

Farmers' goals and values are knowable, but not simple. (And why farmers and researchers are like the odd couple)

Brett Robinson^{1,2}, David Freebairn¹, Kerry Bell³ and Samsul Huda²

¹ T1 Natural Resources and Mines Qld, APSRU, PO Box 318, Toowoomba, Qld 4350 www.nrm.qld.gov.au
Email brett.robinson@nrm.qld.gov.au

² University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith South, NSW 1797 www.uws.edu.au Email
s.huda@uws.edu.au

³ Primary Industries Queensland, PO Box 102, Toowoomba, Qld 4350 www.dpi.qld.gov.au Email
kerry.bell@dpi.qld.gov.au

Abstract

What do farmers really want? As an aid to communication and understanding, we surveyed farmers and researchers to gauge their goals and values. Temperament (also known as personality type) was also assessed, to see whether this explained differences in goals and values.

Farmer's most important sources of satisfaction were; Pride of ownership, Making a satisfactory income, Self-respect by doing a worthwhile job, Meeting a challenge, Enjoyment of work tasks, and Ensuring a future income. Low importance was attributed to; Expanding the business, Continuing the family tradition, and Recognition or prestige (low to lowest). In the opinion of farmers, what makes a good farmer is (from the highest); Leaves the land better than they found it, Cares for their workers and family, Is most satisfied with their life, and Is progressive/up-to-date/experimental. The least important were (to the least important); Own their land, Is a leader in the farming community, Is not in debt.

The ratings for these values were similar to those previously found overseas and in Australia. Ratings of several sources of satisfaction differed between groups of farmers with different temperaments. Surprisingly, farmers and the research team had remarkably similar values concerning farming, despite substantial differences in their temperaments.

We also learnt that obtaining information concerning goals, values and temperament is not difficult, and people are very interested (and often sceptical) in the methods and results.

Key Words

Motivation, personality, temperament, Myers-Briggs.

Introduction

The aim of this study is to raise some questions; *What do farmers really want from farming? What do farmers think about farming? What sort of people are farmers? What sort of people are we?*

Why do we want to know this? Research, development and extension (R D and E) is less effective than it might be, and part of the problem is a lack of effective communication and understanding between people in the farming and research communities. Recognition of the importance of the wants and needs of the people in agricultural systems has seen a strong move in recent years from 'hard systems' to 'soft systems' research, which highlight the roles of people.

Is it possible to know what farmers really want? Yes. This study follows previous ones overseas and in Australia (1,2) that have surveyed farmers to reveal their objectives and underlying orientations (goals and values). In this study, associations between these goals and values, and temperament orientations (artist, rational, guardian and idealist) are also explored. In summary, our aims are to find out (i) what farmers want from farming, (ii) what they like about it, (iii) whether farmers and researchers are like-

minded, and (iv) whether knowing about this can help us (a farming systems R D and E team) be more effective.

Methods

Survey

Two small groups of farmers were surveyed at field days west of Goondiwindi and St George in southern Queensland. A total of 38 replies were received. Also, 15 farming systems researchers and 9 other farming systems workers in a farming systems project (Western Farming Systems Project Qld; WFSP). This latter group consisted of extension and technical staff. The survey questionnaire concerned the characteristics of a good farmer, in order to sense their **value** systems. Farmers were also asked about their sources of satisfaction (1, 2), which we shall call their **goals**. The rating system was from 1 (not important) to 3 (quite important) to 5 (very important).

Everybody was also asked to answer questions that were used to classify their temperament or personality (3), and was allocated to one of the four widely recognised (Myers-Briggs) types;

- **Artists**, who tend to see the world as objects for creation and discovery,
- **Guardians**, who tend to see the world as objects for use or operation,
- **Idealists**, who tend to see the world as concepts and seek justice, or
- **Rationalists**, who tend to see the world as concepts and seek knowledge.

Statistical analysis

The survey data were analysed using three different statistical methods, described below. A 5 % level of significance was used in all three methods.

- The difference in average ratings for goals and values across temperaments was assessed using analysis of variance (ANOVA).
- When ANOVA showed a significant result, the least significant difference (Lsd) was used to determine which means were significantly different to each other.
- The distribution of temperament types between farmers and others was assessed for independence by a chi-square test.

Results and Discussion

What are farmers' goals, and what is common (or different) among different farmers?

Figure 1 shows that farmers' ratings, ranked from most important to least important. Higher ratings (most important) were for; Pride of ownership, Making a satisfactory income, Self-respect by doing a worthwhile job, Meeting a challenge, Enjoyment of work tasks, and Ensuring a future income. Low importance was attributed to; Expanding the business, Continuing the family tradition, and Recognition or prestige (very low importance). These results are somewhat different to previous surveys overseas (1) and in Australia (2), where the highest ratings have been for a healthy lifestyle and independence, and ensuring a future income and meeting a challenge, respectively.

It is particularly interesting in these results that that the average rating of different economic indicators could be either similarly distributed, or widely distributed (and statistically significant) across temperament types. For example; Making a satisfactory income was similarly important and not significantly different across temperaments, while Making the most income was highly different ($P=0.001$) among the four temperaments. Not surprisingly, Making the most income appealed most to the rationalists and least to the artists (Table 1). The goal of Ensuring a future income was intermediate, both in its overall rating (3.83) and the importance of temperament in determining its importance ($P=0.058$) (Figure 1).

What do farmers, researchers and others value in farming?

The most important values were; Leaves the land better than they found it, Cares for their workers and family, Is most satisfied with their life, and Is progressive/up-to-date/experimental. These are quite similar to results in England (1), where the most important values were; Produces the best crops/livestock, Leaves the land better than they found it, Is progressive/up-to-date/experimental, Is most satisfied with their life, and Cares for their workers and family. The least important values were; Owns their land, Is a leader in the farming community, Is not in debt, which were the same group of three values ranked lowest in the English survey (1). Given that the two groups of farmers were separated by thirty years and numerous social and cultural differences, it may appear remarkable that their values are so similar. On the other hand, it may take a certain “type” of person or one with particular values to be a farmer, and this may be a relatively timeless and general principal.

While it is tempting to seek simple and general rules concerning values or motivations in data such as these, the data in fact reveal the opposite; that the values are diverse and interwoven. So instead of deriving simple principles to guide farming systems R D and E, the survey results emphasise the diversity and richness of goals and values of farmers and researchers. Several highly rated values concerned conservation (Leaving the land better), community (Caring for workers and family) and personal fulfilment (Is satisfied with life). Purely economic values did not rank highly.

None of the values of farmers and researchers were significantly different among the temperaments (P=0.05). Given that temperament is a powerful indicator of actions and beliefs, the lack of correlation with values is surprising.

Do farmers and researchers have different values?

Figure 2 shows the average rating for the three occupational groups (farmer, farming systems researcher and other farming systems worker). The differences were significant (P<0.05) in only one case; Making the most money. Farmers’ higher ratings of this value may reflect a greater directness (and perhaps honesty) in their approach; it appears that collectively they see farming more as a business with a goal of making money.

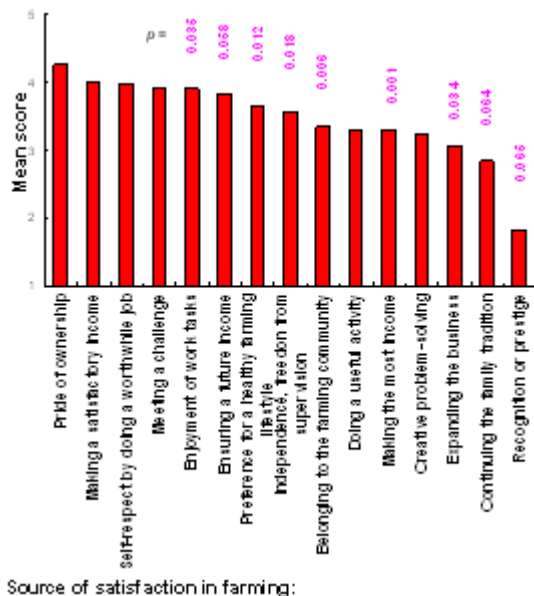


Figure 1. Ratings for various goals. The labels show the level of significance of differences between temperaments (no label indicates p >

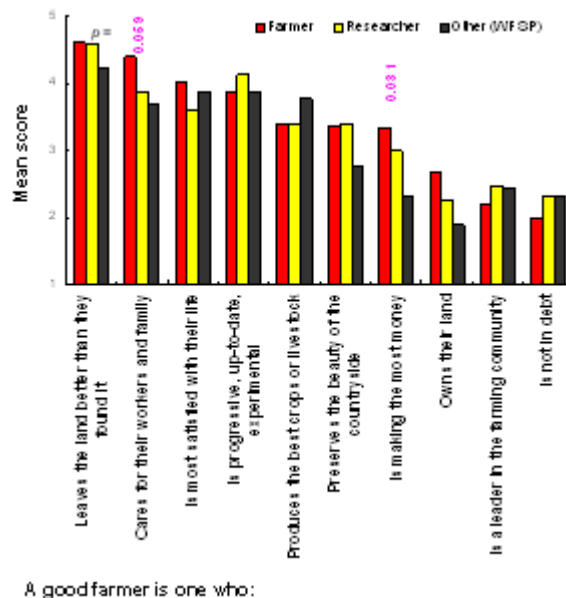


Figure 2. Ratings for various values among farmers, researchers and other agency staff. The labels are the level of significance of

0.1).

differences between occupations (no label indicates $p > 0.1$).

Table 1. Ratings of goals by farmers with different temperaments, where the associations were significant at $P < 0.05$. Average ratings with the same letter are not significantly different from each other.

Goal	Artist	Guardian	Idealist	Rationalist
Enjoyment of work tasks	3.43 a	3.71 ab	4.50 c	4.49 bc
Independence/freedom from supervision	3.43 ab	3.95 b	3.00 a	3.01 a
Expand the business	3.43 b	3.16 b	2.01 a	3.49 b
Prefer a healthy lifestyle	3.00 a	3.90 b	4.25 b	3.01 a
Making the most income	2.14 a	3.26 b	3.67 bc	4.49 c
Belonging to the farming community	2.71 a	3.47 bc	4.33 c	2.51 a

Do farmers and researchers have different temperaments?

In the wider community, Guardians are the most common type (approx. 50%), while Rationalists are comparatively uncommon (perhaps 10%). Figure 3 shows the temperaments of those surveyed in this study. Farmers were mostly Guardians and Artists; the more down-to earth, literal and directly productive types. The research team was distributed more evenly among the temperaments. Not surprisingly, there were quite a few Rationalists; the most analytical type. Of the 12 researchers that worked from the city of Toowoomba, only 3 were Guardians (1 Artist, 3 Guardians, 4 Idealists and 4 Rationalists). Other team members, often located in regional centres, had the higher percentages of Guardians, as is typical of the farmers in this study and the wider community.

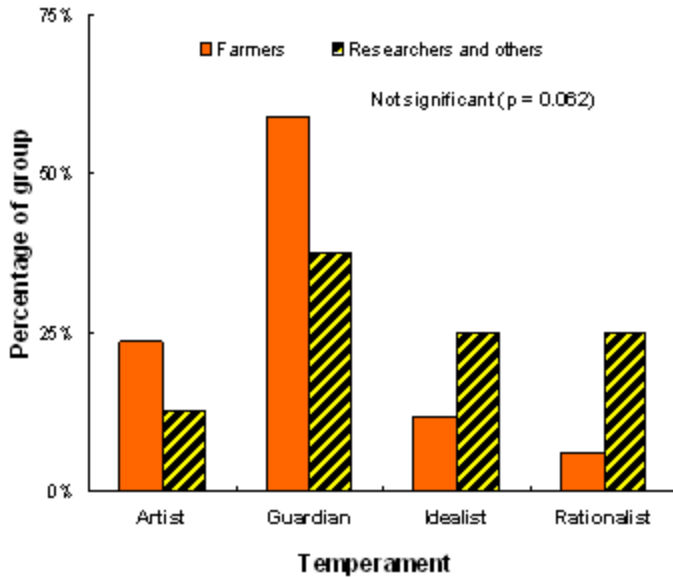


Figure 3. The distribution of temperaments of farmers and the research team.

Conclusions

Although farmers are the clients of a whole array of R D and E workers, there has been little attention paid to understanding what they are interested in. There has also been a lack of effort in understanding the views of the R D and E workers.

This study showed that a simple survey of farmers and a research team could reveal underlying motivations and orientations towards farming and research. We found that farmers and researchers had very similar values, but different personalities, and hence they are a kind of “odd couple”.

Acknowledgment

This research was partly funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation (DAQ499).

References

- (1) Gasson, R. (1973) J Agric. Econ., 24:521-533.
- (2) Frost, F.M. (2000) Aust. J. Exp. Agric., 40:511-517.
- (3) Kiersey, D. (1998) Please Understand Me II. Prometheus Nemesis Book Co.