



## GENERATIONAL RENEWAL IN AGRICULTURE

### KEY MESSAGES

- Stabilization of agricultural incomes
- Strengthening of rural services
- Training and innovation
- Access to land
- Access to credit
- Coordination and simplification of CAP measures
- Reforming the perception and image of the agricultural sector
- Encouraging innovation and sustainability
- Improving quality of life in rural areas
- Strengthening synergies between agriculture and other economic sectors

### Summary for Policy Makers

The agricultural sector in Italy is facing a generational crisis, with an increasingly aging rural population and a low proportion of young entrepreneurs. Generational renewal is essential to ensure a sustainable future for Italian agriculture and foster innovation. The role of women in agriculture remains significantly unbalanced, which has important implications for the dynamics of the sector.

This policy brief analyzes the main challenges and opportunities to increase youth and female participation in agriculture. It is based on the outcomes of a workshop attended by over 50 young farmers and a questionnaire involving an additional 100 participants.

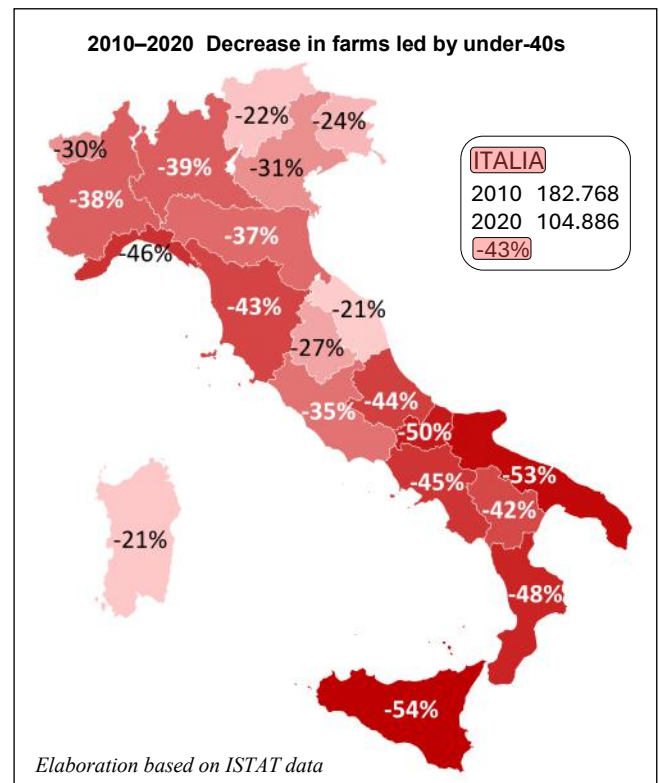
The survey shows that the main barriers to youth involvement in agriculture are the lack of services in rural areas, low attractiveness and limited professional development opportunities, and the

perception of lacking adequate skills to successfully start an agricultural business.

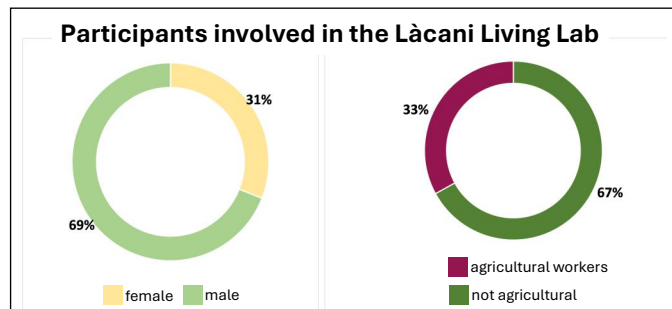
Those who choose to stay in the sector are driven by strong motivations, such as passion, the desire to live in a healthy environment, and a sense of responsibility towards their land and family. Major obstacles to the development of agricultural enterprises include limited access to credit, climate change, and lack of technical assistance.

Contrary to the assumptions informing current rural development policies, **financial incentives rank low among the reasons for young people choosing to engage in the silvopastoral sector.**

This policy brief provides **recommendations for policymakers aiming to promote greater youth and female inclusion in the agricultural sector in Sardinia.** It recommends targeted interventions to remove access barriers, including:



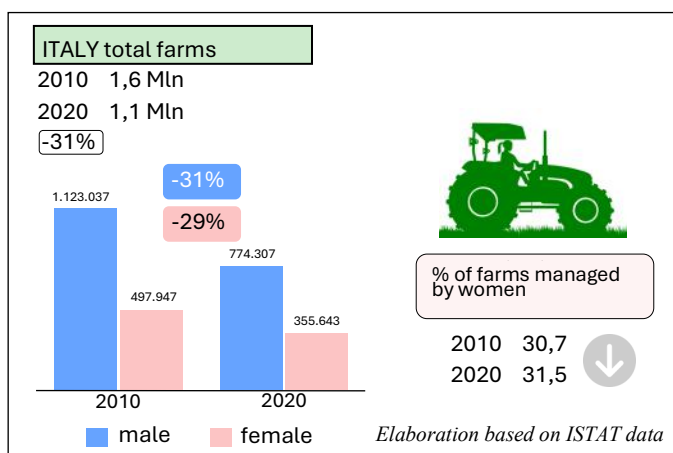
stabilizing agricultural incomes, strengthening services in rural areas, investing in advanced training, facilitating access to credit and production inputs, and promoting greater coherence in agricultural policies. The aim is to enhance the motivations and opportunities offered by the sector through a reform of its perception and public image, by offering incentives for innovation and strengthening synergies with other economic sectors. This initiative was carried out within the framework of the research and development project **Salam-MED** (salam-med.org), funded by the **PRIMA** Foundation (prima-med.org) and coordinated by the University of Sassari. It aims to provide scientific and innovative contributions to the fight against desertification and proposes an innovative model for engaging youth and women through “living labs.”



terms of professional development. Young people not currently working in the sector (33 respondents) identify similar obstacles but also highlight additional barriers, such as lack of information about business opportunities, the perception of a lifestyle that is profoundly different from that of urban areas, and insufficient skills to enter the sector. Elements such as agricultural income uncertainty and difficulties in accessing credit are less relevant for those outside the sector.

Despite these challenges, those who remain in the sector (67 respondents) are often driven by strong motivations. Passion for working “on the land,” the desire to live and work in a healthy environment in close contact with nature, the opportunity to start an independent business, and a sense of responsibility toward their land and family are factors that lead many young people to stay.

However, the commitment shown by young people working in the sector is often severely tested by a number of critical issues. Bureaucratic burdens, damage caused by extreme climate events, and the lack of qualified technical assistance represent significant obstacles to the management and development of agricultural enterprises. The limited availability of land and restrictions on land mobility due to concentration phenomena, along with the absence of an adequate pension system, further hinder generational turnover in agriculture. Starting an agricultural business requires capital and investment, which young farmers often lack. The vast

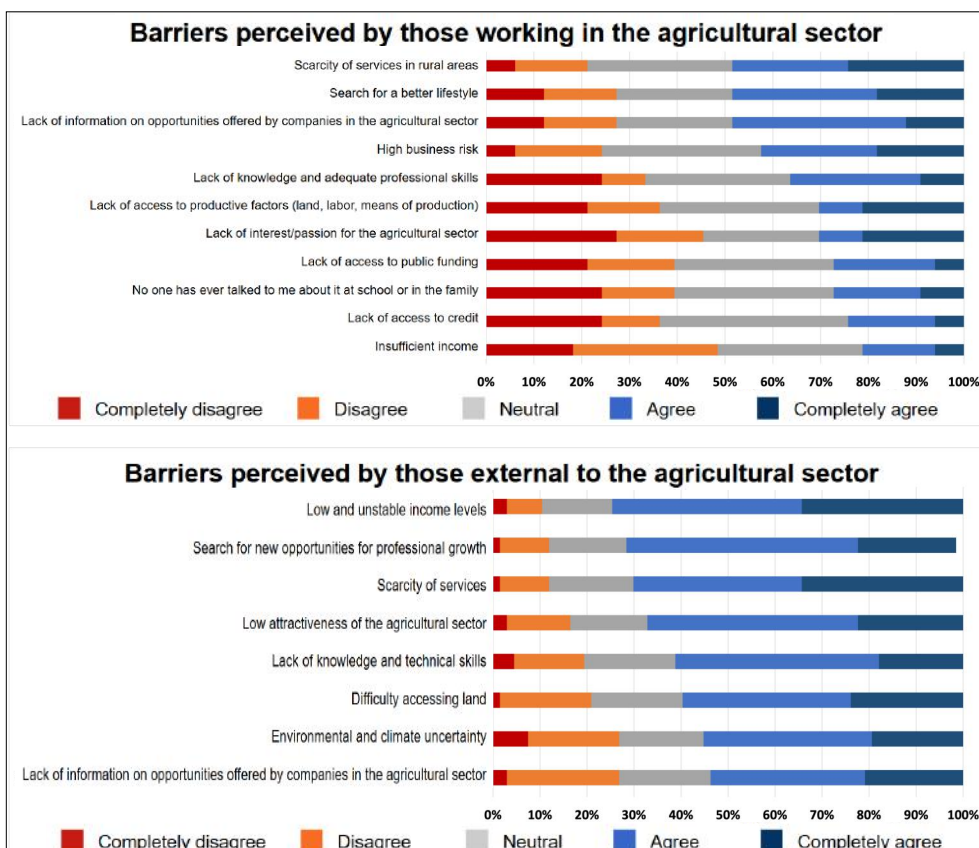


## The Research

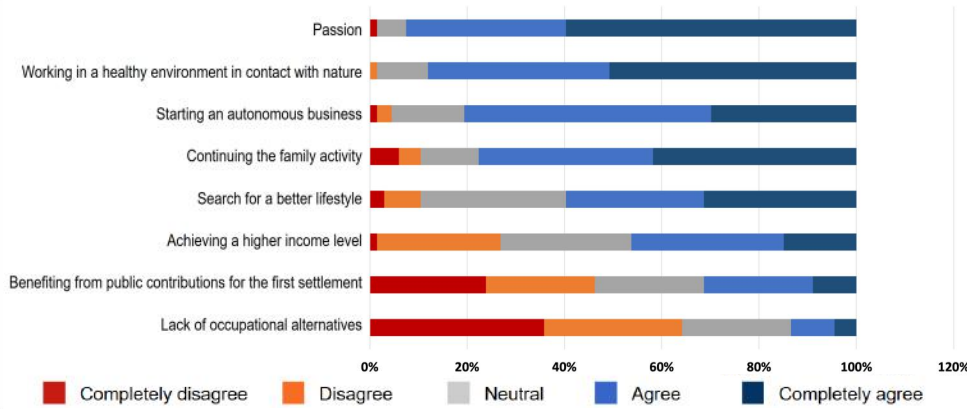
Through six living labs in Italy, Spain, Greece, Morocco, Egypt, and Tunisia, the project promotes sustainable technologies to improve soil and water management, involving young people and women. In Sardinia, the “L'acani” living lab explores the future of silvopastoral systems, fostering innovation and social learning to create new business opportunities in challenging rural areas.

Focus groups were conducted with the participation of over 50 young farmers in person, and an additional 100 through a questionnaire (<http://bit.ly/3VKuiJE>). This opportunity to discuss the challenges and opportunities of generational renewal in agriculture helped identify key data and suggestions on the topic.

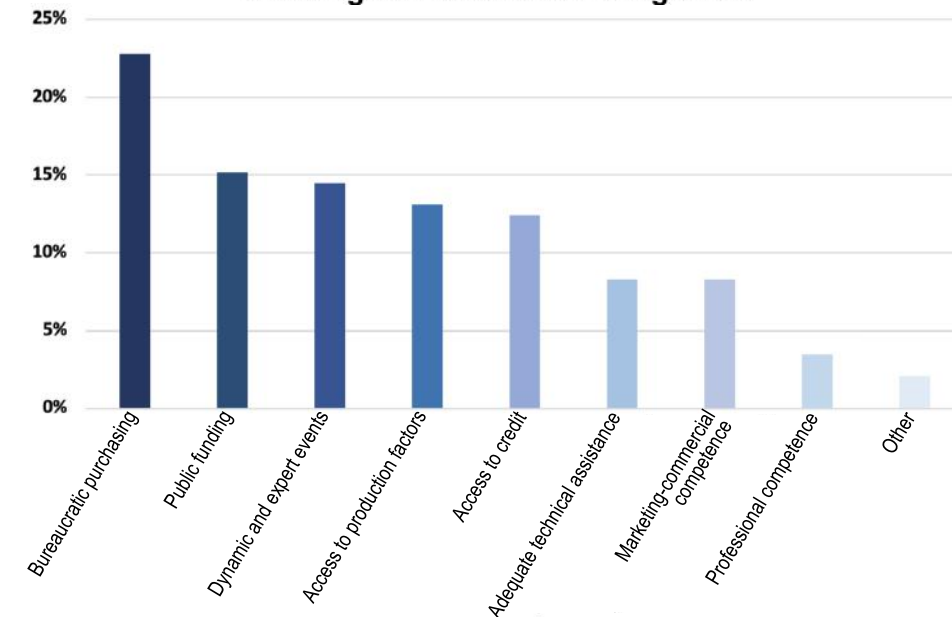
The analysis of the results showed that the main reasons discouraging young agricultural workers (67 respondents) include income instability, lack of services in rural areas, and the perceived low attractiveness of the sector in



### Factors that motivate young people to work in the agricultural sector



### Challenges in business management



majority of those consulted believe that integrating their income through direct payments is a key factor in choosing an entrepreneurial career in the agricultural sector. There was a strong belief that, without this complementary support, most young farmers would not have been able to enter the profession.

## Recommendations for Policymakers

This framework highlights the need to overcome barriers perceived by young people through targeted policies and integrated approaches to support adaptive pathways in response to ecological, socio-economic, and cultural dynamics.

### Recommendations for overcoming perceived barriers

#### 1. Stabilization of agricultural incomes

To reduce the gap between agricultural incomes and those of other economic sectors, promoting greater stability, two lines of action can be identified:

- **Managing price volatility and mitigating economic uncertainties**, limiting dependence on resources external to the enterprise, replacing them with greater use of endogenous territorial resources. For

example, careful management of forage crops and grazing, combined with agreements between irrigated and dry areas, can reduce the need for feed and fertilizers.

- **Targeted complementary payments to young farmers** to facilitate entry into the sector.

#### 2. Enhancement of services in rural areas

The reference framework is that of European rural development policies, implemented according to local specificities. There is a perception of top-down policies and infrastructural deficiencies. It is necessary to:

- **Help businesses manage constraints**, enhancing development funds, moving from a "command-control" approach to bottom-up design and effectiveness evaluation;
- **Invest in key infrastructures** such as transport, logistics, energy, and digital connectivity to reduce competitive disadvantages;
- **Encourage targeted investments** in marginal areas and young entrepreneurs, oriented toward the development of business networks.

#### 3. Training and innovation

Awareness of the role of the agricultural entrepreneur comes through adequate training. It is important to:

- **Develop training pathways beyond technical skills**, including managerial, financial, and technological aspects. Young entrepreneurship requires curriculum renewal with a focus on innovation, digitalization, and sustainability.
- **Promote training pathways with practical experiences**, internships and Erasmus+ programs; incubation services; creation of mentorship networks and peer learning.
- **Strengthen the role of regional agencies and university research through "living labs."**

#### 4. Access to land

Policies such as the creation of **land banks** are necessary. New enterprises are increasingly less based on owned land, and alternative forms of ownership are spreading. It is necessary to develop new forms of land management,

especially in mountain areas, to combat abandonment and enhance local resources where **fragmentation represents the main constraint**. Examples include land associations in Piedmont.

### 5. Access to credit

Accessing low-cost financing is essential for making investments and planning business development. For young enterprises, it is necessary to:

- **Create accessible financial instruments**, such as subsidized rate loans, accompanied by risk management mechanisms, for projects evaluated for quality.
- **Simplify procedures for accessing financing** and support investment planning.

### 6. Coordination and simplification of CAP measures

Coordination between CAP measures is essential to ensure integrated support for rural development, strengthening design capacity to address market and climate uncertainties:

- **Increase design capacity** with call scheduling, avoiding delays related to ranking list adjustments.
- **Integrate early retirement measures** and provide tools that **facilitate generational transfer**. It is appropriate to develop differentiated policies for succession and new businesses, ensuring access to support services for development.

### Recommendations for enhancing motivations and opportunities

### 7. Reform perception and image of the agricultural sector

Agriculture is often perceived as a low-profitability sector with limited opportunities. Rebuilding this perception is crucial for the sector's attractiveness. It is essential to:

- **Combine financial incentives with awareness-raising actions**.
- **Invest in cultural perception** and promote the concept of "agripreneurship," which perceives the sector as dynamic and innovative.
- **Support initiatives** that highlight career opportunities and leadership.

### 8. Encourage innovation and sustainability

Various studies show that agriculture oriented toward technological innovation and sustainable practices is **more attractive to young people**. Technologies such as precision agriculture and "smart" digital solutions play an important role in creating new awareness.

### 9. Improve quality of life in rural areas

Challenges in rural areas include isolation, connectivity difficulties, and lack of essential services. To address these issues, it is necessary to:

- **Invest in rural infrastructure** that improves quality of life, promoting access to essential services.
- **Develop synergies between agriculture and other sectors**, such as rural tourism and multifunctional agriculture, to diversify income and make rural areas more attractive.



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