on

Rural Development, stated that it is “committed to ensuring support for the maximum number of family farms and to facilitating part-time farming” (Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development 1999). Setting out a strategy for the contribution Irish agriculture could make to sustainable rural development in the future, the Agri Food 2010 Committee proposed that “government should aim to create viable farm households through policies which create and maintain off-farm employment opportunities in rural areas” (Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development 2000).

As indicated earlier in this article, policy environment and institutional arrangements play a large part in the particular livelihood strategies adopted by farm households. Agricultural commodity markets and related policies have been and will continue to be a major influence on pluriactivity, but it is also driven by forces outside of agriculture; in particular developments in labour markets and transport infrastructure as well as societal pressures and norms. These factors have been largely ignored and as a result pluriactivity has emerged primarily as an ‘autonomous’ phenomenon. In our concluding paragraph we suggest that policies designed to enable pluriactivity should include a number of specific considerations.

Enabling policy measures

In our opinion one of the fundamental principals informing a policy that supports pluriactivity among farm households should be that it goes beyond sectoral approaches. A key feature of contemporary livelihood strategies based on pluriactivity is that they respond to a *multiplicity of markets and policies*. The complex web of policy fields that surround pluriactivity should be addressed in an integrated way and issues such as local employment generation, infrastructure and environmental improvement should be included. Cultural policy could also be a relevant part of this policy mix in so far as this is commensurate with the construction of new rural identities (Bateman and Ray 1994). In short, it is necessary that all public policies which impact on rural areas are ‘rural proofed.’

Pluriactivity takes many different forms depending on the rural area and the bottle-necks to its development are probably equally diverse and location-specific. One general point should be made about the measures necessary to enable an adequate co-ordination of the family labour allocated to different activities. Many of the new work opportunities that have emerged in the wake of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ boom are often not very compatible with farm work and involve, for example, inflexible working schedules and considerable traveling time. Local employment generation and infrastructure development could enable easier access to alternative employment. In some cases, improved labour efficiency in agriculture could lead to similar improvements in the compatibility between on-farm and off-farm activities. In Ireland, the emerging interest in ‘farm partnerships’ is seen as one way of improving labour availability. Reports from other countries indicate that co-operative solutions such as investing in a co-operative milking parlour as part of a village renewal scheme can also be effective (Knickel 2000).

Agricultural research and advisory agencies need to adopt a new approach because many pluriactive farm households remain beyond the reach of these services. Apart from developing advice packages that address the needs of pluriactive farms, advi-

sory agencies should be flexible and ensure that their services fit the time economy of the far households involved. There is also a need for renewed research into pluriactivity by farm households in order to understand how best to support and release the potential for rural development it implies. While this may involve the specific contribution pluriactive farms can make to strengthening rural nature and landscape, it should also address the need for alternative technological trajectories and farming systems that meet the specific requirements of pluriactive households.⁸

For a long time pluriactive farms have been excluded from development policy. In view of the changing requirements of agriculture and farmers in the newly emerging model of rural development (see Van der Ploeg et al. 2000), this position needs to be reconsidered. Rural development is about the construction of linkages between different economic sectors, households regaining control over their farm resources, and people actively choosing to construct their livelihood in the countryside. Concrete experiences of rural development turn out to be especially successful if they are able to 'build bridges' between different activities and enable mutual reinforcement. Pluriactive farming embodies several examples of this and its experiences could inform us of new potentials for Rural Development.

Notes

1. We are aware of the complications involved in defining the concepts of pluriactivity and part-time farming. In this article we use 'pluriactivity' to refer to the existence of paid employment, outside the home farm, by the farm operator and/or spouse of the farm operator. This is by far the most widespread form of pluriactivity in Irish agriculture. Pluriactivity can be defined as "the combination of agriculture with other economic activity by farm households" (Fuller et al. 1991) and therefore is strictly a broader concept than 'part-time farming' that refers to the practice of combining farming with an off-farm job. It also includes different types of 'para-agricultural' activities such as on-farm transformation of products or farm-based tourism. Since their relevance to rural development appears to be significantly different, these fields of activity are left out of analysis in this article.
2. It was found that only two out of every five households derived more than 70% of their household income from farming, whilst for nearly half of all households, farm-based income provided less than 30 % of household income.
3. For the purposes of calculating off-farm work income in this study the off-farm work activities of adult sons and daughters in the household were not taken into account unless it was evident that they were the main income providers.
4. Leaving Certificate is the final examination undertaken by students at secondary school in Ireland beyond which young people (17–18 years old) typically either seek employment, develop a trade skill or continue into higher education.
5. Farm income includes direct payments i.e. non-market payments made to farmers whether these production related or not (headage, premia and accompanying measures). Social welfare includes child benefit, state pension, unemployment benefit, disability pension, lone parent's allowance, carer's allowance and smallholder's allowance.
6. Reference situations may be a specific moment in history, the fictional situation in which an activity would not occur, but also a hypothetical future situation presupposing a specific development scenario. The first 'with-without' comparison we make, assuming a situation in which the practice of pluriactivity would not exist, is essentially a *static* analysis. Obviously, resources that are presently used by part-time farms in reality will be applied for alternative activities. This means that for a *dynamic* impact analysis substitution effects need to be taken into account (see Knickel and Renting 2000).

7. Of course a range of other substitutions could be envisaged, maybe the most realistic being planting trees on land currently used by pluriactive farms. This alternative scenario would have highly detrimental effects for the rural economy and the quality of rural nature and landscape.
8. At this point we recognize the many complications that such a shift of production would encounter such as its feasibility in terms of labour availability, land fragmentation as well as a whole range of socio-cultural and economic factors.
9. Van der Broek (1998) in this respect points to problems emerging from the excessive popularity of a limited number of production lines requiring relatively little labour input amongst part-time farmers, for example beef cattle.

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