

Perception of Farm Succession Planning by Poultry Farmers in Southwest, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study assessed poultry farm characteristics and poultry farmers' perception of farm succession planning in southwest Nigeria. A multistage sampling procedure was used in selecting poultry farmers in Oyo and Osun states. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results reveal that poultry farmers are predominantly small and medium scale farmers. They are mostly sole proprietors (72.5%) and family farm owners (11.9 %). Most (73.4%) farmers operated on full time basis, while others are either part – time or occasional farmers. The majority (95.9%) of the farmers had favourable perception towards farm succession planning, 30.3% had complete succession plan and 22.9% had commenced successor participation. There were no significant associations between farm ownership structure, but significant associations exist with farming status ($\chi^2 = 9.7$), total farm debt ($\chi^2 = 19.2$), and succession planning among the poultry farmers ($p \leq 0.05$). The study concluded that succession planning is new in the study area and must be further investigated in order to provide a data base for policy decision with regards to livestock (especially poultry) farming and aging proprietorship.

Key words: Farm succession planning, sustainable poultry production, poultry farmers.

Introduction

Farm succession planning is the organised process of identification, preparation and grooming of potential successor(s) to take over the management, ownership and possession of the farm assets. It is a risk management strategy through which most of the present owners of poultry farms can proactively attend to the future positioning of the farm by ensuring that a competent person has been groomed to immediately queue into the management activities of the farm in case of emergency. It is even a way of making sure that businesses (such as an agricultural farm) exist beyond the life span of the founder. Traditionally, older generations of farmers hardly discuss issues of succession because they perceive that such thoughts are synonymous with wishing them early death and to some farmers their subsistence production (which is often at home, at the backyard, with strictly family labour etc) restricts them to small and / or medium scale production which does not give room for entertaining such ideas. Barclay, Foskey and Reeve (2007) posited that some farmers (especially polygamous ones) do not entertain the thought in the sense that it brings them face to face with the reality of the problem of equality treatment of their children. For these and many other reasons, older farmers would rather leave the issue of succession unattended to, and allow any family member to take over their farm assets at their demise/death.

Succession planning is a comprehensive approach to strategic human resources management (Kesner and Sebor, 1994), leadership development (Bernthal and Wellins, 2006) and overall workforce planning (Kiyonaga, 2004). It is a proactive attempt at ensuring that an organisations' leadership will be continuous by identifying how these positions will be filled as both planned and unplanned departure occurs (Schmalzried and Fallon, 2007; Nura and Osman, 2012). It therefore includes the transfer of ethics, values and traditions along with the actual business itself. Unfortunately, this succession planning which has gained international prominence in the world of business is often underrated and reluctantly discussed by the Nigerian farmers. Nevertheless, Becker, *et al* (2009) posited that succession planning is crucial for the successful future farm transfer within the farming population. The assessment of farm succession plans becomes absolutely important for the sustainability of farm assets (Gale, 2003) because failure to do so (i.e failure to plan for succession) may lead to total degeneration or close – down of the farm, family conflicts, breakdown in family relations, loss of existing rights to assets as a result of injustice in inheritance decisions meted out as a result of gender bias, moral and other biases. This issue therefore needs to be seen as a means of influencing poultry farmers' behaviors on how they should prepare for 'this inevitable end' of becoming aged and handing over to competent hands or members of their family for continuity.

Whether a farm family (consisting of home for the farm family members, local tradition keepers, agricultural landscape basic holders of agricultural activities) and the rural way of life etc will be sustained persistently or decay depends on many factors: one of which is intergenerational transfer of the family farm through a well stated succession planning process, wages from other sectors of the economy (Bohak, 2011); farm size and farm owner's educational status (Corsi, 2004). Intergenerational transfer as a multifaceted process encompasses succession, inheritance and retirement. It is a concept premised on the functionalist perspective of aging (Havighurst, Bernice, and Sheldon, 1968) which is related to the activity theory which recognizes that equilibrium developed by an individual in the middle age must be maintained in the later years and must find substitutes from previous statuses, roles and activities. This theory therefore presumes that older people and middle – aged people have same social and psychological needs that make them not to easily want to withdraw from any activity they are engaged in, unless compelled or restricted by poor health, injury and / or disability. It is only this that can compel them to slow down and subsequently leave the bulk of the farm control to their successor(s). Hence, activity theory proposes that the aging process and the quality of life are delayed and enhanced respectively when older people remain sociologically active and maintain social interaction. Whenever a pioneer / principal farmer refuses to retire for younger ones (successors) to step in, the opportunity for intergenerational transfer is significantly reduced. This may lead to the complete collapse / termination of the farm operation.

Succession planning has been found in some research works to have link with business characteristics like business size, ownership structure, production levels etc. For instance, a Canadian federation of independent business survey in 2006 found that small and medium sized enterprises are not adequately prepared for their business succession; only 10% of owners have a formal, written succession plan; 38% have an informal unwritten plan and the remaining 52% do not have any succession plans or planning at all. Also a CIBC (2004) survey on small business outlook suggests that succession planning is increasingly becoming a critical issue. Farm characteristic of the poultry farm in this study therefore refers to specific farm features or factors such as farm size (small scale , medium scale and large scale); ownership structure (like partnership farming, sole proprietorship, rent, lease and family farm); farming status (like full – time farming, part – time farming and festive or occasional farming); production level (like subsistence production and commercial production) and level of indebtedness of the farm in terms of total farm debt expressed as percentage of the total farm assets.

Poultry farming in Nigeria became highly popularized with effect from the late 70's to the extent that the poultry business now occupies a pivotal position in the livestock

industry. Poultry farming suddenly became the cheapest and easiest sector of animal production that attracted the influx of many elites, civil servants, retirees etc into its practice at both part – time and full – time basis as a way of supplementing their inadequate income as well as its enormous potential for rapid growth, production of a highly palatable and generally acceptable poultry meat and egg. One then expects that with such a paradigm shift as this (that is, the type of farmers involved in poultry production) there is likely to be a change in the dynamics of farm succession planning when compared to the older generations of farmers. It is against this background that the study assessed poultry farmers' perception of farm succession planning in Southwest Nigeria by specifically looking at how the farm characteristics and farmers' perception of succession relate to succession planning status.

Two hypotheses examined for this study were:

Ho₁: There is no significant association between the poultry farmers' farm characteristics and their perception of farm succession planning;

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between the farmers' perception of succession planning and their succession planning status.

Methodology

Osun and Oyo states were randomly selected from the six states in the southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria, namely: Ekiti, Oyo, Lagos, Ogun, Osun and Ondo states. The geopolitical zone is bound by the Republic of Benin on the west; Edo and Delta states on the east, Gulf of Guinea in the south and in the North by Kwara & Kogi states. It harbours a population of 27,581,992 people (NPC, 2006) and occupies a land mass of 76,852 square kilometres. It has a tropical climate with two distinct seasons: the rainy season (April – October) and dry season (November – March). The major river in the zone is river Osun.

The target study population consisted of registered poultry farmers / members of the Poultry Association of Nigeria (PAN) in the southwest, totaling 504 (Study survey, 2015). PAN is a recognized body of poultry farmers by the ADP in Nigeria and has fourteen (14) and seven (7) poultry zones in Oyo and Osun states respectively.

Multi-stage and purposive sampling techniques were used in selecting the respondents who were registered poultry farmers for the study. The step by step procedure adopted were as follows: The first stage involved the identification of the fourteen and seven poultry zones that constitute the poultry association of Nigeria in

Oyo State (PANOY) and the poultry association of Nigeria in Osun state (PANOS). Stage 2 involved purposive selection of the twenty – one poultry zones for the study. In stage 3, 50% of the poultry farmers within each zone in the selected states were chosen through random sampling technique. This yielded the sample size of 102 and 150 poultry farmers from the respective states. This total sample size of 252 poultry farmers was intended to be used for the study, however, only a response rate of 96.8% was got from the selected sample. This then gave a total of 244 respondents for final analysis.

Primary data collection procedure involved the use of questionnaire as instrument. It contains seven (7) items on farm characteristics and seventeen (17) items on poultry farmers' perception of farm succession planning which are the independent variables. The farm characteristics section embraces (i) ownership structure or pattern measured at nominal level and allocated scores of 1,2,3,4,5 etc for sole ownership, inherited, rent/lease, family farm, & partnership respectively; (ii) farming status measured at nominal level covering full –time, part –time and seasonal farming assigned score of 1,2,3 and (iii) farm size categorized as small scale (S/S), medium scale (M/S), and large scale (L/S) farms measured at interval level with scores 1,2,3 respectively. The section on the poultry farmers' perception of farm succession planning (which is the second independent variable) is measured on a 5 point Likert scale of SA = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, D = 2 and SD = 1. The scores and results from these variables are reported and also used to categorize the respondents into having favourable or unfavourable perception about farm succession planning. The inferential statistics used in relating the two independent variables to the dependent variable and testing the two emanating hypotheses are Chi – square and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

Results and Discussion

Poultry Farm Characteristics

Table 1 shows that sole ownership was the most common form of farm structure (72.5%) followed by family farm ownership structure (11.9%) and ownership via

rent/lease (11.1%) of the sampled poultry farmers in the study area. Most (79.9%) of these farmers were males and the rest (20.1%) were females but they are all registered members of the Poultry Association of Nigeria (PAN). Dominance of male poultry farmers over the females in PAN membership could be as a result of the fact that women lack the financial capacity and empowerment that might be required for poultry business and association membership when compared to their male counterparts. The sole ownership status is indicative that the poultry farm ownership is completely in the hands of the principal farm owners and its survival is dependent on their individual efforts. This is in agreement with Foskey (2005) who posited that sole proprietors are visionaries imbued with autonomy and power to make decisions that will lead them to the realization of their visions. This autonomy in decision-making is a form of individualism that could aid easy farm survival and future transfer of the poultry farm business. This indirectly agrees with Vogel (2007) and Bohak (2011) who posited that part – time farmers are less likely to hand – over their farms to anybody because they have lower farm survival rate. The explanation for this is that if a farmer does not work full – time on the farm, his potential successor will operate in the same manner by working off – the farm most of the time and this will hinder the interest in taking over the farm. Although, sole proprietorship or ownership style gives room for personalized service and attention to clients, it tends to eschew delegation of authority & responsibility (Kebler, 2007), and the autocratic leadership style that goes along with it may hinder succession process or render it unpredictable.

The study also reveals that most (72.5 %) of the poultry farmers have farm /flock size of 1,000 – 10, 000 birds while, few (20.1 %) have less than 1, 000 birds. Their average flock size was 3,610 birds. This implies that the poultry farmers are medium scale producers, they are thus likely to be commercial farmers. According to Corsi (2004) farm size is an indication of the economic strength of a farm, hence the respondents are likely to have sufficient proceeds and income from these medium size farms to be able to support the intending successor that will take over the farm. However, large scale farms hold out the best prospect of generating the best employment and income for a successor to join the farm and be gradually integrated into the management before the transfer is complete (Gasson, Crow, Errington, Hutson, Marsden and Winter, 2008). According to Ochon, Casanovas and Almansa (2007); Uchiyama, Lobley, Errington and Yanagimura (2008) there is much to lose if a farmer fails to consider succession as an option because to them, the bigger the farm size, the higher the possibilities for future farm transfer. In fact, Uchiyama *et al* (2008) further affirmed that farm size influences the route to succession because small farms are likely to provide less opportunity for two generations to work side by side. It is found that majority (73.4 %) are of full – time farming status as against 20.9 % that are part – time, while there are very few (5.70%) seasonal poultry farmers

who only rear birds for quick income generation during festivities like Christmas, Id-el – Fitir, Easter etc. This may indicate that the farms are mostly operated commercially as small - medium scale enterprises (SMEs).

The respondents' membership in PAN affords them the benefit of deriving easy access to poultry – related information, rebates and discounts on activities such as annual environmental auditing, veterinary services, and reduced prices for inputs etc from the government through the association. When the total farm debt of the farm/farmer is expressed as proportion of the farm asset (in %), the result reveals that few (38.5%) of the farmers had no debt, while about half (50.8%) have less than 20% debt. Other degrees of indebtedness as perceived by the farmers are indicated on Table 1. The result shows that most of the poultry farmers carry relatively light debt loads, hence there will be no need for any future liquidation of farm assets for any reason. Therefore, the process of farm succession planning and retirement would be easier. This agrees with Bohak (2011) who says that the harder the conditions under which farmers operate due to high debt, the less likely they would desire for their heirs or children to replace them and inherit their burden.

Table 1: Distribution of farmers based on poultry farm business characteristics

Variables	Percentage (%)	Mean/Mode
Ownership structure		
Sole proprietorship	72.5	Sole proprietorship
Inherited	2.5	
Rent / Lease	11.1	
Family farm	11.9	
Partnership	2.0	
Farming status		
Full – time	73.4	Full -time
Part – time	20.9	
Seasonal farming	5.7	
Farm size		
Less than 1,000 birds	20.1	3,610
1,000 – 5, 000 birds	58.2	
5, 001 – 10,000 birds	14.3	
10,001 – 15, 000 birds	2.5	
15, 001 – 20,000 birds	3.7	
Above 20,000 birds	1.3	
Farming experience (in years)		
1– 9 years	46.3	11.6
10 – 19 years	32.8	
20 – 29 years	18.0	
>30 years	2.9	
Monthly poultry farm income (in Naira)		
Less than ₦- 20,000	11.9	89, 926.2
20,000 – 39,000	14.3	
40,000 – 59,000	18.0	
60,000 – 79,000	14.3	
80,000 – 99,000	5.7	
Greater than 100,000	35.7	
Total farm debt		
81 – 100% of the total farm assets	0	
61 - 80 %	2.0	
41 - 60 %	0.8	
21 – 40 %	7.8	
Less than 20 %	50.8	
None (No debt)	38.5	

Source: Field survey (2015)

Findings on the poultry farmers' (respondents') perception of farm succession in Table 2 reveals that the respondents are positively disposed to the following statements like: succession is a fundamental aspect of farm continuation and rural development ($\bar{x} = 4.7$), succession is important for farm survival and sustainability

($\bar{x} = 4.7$) in the sense that it guarantees future viability of the farm ($\bar{x} = 4.4$). It also shows their negative perception as reflected in their negative disposition to such statements as: the disadvantages of farm succession outweigh its benefits, only male heirs should be considered as poultry farm successors, it is dangerous to consider female heirs as farm successors and that serious thoughts should not be given to farm succession with (equal) mean values of 2.80 respectively. Some of these perceptions imply that the patrilineal way of farm property inheritance is not being supported by these respondents and this is perhaps indicating that farm succession is beginning to shift from the era of male dominance through informal rules and culture code to the embrace of gender equality and sensitivity even among agricultural households. Finally, they are negatively disposed to the statement that succession planning is a waste of time and resources with mean value of 2.70.

Table 2: Distribution of farmers based on perception about farm succession in poultry farm business

S/N	Perception Statements	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation ((SD)
1	Succession is a fundamental aspect of continuation & rural development	4.7	0.543
2	Succession is important for farm business' survival & sustainability	4.7	0.603
3	It is necessary to make plans for succession	4.7	0.836
4	Planned succession guarantee future viability of the farm	4.4	0.852
5	Planned succession helps in making good retirement decisions	4.3	0.727
6	Planned succession helps in facing future challenges	4.3	0.812
7	Planned succession ensures smooth transition following retirement, incapacitation or death	4.2	0.897
8	Farm without succession plans are more likely to be converted to non-farm use	4.0	0.972
9	Farms without a declared successor often end up in decay	3.9	1.127
10	The conversion of farms to non-farming activities can be addressed through farm succession	3.8	1.167
11	Communication problems between parental and younger generations can be solved through succession planning	3.8	1.188
12	Succession is not essential for farm continuation	3.0	1.002
13	Only male heir(s) should be considered as farm successors	2.8	1.010
14	It is dangerous to consider female heirs as farm successors	2.8	1.091
15	Serious thoughts should not be given to farm succession	2.8	0.941
16	Disadvantages of farm succession outweigh its benefits	2.8	0.905
17	Succession planning is a waste of time and resources	2.7	0.924

Source: Field Survey 2015

The overall perception of farm succession by the respondents is thus illustrated with the pie – chart in Fig.1 indicating that the majority (95.9 %) of the poultry farmers are favourably disposed to the issue of farm succession planning in poultry farming.

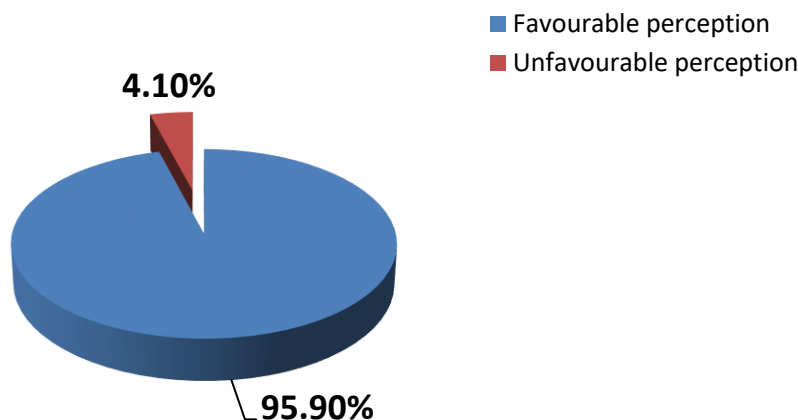


Figure 1: Farmers' overall perception of farm succession in poultry business.

Association Between Farm Characteristics and Perception of Farm Succession Planning

Table 3 reveals that there is a significant association between farming status ($\chi^2 = 9.730$, $p \leq 0.05$), total farm debts ($\chi^2 = 19.216$, $p \leq 0.05$) and the poultry farmers' perception of succession planning, while a non – significant association was found to exist between farm ownership structure comprising of sole proprietorship, partnership, rent/lease, family farm ownership, inherited ownership ($\chi^2 = 7.437$, $p \geq 0.05$) and perception of farm succession planning. Firstly, these findings indicate that the farming status of the poultry farmer (whether part – time or full time) is a significant predictor of the farmers' perception about farm succession planning. This corroborates with the findings of Kerbler (2007) and Vogel (2007) who affirm that part – time farmers are less likely to agree to handover their farm business within the family when compared to their full – time counterparts. This is because the later is likely to realize that he has a lot to lose if he ignores planning for who takes over from him after having spent virtually all his time on it, whereas the farmer on part – time has other areas of focus occupying and competing with his time apart from the farm business hence there is interest impairment. Secondly, the findings on the farm debt also show that there is an association between debts: equity ratio (ie the total

farm debts) and the poultry farmers' perception of succession planning processes. This agrees with the findings of De Massis, Chua and Chrisman (2008) and Kerbler (2007). According to De Massis *et al* (2008), an incumbent farmers' debt may exert a considerable strain on the family resources by reducing the likelihood of engaging in succession planning as well as leading to the failure of any succession process put in place. Similarly, Kerbler (2007) also reports that there is the likelihood of hindering, reducing farm succession and transfer (intergenerational continuity) if farm debts resulting from loans and other financial encumbrances are too great a burden for the farms' further development. It seems therefore, that the harder the conditions under which farmers operate due to high debt, the less likely they will wish any of their heirs to replace them or embark on any planning for succession.

Table 3: Association between the poultry farmers' farm characteristics and their perception of succession planning

Variable	df	Chi-square value (χ^2)
Farming status	4	9.730*
Total farm debt	8	19.216*
Farm ownership structure	8	7.437

*P ≤ 0.05

Source: Field Survey (2015)

The PPMC statistical analysis used in testing the second hypothesis showed that there is no significant relationship between the poultry farmers' perception of succession planning and their succession planning status. The correlation value obtained between the two variables is $r = 0.184$, $p \geq 0.05$. This implies that the observed poultry farmers' favourable perception of succession has not be sufficient enough as to influence their (the farmers) decision to embark on farm succession planning as revealed by its non – significance. This when translated to practice means that sampled poultry farmers are yet to fully comprehend the importance of succession planning as a necessity for ensuring a successful outcome hence they have not fully committed themselves to practicing it. This corroborates with the findings of Sharma, Chrisman, Pablo and Chua (2001) and Foskey (2005) who assert that the chances of obtaining a satisfactory succession is practically impossible (nil) without commitment on the part of the incumbent farmer while any incumbent who plans for succession because of its feasibility and not its desirability will more likely delay, abort or sabotage its final implementation. Hence, this study

suggests that without the whole hearted commitment of the incumbent to the succession process, it may be better to plan to sell the farm business rather than to transfer its leadership or management to the next generation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Succession planning is important and it is necessary to make provisions for it, irrespective of whether they are small scale or medium scale poultry business. Poultry farmers should endeavour to start planning for their succession by selecting and grooming selected individuals in their family. There should be more research work in the area of succession planning in farming (livestock and cropping). More female should be encouraged and empowered to take over their parents' farm businesses or more parents should be willing to declare their female children as the farm successors. Government may need to provide intervention in terms of legislations or policies that will make farmers (such as poultry farmers) put succession planning in place as early as possible on their farms so as to avoid undue liquidation or forfeiture of their hard raised farm assets to undeserving inheritors within or outside the family. Those who have enough evidence to show that they have commenced the process and possibly groomed selected individuals should be motivated by government in very tangible forms (such as occasional and unexpected awards, tax rebates etc)

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