world

MDPI

Article

The Setting-Up Measure to Support Generational Renewal in Agriculture: The Italian Experience

Francesco Licciardo [1,*], Roberto Henke [1], Francesco Piras [2] and Barbara Zanetti [1]

[1] Council for Agricultural Research and Economics, Research Centre for Agricultural Policies and Bio-Economy, 00187 Rome, Italy; roberto.henke@crea.gov.it (R.H.); barbara.zanetti@crea.gov.it (B.Z.)
[2] Department of Agriculture Sciences, University of Sassari, Viale Italia 39/a, 07100 Sassari, Italy; franpiras@uniss.it
* Correspondence: francesco.licciardo@crea.gov.it

Abstract: Since the 1970s, the issue of ageing farmers and generational renewal in agriculture has consistently attracted the attention of policymakers. However, despite successive reforms of the European Union Structural Funds, efforts to encourage young people to enter the agricultural sector remain largely focused on agricultural and rural policies, specifically on the First Settlement scheme. This paper highlights the role of the European Union's rural development policy in supporting and encouraging generational renewal in agriculture. A qualitative analysis of the Italian case examining some of the demographic changes that have occurred within the agricultural system at the regional level has been conducted. The analysis is based on the comparison of policy implementations in different programming periods. Using data from the General Censuses of Agriculture and the Italian Agricultural Payments Agency—supplemented by the Annual Implementation Reports of the Italian Rural Development Programmes—the research traces the evolution of initiatives supporting young farmers. The main findings reveal a notable decline in the number of young people in the primary sector over the last decade, together with an ageing population of agricultural farmers. Measures to support young farmers under the Common Agricultural Policy appear to be ineffective in countering the ageing trend. There is scope for integrated policies to enhance the attractiveness and profitability of rural areas and to ensure long-term sustainable generational renewal in the agricultural sector.

Keywords: Rural Development Programmes; Common Agricultural Policy; generational renewal; young farmers; start-up aid

check for updates

Citation: Licciardo, F.; Henke, R.; Piras, F.; Zanetti, B. The Setting-Up Measure to Support Generational Renewal in Agriculture: The Italian Experience. *World* **2024**, *5*, 1130–1147. https://doi.org/10.3390/world5040057

Academic Editor: Manfred Max Bergman

Received: 6 August 2024
Revised: 8 November 2024
Accepted: 8 November 2024
Published: 13 November 2024

Copyright: © 2024 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

According to European Commission data [1], the distribution of the population by age groups in the European Union (EU) shows a general trend towards ageing. Between 2002 and 2022, the share of people over 80 almost doubled. Conversely, the share of young people (0–19 years) declined in all Member States (MS), from 23% to 20%. In 2022, the lowest percentages of young people were recorded in Malta and Italy (18%). Italy is, therefore, among the MS contributing most to the impoverishment of the European population. In Italy's rural areas, the ageing phenomenon and the decline of the active population are even more pronounced, with repercussions on the entire productive and social fabric of several regions [2–4]. Demographic data confirm a steady rise in the number of people over 65, showing a 17% increase between 2012 and 2023, in contrast to a 16% decrease in the number of young people under 40. Compounding concerns about the "demographic winter" [5,6] is the reduction in the 0–20 age group (−12%). The ongoing depopulation in rural areas is primarily attributed to the convergence of several issues characterising these areas, such as the absence of essential infrastructures and services (education, health, socio-cultural), which directly affect the quality of life of a territory, and the limited availability of jobs. These limitations drive the rural population, particularly young people, towards urban

and peri-urban areas, which offer more opportunities for employment, education, and services [7–9]. Concerning agricultural activity, the European Commission [1] records a presence of young farm entrepreneurs of 11.9% at the EU level, dropping to 7.2% in the case of Italy. These figures confirm the persistence of mature entrepreneurship, a phenomenon often linked to the low attractiveness of rural areas, where agriculture and forestry remain the main economic activities [10–13].

The European Commission, through the initiative "Long-term vision for rural areas: for stronger, more connected, resilient and prosperous EU rural areas" [3], argues that encouraging as many young people as possible to move to (or remain in) rural areas is a crucial condition to ensuring the vitality of the agricultural sector and territories, given their greater propensity for innovation and entrepreneurial development in agriculture and other economic activities [14,15]. However, as demonstrated in several studies [16–23], the entry of young people to farm management tends to be hindered by several factors related to the structural and organisational characteristics of the sector (e.g., limited access to land, credit restrictions, lack of services, etc.), which are influenced by social, economic, environmental, and institutional constraints.

The ongoing depopulation and abandonment seen in EU rural areas, alongside the persistence of mature agricultural entrepreneurship, have drawn policymakers' attention to generational renewal since the 1970s, recognising it as essential for regenerating the farming system and the rural context. The goal of promoting and ensuring the presence of young people in farming and rural areas has led, over the years, to the introduction of public support initiatives in EU-funded Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) and Italian national policy [17,24–28]. Nevertheless, the results indicate that the efforts made by rural development policies to support generational renewal over the last two decades are not yielding the desired effects [17,23,27,28].

The paper focuses on two key aspects. First, it explores the main changes within the Italian demographic structure of farm managers, comparing young and older farmers and highlighting new insights from the two latest census surveys (2010 and 2020). Second, it investigates the behaviour of the Italian regions and Autonomous Provinces (AP) regarding resources allocated to the start-up measure comparing two different programming periods (2007–2013 and 2014–2022). Specifically, it assesses whether regions with a low presence of young people and a weak generational renewal opt to invest significantly in the start-up measure in the two past programming periods.

In this context, the analysis of specific data on young farmers included in the 7th Italian Agricultural Census [28–32] sheds light on their entrepreneurial behaviour compared to the overall farmers' population, revealing their innovative tendencies [33–36]. This information, which helps to define and characterise the farmer profile, provides an important knowledge base to assist policymakers in developing appropriate policies and tools to encourage and support young agricultural entrepreneurship over time.

The paper fills a gap in the recent literature combining the structural information coming from the Census data with administrative data on public support coming from the CAP. Moreover, it presents results at the regional level which is very relevant for the assessment of policies in a country like Italy, where policies are managed by the regional administrations. In the literature, most studies on the theme of generational renewal and agricultural decline are run by case studies, and their results are difficult to replicate in different territories and usually quite costly due to the collection and elaboration of primary data.

Our research investigates whether the proper policy mix supply is directed towards regions where the issue of decline and lack of a generational change is particularly evident and if they are successful in activating a virtuous circle of generational renewal and revitalisation of declining areas. Despite the rather simple qualitative approach of the paper, it features some interesting evidence that could be further investigated in the future with different and more sophisticated tools.

The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 provides a review of the literature on the topic of generational renewal. The national context and data used in the paper are outlined in Section 3. Section 4 briefly describes the framework of rural development policy reforms on generational renewal, while Section 5 presents the research findings and discussion. Section 6 concludes the paper, outlines implications for policymakers, and makes recommendations for future research.

2. Background and Literature Analysis

Why is it relevant to analyse the dynamics of generational renewal in agriculture? The current literature seems to focus mainly on two relevant issues: first, the change in agricultural entrepreneurship, and second, the risk of rural depopulation and the subsequent contraction of agricultural production. With regard to the first point, recent trends in the agricultural labour force have highlighted the need for specific skills related to changes in the primary sector, as well as the new professional opportunities offered by the primary sector in terms of new and diversified sources of income [31,37,38]. On this specific matter, Condor [39] suggests that the new paradigm of the 1990s based on liberalisation and sustainability opened the way to a new idea of agricultural entrepreneurship favouring the entry of a new generation of workers in agriculture. Product differentiation and income diversification shifted the focus from product maximisation in agriculture to the growth and enhancement of new functions and new entrepreneurial goals in agriculture. Condor's systematic review of the literature on new entrepreneurship in agriculture [39] highlights a relevant dimension in the setting up of younger farmers in the primary sector.

Other relevant dimensions of the topic emerging in the literature review on the subject include data availability and geographical references, as noted in the work of Borda et al. [40]. In their literature review, the lack of good quality data on this issue is highlighted, as well as how the topic of generational change and ageing workers in agriculture is particularly investigated in Europe and Asia, but not so much in North America, where the problem still exists. This element relates to the issue of entrepreneurship stressed before, considering the attention to the matter in Europe in terms of policies [41,42] and the transition agriculture is going through in the Eastern part of the world [43–45]. Borda et al. [40] highlight that one of the main causes of the decline of young farmers is the lack of proper motivations to enter agriculture, due to low income, limited cultural and personal growth opportunities, land access, and other factors. Other works also stress the educational element which is directly connected to the change of work and job opportunities in agriculture. It is also related to the (slow) growth of higher educational skills in the primary sector noted in Italy [37]. Innovative practices such as digital agriculture and precision farming are a form of attraction for younger farmers when they are available to take over in family farms. However, this raises the issue of a situation where younger farmers take the lead in farms when they do not have a real alternative but keep the farm in a state of "status quo": these farms, even if run by a new generation of farmers, will not necessarily survive the transition and will really benefit from the new technologies.

The lack of a new generation of farmers tends to hit especially family and small farms. It is not so much the lack of food production that is of concern, but rather the lack of territorial control and depopulation in inner and mountainous areas. However, the issue of food security can become crucial in specific parts of the world where family farms and small-scale agriculture still provide essential food to the local population.

Borda et al. [40] also point out that generational renewal policies, which are particularly relevant in the latest waves of policy reforms in the EU, are often seen by potential young farmers more as obstacles rather than opportunities. This is due to the administrative burdens required by the support measures and, above all, to the delay and uncertainty of access to financial funds. Similar considerations are also reported for non-Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds, such as access to financial credits, loans, land, and so on. At the same time, both agricultural and non-agricultural funds are a way to improve and

widen farm activities, such as agritourism, production of bio-energies, quality products, and on-farm social activities.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Study Site

In line with the European Commission's vision outlined in the European Green Deal [46], and further detailed in the Farm to Fork strategy [47], the objectives of the CAP include providing high-quality, affordable food, ensuring a fair standard of living for farmers, and supporting rural communities. Additionally, the CAP aims to safeguard natural resources and promote environmental sustainability. These objectives are pursued at the level of each MS. In the context of the CAP, the EU strategy for rural development aims to promote the structural modernisation and economic diversification of rural areas, but also the improvement of quality of life and the protection and enhancement of environmental resources. Generational renewal can therefore represent both a challenge and an opportunity for the future of the EU, to the extent that it is recognised as a political priority [3,48].

Italy is one of the largest agricultural producers and food processors in the EU, with a highly diversified agricultural sector. In Italy, rural development is implemented through 22 RDPs—one at the national level and 21 regional programmes (Figure 1). Additionally, a National Rural Network programme facilitates the exchange of knowledge and best practices among various stakeholders involved in rural development across the country. Agriculture occupies more than half of Italy's land area; more importantly, it plays a vital role in society. According to the European Commission [49,50], Italy covers an area of 301,337 km^2, of which 92% is classified as rural. The total population stands at 60.7 million, of which almost 58% live in rural areas. The Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) is just under 13 million hectares, of which almost 4 million (31%) are irrigable, and nearly 3 million hectares (21%) are actively irrigated. The average farm size is 7.9 hectares of agricultural land. Out of 1.6 million agricultural holdings, approximately 650,000 have irrigable land. In the livestock sector, there are about 220,000 livestock farms, with an average of 46 livestock units per farm. These data underline the importance of agriculture, particularly in the context of discussions on rural depopulation.

3.2. Data and Methods

Secondary data [51,52]—collected from existing sources such as government institutions, international organisations, and research institutes—are a valuable resource for analysing the agricultural sector. These data typically offer a broader temporal and spatial coverage, enabling more comprehensive and detailed analyses [53]. As noted by Wickham [54] and Kumara [55], the reliability and comprehensive nature of secondary data make it indispensable for research. The value of secondary data is particularly important in supporting evidence-based policy formulation. However, relying on multiple data sources can pose significant challenges, especially in terms of data consistency, compatibility, and reliability. One of the main difficulties in using secondary data from various sources is the risk of inconsistency and contradictions. Different organisations may adopt varying methodologies, definitions, and data collection techniques, leading to discrepancies in reported figures. For example, discrepancies in agricultural data often arise from differences in definitions and measurement techniques. Such inconsistencies require careful consideration and adjustments when analysing data from multiple sources.

In the present work, only official statistical sources were used, including one of an administrative nature. Specifically, two main sources were used: (a) information from the Italian Census data, and (b) information collected by the Italian Agricultural Payments Agency (AGEA) integrated by the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) of the Italian Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). It is important to note that the data contained in the AIRs are validated and approved by the European Commission, which significantly reduces the potential for errors when using different sources of information.



Figure 1. The study area: Italy and its administrative units.

In particular, the study on the structure and demographic trends of Italian farmers draws upon data from the 2010 [56] and 2020 [29] National Censuses of Agriculture [30,56]. It should be noted that in order to focus the analysis on young agricultural entrepreneurs, and in the absence of a universally accepted definition of young farmers [17], the authors adopted the age range defined by the CAP, setting 40 years ($\leq$40) as the threshold to distinguish between younger and older farmers. Under the framework of the CAP, individuals under the age of 40 are classified as young farmers, making them eligible for the Young Farmer Payment [48].

Using census data, we calculated the rate of generational renewal in Italian agriculture over the past twenty years. This is a descriptive statistical exercise that has highlighted existing territorial differences. Additionally, from the perspective of farm demography, the analysis has revealed varying regional capacities to maintain a suitable balance between younger farmers (aged $\leq$ 40) and the older population. This type of analysis provides valuable insights into the internal and external factors that may either facilitate or hinder the entry of young people into the agricultural sector.

Regarding the second research question, which examines the role of European development policy in fostering generational renewal in the agricultural sector, the study focuses on the period 2013–2023. This timeframe aligns with the programming cycles of the EU Structural Funds. To offer a comprehensive overview of how interventions have evolved over time in response to shifts within the EU framework, the study uses financial and physical data from AGEA, which provide detailed yearly insights into the physical, financial, and procedural progress of rural development initiatives.

The collection of information (physical, financial, and procedural) on the implementation of interventions related to generational renewal enables a financial analysis of public expenditure. The descriptive analysis examined the data pertaining to measure 112 (Setting up of young farmers) for the period 2007–2013, measure 6.1 (Aid to start up entrepreneurial activities for young farmers) for 2014–2022, and finally, intervention SRE01 (Setting up of young farmers) for the current programming cycle (2023–2027). This allowed for an exploration of the financial decisions taken by Italian RDPs concerning the measures for supporting the establishment of young farmers across the three programming periods under review, which span a considerable time and intersect with the last two Censuses of Agriculture. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the financial data. Regional public expenditure aimed at supporting young farmers, along with census data, was then represented using scatter plots, with one plot for each programming period.

4. The Role of European Policies in Supporting Generational Renewal in Agriculture

4.1. Italian Young Farmers

In 2020, farms managed by young farmers represented 9.3% of national agricultural entrepreneurship in Italy, a value that is 2% lower than in 2010, when the share of young farmers was 11.3%. The data show how the low presence of young farmers affects the entire national territory, with different weights, as already highlighted by Cagliero and Novelli [57] and recently by Licciardo et al. [28].

However, the presence of older farmers is significant in all areas, although in some regions there is a higher incidence of young farmers than the national average: in Sardegna, Valle d'Aosta, and Bolzano, for example, the incidence of young farmers is around 13%. Lower incidence values of farmers over 55 compared to the national average value (42.6%) are found in Piemonte, Lombardia, and Trento, with values around 32%.

In light of this significant drop in numbers, it is necessary to highlight some aspects that positively characterise the profile of young farmers.

The data from the latest 7th General Census of Italian Agriculture by ISTAT [29] provide a complete picture of the profile of young farmers and their farms compared to older farmers. Young farmers have a medium-to-high level of education and training, higher than the national average: 49.7% have a high school diploma and 19.4% have a university degree, compared to about 20.1 and 9.7% of the national average.

Young farmers tend to come from families with agricultural activities and operate larger farms by renting land. (60.8% vs. 41.2% of the national average), an aspect that probably confirms the existence of the problem of access to land by young farmers, as already highlighted in some studies [58–61]. Young farmers are undoubtedly more innovative (24.4% vs. 9.7% of the over 40), digitalised and computerised (33.6% vs. 14% of the over 40), and inclined to associate (47% vs. 41% of the over 40). Moreover, they are inclined to diversify the activities of their farms (11.6% vs. 5.2% of the over 40), which allows them to obtain an income that is supplementary to agricultural income [37,38,62,63]. Finally, they pay greater attention to the marketing phase of the products (also through direct sales) and sustainable production methods, such as organic farming.

4.2. The Evolutionary Development of Youth Support Policies in European Rural Areas

The European Commission's path towards the definition of instruments to support the setting up of young farmers began in the mid-1980s [64,65]. However, it is with the reform of the Structural Funds 2000–2006 that the setting up of young farmers is included in the framework of Regulation (EC) No 1257/99 on support for rural development, together with other measures that were previously dispersed in various regulatory instruments.

The entry of young farmers into agriculture is supported through rural development policies not only to facilitate their setting up but also to improve the quality of their human capital and strengthen the competitiveness of their farms.

Despite the EU's reform processes that have affected the Structural Funds in the last three decades [23], the main measure to promote the entry of young people into agriculture has remained the start-up aid (Table 1).

Table 1. The generational settlement in European rural development in the different programming periods.

Programming Period	Legal Basis	Conditions of the Young Farmer	Start-Up Aid Value
2000–2006	Reg. (EC) No. 1257/1999 (b) Setting up young farmers	• is less than 40 years old and is setting up an agricultural holding for the first time • possesses adequate occupational skills and competence	raised from 25,000 euro to 30,000 euro in the case of farm advisory services
2007–2013	Reg. (EC) No. 1698/2005 112 Setting up of young farmers	• is less than 40 years old and is setting up for the first time on an agricultural holding as head • possesses adequate occupational skills and competence • submit a business plan for the development of farming activities	• raised from 40,000 euro to 55,000 if part of the aid is granted as an interest subsidy • introduction of the package of measures
2014–2022	Reg. (EU) No. 1305/2013 6.1 Aid to start up entrepreneurial activities for young farmers	• is less than 40 years setting up for the first time in an agricultural holding as head • possesses adequate occupational skills and competence • submission of a business plan for the development of the farm activities	• euro 70,000 granted in the form of a capital contribution or interest rate subsidy • youth sub-programme
2023–2027	Reg. (EU) No. 2115/2021 SRE01 Setting-up of young farmers	• is less than 40 years old and is setting up for the first time in an agricultural holding as head • has appropriate training or skills, as determined by Member States in their Rural Development Complements • submission of a business plan for the development of farm activities.	euro 100,000 granted as a capital contribution or interest rate subsidy

Source: Authors' adaptation from Licciardo et al. [23].

Introduced in the 2000–2006 programming period, the start-up grant (measure b) was set up to aid young people under 40, with adequate professional knowledge and skills, who intend to start up a farm for the first time.

Although the start-up aid has stimulated the start of new farms, in many cases it has not been sufficient to cover their costs or farm investments, demonstrating very limited effectiveness [66,67]. In other situations, the start-up aid has led to an undesirable dynamic that resulted in a mere formal transfer of ownership, which remained in the hands of the old owner, revealing a mere injection of financial resources into the farm.

To overcome these limitations, within the framework of the structural funds reform process, changes were made to the conditions for access to the start-up aid to ensure the creation of more competitive farms and, above all, to ensure their sustainability over time.

The gradual increase of the start-up aid from 25,000 euro in the 2000–2006 programming period to the current 100,000 euro and the submission of a business investment plan are the result of the legislator's awareness of the need to define a coherent start-up grant with a long-term farm project.

During the 2007–2013 programming period, the presentation and evaluation of the business investment plan were a prerequisite to access a start-up aid (measure 112) and the instrument measures for planning the development stages for the farm. The business investment plan must contain the following: the farm project, an analysis of the territorial context in which the new farm will be established, and a description of the material and immaterial investment requirements. During the programming period, the initial contribution has been increased from 40,000 to 55,000 euro.

This is an important innovation proposed by the Regulation (EC) n. 1698/2005, which changed the logic by combining support for young farmers' installation with the processes of development and modernisation of their farms supported by other investment measures under the RDP [68].

In Italy, the push towards the integration and concentration of coherent measures with the farm project led to the definition of the so-called Youth Package. This tool offers access to a series of RDP measures related to competitiveness, innovation, sustainability, and multifunctionality. The European Court of Auditors [67] itself, in its special report on the implementation of the measure for the setting up of young farmers in Italy, recognised that the support offered by the setting-up measure doubles its effectiveness in terms of cost-benefit ratio if it is provided together with the investment measures. On average, established farmers who joined the youth package were more productive, profitable, and more innovative [16].

In the 2014–2020 programming period, support for the first settlement was allocated to sub-measure 6.1, which is part of a package of six sub-measures aimed at supporting the development of farms. The start-up aid of 70,000 euro, as well as support for setting up and generational renewal, was granted to increase the profitability and competitiveness of the sector and to introduce technological and managerial innovations.

The novelty of this programming period, extended to 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic with the European Commission Communication [69], is the complementary income support for young farmers under the First Pillar of the CAP. The payment provides additional income support during the farm start-up phase for a maximum of 5 years.

For the 2023–2027 programming period, the European Commission [49,70,71] has identified generational change as a priority to be pursued within the new strategic framework of the CAP. In order to reduce the risk of farm failure during the first years after start-up, the European Commission offers a system of support for first-time settlers, which combines incentives to facilitate the exit of older generation, the transfer of their knowledge, increased a territorial mobility and succession planning through the use of advisory and mentoring services. In order to enable the MSs to define their strategy to promote generational renewal, art. 5 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 [48] clarifies the three basic aspects of the definition of a young farmer: (i) the maximum age (between 35 and 40 years), (ii) the role as head of the agricultural holding, and (iii) the identification of specific professional competences and skills. Furthermore, the MSs are required to develop a clear strategy to support young farmers that includes the correlation between the needs and selected RDP measures and the complementarity between these and the national measures aimed at the same objective.

The setting up of the start-up aid has been re-proposed in its essential elements, but the maximum amount of aid has been increased to 100,000 euro.

5. Results

Between 2007 and 2023, the rural development policy in Italy allocated an average of about 874 million euro per programming period to support youth entrepreneurship in Italian agriculture (Table 2). The weight of the resources allocated to the establishment start-up aid on the total RDP shows a moderately increasing trend, ranging from 4% of the 2007–2013 programming period to 5.4% of the current 2023–2027 period. The level of resources for generational renewal has varied over the programming periods and has been consistently below the national average, except in Lazio and Abruzzo. Regional

policy objectives seem to have prioritised other areas of intervention than support for young farmers, despite the existence of mature farming entrepreneurship. This is the case in Umbria and Marche, where funding is below average. In the first instance, regional strategic objectives appear to have prioritised areas of intervention other than support for young farmers, despite the presence of mature agricultural entrepreneurship. Out of the 21 regional territories, only Lazio and Abruzzo have consistently allocated a significant share of their financial resources to the young farmer setting-up measures, exceeding the national average throughout the programming period.

Table 2. Percentage of total RDP resources allocated to the settlement measure (years 2007–2023).

Regions	2007–2013	2014–2022	2023–2027
Piemonte	4.4	5.3	5.9
Valle d'Aosta	3.6	1.5	0.9
Lombardia	2.5	3.6	4.3
P.A. di Bolzano	3.0	8.7	6.7
P.A. di Trento	20.1	6.7	6.3
Veneto	5.4	7.1	8.7
Friuli Venezia Giulia	3.0	5.5	5.5
Liguria	3.4	4.9	4.1
Emilia-Romagna	5.6	5.3	6.0
Toscana	8.8	3.8	5.4
Umbria	1.8	3.1	2.6
Marche	1.5	2.6	3.5
Lazio	6.7	13.9	10.8
Abruzzo	9.1	8.5	7.7
Molise	2.2	4.5	5.3
Campania	1.5	4.2	2.2
Puglia	4.4	5.1	4.4
Basilicata	3.6	7.6	5.5
Calabria	4.2	3.5	5.3
Sicilia	2.9	2.7	5.5
Sardegna	0.7	6.1	4.9
ITALY	4.0	5.1	5.4

Source: Authors' own elaboration on AIRs and RDPs data.

With reference to the last three rural development programming periods, an analysis of regional data on the ratio of financial resources invested in the first settlement measure to the total RDP, alongside the renewal rate of young farmers (calculated by the ratio of farmers under 40 to those over 65), allows for some reflections on the strategies adopted at the regional level to support young farmers.

In the following graphs, the regions are classified based on the combined values of resources allocated to the first settlement measure and the renewal rate. The intersection of the axes gives the national average value.

For the 2007–2013 programming period, these values are 4% for the weight of planned resources allocated to the start-up aid within the total RDP, and a 30% incidence of young farmers replacing those over 65 [57]. For 2014–2022, the incidence of young farmers replacing over-65 s is 22% [29], while the national average weight of resources programmed for measure 6.1 (start-up aid) is 5% of the total RDP.

By examining key variables, such as the share of resources invested in initial setting-up aid measures and the generational renewal rate, four distinct groups of regions were identified, each with a different level of commitment to policies supporting young farmers. The results of this categorisation are presented in Figures 2–4. In these figures, the most favourable scenario for generational renewal is represented by quadrant A, characterised by a favourable replacement rate and a high allocation of resources to initial setting-up measures. In contrast, regions in quadrant C face an unfavourable situation, where the low incidence of young farmers is not accompanied by significant regional investment in initial setting-up instruments. There are two intermediate scenarios: quadrant B, where regions

have an unfavourable incidence of young farmers but address this issue by allocating substantial resources to initial setting-up measures; and quadrant D, where regions have a favourable demographic situation but do not allocate consistent financial resources to start-up aid. During the 2007–2013 programming period, data from the 6th General Census of Agriculture [56] shows 182,768 young farmers, representing 11.3% of the national agricultural farmers. In response, Italian regions allocated a total of 702,419,187 euro through their RDPs to encourage the involvement of young people in agriculture. This funding supported over 22,000 applications for the first set-up (measure 112, Article 22 of Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005).

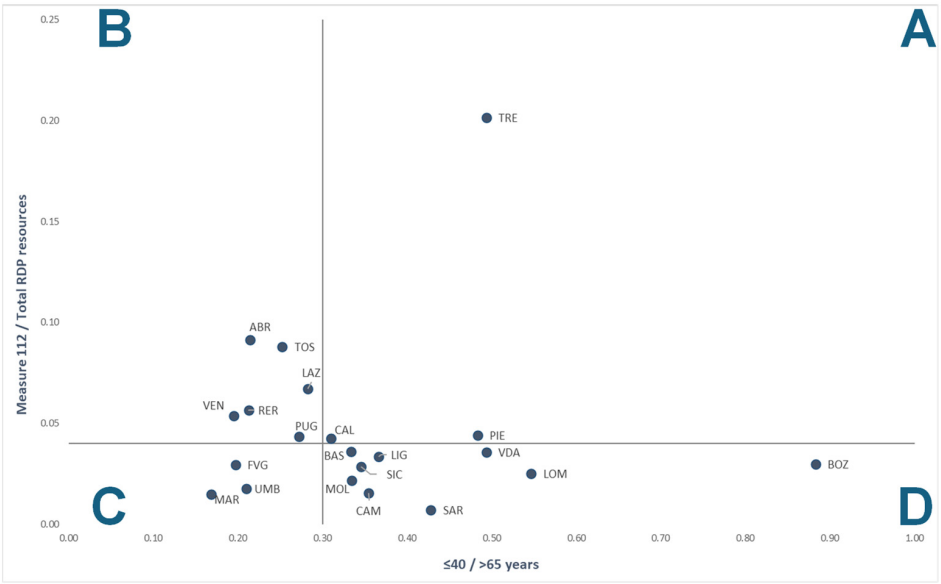


Figure 2. Distribution of regions based on the presence of young farmers and the funding of measure 112 of the 2007–2013 RDPs (% values) (Authors' own elaboration on RDPs and ISTAT data). Note: 1—Piemonte (PIE); 2—Valle d'Aosta (VAL) *; 3—Lombardia (LOM); 4—Trentino Alto Adige * (Autonomous Provinces of Trento (TRE) and Bolzano (BOZ)); 5—Veneto (VEN); 6—Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) *; 7—Liguria (LIG); 8—Emilia-Romagna (RER); 9—Toscana (TOS); 10—Umbria (UMB); 11—Marche (MAR); 12—Lazio (LAZ);13—Abruzzo (ABR); 14—Molise (MOL); 15—Campania (CAM); 16—Puglia (PUG); 17—Basilicata (BAS); 18—Calabria (CAL); 19—Sicilia (SIC) *; 20—Sardegna (SAR) *; (* Regions with special status).

Quadrants B and C in Figure 2 show a group of nine regions where the weight of young farmers is relatively low. However, six regions have actually used measure 112 to address the generation gap in agriculture by allocating financial resources to this measure above the national average. For example, Abruzzo and Toscana allocated 9.1% and 8.8%, respectively, of their financial plans, to support the setting-up of young farmers. In these regions, measure 112 was a priority [72,73]. This measure is linked to other rural development measures aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors (Article 4 of Regulation (EC) No. 1698/05).

A different approach was taken by the three regions in quadrant C. Despite an older agricultural population, they prioritised other investments. This does not imply a lack of support for the first settlement of young farmers, but rather that the financial resources allocated to this measure were lower than the national average.

Regions in quadrants A and D have more young farmers than the national average, indicating a lower generational imbalance in agriculture. Two extreme cases illustrate this trend: the APs of Trento and Bolzano. Trento allocated the highest share of rural development funds to generational change [74], aiming to counteract the ageing trend in agriculture and encourage young people to settle in rural areas. Bolzano, with the highest proportion of young farmers in the country (88%), opted for a less aggressive strategy

of generational renewal, investing only 3% in measure 112. The agricultural sector in Bolzano benefits from a well-established cooperative system. In this context, the main contribution of newly established farms seems to be their enhanced capacity for innovative investments [75].

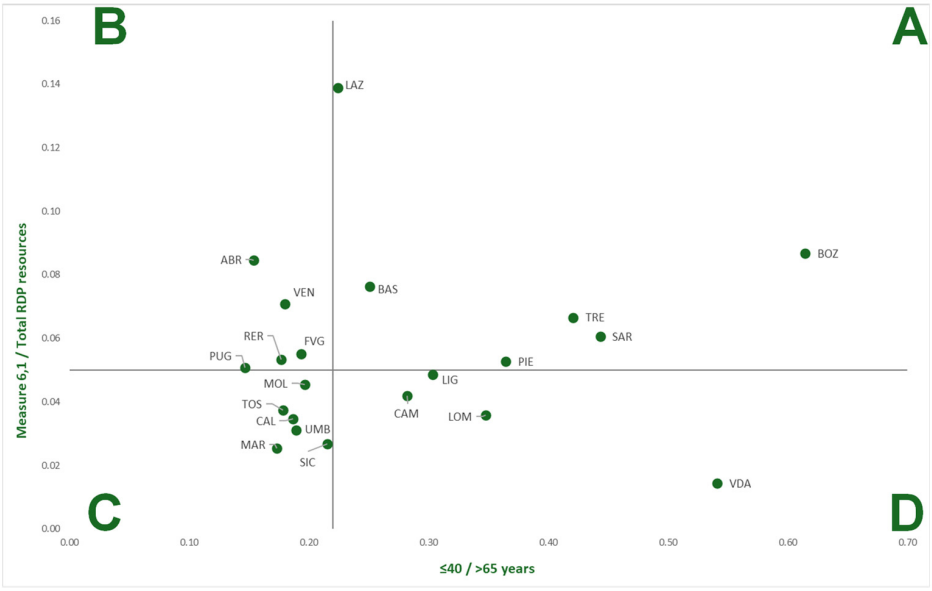


Figure 3. Distribution of regions based on the presence of young farmers and the funding of measure 6.1 of the 2014–2022 RDPs (% values) (Authors' own elaboration on RDPs and ISTAT data).

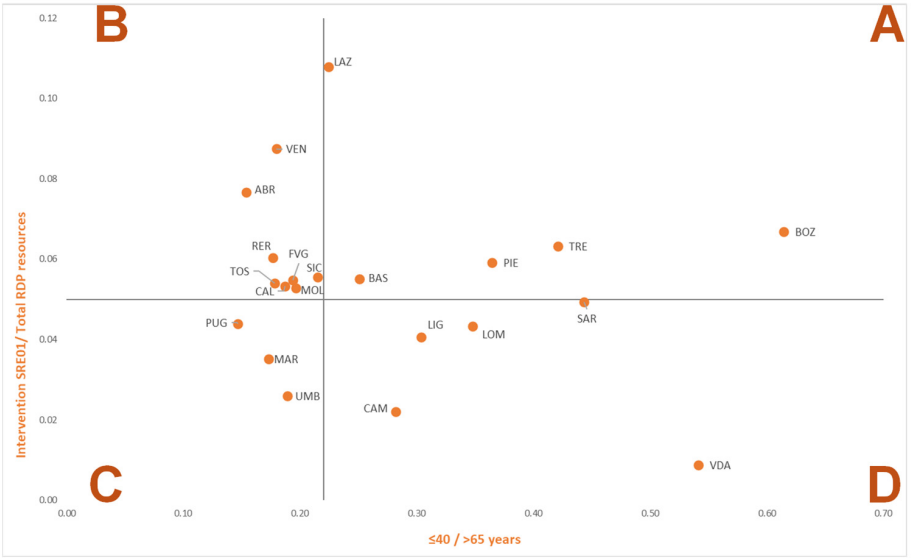


Figure 4. Distribution of regions based on the presence of young farmers and the funding of measure SRE/01 of the 2023–2027 CSRs (% values) (Authors' own elaboration on RDPs and ISTAT data).

Data from the 7th General Census of Agriculture [29] show that 104,886 farms are led by young farm managers (≤40 years), representing 9.3% of all national farms. Compared to 2010, the share of young farmers in the total number of farmers has decreased by 21.5%. This is accompanied by other significant trends, including a slight reduction in total agricultural area and a corresponding increase in the average size of farms [28,30–32].

Financial resources allocated for generational renewal under the 2014–2022 regional rural development policies amount to 1.2 billion euro. Based on AGEA data supplemented by the AIRs, just over 23,780 applications were financed under measure 6.1, corresponding

to the same number of new young farmers. The regions' financial investment choices to promote generational change are illustrated in Figure 4.

Compared to the 2007–2013 programming period, the data show an 8% decrease in the generational renewal rate during the intercensal period, to which some Italian regions have responded with a modest increase in the financial ceiling for the generational renewal support measure. ISTAT data [29,56] show a significant reduction in the number of young agricultural entrepreneurs between 2010 and 2020, with decreases ranging from 16% in the AP of Trento to 54% in Sicily.

Figure 3 illustrates that eleven regions recorded a generational change rate below the national average, two more than in the previous programming period (quadrants B and C). In particular, the regions in quadrant C have allocated fewer financial resources to support the setting-up of young farmers than the national average. A notable exception is the Friuli Venezia Giulia region, which has increased its allocation of financial resources to measure 6.1 compared to the 2007–2013 period. Conversely, despite decreasing renewal rates, regions such as Molise, Toscana, Calabria, and Sicily reduced their financial support to the measure, expanding the group of regions in quadrant C.

In quadrant A, Lazio is the region that has allocated 14% of its RDP resources to measure, with a generational change rate of 22%, in line with the national average. Lazio has implemented the regional RDP with the largest budget for the first settlement measure in Italy, choosing to offer the maximum premium allowed by the EU regulations of 70,000 euro. The goal [76] is to support the entry of young farmers under 40, particularly in areas where the maintenance of agricultural activity is crucial for the protection of mountain areas.

Compared to the previous programming period, other regions, notably Basilicata and Sardegna, have also increased their financial investment in favour of young farmer settlement, thereby moving into quadrant A.

The strategy adopted by Valle d'Aosta (quadrant D) is in sharp contrast. This region has invested only 1.5% of its RDP resources—the lowest among Italian regions—compared to a generational change rate of 54%, the second highest in Italy after Bolzano's 61% (quadrant A). Valle d'Aosta's strategy focuses on encouraging the setting up of young farmers, but only if their business plans are sustainable, competitive, and innovative, particularly in terms of diversifying agricultural activities and improving processes. For this reason, the region emphasises the need for young farmers to receive adequate technical and entrepreneurial training to set up medium-sized farms (in relation to the regional context) capable of generating a sufficient income for themselves and their families [77]. This explains the lower financial allocation to establishment start-up aid.

Public resources allocated to generational renewal in agriculture for the period 2023–2027 amount to 710,359,350 million euro. It should be noted that although previous investments have not improved the rate of generational renewal, some regions have expressed a willingness to invest significant resources in the settlement of young farmers.The relationship between the proposed investment for the current programming period (intervention SRE01) and the demographic structure of the agricultural sector is illustrated in Figure 4. An analysis of the relationship between the regional investment plans and the generational change rate confirms the existence of a block of regions (quadrants B and C) with a generational change rate below the national average. These are the same regions previously identified (Figure 3), although the number in quadrant C has been reduced to three (Puglia, Marche, and Umbria). Despite their persistently low replacement rates, these regions continue to have surprisingly low levels of public expenditure. Among these regions, Marche and Umbria have again chosen to allocate financial resources—3.5% and 2.5%, respectively—below the national average to support youth settlement. In both regions, the number of young farms is not increasing but remains relatively stable.

Lazio and Veneto have a low to medium proportion of young farmers, but invest significantly more than the national average in generational renewal, allocating 10.8% and 8.7% of their RDP resources, respectively.

The situation presents some changes in quadrants A and B. Although the presence of young farmers is reduced compared to the previous programming Liguria, Val d'Aosta and the APs of Bolzano and Trento have planned a slight increase in the financial resources allocated to the setting up of young farmers.

An analysis of the available statistical data shows that there is a clear lack of generational renewal in the agricultural sector in Italy, accompanied by a steady decline in the number of young farmers throughout the country.

In Figure 5, the comparison of generational change rates for 2010 and 2020 allows us to analyse the phenomenon of generational change in Italy and to reflect on the possible conditions that influence its value.

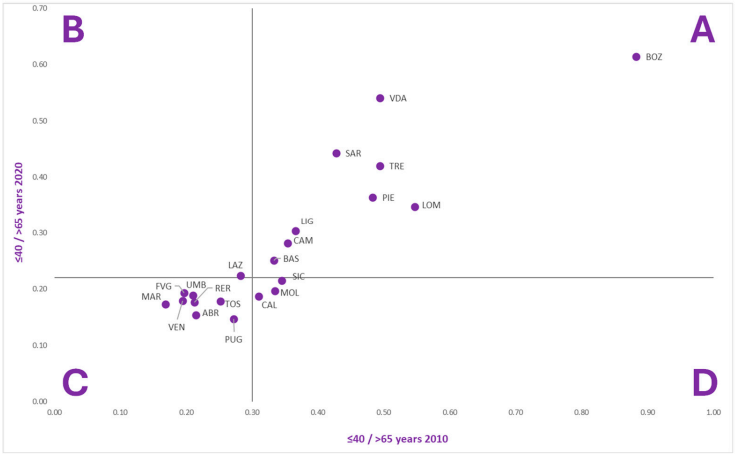


Figure 5. Distribution of regions according to the presence of young farmers in the 2010 and 2020 General Agriculture Censuses (% values) (Authors' own elaboration on ISTAT data).

Quadrant A concentrates on the regions and autonomous provinces with the highest rate of generational change in Italy. It is striking that most of these areas are mountainous marginal areas, characterised by economic and social decline and depopulation. However, while in northern Italy young people are attracted by a competitive agricultural sector integrated into the local economy, in Basilicata, Sardegna, and Campania, young people work in agriculture because of limited job opportunities in other sectors.

On the other hand, quadrant C shows the most critical situation for regions with a rate of generational change in agriculture below the national average. In Puglia and Abruzzo, there is a worrying gap between the new and old generations of farmers, the majority of whom are over 60.

Emilia-Romagna, Toscana, Veneto, and Friuli Venezia Giulia are regions of national economic importance with a strong and established agri-food sector. For these regions, the difficulties of generational change can be explained by the persistence of obstacles to young people entering agriculture (access to land, credit, etc.) and the greater attractiveness of more profitable sectors.

Finally, while Lazio, in quadrant B, shows a weak signal of projection towards generational renewal, in the regions of Sicilia, Molise, and Calabria (quadrant D) the limited presence of young people in agriculture persists. These are regions with a strong agricultural vocation. However, the lack of a more integrated and competitive agriculture, which cannot offer an alternative to traditional farming, does not motivate older farmers to give up their role in the management of the farm. Young people are looking for more profitable work alternatives in other contexts, such as manufacturing and services.

For half of the Italian regions, the effect of investments to support the first settlement in the farm did not lead to a significant improvement in the renewal rate from one programme period to the next. The result is probably influenced by the persistence of some features of the local agricultural system, the level of local development in the reference area, and demographic conditions.

6. Conclusions

Our analysis reveals diverse strategies adopted by Italian regions to tackle one of agriculture's major challenges: the ageing population of farmers and agricultural workers. One of the most evident consequences of the ageing farmers is the increasing decline of rural areas, especially the internal and mountainous areas, whose gap with the urban and coastal areas grows in economic and social terms. The progressive abandonment has also dramatic consequences in environmental terms, not only in rural areas but also in urban and coastal areas, where the growth of population and activities creates imbalances and high environmental pressure. Rather than merely focusing on the impact of the CAP first settlement measure in agriculture, this analysis looks at how regions have addressed the need to revitalise human capital in the primary sector and rural contexts, with the aim of reducing the generational imbalance. The use of secondary administrative data coming from the policy implementation, combined with statistical data coming from the official statistical offices in Italy, is rather original and features interesting results that show how regions in Italy respond differently to the policy supply coming from the CAP with an articulated behaviour that responds also to the different priorities set out in programming plans.

Generational renewal in agriculture has always been one of the greatest needs and challenges and is now a strategic objective on the EU's political agenda. In addition, to the start-up premium, the rural development policy offers complementary income support and investment opportunities that can help young farmers get started.

The CAP 2023–2027 has chosen to maintain the first rural development measure for set-up and the additional payment for young farmers under direct payments. Despite the considerable financial resources, there are many critical voices on the two instruments considered insufficient to ensure generational change and overcome a worrying phenomenon of senility in the agricultural sector. Our results seem to go in this direction, although they reflect differentiated results among the Italian regions.

Despite the lack of a proper analysis of cause–effect relationships, the results have convincingly shown that regions that have invested significant economic resources in start-up aid have not achieved a significant improvement in the presence of young entrepreneurs. On the other hand, some regions, despite having a low proportion of young people, have always invested below-average resources.

The persistently low rate of generational change in agriculture thus outlines a worrying phenomenon of ageing in the agricultural sector, which is often accompanied by an increase in social and economic disparities among territories.

It appears evident from our results that the current policy instruments will not be able to address successfully the problems of settling young farmers and developing their entrepreneurial activities in agriculture. The European Court of Auditors [66] has already highlighted that, in addition to CAP measures, the demographic, social, and economic context of the area, access to credit, land capital, and employment opportunities in other sectors influence generational change in agriculture.

The ISTAT census data show a worrying phenomenon of rural ageing, which is due to the increase in life expectancy, the decline in the birth rate, and the migration of young people to more developed areas that offer more opportunities for training, work, and services.

Sutherland [17] highlights the close link between ageing farmers and rural demography and asks whether it is the latter that policy should address first. The results of our analysis support the idea of rethinking policies to attract young people to farming, addressing only the critical issues related to farm management and its sustainability over time [8,9].

The policy of generational change must be seen as an integral part of a broader general economic policy orientation. In this sense, the promotion of youth entrepreneurship must be considered with a view to the demographic renewal of the population, not only in the agricultural sector. Finally, and limited to the agricultural sector, no measure to encourage young people to enter the sector will produce positive and stable results in the presence of

agriculture, or rather an agri-food system, which is not competitive and cannot offer an adequate level of remuneration.

Most likely, it was the lack of an overview of the territory at the planning stage that was the cause of a strategy that was not entirely effective. For this reason, within the current programming of the CAP, SMs are invited to integrate policies to prevent the abandoned of rural areas [3], and to invest in infrastructure to provide young people with quality education, public services and data connectivity to facilitate their access to the world of work [78].

Considering future research possibilities, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, which arise mainly from the use of secondary data and—as mentioned before—does not investigate the links among the causes of a decline in generational renewal and their effects on agricultural activities and rural areas. However, the use of secondary data from multiple sources is essential for comprehensive agricultural research and policymaking. The challenges of data inconsistency, temporal and spatial discrepancies, and methodological differences necessitate careful consideration and advanced techniques to ensure accurate and reliable analyses.

Future research could, on the one hand, incorporate census data, offering valuable insights into farm structures and their evolution; on the other hand, the option of a questionnaire survey should be explored to investigate the economic performance of farms settled with public support. In this regard, the authors are exploring the potential to cross-reference census data with information from the Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN) database. FADN is used for processing quantitative data, providing valuable insights into the investigation of the structural and economic characteristics of farms. Further integration of secondary information with FADN data (which is a primary source and statistically representative at the regional level) will improve the quality of the analysis and the resulting findings and will provide micro-economic insights, with results at the farm level.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, F.L., B.Z. and F.P.; writing—original draft preparation, F.L., B.Z. and F.P.; methodology, F.L.; literature review, R.H.; formal analysis, B.Z.; writing—review and editing, F.L., B.Z. and R.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: More information and the full data can be requested from the authors of the present work.

Acknowledgments: The authors express their gratitude to Stefano Tomassini for his invaluable contribution to organising the dataset.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

1. European Commission: Eurostat. Demography of Europe. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2023#ageing-population (accessed on 12 February 2024).
2. ISTAT. La Geografia delle aree Interne nel 2020: Vasti Territori tra Potenzialità e Debolezze. Available online: https://www.istat.it/it/files/2022/07/FOCUS-AREE-INTERNE-2021.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2024).
3. European Commission. A Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas—Towards Stronger, Connected, Resilient and Prosperous Rural Areas by 2040. COM (2021) 345 Final, Brussels. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3162 (accessed on 20 June 2024).
4. ISTAT. Demo. Statistiche in Cifre. Demo—Statistiche Demografiche (istat.it). Available online: https://demo.istat.it/ (accessed on 14 February 2024).
5. Impicciatore, R.; Ghigi, R. L'inverno demografico. In La crisi in Italia e nella UE. *Quad. Sociol. Rosemberg Sellier* **2016**, *72*, 7–29. [CrossRef]

6. Blangiardo, G.C. The 'demographic winter' in Italy: Crisis factors, problematic issues and policy actions. *Eur. View Sage J.* **2024**, *23*, 14–21. [CrossRef]
7. ESPON. *Fighting Rural Depopulation in Southern Europe*; ESPON: Luxembourg, 2018; Available online: https://www.espon.eu/soria (accessed on 20 June 2024).
8. Savarese, E.; Peta, E.A.; Festuccia, A.; Ventura, F. Young People Perception of Rural Areas, Rete Rurale Nazionale. 2012. Available online: https://www.reterurale.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/EN/IDPagina/9962 (accessed on 20 June 2024).
9. Finizia, A.; Merenyi, M.; Nucera, M.; Selmi, U. Giovani e Agricoltura. Rapporto 2024. Rete Rurale Nazionale, Roma. 2024. Available online: https://www.reterurale.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/25804 (accessed on 20 June 2024).
10. Milone, P.; Ventura, F. New generation farmers: Rediscovering the peasantry. *J. Rural Stud.* **2019**, *65*, 43–52. [CrossRef]
11. Piras, F.; Pulina, P.; Ventura, F. Un'analisi Qualitativa Sull'insediamento dei Giovani Agricoltori nel Periodo 2007–2013. Rete Rurale Nazionale. Roma. 2018. Available online: https://www.reterurale.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/19085 (accessed on 22 May 2024).
12. Jentsch, B. *Young People in Rural Areas of Europe*, 1st ed.; Shucksmith, M., Ed.; Routledge: London, UK, 2004. [CrossRef]
13. Dwyer, J.; Micha, E.; Kubinakova, K.; van Bunnen, P.; Schuh, B.; Maucorps, A.; Mantino, F. Evaluation of the Impact of the Cap on Generational Renewal, Local Development and Jobs in Rural Areas. European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, Brussels. 2021. Available online: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4bd0b0a2-0503-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1 (accessed on 20 June 2024).
14. de Guzman, M.R.T.; Kim, S.; Taylor, S.; Padasas, I. Rural communities as a context for entrepreneurship: Exploring perceptions of youth and business owners. *J. Rural Stud.* **2020**, *80*, 45–52. [CrossRef]
15. Dax, T.; Copus, A. European Rural Demographic Strategies: Foreshadowing post-Lisbon rural development policy? *World* **2022**, *3*, 938–956. [CrossRef]
16. Ascione, E.; Tarangioli, S.; Zanetti, B. *Nuova Imprenditoria per L'agricoltura Italiana. Caratteri, Dinamiche e Strutture Aziendali*; INEA Studi & Ricerche: Roma, Italy, 2014; ISBN 9788881454396.
17. Sutherland, L.A. Who do we want our 'new generation' of farmers to be? The need for demographic reform in European agriculture. *Agric. Econ.* **2023**, *11*, 3. [CrossRef]
18. Suess-Reyes, J.; Fuetsch, E. The Future of Family Farming: A literature review on innovative, sustainable and succession-oriented strategies. *J. Rural Stud.* **2016**, *47*, 117–140. [CrossRef]
19. van der Ploeg, J.D.; Renting, H.; Brunori, G.; Knickel, K.; Mannion, J.; Marsden, T.; De Roest, K.; Sevilla-Guzmán, E.; Ventura, F. Rural development: From practices and policies towards theory. In *The Rural: Critical Essays in Human Geography*; Munton, I.R., Ed.; Routledge: London, UK, 2017; pp. 201–218. [CrossRef]
20. Coopmans, I.; Dessein, J.; Accatino, F.; Antonioli, F.; Bertolozzi-Caredio, D.; Gavrilescu, C.; Gradziuk, P.; Manevska-Tasevska, G.; Meuwissen, M.; Peneva, M.; et al. Understanding farm generational renewal and its influencing factors in Europe. *J. Rural Stud.* **2021**, *86*, 398–409. [CrossRef]
21. Korthals Altes, W.K. Access to Land: Markets, Policies and Initiatives. *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 5097. [CrossRef]
22. Matthews, A. Is There a Particular Generational Renewal Problem in EU Agriculture? www.Capreform.eu (blog). 20 April 2018. Available online: http://capreform.eu/is-there-a-particular-generational-renewal-problem-in-eu-agriculture/ (accessed on 18 July 2024).
23. Licciardo, F.; Zanetti, B.; Gargano, G.; Tarangioli, S.; Verrascina, M. Rural Development Policies Supporting Generational Renewal. Some Evidence from the Italian Experience. *Politiche Soc.* **2022**, *1*, 89–112.
24. Cardillo, C. *Italia Professionalità e Ricambio Generazionale Nelle Aziende Agricole a Conduzione Diretta*; Un'analisi tipologica; Dipartimento Economia e Territorio Università degli Studi di Cassino Working paper: Cassino, Italy, 2002.
25. Corsi, A.; Carbone, A.; Sotte, F. Quali fattori influenzano il ricambio generazionale? *Agriregionieuropa* **2005**, *1*, 9–12.
26. Cersosimo, D.; Ferrara, A.R. I giovani agricoltori italiani: Profili quantitativi e tendenze di lungo periodo. I giovani agricoltori italiani oggi. Consistenza, evoluzione, politiche. In *Quaderno Gruppo 2013*; Cersosimo, D., Ed.; Edizioni Tellus: Roma, Italy, 2013; pp. 23–71.
27. Zagata, L.; Sutherland, L.A. Deconstructing the Young Farmer Problem in Europe: Towards a Research Agenda. *J. Rural Stud.* **2015**, *38*, 39–51. [CrossRef]
28. Licciardo, F.; Tarangioli, S.; Gargano, G.; Tomassini, S.; Zanetti, B. The 7th Census of Italian agriculture: Characteristics, structures and dynamics of generational renewal. *Ital. Rev. Agric. Econ.* **2023**, *78*, 109–118. [CrossRef]
29. ISTAT. *7° Censimento Generale dell'Agricoltura. Istituto Nazionale di Statistica—ISTAT. (The General Census of Agriculture)*; ISTAT: Rome, Italy, 2020; Available online: https://7censimentoagricoltura.it/ (accessed on 10 June 2024).
30. Manzi, C.; Gismondi, R.; Truglia, F.G.; Giordano, P. Come cambia l'agricoltura italiana: Una lettura temporale e territoriale. In Proceedings of the XLIII conference of the Italian Association of Regional Sciences, Milano, Italy, 5–7 September 2022.
31. Henke, R.; Sardone, R. The 7th Italian Agricultural Census: New directions and legacies of the past. *Ital. Rev. Agric. Econ. (REA)* **2022**, *77*, 67–75. [CrossRef]
32. Altamore, L.; Chinnici, P.; Bacarella, S.; Chironi, S.; Ingrassia, M. Current Framework of Italian Agriculture and Changes between the 2010 and 2020 Censuses. *Agriculture* **2024**, *14*, 1603. [CrossRef]
33. McKillop, J.; Heanue, K.; Kinsella, J. Are all young farmers the same? An exploratory analysis of on-farm innovation on dairy and drystock farms in the Republic of Ireland. *J. Agric. Educ. Ext.* **2018**, *24*, 137–151. [CrossRef]

34. Liontakis, A.; Sintori, A.; Tzouramani, I. The Role of the Start-Up Aid for Young Farmers in the Adoption of Innovative Agricultural Activities: The Case of Aloe Vera. *Agriculture* **2021**, *11*, 349. [CrossRef]
35. Carbone, A.; Carillo, F.; Ciaian, P.; Sardone, R.; Antonioli, F.; Cardona, J.T. Does the European Union Start-Up Aid Help Young Farmers to Innovate and to Join Networks? *Agriculture* **2024**, *14*, 1772. [CrossRef]
36. Góngora, R.; Milán, M.J.; López-i-Gelats, F. Pathways of incorporation of young farmers into livestock farming. *Land Use Policy* **2019**, *85*, 183–194. [CrossRef]
37. Henke, R.; Vanni, F. Drivers of on-farm diversification in the Italian peri-urban agriculture. *Ital. Rev. Agric. Econ.* **2017**, *72*, 79–100.
38. Salvioni, C.; Henke, R.; Vanni, F. The impact of non-agricultural diversification on financial performance: Evidence from family farm in Italy. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 486. [CrossRef]
39. Condor, R. Entrepreneurship in agriculture: A literature review. *Int. J. Entrep. Small Bus.* **2020**, *40*, 516–562. [CrossRef]
40. Borda, Á.J.; Sárvári, B.; Balogh, J.M. Generation Change in Agriculture: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Economies* **2023**, *11*, 129. [CrossRef]
41. Coopmans, I.; Dessein, J.; Accatino, F.; Antonioli, F.; Gavrilescu, C.; Gradziuk, P.; Manevska- Tasevska, G.; Meuwissen, M.; Peneva, M.; Soriano, B.; et al. Policy directions to support generational renewal in European farming systems. *Eurochoices* **2020**, *19*, 30–36. [CrossRef]
42. Hamilton, W.; Bosworth, G.; Ruto, E. Entrepreneurial younger farmers and the "Young Farmer Problem" in England. *Agric. For.* **2015**, *61*, 61–69. [CrossRef]
43. Shen, Z.; Wang, S.; Boussemart, J.P.; Hao, Y. Digital transition and green growth in Chinese agriculture. *Technol. Forecast. Soc. Change* **2022**, *181*, 121742. [CrossRef]
44. Jansuwan, P.; Kerstin, K.Z. What to do with the farmland? Coping with ageing in rural Thailand. *J. Rural Stud.* **2021**, *81*, 37–46. [CrossRef]
45. Lerman, Z.; Sedik, D. Transition to smallholder agriculture in Central Asia. *J. Agrar. Change* **2018**, *18*, 904–912. [CrossRef]
46. European Commission. European Commission Communication COM/2019/640 Final—Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The European Green Deal. 2019. Available online: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0640 (accessed on 15 September 2024).
47. European Commission. European Commission Communication COM/2020/381—Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A Farm to Fork Strategy for a Fair, Healthy and Environmentally-Friendly Food System. 2020. Available online: https://effat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/PS-A-From-Farm-to-Fork-Strategy-for-a-fair-healthy-and-environmentally-friendly-food-system.pdf (accessed on 15 September 2024).
48. EU–European Union. *Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 Establishing Rules on Support for Strategic Plans to Be Drawn up by Member States under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and Financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and Repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013*; EU: Brussels, Belgium, 2021.
49. European Commission. Agriculture and Rural Development. Common Agricultural Policy. Available online: https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy_en (accessed on 12 September 2024).
50. European Commission. Factsheet on the National Rural Development Programme 2014–2022 for Italy. Available online: https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development/country/italy_en (accessed on 10 September 2024).
51. Brannen, J. *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research*; Routledge: London, UK, 2017.
52. Martins, F.; da Cunha, J.; Serra, F. Secondary Data in Research—Uses and Opportunities. *Iberoam. J. Strateg. Manag. (IJSM)* **2018**, *17*, 1–4. [CrossRef]
53. Olabode, S.O.; Bakare, A.A.; Olateju, O.I. An assessment of the reliability of secondary data in management science research. *LASU J. Employ. Relat. Hum. Resour. Manag.* **2018**, *1*, 182–194. [CrossRef]
54. Wickham, R.J. Secondary Analysis Research. *J. Adv. Pract. Oncol.* **2019**, *10*, 395–400. [CrossRef] [PubMed] [PubMed Central]
55. Kumara, A.S. *Researching with Secondary Data: A Brief Overview of Possibilities and Limitations from the Viewpoint of Social Research*; MPRA Paper 112639; University Library of Munich: München, Germany, 2022.
56. ISTAT-Istituto Nazionale di Statistica. *6° Censimento Generale Dell'Agricoltura*; ISTAT: Rome, Italy, 2010.
57. Cagliero, R.; Novelli, S. Giovani e senilizzazione nel Censimento dell'agricoltura. *Agriregionieuropa* **2012**, *31*, 11–14. Available online: https://agriregionieuropa.univpm.it/it/content/article/31/31/giovani-e-senilizzazione-nel-censimento-dellagricoltura (accessed on 12 June 2024).
58. Rossier, R. Farm Succession Switzerland: From Generation to Generation. In *Keeping it in the Family. International Perspectives on Succession and Retirement on Family Farms*; Lobley, M., Baker, J.R., Ashgate, W.I., Eds.; Routledge: London, UK, 2010; ISBN 978-1-4094-0996-0.
59. Brun, F.; Giuliano, S.; Mosso, A. L'insediamento dei giovani agricoltori in Piemonte nel periodo 2007–2013. *Agriregionieuropa* **2014**, *38*, 84–87. Available online: https://agriregionieuropa.univpm.it/it/content/article/31/38/linsediamento-dei-giovani-agricoltori-piemonte-nel-periodo-2007-2013 (accessed on 7 June 2024).

60. Keiko Yamaguchi, C.; Stefenon, S.F.; Ramos, N.K.; Silva dos Santos, V.; Forbici, F.; Rodrigues Klaar, A.C.; Silva Ferreira, F.C.; Cassol, A.; Marietto, M.L.; Farias Yamaguchi, S.K.; et al. Young People's Perceptions about the Difficulties of Entrepreneurship and Developing Rural Properties in Family Agriculture. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 8783. [CrossRef]
61. Mausch, K.; Harris, D.; Dilley, L.; Crossland, M.; Pagella, T.; Yim, J.; Jones, E. Not All About Farming: Understanding Aspirations Can Challenge Assumptions About Rural Development. *Eur. J. Dev. Res.* **2021**, *33*, 861–884. [CrossRef]
62. Van Huylenbroeck, G.; Durand, G. (Eds.) Multifunctional agriculture. In *A New Paradigm for European Agriculture and Rural Development*; Ashgate: Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT, USA, 2003.
63. Carter, S. Portfolio entrepreneurship in the farm sector: Indigenous growth in rural areas? *Entrep. Reg. Dev.* **1998**, *10*, 17–32. [CrossRef]
64. Potter, C. Agri-environmental policy development in the European Union. In *Nature and Agriculture in the European Union*; Brouwer, F., van der Straaten, J., Eds.; Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham, UK, 2002.
65. Feindt, P.H.; Grohmann, P.; Hager, H. The CAP post 2020 reform and the EU budget process. In *EU Policymaking at a Crossroads*; Munch, S., Heinelt, H., Eds.; Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham, UK, 2022; pp. 95–122.
66. Carbone, A.; Corsi, C. La Riforma Della PAC e i Giovani, in Agriregionieuropa, 2013, n, 35, pp. 33–35. Available online: https://agriregionieuropa.univpm.it/it/content/article/31/35/la-riforma-della-pac-e-i-giovani (accessed on 12 February 2024).
67. European Court of Auditors. EU Support to Young Farmers Should Be Better Targeted to Foster Effective Generational Renewal. Special Report. 2017. No 10, Publications Office. Available online: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2865/36234 (accessed on 12 June 2024).
68. Gabrielli, G. La misura di primo insediamento nei Psr 2007–2013. In *Le Misure per i Giovani Agricoltori Nella Politica di Sviluppo Rurale 2007–2013*; INEA OIGA: Roma, Italy, 2010.
69. EC–European Commission. *Communication from the Commission Temporary Framework for State Aid Measures to Support the Economy in the Current COVID-19 Outbreak 2020/C 91 I/01*; EC: Brussels, Belgium, 2020.
70. EU–European Union. *Regulation (EU) 2017/2393 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2017 Amending Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 on Support for Rural Development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), (EU) No 1306/2013 on the Financing, Management and Monitoring of the Common Agricultural Policy, (EU) No 1307/2013 Establishing Rules for Direct Payments to Farmers under Support Schemes within the Framework of the Common Agricultural Policy, (EU) No 1308/2013 Establishing a Common Organisation of the Markets in Agricultural Products and (EU) No 652/2014 Laying Down Provisions for the Management of Expenditure Relating to the Food Chain, Animal Health and Animal Welfare, and Relating to Plant Health and Plant Reproductive Material*; EU: Brussels, Belgium, 2017.
71. EU–European Union. *Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 Laying Down Common Provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and Financial Rules for Those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy*; EU: Brussels, Belgium, 2021.
72. IZI Spa. *PSR 2007/2013 della Regione Abruzzo—Rapporto di Valutazione ex Ante*; IZI Spa: Pescara, Italy, 2007. Available online: https://www.reterurale.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/5027 (accessed on 3 October 2024).
73. IRPET. *PSR 2007/2013 della Regione Toscana—Rapporto di Valutazione ex Ante*; IRPET: Florence, Italy, 2007. Available online: https://www.regione.toscana.it/documents/10180/11842620/Sintesi_VEXA_rev.pdf/83874893-e122-44ca-b0f4-267c6dc9797b (accessed on 3 October 2024).
74. AGER & STARTER. *PSR 2007/2013 della Provincia Autonoma di Trento—Rapporto di Valutazione ex Post*; AGER & STARTER: Trento, Italy, 2016. Available online: https://www.reterurale.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/17167 (accessed on 10 October 2024).
75. IZI Spa & Apollis Snc. *PSR 2007/2013 della Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano—Rapporto di Valutazione ex Post*; IZI Spa & Apollis Snc: Bolzano, Italy, 2016. Available online: https://agricoltura.provincia.bz.it/it/documenti-del-valutatore-indipendente-2007-2013 (accessed on 10 October 2024).
76. COGEA. *PSR 2014–2020 della Regione Lazio—Rapporto Tematico Sull'insediamento dei Giovani Agricoltori*; COGEA: Rome, Italy, 2023. Available online: https://www.lazioeuropa.it/psr-feasr/psr-valutazione/report-e-pubblicazioni/ (accessed on 3 October 2024).
77. Lattanzio Monitoring & Evaluation. *PSR 2014–2020 della Regione Valle d'Aosta—Rapporto di Valutazione Intermedio*; Lattanzio Monitoring & Evaluation: Aosta, Italy, 2019. Available online: https://www.regione.vda.it/agricoltura/psr_2014-20/normativaedocumentazione_PSR_14-20/rapporti_di_valutazione_i.aspx (accessed on 3 October 2024).
78. Council of European Union. *Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States Meeting within the Council on Promoting the Integration of Youth into Political Decision-Making Processes in the European Union (C/2023/1342)*; UE: Brussels, Belgium, 2023.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.