

## Call for Bachelor and Master theses in the Economic Geography Unit

# Socio-spatial dynamics of farming

**Starting date:** any time

**Duration:** according to University degree programme

**Working Place:** possibility to work at Agroscope on site in Tänikon

**Language:** English, German

**Contact:** Melf-Hinrich Ehlers, Socioeconomics Group, Agroscope

**Email:** [melf-hinrich.ehlers@agroscope.admin.ch](mailto:melf-hinrich.ehlers@agroscope.admin.ch)

### Topic overview

Farming systems and farms are operating in social and spatial settings. Through their activities they shape their social and spatial environment, such as landscape, village life, rural identity and tourism opportunities. In turn, they are affected by their social and spatial environment, be it agricultural policy, regional planning and development, consumer lifestyle or demographic change. At the same time, they are social and spatial arrangements themselves, involving farming families and workers, sites with buildings, infrastructure and fields, for example. Some of the socio-spatial relations of farming may appear stable or slow in dynamism, while others may appear sudden, drastic, rapid or disruptive. Thus, questions arise as to what are drivers of individual socio-spatial dynamics of farming, what effects they have and why there are instances of resistance to change.



Social and geographic research methods and theories are ideally suited to approach these questions of socio-spatial dynamics of farming. They could, for example, uncover the extent to which farmers or farm workers are able to influence these dynamics or the degree to which they are only cogwheels in a system. Likewise, the methods and theories could examine how farmers, farming stakeholders or members of wider society feel about these dynamics. The methods and theories could also be used to establish measures that influence the socio-spatial dynamics of farming, for example through policy and planning.

### Supervision

You will write your thesis within the [Economic Geography Unit](#) at the University of Bern in collaboration with the Socioeconomics Group of the federal research centre on agri-food systems [Agroscope](#). Supervision will be shared between the two institutions.



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Economic Affairs,  
Education and Research EAER  
**Agroscope**

Swiss Confederation

## Potential topics

- How does local or regional building development pressure influence business orientations of farms?
- To what extent do stakeholder perceptions of farming at the urban fringes converge?
- How do local social relations affect sustainability of farms?
- How do farmers feel about rural landscapes and related policies?
- How do farmers feel about the use of remote sensing to monitor their compliance with policy measures?
- What is the role of spatial settings for the quality of life at farms?
- How do farms influence quality of life in their spatial surroundings, such as villages?
- How do agri-food sector transformations impact the social sustainability of farms or farming communities?
- How can farmers or agricultural policy contribute to mitigating the urban-rural divide?
- What spatial and locational factors influence farm diversification?
- What are barriers and drivers of new entrants into farming?
- How do spatial and locational factors influence in farm succession?
- How does place-attachment of farmers affect farming decisions?
- What regional implications can the reduction of stocking densities of farm animals have?
- How do spatial arrangements and melioration influence working time budgets of individual farms or of regional farming sectors?
- How do spatial arrangements of climate change adaptation and mitigation measures influence work loads of farms?
- How do spatial settings influence the outsourcing of farm work to contractors in Switzerland?
- To what extent do spatial settings influence adoption of climate change mitigation or adaptation measures at farms?
- What spatial factors play a role in the acceptance of agricultural photovoltaics?
- What social aspects determine the implementation of policy schemes that connect ecological focus areas to protect biodiversity in farming landscapes?

## Potentially relevant literature

- Cheshire, L., Meurk, C., & Woods, M. (2013). Decoupling farm, farming and place: Recombinant attachments of globally engaged family farmers. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 30, 64-74.
- Contzen, S., & Häberli, I. (2021). Exploring dairy farmers' quality of life perceptions—A Swiss case study. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 88, 227-238.
- Ehlers, M. H., Huber, R., & Finger, R. (2021). Agricultural policy in the era of digitalisation. *Food Policy*, 100, 102019.
- Lange, A., Piorr, A., Siebert, R., & Zasada, I. (2013). Spatial differentiation of farm diversification: How rural attractiveness and vicinity to cities determine farm households' response to the CAP. *Land Use Policy*, 31, 136-144.
- Lyle, G. (2015). Understanding the nested, multi-scale, spatial and hierarchical nature of future climate change adaptation decision making in agricultural regions: A narrative literature review. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 37, 38-49.
- Kimmich, C., Ehlers, M.H., Kellner, E., Oberlack, C., Thiel, A. & Villamayor-Tomas, S. (2023). Networks of action situations in social–ecological systems: current approaches and potential futures. *Sustainability Science*, 18, 1-10.

- Moretti, D. M., Baum, C. M., Ehlers, M. H., Finger, R., & Bröring, S. (2023). Exploring actors' perceptions of the precision agriculture innovation system—A Group Concept Mapping approach in Germany and Switzerland. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *189*, 122270.
- Pirro, C., & Anguelovski, I. (2017). Farming the urban fringes of Barcelona: Competing visions of nature and the contestation of a partial sustainability fix. *Geoforum*, *82*, 53-65.
- Saleh, R. & Ehlers, M.-H. (2023). Exploring farmers' perceptions of social sustainability. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 1-26.
- Suess-Reyes, J., & Fuetsch, E. (2016). The future of family farming: A literature review on innovative, sustainable and succession-oriented strategies. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *47*, 117-140.
- Sutherland, L. A., & Burton, R. J. (2011). Good farmers, good neighbours? The role of cultural capital in social capital development in a Scottish farming community. *Sociologia Ruralis*, *51*(3), 238-255.
- Sutherland, L. A., & Calo, A. (2020). Assemblage and the 'good farmer': New entrants to crofting in Scotland. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *80*, 532-542.