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The innovative factor in agriculture in the Valencian Community (Spain). Factors driving agricultural innovation

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ARTICLE SECTION

The innovative factor in agriculture in the Valencian Community (Spain). Factors driving agricultural innovation

Abstract: This sociological study focuses on rural innovation. Farmers are the main actors of innovation in the agricultural sector. This study focuses on the socio-economic profile of the Valencian farmer and his/her attitude towards innovation. Adopting a position inclined to innovate depends on multiple factors that influence business management. This paper uses data from a farmers' survey carried out in the Valencia region that considers the socioeconomic factors that make farmers take a position favourable to innovation. Later, the study focuses on a typical profile of innovative producers, according to their characteristics, taking into account market orientation, learning orientation and innovative attitude. The results show a positive contribution of level of education and location in urban areas (access to knowledge and services) to the innovative attitude.

Key words: Innovation, Valencian Agriculture, Territorial Management, Public Policies, Rural Sociology.

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IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

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|---|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Innovación: el artículo investiga un concepto poco desarrollado en el caso valenciano.2. Educación: se busca poner en valor el peso de las políticas educativas para innovar en la gestión territorial.3. Sociología Agraria: el artículo despliega una investigación sociológica en el ámbito del campo valenciano.4. Agricultura: la agricultura entendida como un espacio social para la economía i la innovación.5. Territorio: el estudio plantea un ámbito territorial valenciano, aunque sus conclusiones son aplicables a la agricultura mediterránea. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Innovation: the article investigates a concept that is not very developed in the Valencian case.2. Education: the aim is to highlight the importance of educational policies for innovation in territorial management.3. Agrarian Sociology: the article carries out sociological research in the Valencian countryside.4. Agriculture: agriculture understood as a social space for the economy and innovation.5. Territory: the study is based on the Valencian territory, although its conclusions are applicable to Mediterranean agriculture. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Innovació: l'article investiga un concepte poc desenvolupat en el cas valencià.2. Educació: es busca posar en valor el pes de les polítiques educatives per a innovar en la gestió territorial.3. Sociologia Agrària: l'article desplega una investigació sociològica en l'àmbit del camp valencià.4. Agricultura: l'agricultura entesa com un espai social per a l'economia i la innovació.5. Territori: l'estudi planteja un àmbit territorial valencià encara que les seues conclusions són aplicables a l'agricultura mediterrània. |
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT¹

Innovation capacity is essential for farmers to remain competitive and overcome the challenges facing Mediterranean agricultural systems. Based on an extensive empirical study, this paper elucidates the common attributes of innovative farmers in the Region of Valencia (Spain). The model presented in this study investigates whether an innovative attitude can be explained by market-entrepreneurial orientation, learning orientation, individual profile traits and farm size. The findings provide insights into how age and experience affect innovation in agricultural smallholdings. The study shows that the most innovative farmers run large farms and have a strong market-entrepreneurial orientation. Farm size and learning orientation are key requirements to enhance the innovative attitude of farmers.

Innovation is related to the versatility and capacity to adapt to changing market demands. Accordingly, innovation determines whether certain economic activities will prosper or disappear. The agricultural economy is subject to rapid change. Here, innovation can act as a key factor, driving regional development. Accordingly, innovation is a key factor in successfully overcoming the challenges facing Mediterranean agriculture. Traditionally, the literature describes agriculture as a sector with low innovation intensity (Connor and Chiek, 1997) and with limited capacity to generate innovations on its own. Some authors consider agriculture a net recipient of indirect innovations, importing knowledge and solutions from other sectors (Alba et al., 2010).

This empirical study examines the Spanish region of Valencia (Comunitat Valenciana), which is located on the Mediterranean coast. The human capital in Mediterranean agricultural systems has several idiosyncrasies that are worth noting. Most farms are run by only one farmer who is not necessarily the owner. These farmers are generally old, and a large proportion of them are aged over 60 years.

The literature on innovativeness at the individual level suggests that farmers with more business experience should display a more innovation-oriented attitude. In contrast, the effect of age on innovative capacity has been reported as negative (Parsons, 2015), whilst other studies have provided inconclusive findings (Ng and Feldman, 2013). Our study addresses this gap by providing new findings and insights into how age and experience affect innovation in agricultural smallholdings. More specifically, the main objective of this paper is to characterize the innovative profile of farmers in the Spanish region of Valencia, identifying demographic traits and variables that drive innovative behavior. Our findings contribute to understanding the factors that characterize innovative agricultural holders. Our findings also identify the areas that should be supported by public or private actors to make agricultural holders more competitive and better integrated in the regional economy.

Studies of farmers' innovative behavior are nothing new (Mutsvangwa-Sammie et al., 2017; García-Álvarez-Coque et al., 2018). However, some questions remain unanswered, including how market and entrepreneurial orientation and learning orientation influence smallholders' innovative attitudes. This study contributes to the debate on innovation in the agriculture sector by showing who innovative farmers are and, more specifically, identifying their common attributes. Our empirical findings will enrich the literature by revealing the conditions that enhance or deter innovative attitudes in farmers in the Region of Valencia, which is representative of the Mediterranean agricultural system

¹ Traducción exclusiva de los autores / Authors' exclusive translation.

In summary, the specific objectives of the study are as follows: to broaden existing knowledge of the profile of agricultural holders in the Mediterranean region of Valencia in relation to their innovative attitudes; to identify the factors or dimensions that underpin innovative behavior in farmers; and to describe the sociodemographic profile of a typical farmer in Valencia in terms of innovative attitude traits.