

## Giving up agriculture for a new career

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**Abstract:** *General structural adjustment in agriculture or other reasons may end in a farm exit. The Swiss Ministry of Agriculture provides financial support for farm managers to start a new non-agricultural career when giving up farming before retirement. But only few farmers make use of the programme which provides financial support for farmers and their families during the period of the non agricultural re-training of their choice. The case studies show that rarely one single reason leads to the decision for a new career. In most cases there are several reasons, often accumulative, which result in giving up agriculture. Often farming families need to decide if in our days a high level of debt for the modernization of old buildings for farming is reasonable. Associated with problems based on partnership and/or health a new professional orientation is sometimes the only realistic solution for the farmers as hard it may be for many of them. In most of the investigated cases, farm exit is a long lasting decision process, often very difficult and a process which makes a lot of demand on the concerned people.*

**Keywords:** *Agriculture, structural change, farm exit, occupational choice, career path*

### Introduction

The structure of Swiss agriculture is characterised by family farms. Agricultural structural change takes place primarily within the context of the succession of generations (Rossier et al, 2007). There are around 2 percent of all Swiss farms which are given up every year in this way.

In Switzerland, an early exit from agriculture is rarely observed. The national allowances for re-training do not motivate farmers to give up farming. But such a financial support granted by the Swiss government during the period of education helps to realize a new career. But it means also to leave agriculture for good.

Switzerland advocates a multilateral system in which sustainable agriculture and rural development are politically prioritized in order to protect the environment, promote the rural economy, assure environmental services and food security. Switzerland wants, first of all, to support people in agriculture by direct payments and other measurements. The programme for a new off-farm career is meant for those who want to leave agriculture.

The goal of this research was a better understanding of the motivation of early farm exit and of process of giving up agriculture for another career. The sample of the study were people who had shown interest or participated in the national programme for re-training allowances. There were thirteen men and one woman. All men accepted to make an individual semi-structured interviews, but not the woman. She justified her denial by saying that in her case there was no change at all because before leaving agriculture she already worked outside agriculture.

The former farm managers interviewed are on average 43.5 years old; the youngest is 33, the oldest 52 (which is the age limit for retraining grants). Inhibitions towards a second training increase with age, at the same time as chances of employment outside of agriculture fall. The size of the farms varies from 6.5 up to 27 hectares, with an average of 15.5 ha. This doesn't tell us much, however, since the farms in both the valley and mountain regions are highly heterogeneous in terms of type and structure (dairying, livestock fattening, arable farming, suckler-cow production, mixed farms, special-crops farms).

The thirteen interviews (four in the French and nine in the German speaking part of Switzerland) took place in spring 2009. The interviews were made by the author and a second person as observer. All

interviews were audio taped and transcribed, followed by a content analysis summing up motivation and process of giving up agriculture. The interviews lasted from one to three hours. If possible the partner took part in the interview (case 9, 10, 13).

## Case studies

### Case 1: A Crisis as a New Beginning (Valentin\*)

Fifteen years after taking over the family farm, Valentin (46) would like to build new freestall housing for his cows. It's been a long time since any money has been invested in the farm, and it's time to make some changes. But the desperately needed investment aid is not forthcoming, since the mountain farm with its fourteen hectares and its 90,000-kg milk quota is not creditworthy. What's more, the prospect of leasing some land from the neighbours has not been fulfilled – the 'soil rent' they already receive in the form of direct payments is simply too attractive. Without investment credits and subsidies, the project is doomed to failure. The dream of the freestall barn is over.

With health problems then being added to the mix which make an operation necessary, Valentin decides to set out on a new career path. He's read somewhere about the federal retraining programme for farmers, and wants to train as a cook. In order to do this, though, he must give up farming – that's one of the conditions. This decision is easier for him to make, since his son has also chosen a career outside agriculture. It simply makes no sense for Valentin to struggle for another 20 years in agriculture just to be able to pay off his debts.

Why become a cook of all things, though? In his youth, Valentin enjoyed cooking and was happy to take over kitchen duty when his wife got a job outside the farm and he was at home working the land. To his mind, cooking is an interesting and creative profession, and most importantly, not a "conveyor-belt job". His pull-out from agriculture begins with the sale of the cows and the machinery, with the latter proving to be not all that simple. His small machinery is difficult to shift. Finally, however, they find a buyer in Macedonia. The land is leased to a farmer in the village who wants to expand his farm so as to provide his son with a living later on. In this way, both come out winners. The sale of the land, however, is taboo, since land always means security in times of need. The buildings are transferred from business to personal assets, and the business debts become personal debts. Valentin carries on living in the farmhouse, which is declared a 'residence with a barn'.

Valentin still has long working days as a cook, but he now also has holidays. Not all the people in the village understand his decision to give up farming, but Valentin is convinced he's done the right thing. He's happy that he can do something new. Nowadays, he no longer puts his heart and soul into farming, but instead into his new job as a cook. Valentin's father hasn't said much about his son's decision. Sometimes, though, when Valentin cooks something nice for his father, the latter is visibly satisfied.

### Case 2: At the End of my Tether (Ruedi)

Together with his family and parents, Ruedi (41) farms fifteen hectares in the mountain area. The family also owns another fifteen hectares of forest and a sawmill. Because the farm can't provide a living for two families, after taking over the reins Ruedi expands the sawmill from a sideline into a full-time enterprise with the federal government's start-up aid. The dwelling house is new, as is the barn. The workload on the farm together with that of the sawmill is extremely heavy, however. Ruedi hardly has any time for his wife and children. The couple split up, and his wife and children leave the farm. A world collapses.

Ruedi can hardly cope with the farm and sawmill on his own. The thought then occurs to him that he can simply do something completely new, and venture a new beginning somewhere else. He applies

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\* Names have been anonymised

for a job as an engine driver – a boyhood dream. He passes the entrance exams and is accepted for training. Suddenly, everything's moving very quickly – almost too quickly, Ruedi thinks in retrospect.

The final orders for the sawmill have been filled, the machinery sold, and the land leased to a neighbour in the village. Ruedi would have even sold the land to him, but the young farmer can't afford to buy. The financial side of giving up the farm is complicated, however, and takes up a great deal of time. Ruedi is glad that the agricultural advisory service and his principle bank are there to help with support and advice. The mortgage for the dwelling house must be extended so that the start-up aid can be repaid. In addition, there is child support to pay. Ruedi moves away from the farm to where he is doing his engine-driver training. His parents, who have the right of abode, remain in the old farmhouse. Ruedi's children also visit with him there every fortnight. Knowing that his parents needn't leave their familiar surroundings is a help. Ruedi also finds that his parents are understanding about his retraining.

It takes courage to risk this step, and giving up farming – and especially the sawmill which he himself built up – is not easy for Ruedi. But the many positive reactions from his immediate surroundings both surprise and encourage Ruedi, who hadn't actually reckoned on all this support.

What Ruedi likes about his new job as an engine driver is that he has to shift for himself, and once again be self-reliant. He enjoys working on his own, is happy in his own company. Of course, he already knew this from farming. Although he can no longer work directly outdoors, in nature, his new life affords him more spare time and income. 'Look forward', is his motto. He feels that time is a great healer.

### **Case 3: It No Longer Makes Sense (Emanuel)**

There are several things that prompt Emanuel (39) to give up his farm and turn his back on agriculture for good. On the one hand, there is the small six-and-a-half-hectare mountain farm, and on the other, the old buildings for the couple of dairy cows and the veal calves he has. Emanuel works the farm with his father up until the latter's death whilst working part-time in a haulier's in order to earn a bit extra. He is stretched at both jobs, the farming job and his sideline. Even if he works 365 days a year, the bottom line is that he has nothing and is heading nowhere. But then he's fired from his part-time job because he can't work full time like the company wants him to. It's simply not possible; in summer the mountain farm needs him, and he can't work off-farm. The hay harvest must be brought in, and he has no help on the farm besides his mother. This involves a lot of manual labour, which is a further reason for Emanuel giving up farming. Without a partner and a family, he sees no future in agriculture.

That's why, after his father's death, Emanuel decides to make some changes. His mother is getting older, and doesn't want to carry on working in the same way. His farm is too small for investment credits, but can't be streamlined without them. Although he can still cope with the animal-welfare requirements, when another new slurry pit is needed (this five years ago), he must make a decision.

For the first time he thinks about packing it in, but then carries on regardless. He then consults the careers guidance office and thinks about learning another non-agricultural trade, but nowadays almost all jobs involve working with a computer. This puts Emanuel off. He drops the idea and goes to work in a sawmill. He leases his land and barn – not the easiest endeavour, since his land is very steep and lies in the shade, and is therefore not particularly sought-after. Finally, though, he finds someone with experience of steep land who isn't bothered by the shaded position. He pulls down the ugly, scruffy old barn. In his opinion there are already enough such blots on the landscape.

Sometimes Emanuel helps out his tenant. He still hasn't given any thought to taking a holiday, but he takes time off to cycle and go snowshoe trekking, which he can do right on his doorstep.

#### **Case 4: A New Life Chapter (Paul)**

Paul (56) comes from a farm of thirteen-and-a-half hectares, including the unsecured leased land. When he takes over the farm from his father in 1980 as a tenant farmer, he continues to work in industry. Five years later, he is able to purchase the farm from his father. When the village cheese dairy folds, however, he packs in milk production and converts his farm to suckler-cow production and poultry fattening.

Paul soon finds himself in the midst of a personal and business crisis, triggered by his divorce, his father's fatal accident at work, and the heavy indebtedness of the farm as a consequence of internal expansion. Today, Paul regrets the expensive investments he made at that time. Moreover, living space is tight with four children, and a second residence becomes a must. When on top of this a new slurry pit becomes necessary, it's the last straw. The farm and Paul are deep in debt. Paul finally decides to give up practical agriculture. Although his only son has studied farming, he then did a second training course outside of agriculture. One of his three daughters marries a farmer. After the farm is given up, the land is leased to Paul's son-in-law. Paul hold onto the woods as well as a few trees around the house. The decision to give up the farm and the subsequent retraining as an agricultural salesman are not easy for Paul, particularly the giving up of his self-employed status. Moreover, he is unable to find a job directly after his training course. After a fairly hard start to his new working life, however, he now has a job he finds satisfying. His financial situation is a worry for him, though. The proceeds from the sale of the agricultural goods don't prevent him from needing to increase his mortgage on the farmhouse in order to repay the investment credit. He can't afford to pay the high taxes. This was before the business-tax reform. Selling the house is out of the question, since after paying off his siblings Paul would not even be able to settle his tax liability. Moreover, his mother has the right of abode. Although her flat is currently empty because she lives in a nursing home, it would only be possible to rent it out after a general renovation, and he doesn't have the money for that. Today, Paul lives with his dog, cats and two children in the former farmhouse. Training as an agricultural salesman was a good solution for him – at least in this way, he keeps his ties with farming.

#### **Case 5: A Career with Detours (Noel)**

Noel studies agriculture with an emphasis on fruit and vegetable-growing. His father owns a seven-hectare 'special crops' farm, producing mainly apples, pears and some vegetables. After completing his course, Noel goes to Africa for two years as a trainee, where he is able to pursue his desire to help his fellow human beings.

He comes back to Switzerland because he wants to start a family and run the farm together with his father. The partnership is anything but straightforward, however. Father and son have different opinions and ideas on agricultural matters. Once again, they part ways, the father remaining on the family farm, the son from then on primarily farming leased land, since Noel owns little acreage of his own. This works fine for a couple of years, until the good farming years are over and money becomes tight for Noel and his family. What's more, Noel increasingly misses social contact, since apart from the harvest season he works for the most part alone on the farm. His wife and three daughters aren't interested in farming, and are involved elsewhere. More and more, Noel is losing his zest for life as well as his motivation. He needs to look inward, and urgently needs time out for reflection. He works off-farm for a while, and takes on various jobs. During this time, his father is once more running the farm all on his own. In the long term, however, this is no solution for either the father or the son.

Noel's wife urges him to make a new career move, but for the moment he doesn't dare. Too many years have passed since his schooldays and apprenticeship. Despite this, he finds out about various jobs, especially in the social welfare sphere. Most jobs in the social services require a university degree. He feels that that's setting his sights too high, after all. He decides on an apprenticeship as a heating engineer, but the work on the construction site is not at all to his taste, and he quits his apprenticeship. In his second attempt, Noel decides to train as a welfare officer. At last he's found a job that he likes. Even Noel's father has by now accepted his son's new career. After his wife's death,

his father leases the land to a cousin. For Noel, who is now 50 years old, this is a good solution. He sells two of the three plots of land belonging to him and settles his debts with the proceeds. For Noel, giving up farming is a relief which has also given him back his zest for life.

#### **Case 6: A Rational Decision (Martin)**

Martin (33) grows up with two older sisters on a farm. To this day, he has very close ties to agriculture. His parents' farm contains eighteen hectares of arable land. Father and son form a generation community. The farm is renovated largely with their own funding: the old milking barn for six or seven cows is replaced by freestall housing for suckler cows. After military training school, Martin takes up a traineeship abroad, on a large dairy farm in Denmark. The Danish farmer he works for works himself half to death, yet is getting nowhere. This gives Martin pause for thought. He knows now what it means to run an agroindustrial farm. Martin enjoys farming, but would also like to live a little, have a bit of leisure time or perhaps even go on holiday from time to time. After his return from Denmark, he works outside the farm and helps his father on the farm evenings and weekends. In addition, and instead of attending the usual farm management college, Martin pursues a course in entrepreneurship in the SME sector.

What's the way forward after farm transfer? For Martin, it makes no sense for him to carry on working full-time outside the farm whilst his father continues to run the farm after retirement. He wants his parents to be able to enjoy their sunset years. What's more, forecasts for farming are in general somewhat gloomy. Martin has no prospects of more leased land or a second farm. After careful consideration, Martin decides to give up the farm and begins his vocational retraining as a physiotherapist. He wants to do something that he enjoys doing, but also wants to switch to a job that meets his needs in terms of working conditions and income.

A lot of preparation goes into the giving up of the farm, so that taxes aren't sky-high upon privatisation. A competent tax adviser supports Martin's family during this process. The whole farm, including acreage and farm buildings, is leased to a neighbour, so that the latter's farm successors will have a sporting chance of success in future. Martin's parents can remain in their accustomed surroundings. All family members have reacted positively to the giving up of the farm. With his parents, it was actually his mother who had trouble letting go; she was absolutely devoted to the animals. However, the arranged lease of the land means that there are still animals on the farm, so letting go is slightly easier.

#### **Case 7: Remaining Independent (Eric)**

Ever since he was a young boy Eric (40) has dreamed of becoming a farmer, and his wish comes true. After his agricultural training, Eric works an eighteen-hectare holding with dairy and arable farming, together with his father. The income isn't sufficient for two households, though. Eric also performs wage labour for third parties and buys himself a sugar beet harvester. He does the winter road maintenance for the district on the side, as well.

Only when he can afford to buy his father's farm does he take it over. Tenant farming doesn't interest him – he likes to call the shots himself. Eric also leases an alpine cow pasture in France. He loves dairy cows – but he loves repairing agricultural machinery and equipment just as much, if not more. In particular, welding is right up his street – moreover, a lucrative sideline in the form of work as a mechanic develops from this interest. Together with his neighbours, he has recently formed a new livestock owners' association. This enables Eric to create a bit of space for his part-time activity, since farming work and his various sidelines aren't always compatible in terms of the hours. Meanwhile, things are now looking less than rosy in agriculture. Over the past few years, he's been feeling more and more like a "bounty hunter", chasing subsidies. Farming leaves him too little entrepreneurial leeway. He considers the pros and cons of agriculture versus sideline. Carrying on with both simply won't work. Eric decides to go freelance as a mechanic and give up the farming.

He leases the farm to his neighbour, selling the latter all of his livestock and machinery and paying off his own debts with the proceeds. Now there's no going back – but even so, he sometimes feels in two minds about things.

Giving up the farm means a big change for Mrs F. as well, who must let go of her role as farmer's wife. The family hold on to the alpine pasture in France, however. Mrs F. will now spend four months there every summer looking after the neighbour's seventy dairy cows. What's more, the mountain pasture offers Eric a great chance to relax and 'get away from it all' after he's through with his work in town. An agreement is reached with the neighbour: Eric will lease his farm to the latter at a 'friendship' rate, in exchange for which he'll take on the neighbour's cows for summer grazing on the alpine pasture. That way, everyone's a winner.

Something else has changed dramatically since they've given up the farm: family life. Like so many fathers, Eric now leaves the house in the morning and doesn't arrive back home until the evening. Days spent with his little daughter in the barn are now most definitely a thing of the past. Now, Eric must deliberately make time for his family.

### **Case 8: Underestimating the Challenges of Independence (Pascal)**

Actually, Pascal (52) would prefer not to give up his vineyard, but he doesn't have a choice. After training as a wine grower, Pascal works with his father for many years. They work two-and-a-half hectares of their own land, plus five hectares of vineyard on a jobbing basis. The estate owner buys the grapes from them after each vintage at a fixed price. The vines are in an excellent vineyard, but the land is steep and terraced, and thus does not lend itself easily to mechanisation. Because there is so much manual labour to be done, the O. family employs four permanent workers and up to another thirty helpers during the vintage. Business is going well; the vineyard hasn't the slightest problem selling its products. Pascal's work is properly remunerated.

Taking over the family vineyard ten years ago, Pascal decides to change the business strategy. He wants to do things differently from his father. Pascal decides to forgo renewing the jobbing contract for the five hectares, and instead rely on pressing the wine from his own two-and-a-half hectares of vines himself. He no longer wants to be the winery owner's 'flunkey', he wants to be independent. He does, however, remain faithful to the traditional production of white wine (Chasselas). Now the worries begin. There are expenses aplenty: for taking over the farm and for the investment credits, for the land reorganisation and subsequent mechanisation, and finally for the whole switch to the production of quality wine and the introduction of value-added tax. Everything comes with a price tag. Despite improved mechanisation, he can't do without employees completely. Pascal finds himself deeper and deeper in debt, and is obliged to borrow money. He has overestimated the proceeds from the sale of his own wine. He's now only working to pay off the interest, and eventually must even pledge his wine in order to meet his credit obligations. In the end, even this does not work. The debt trap springs shut. Pascal can no longer pay his living costs. His parents help out, but it's too late to save the vineyard, or his marriage for that matter.

Pascal can't stand up to the pressure – the strain is too great. He feels overtaxed, is increasingly losing self-confidence, and is in need of psychological counselling. He can't cope on his own any longer. Pascal is glad that he hasn't completely lost his family inheritance. He leases the land to a neighbour and manages to rent out the semi-detached house. The machinery is the only thing he sells.

The subsequent search for a job proves to be somewhat of a challenge at his age. Fortunately, he has the income from the rental, which also enables him to pay for his son's training. He first looks for a job in the social services, as he'd like to train in this field, but success eludes him. Eventually, he finds a job at a funeral undertaker's. Dealing with the bereaved is also social work in its way, Pascal feels. In his new home, he doesn't talk about his previous work; he'd rather not be confronted with his past any more. He does, however, look forward to the grape harvest at his neighbour's, because for the first time in four years he can lend a hand completely free from worry.

### **Case 9: No False Compromises (Flurin)**

After his agricultural training, Flurin (41) works as an employee on his parents' twenty-five-hectare mountain farm. They have thirteen dairy cows and also rear stock. In the winter Flurin works for the railway and as a ski instructor. Whilst skiing he becomes acquainted with the woman who's now his wife, who's from the lowlands. They have three sons. Because there's not enough room for their young family in his parents' home in the village, they must rent a flat in the village. The barn is a bit outside the village. There, and with a great deal of their own funding, they later build themselves a house. After they take over the farm, there's a role swap, and the father is now employed by the son.

The members of the Milk Producers' Association decide to switch over to organic production. For Flurin, this means certain adaptations in his 1970s-built barn. As on many farms, Flurin's slurry tank is also too small, and must be enlarged for water-pollution prevention reasons. He applies to the Canton for a financial grant towards this. The agricultural advisory service points out to him that he's only entitled to a one-off subsidy. Since other investments are planned, such as the fitting of a hay crane, Flurin submits an overall concept. This exceeds the cap on expenses, however. Despite whittling down his plans substantially, the funding still isn't sufficient. In addition, Flurin would have to make too many compromises and switch his farm to suckler-cow husbandry or heifer rearing. Nor does the plan now include a hay crane. It's no longer his project.

Flurin then considers forming a livestock-husbandry or farming cooperative with an older bachelor neighbour. The latter at first agrees to the arrangement, but then back-pedals. Suddenly, the risk is too great for him. When Flurin then also loses three hectares of leased land, he begins to call into question the farm as a whole. Moreover, like him, two of his three boys suffer from an allergy, making farm succession uncertain as it is. Mrs T. doesn't interfere, but intimates that she's not particularly keen to work full-time outside the farm just so they can pay its debts.

Flurin goes for career counselling, but he actually already knows what path he wants to take. His great passion is for machines, and so he retrain as a construction machinery mechanic. His parents and many people in the village can hardly believe that Flurin is giving up farming, but when he hands in his resignation as Chairman of the Milk Producers' Association, they can all see that he means business. Flurin leases his land to his colleagues from the Association, so that they don't lose out. Giving up the farm is a long and difficult process for the whole family, but once the decision has been made, it takes a great weight off all their minds and they can once again get a decent night's sleep.

### **Case 10: Looking Ahead (Heinz)**

Heinz (42) is a stock breeder. His twenty high-yielding cows boast a barn average of 10,000 kg milk per cow and year. In addition, he practises arable agriculture on his twenty-seven-hectare farm. Right after his training, he takes over the lease of the farm from his father, who is in poor health. When his father dies shortly thereafter, the shell of a new barn stands completed. The farm passes to the community of heirs. This puts paid to the barn renovation that's been begun. Since it's the community of heirs that's building, Heinz receives no investment aid. He then purchases the farm from the community of heirs and borrows money in order to buy out his siblings. Today he would do things differently, but who ever thinks that they're going to pack it in at some stage?

Heinz is bothered by health problems. He needs several knee operations. He can no longer milk the cows, has to give up milk production, so from now on he rears calves. But the market for calves has dried up, and it's a financial non-starter. A work accident occurs when the calves are being loaded, and this finally leads to the decision to pack in farming and to find a new job. At the suggestion of the disability insurance people, he retrain as an agricultural merchant. Although he's invested his heart and soul in his farm, Heinz sees this retraining as an opportunity. However, when he can't find a job after completing his training owing to his inability to provide proof of work experience, his disappointment is great. He registers at the regional job centre, so that the young family can meet its commitments. Tough times follow, and the whole family suffers in this situation. As a result, Mrs R.

increases her working hours at the post office. During this time, Heinz takes care of the household and the two children. He doesn't mind doing this, but he'd rather work in his new profession.

He's glad when he finally finds a job, even though it's fairly far from his home. Now he's got his foot in the door. Soon he finds another job nearby, with the tax authorities. Heinz enjoys the work a lot, even though he wonders slightly at the outset whether he's the right man for the job. Now he's even almost a bit proud of his occupational history.

He leases the land and farm buildings to a young farmer from the village, who with forty hectares of utilisable agricultural area now has a real chance for the future. He chooses this farmer because their views on agriculture coincide. The sale of the land is out of the question, since his brothers and sisters would then get a crack of the whip/demand their share.

The family can build on a solid social network in hard times. His wife's family in particular supports Heinz both morally and financially. That's very important. The new job is also a blessing for Heinz's health, however. What's more, he now has a steady wage and a pension fund, and he is even enjoying this new-found security to a certain extent.

### **Case 11: A farmer's Work is Never Done (Marcel)**

After training as a farmer, Marcel (36) works an employee on his father's farm (dairying, pig-fattening and five hundred laying hens) until farm transfer. The farm is in the mountain region and has a surface area of sixteen hectares, most of it leased land. As a sideline, he also works in construction. Marcel does not have a vocation for farming, nor is he a livestock breeder like most of his colleagues in the region. Even during his training, Marcel stands out as a machinist; cows don't capture his interest in the same way. Nor is his father a livestock breeder. Instead of going to livestock shows with his dad like the others, the two of them can often be found together under the tractor, doing repairs.

One year after he takes over the farm, Marcel marries. Things are very tense between his parents and his wife, however. His parents decide to move away from the farm before the situation escalates. The size of the living quarters is not ideal – there are effectively two flats, but just one front door. Marcel's father continues to help him on the farm.

The young family now lives alone on the fairly remote mountain farm. Marcel is often away during the day working on the building site, and when he comes home in the evening he must first go to the barn. This rankles with Mrs R. The relationship suffers. As a saleswoman, she had quite a different social life before the birth of the two children. In the end, Mrs R. leaves the farm with the children.

Financially, the farm is also in fairly poor shape. The family cannot live from agriculture alone, but the double burden of agriculture and sideline is no longer bearable either. Marcel decides to give up farming and takes a job as a chauffeur. He hopes that this will perhaps save his marriage, but it doesn't work. Divorce is now inevitable.

Farm exit per se goes without a hitch. Marcel cancels the lease contracts, sells his livestock to the butcher, and leaves the machinery syndicate and cheese-making cooperative. He sells his milk quota within the cheese-making cooperative, in order to avoid 'bad blood'. There are numerous people interested in the three hectares of land he owns. He settles on a young farmer who can also use his barn. Meanwhile, however, Marcel is no longer so happy with his choice of tenant; the latter doesn't always stick to the agreements, and that annoys Marcel. On no account does he want to move away, though – his home is here. And perhaps his parents will also come back.

Marcel finally has time for his hobby, motorbike riding. He now no longer has to make hay when the sun shines, but can instead properly enjoy going for a ride.



### **Case 12: Stopping at the Right Time (Cyril)**

After training as a farmer, Cyril first of all does his military service, then joins the police force for a couple of years. The idea is to bridge the time gap until he takes over the family farm. There's not enough room for both father and son on the farm – an arable holding on the southern foot of the Jura with twenty-five suckler cows and a utilised agricultural area of twenty-two hectares.

When his father reaches pension age, Cyril takes over the farm – at twice the capitalised earnings value, in fact. This is because the farm has a dwelling house with two flats in a lovely residential area, near the town. Only with a higher purchase price can the siblings' claims be satisfied. As a result, Cyril is heavily in debt. In addition, the dwelling house is still burdened with a high mortgage going back to the parents' renovation of their flat before farm transfer. Upon transfer, the parents retain the right of abode.

The farm doesn't turn a profit. Without his wife's income, the family wouldn't be able to make ends meet. His wife's employment as a sales clerk secures the family's living. For his part, Cyril works one hundred per cent on the farm. He looks for optimisation options here. An expansion of the farm is not possible for reasons of cost. Land prices in the region are prohibitive. An agricultural specialisation combined with a non-agricultural sideline is also out of the question for Cyril, since it goes against his concept of professional farming. On no account does Cyril want to become one of those 'Sunday farmers'. He also seriously considers forming a farming cooperative with his friend – but then, of course, he'd lose his independence in any case, and perhaps even his friendship. In this situation Cyril would rather stop farming entirely – and before he is entirely ruined to boot.

He leases the entire seventeen hectares of land he owns, including buildings, to his friend. The machinery and livestock are sold as starting capital for his new life. The block of flats remains in his possession – it's a good investment. His parents occupy one of the flats, and he can rent out/rents out the other one. Together with his wife and their three school-aged children, Cyril moves into a cheaper house near his new job. He is accepted in the federal vocational retraining programme, and trains as a machinist. His wife also finds a new job in the same firm. Cyril and his wife are content with their new life. Financially, they're significantly better-off than before. Life is easier. But the change is not without its problems for the children, who mourn their previous life on the farm. Cyril does not anticipate selling the farm, since you never know what the future will bring.

### **Case 13: Fresh Start (Pius)**

Pius's father relocates in the 1960s. The twelve-hectare forage-growing farm with fourteen dairy cows now lies far outside the village. Pius (49) has seven older and younger siblings. From an early age, he's groomed by his father for the role of farm successor. He 'grows' into agriculture, so to speak, does his agricultural training, and takes over the family farm.

Pius gets to know his future wife – a nursery school teacher – at amateur dramatics in the village. They marry, and from this point on Pius is the farmer, and she the homemaker. This division of labour is a deliberate choice on their part: he enjoys farming, and she feels that a farm is an ideal place for children to grow up, since the mother and father are always there. The family also places great value on self-sufficiency: garden, fruit trees and woods are all important. In this way, they can impart down-to-earth values to their four children. But the financial situation is critical, and they must battle daily to earn a living.

When Pius's father becomes seriously ill and can no longer lend a hand, another labour problem arises on the farm, since Pius also works part-time as a casual chauffeur. Meeting the conflicting demands of farm, sideline and family is impossible. In addition, and for financial reasons, Mrs B. must now work two half-days as a nursery school teacher. The workload is too heavy, Mrs B. becomes ill, and it's clear that something is in urgent need of change. Across-the-board modernisation of the farm is financially out of the question. Pius thinks about combining agriculture with social-care services. Mrs B. is against going into therapeutic agriculture, since she's had a bad experience with a

foster daughter. On the other hand, Pius is sceptical about collective farming, which for him is tantamount to a creeping exit from agriculture; he would prefer making an immediate clean break.

The news that Pius wants to give up the farm leaks into the village. Interested parties are now queuing up at his door. Their pitch for Pius's land and buildings is in some cases unpleasantly aggressive. It's not the highest bidder but a neighbour who is finally accepted. Pius has already formed a good relationship with this neighbour, and the latter's son is doing his agricultural training, so there's sure to be continuity there. Pius is currently training as an RE teacher. He hopes for a job with conventional working hours once he qualifies, so that he can then lead a completely normal family life. It remains to be seen whether the family can then carry on living in the same place.

The whole family finds it hard to bid farewell to farming, especially the youngest daughter. A pony helps her over the loss. The farm is registered as a 'farm without agricultural activity'. Pius himself certainly doesn't want to go back into farming – for him, this chapter is closed for good – but there's always the next generation, of course.

## Conclusions

The thirteen farmers who give up their farms and strike out on new career paths show great individual variety, but also have something in common – namely, the pressing financial situation and a lack of innovation. Premature exit from agriculture is still not the rule in Switzerland. Nor is it the federal retraining grants which induce a person to pull out of agriculture. It is indisputable, however, that federal financial support during the training period helps individuals complete new vocational training courses.

Off-farm labour participation represents an occupational choice which can be either a substitute or a complement for farm labour activity. In Finland (Väre et al., 2006) the farmer's and spouse's off-farm income have different impacts on the decisions to exit and close down the farm: Increasing off-farm income of the spouse delays the decision to close down the farm and slow down the transfer of resources from farms without sound economic perspectives to expanding farms. However, increasing the off-farm income of the farmer himself increases the likelihood of exiting and closing down the farm. Thus, the farmer's off-farm income is likely an indication that a farmer has feasible and attractive occupational alternatives for farming. The Swiss case studies show a similar pattern of occupational choice of the former farm manager who had an off-farm labour beside farming.

A French study of Bernardi et al (2002) observed that more than half of all early farm exits (before the age of 55) were not for economical reasons, then the farms were economical viable. The same study says also, while only 20% of the farm managers are women, the share of women giving up agriculture is 30%, so the proportion of women leaving agriculture is twice as high for women than for men. In Switzerland also, economical reasons are in most cases not the only reason to give up farming, but further problems pushed to this ultimate decision. In Switzerland, we cannot say how the gender situation is presented. Only one of the fourteen cases for farm managers giving up agriculture took part in the programme, and this woman refused to take part in this research. Rossier (2009) shows that perceived future prospects of young female farm managers in Switzerland are less promising than the one of the young men. Only about half of the female farm managers think that their farm is fit for the future.

Moreover, in most of the cases examined here there has been a fairly long decision-making process which is often difficult and highly challenging for the people affected. A new and rewarding job option helps in coping with major changes that not only affect former farm managers but also their partners, children and parents. Thus, if their partners don't identify too strongly or get too heavily involved in the farm family business as farming women, if their children show no interest in agriculture and farm succession, and if their parents can continue living in the same place, then opting out of agriculture is usually an easier proposition.

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