

Young farmers' needs in Italy

Annex I.15 to the Pilot project: Exchange programmes for young farmers

Client: European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development

Rotterdam, 25 September 2015



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Rotterdam, 25 September 2015

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1 Introduction

Objective of the Pilot Project study on young farmers

The “Pilot Project: Exchange programmes for young farmers” has been commissioned by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) to identify the needs of young farmers, get an overview of the existing exchange schemes for young farmers and develop a guide to establish or improve exchange schemes for young farmers (DG AGRI, Tender No AGRI-2012-Eval-03). The study has been implemented by Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte in 2014-2015. The aims of this study were:

- To provide a comprehensive assessment of the specific *needs of young farmers* across the EU;
- To describe and access existing schemes and initiatives for the exchange of young farmers;
- To identify specific results of exchange schemes and specific support measures that have proved to be effective and efficient;
- To provide recommendations on the design, implementation and delivery of exchange programmes and schemes.

This country report on the needs of young farmers

The needs analysis was performed through desk research, interviewing on average 78 farmers per EU Member State and having a focus group in each of the 28 Member States. In the focus group the results of the interviews and the needs of young farmers concerning exchange schemes were discussed.

This report contains the needs analysis for **Italy**, and contains:

- General information on young farmers (chapter two);
- The needs of young farmers (chapter three);
- The needs regarding learning and communication (chapter four);
- The hindrances in obtaining information (chapter five);
- Sustainability of the exchange schemes (chapter six);
- The focus group participants (chapter seven).

The report is targeted at policy officers and other stakeholders interested in getting an insight into the needs of young farmers.

Where to find more information

The following documents can be found on the DG AGRI website:

- The 27 other country reports on the needs of young farmers;
- The Analysis on the needs of young farmers (report I);
- The Inventory and Analysis of exchange schemes for young farmers in EU-28 and a selected number of OECD countries (report II). Together with contact details of around 200 exchange schemes and case studies of 22 exchange schemes;
- A guide for successful exchange schemes for young farmers (report III).

All reports can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/external-studies/index_en.htm.

2 Activities of young farmers

In the interviews, the young farmers were asked the following details, among others. Indicated in the table below are:

- The mean age of the interviewed young farmers;
- The % of young farmers with a Bachelors (BSc), Masters (MSc) or PhD;
- The mean hectares of Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) that the respondents own or rent;
- The mean hectares of forestry that the respondents own or rent;
- The % of respondents that indicate that their farm is located in a favourable or less favourable area;
- The % of young farmers with organic farms.

Table 2.1 Some general features of interviewed young farmers (YF) in Italy

| | Italy | n* | EU-15 ¹ | n | new MS ² | n | EU-28 ³ | n |
|---|---------------|-----|--------------------|-------|---------------------|-----|--------------------|-------|
| Age (mean (std)) | 31.7 (5.0) | 101 | 29.4 (6.0) | 1 241 | 29.4 (6.0) | 840 | 29.4 (6.0) | 2 081 |
| % YF with high vocational education (BSc, MSc, PhD) | 53.9 | 102 | 44.8 | 1 332 | 42.5 | 873 | 43.9 | 2 205 |
| Ha UAA owned (mean (std)) | 139.6 (876.8) | 84 | 77.7 (309.3) | 1 138 | 51.9 (165.5) | 778 | 67.2 (260.9) | 1 916 |
| Ha UAA rented (mean (std)) | 23.0 (46.8) | 79 | 56.7 (156.2) | 1 097 | 49.5 (157.5) | 761 | 53.7 (156.7) | 1 858 |
| Ha forestry owned (mean (std)) | 19.3 (87.3) | 48 | 20.7 (106.7) | 954 | 5.4 (22.9) | 679 | 14.4 (83.2) | 1 633 |
| Ha forestry rented (mean (std)) | 1.9(3.4) | 40 | 2.5 (20.9) | 874 | 1.3 (25.3) | 636 | 2.0 (22.9) | 1 510 |
| % favourable area | 42.2 | 102 | 47.4 | 1 332 | 50.2 | 873 | 48.5 | 2 205 |
| % less favourable or highly unfavourable area | 54.9 | 102 | 43.3 | 1 332 | 42.4 | 873 | 43.0 | 2 205 |
| % YF with organic farm | 25.5 | 102 | 15.2 | 1 331 | 11.8 | 873 | 13.8 | 2 204 |

Source: Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte, 2015.

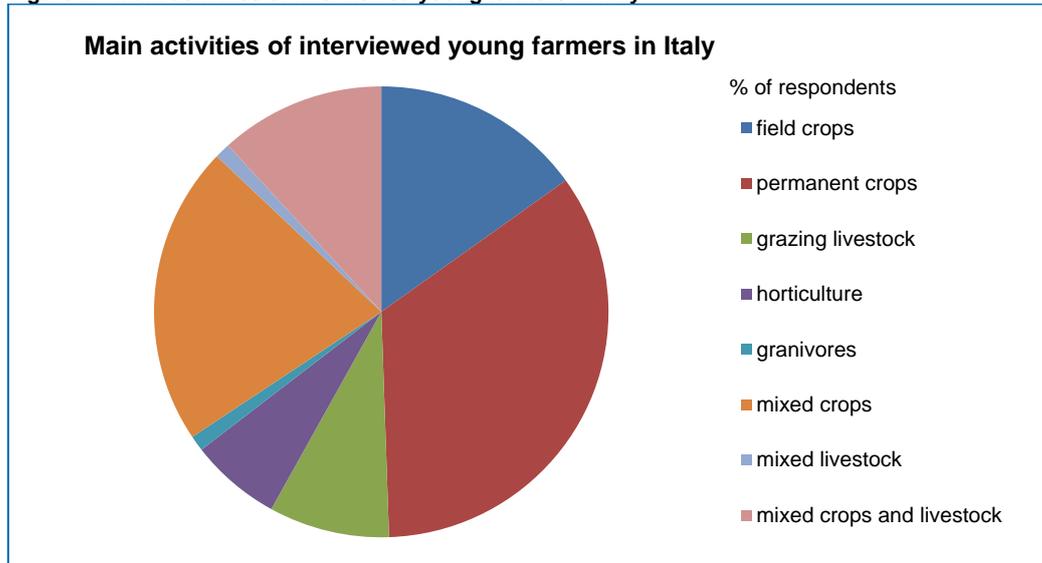
* n = the number of people that were interviewed in respectively Italy, EU-15, new Member States and EU-28.

¹ EU-15 are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

² New Member States are the countries who joined the EU in or after 2004: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia.

³ EU-28 are all Member States, both EU-15 and new Member States.

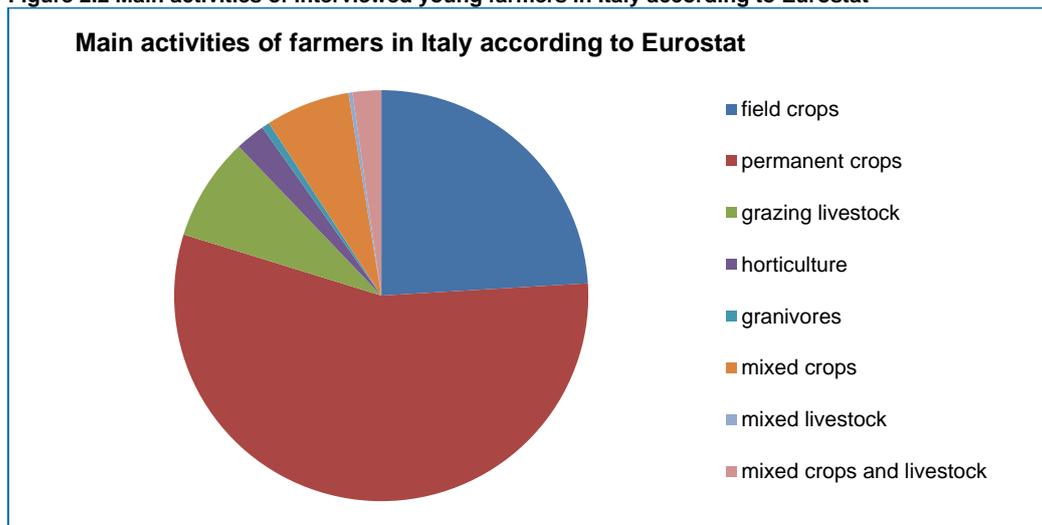
Figure 2.1 Main activities of interviewed young farmers in Italy



Source: Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte, 2015.

The figures above and below highlight the difference between the main activities of young farmers that have been interviewed and the main activities of farmers in general as included in the Eurostat statistics.

Figure 2.2 Main activities of interviewed young farmers in Italy according to Eurostat



Source: Farm Typology in 2010 according to the Agriculture, forestry and fisheries statistics of Eurostat (2013 Edition).

3 Needs of young farmers

The needs of young farmers have been identified through, among others:

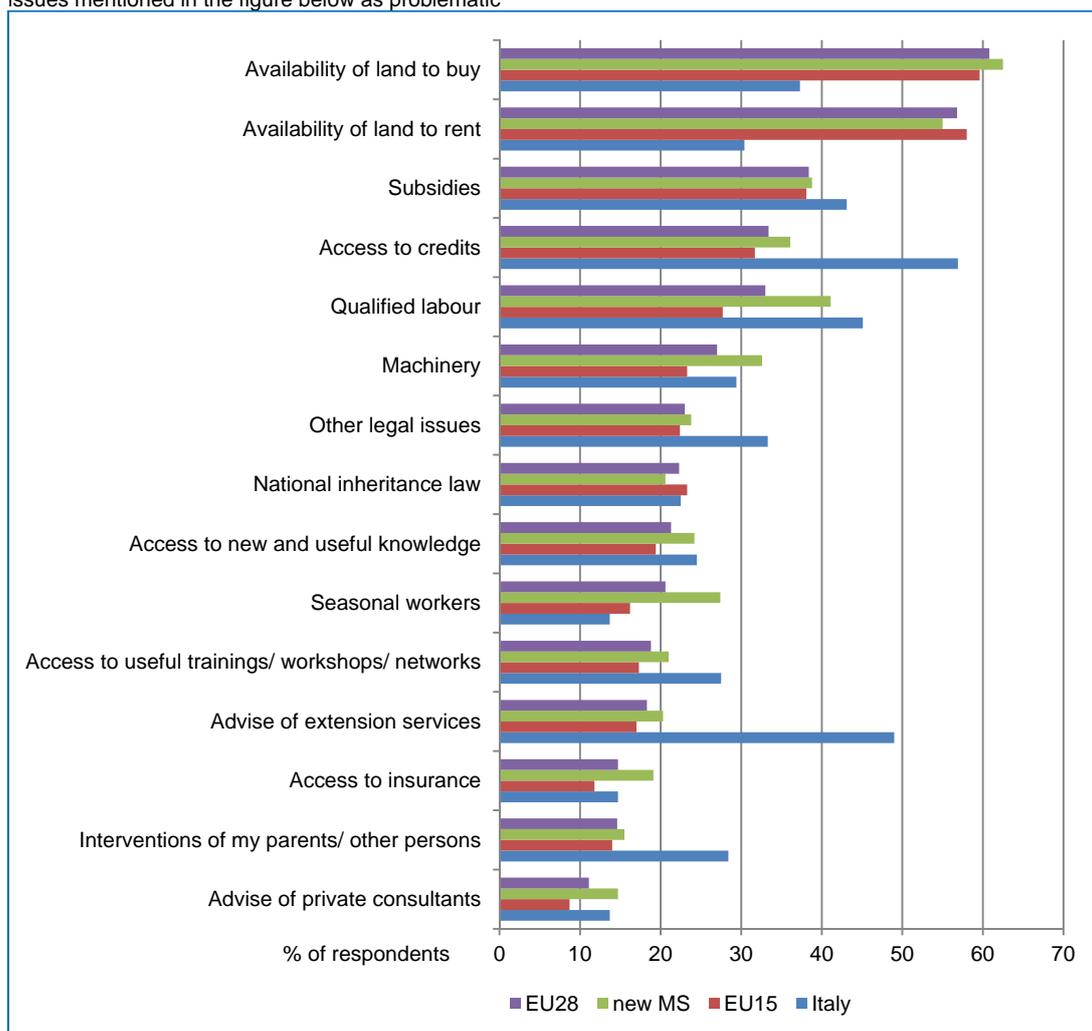
1. Which issues they perceive as problematic, e.g. the possibility of buying land, having access to credit, having the right machinery, having seasonal workers, etc.
2. Which knowledge needs the young farmers have.

3.1 Challenges for young farmers

The interviewed young farmers were asked which issues they perceive as problematic. This is shown in the figure below.

OUTCOME: The interviewed young Italian farmers perceive access to credit, advice of extension services, interventions of parents and legal issues as much more problematic than other young farmers in the EU. Availability of land (to buy and rent) and seasonal workers seem to be less problematic issues for the interviewed young Italian farmers.

Figure 3.1 General needs of young farmers – percentage of interviewed young farmers who perceived the issues mentioned in the figure below as problematic



Source: Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte, 2015.

The **focus group** agreed that the lack of a skilled workforce (qualified labour), excessive bureaucracy (legislation) and the limited quality in information related to public services (advice of extension services) are common problems across the country. However, there are regional differences : greater stress on land access in the centre/north and lack of public support and reliable information in the south. In general, the quality of available training is perceived as low, a fact which is attributed to the limited ability of providers to develop training courses that reflect the actual needs of users.

The fact that lack of financial services is a major issue was debated among the focus group participants. This may differ from region to region and depend on the financial capacity and specific skills of the young entrepreneurs. Similarly, some participants of the focus groups found that the availability of land not being so important was underestimated in the survey. After some discussions it appeared that access to land is more of a problem in the centre/north of Italy and less of a problem in the south (therefore averaging out at the national level as a lower level problem than others previously mentioned).

Starting out in the agricultural sector for young farmers is not easy according to the focus group, given the challenging macroeconomic situation of the country. However, in recent years the sector has emerged as one of the main areas of employment for young professionals. Increasingly often young farmers are returning to the farming properties of their grandparents or great-grandparents after one generation of family entrepreneurial activities in different sectors. And yet, through this process the young farmers may have lost the practical and managerial skills of their grandparents and be looking for ways to learn such skills, including new innovative marketing skills. Young farmers inheriting a well performing family business from their family may be challenged by growing global competition and are therefore in search of greater managerial skills to innovate and compete at the international level. An additional group of young farmers are those opting for agriculture as a new career path after becoming disillusioned by different sectors and professions. As such, they may have greater managerial/marketing skills but are looking for support in learning innovative production techniques. In all cases, the substantial lack of infrastructure for training and innovation in the sector (universities, institutions, research centres) is a strong limitation for young farmers when it comes to entering the sector in a competitive manner.

Within this general scenario, some regional specificities emerge among the main challenges and obstacles faced by young farmers in Italy:

- In some areas of the south, the poor perception of the sector's career potentials prevents many young people of envisioning a possible career-path in agriculture. Highly educated and skilled young professionals tend to migrate, leaving little room for innovation in the sector. Lack of infrastructure such as fast Internet, good public sector services and information and even reliable forms of local associations present additional obstacles to those in search for guidance and information on how to pursue a career in the sector;
- In other areas of the south-eastern and north-eastern regions, young farmers seem to have a clear view on the potential of the sector. However, they are faced with poor quality knowledge and information services. Obstacles are therefore identified in the limited supply of services and information rather than the actual interest of young farmers in following an innovative career in the sector;
- Central Italy lies somehow in between the two other regions, with a definite great awareness and interest in young farmers' performance in the sector, which is not reflected in the available sources of training, information and knowledge sharing at the local level. The lack of institutional support is tackled by a growing trend in bottom-up associations, aimed at supporting the information/knowledge needs of young farmers.

Participants of the focus group stressed on several occasions that bureaucracy is a serious problem in Italy, particularly for the agricultural sector. This is due to the proliferation of public institutions at all levels of governance (local, regional, central) and the excessive fragmentation of Regional Development Programmes throughout the country. As a consequence, public information becomes too fragmented, unintelligible and confusing for young farmers. Excess of bureaucracy (legislation) and limited quality in terms of the information relating to public services are commonly perceived as problematic aspects across the country, as well as among the young farmers.

Small producers and those managing small companies face many legal issues. Lack of effective synergy between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Education is also critical in Italy. This makes it hard to improve the quality of agricultural education and foster innovation through greater cooperation amongst academic, research and training institutes and farmers in different sectors.

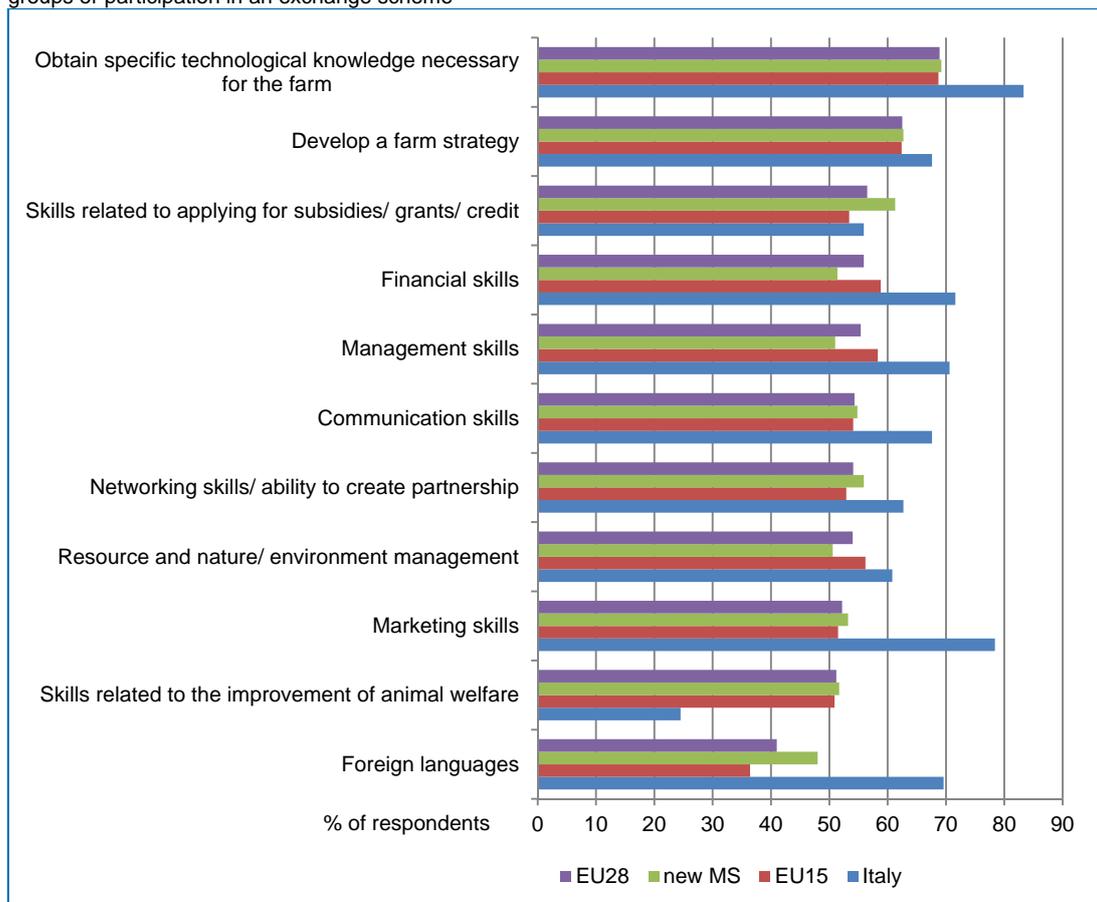
Some consensus also emerges on the need of promoting a better image of the industry, which is simply not considered appealing by youngsters (particularly in the south). It is difficult to convince young people that farming is a profitable and exciting career path. Certain improvements in promoting sustainable renewable energy policy with the aim of increasing the diversification of technologies (e.g. agricultural waste management and biogas) has led to more restrictions for young farmers (e.g. inflation of land prices due to cultivation for biofuel).

3.2 Knowledge needs of young farmers

The interviewed young farmers were asked how likely it is that they will develop the skills mentioned in the table below through trainings, courses, workshops, study groups or participation in an exchange scheme. The results are included in the figure below.

OUTCOME: The interviewed young Italian farmers identify a higher need for most knowledge issues than their peers in Europe. This relates in particular to foreign languages and marketing skills. Skills related to applying for grants or credit and skills related to animal welfare in particular appear to be less important.

Figure 3.2 Knowledge needs of young farmers – percentage of respondents who answered that it was likely that they will develop the skills mentioned in the table below through trainings, courses, workshops, study groups or participation in an exchange scheme



Source: Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte, 2015.

With regard to specific knowledge needs, the **focus group** participants agree on the fact that a lack of collaboration between educational and research institutes and businesses in the agricultural sector pose serious challenges to young farmers. Experience shows that university graduates and high school graduates' skills are not aligned with the real needs of the sector, and do not provide young farmers with the needed theoretical competences and practical abilities to be globally competitive in their professional career. Lack of cooperation between research centres and farmers is also posing serious limits to the type and amount of knowledge that is accessible to young farmers once they enter a farm.

In line with the survey findings, the supply of higher and vocational training does not meet the demand from young farmers. Greater should be promoted between training provided by educational institutes (both vocational and higher education) and the real needs of agricultural farms and young farmers in the country. Within this context, exchange schemes could be promoted to provide practical opportunities for young farmers to develop specific skills and competences and learn from practice.

Young farmers in Italy are therefore open to gaining skills in a variety of technological and managerial knowledge areas, provided that the initiatives they attend are of the expected quality. Due to the current lack of effective training and knowledge exchange initiatives, as well as the disappointment with the existing supply across the various regions, young farmers in Italy appear to be very open and willing to endorse innovative initiatives in a wide range of competence areas.

4 Needs regarding learning and communication

Young farmers were asked about their needs regarding learning and communication:

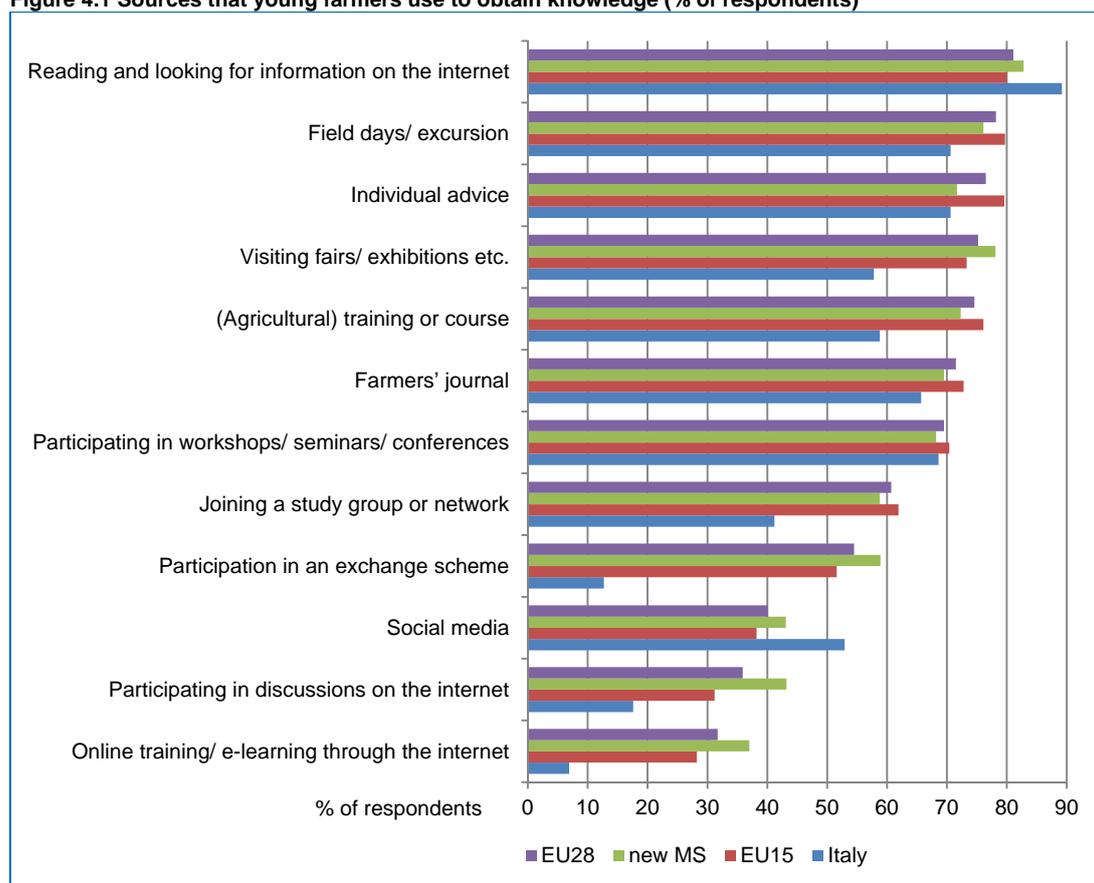
- Through which sources do young farmers like to obtain knowledge?
- Which persons or institutions are information sources for young farmers?

4.1 Most used information sources

The interviewed young farmers indicated that the following sources were most used for obtaining knowledge.

OUTCOME: The interviewed young Italian farmers more frequently look for information on the internet and social media, but participate much less in discussions on the internet and e-learning than their peers in other EU countries. In general, the other information sources are (much) less used by the interviewed young Italian farmers than by their peers. This is especially the case for training and learning types of activities (exchange schemes, study groups, training).

Figure 4.1 Sources that young farmers use to obtain knowledge (% of respondents)



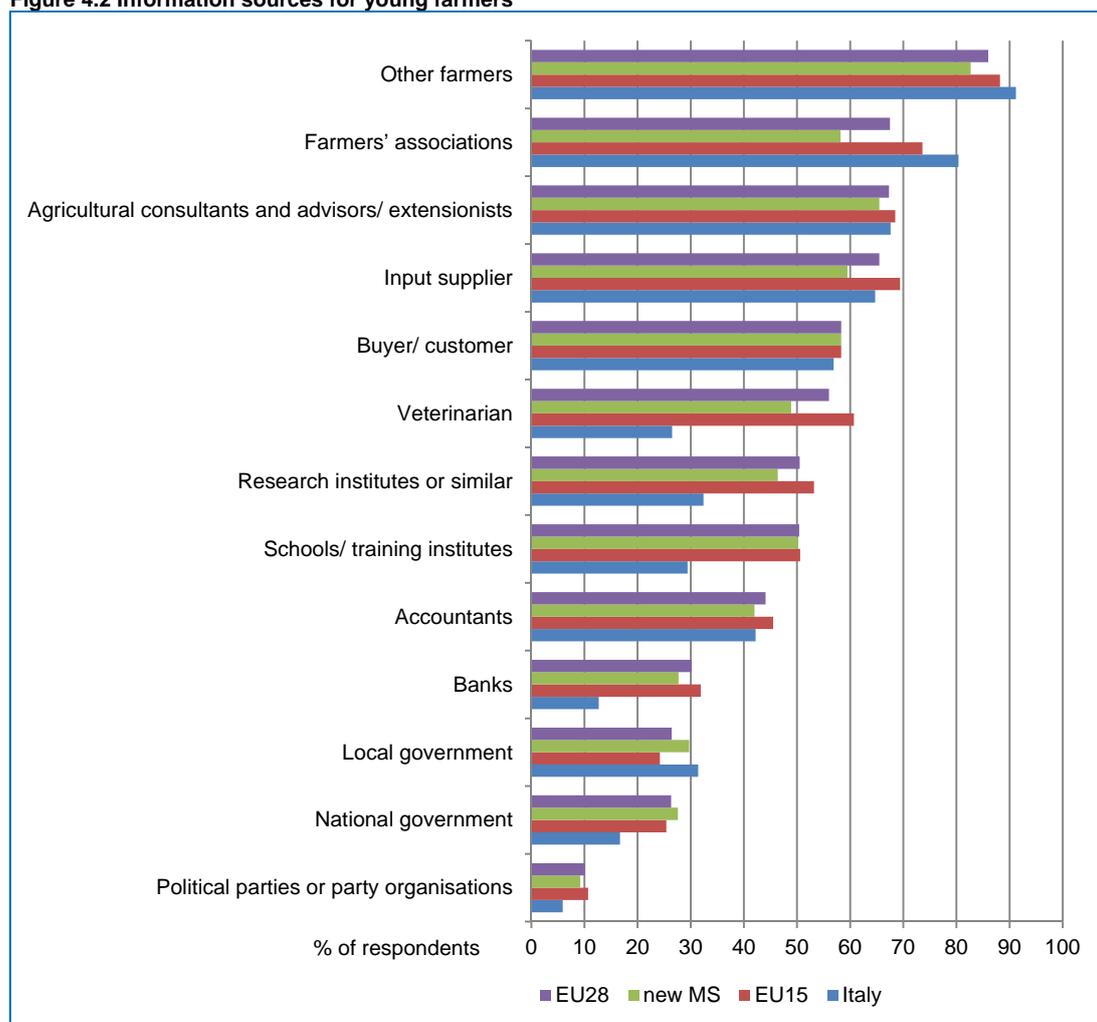
Source: Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte, 2015.

4.2 Young farmers obtaining information from people and institutions

The interviewed young farmers were asked from which people and institutions they obtain knowledge. The figure below presents an overview.

OUTCOME: The information sources used by the interviewed young farmers in Italy are more or less in line with those used by their peers in other EU countries, although some resources seem to be less available or less utilised, such as veterinarians, schools and training institutes, research institutes, banks and the government.

Figure 4.2 Information sources for young farmers



Source: Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte, 2015.

The **focus group** members mentioned that young farmers in Italy tend to rely on relatively informal channels, such as exchanges with peers, to access useful information and practical knowledge. This happens mainly due to the absence of other structured sources of information and knowledge tailored to their real needs. Exchanges of information and knowledge with peers is mostly based on personal acquaintances in their own regions (sometimes abroad). In some cases it happens through activities set up by local farmers' associations.

The lack of supporting structures in Italy limits the access to valuable sources of information/knowledge for young farmers. On the one hand, there is a chronic shortage of broadband infrastructure in the country, especially but not only in rural areas, which limits the access to (and the actual demand for) complex online services (e.g. e-learning, online discussions).

On the other hand, there is a lack of valuable training, information and knowledge for the sector, both on and offline, which discourages young farmers of looking for more structured sources (and encourages ad hoc individual internet search and one to one exchanges with experienced friends/professionals through social media).

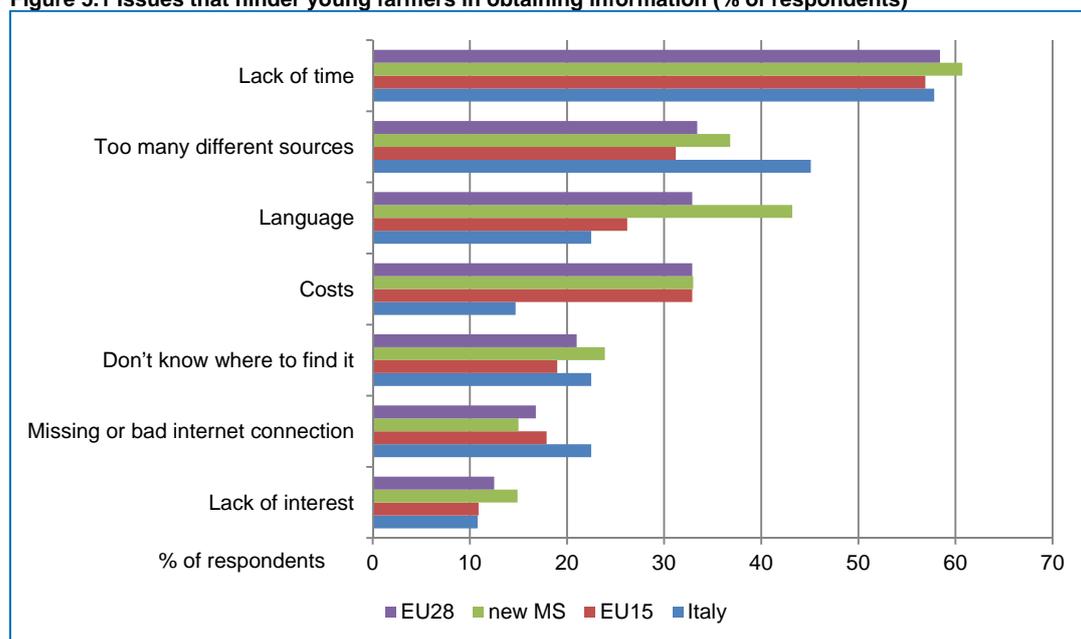
The focus group particularly stressed the lack of structured exchanges and synergy between young entrepreneurs and research/training centres in Italy. The reasons behind this lack of cooperation is mainly cultural (due to lack of clear interest, particularly from the research side) and institutional (as the few examples of functioning cooperation ceased due to budget cuts which abolished some important public institutes, particularly in the central regions of Italy). The lack of cooperation between farms and research/training centres in the sector could be mitigated by the new activities promoted by the European Commission in terms of support to the partnership between research and business, both by DG Research (Horizon 2020 - European Innovation Partnership) and possibly through new forms of exchanges promoted by DG Agri (e.g. joint farmer/researchers exchanges to visit successful practices of sector/research collaborations in other EU countries).

5 Hindrances in obtaining information

The interviewed young farmers were asked which issues were hindering them most in obtaining information, e.g. lack of time, too many sources, the language in which the information is available, the costs of the information, lack of good internet connection. The figure below describes the results.

OUTCOME: The severity of the issues that hinder the interviewed young Italian farmers in obtaining information is more or less in line with that of their peers in other EU countries, although having too many sources seems to be more of a problem in Italy, while the costs seem to be less important.

Figure 5.1 Issues that hinder young farmers in obtaining information (% of respondents)



Source: Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte, 2015.

Participants of the **focus group** agreed with the hindrances presented, which resonated with their experience. They also added that:

- The lack of time available for the exchange of knowledge and information is the main element that limits young farmers' ability to learn. Similarly lack of time is the main reason hindering young farmers in enrolling in exchange programmes;
- An additional element of confusion and limitation for young farmers in accessing innovative knowledge and information and the fragmentation of available sources and information;
- The courses and training provided are not considered good enough quality and are not of interest for young farmers;
- Poor broadband facilities in rural areas (internet is mainly accessed through mobile phone contract services) are also a limitation when it comes to the access of sources of professional information and knowledge, and possibly also to online applications to exchange programmes.

6 Suitability of exchange schemes

The young farmers were also asked about the suitability of the exchange schemes to address their knowledge needs and their interest in participating in these schemes. This was done by asking about:

- Participation of young farmers in exchange schemes and their satisfaction and awareness of exchange schemes;
- Young farmers' attitudes with regard to participating in an exchange scheme;
- Issues that hinder young farmers in participating in an exchange scheme;
- Intention of young farmers to join an exchange scheme;
- Opinion of young farmers about exchange schemes.

6.1 Participation of young farmers in exchange schemes and their satisfaction and awareness of exchange schemes

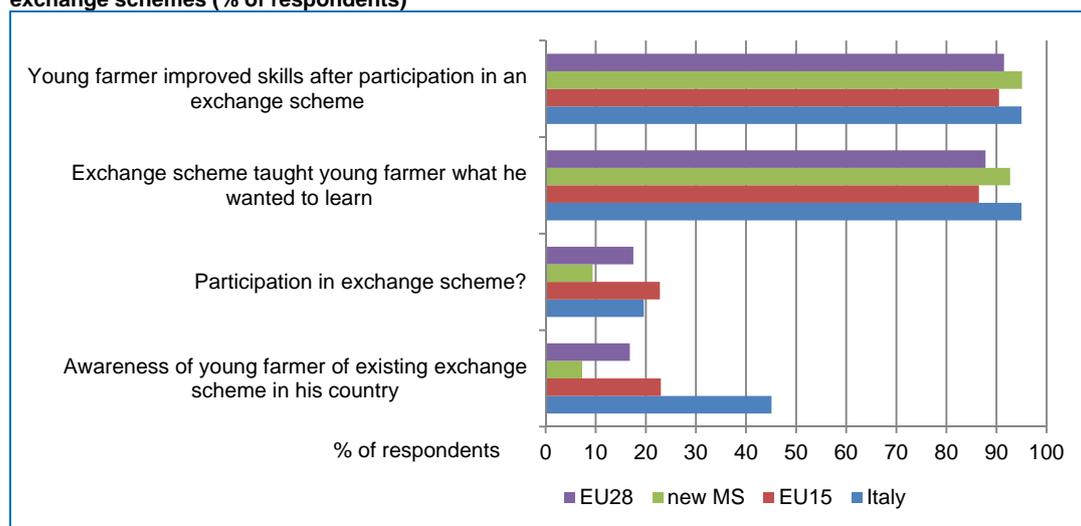
The interviewed young farmers were asked:

- How aware they are of existing exchange schemes in their country;
- If they participated in an exchange scheme;
- If they improved their skills after participating in an exchange scheme;
- If the exchange scheme taught the young farmer what he wanted to learn.

The figure below presents an overview.

OUTCOME: The awareness of the interviewed young Italian farmers of exchange schemes is higher than that of other young farmers in the EU. The answers to the other questions are in line with that of their peers in other EU countries.

Figure 6.1 Participation of young farmers in exchange schemes and their satisfaction and awareness of exchange schemes (% of respondents)



Source: Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte, 2015.

6.2 Young farmers' attitudes with regard to participation in an exchange scheme

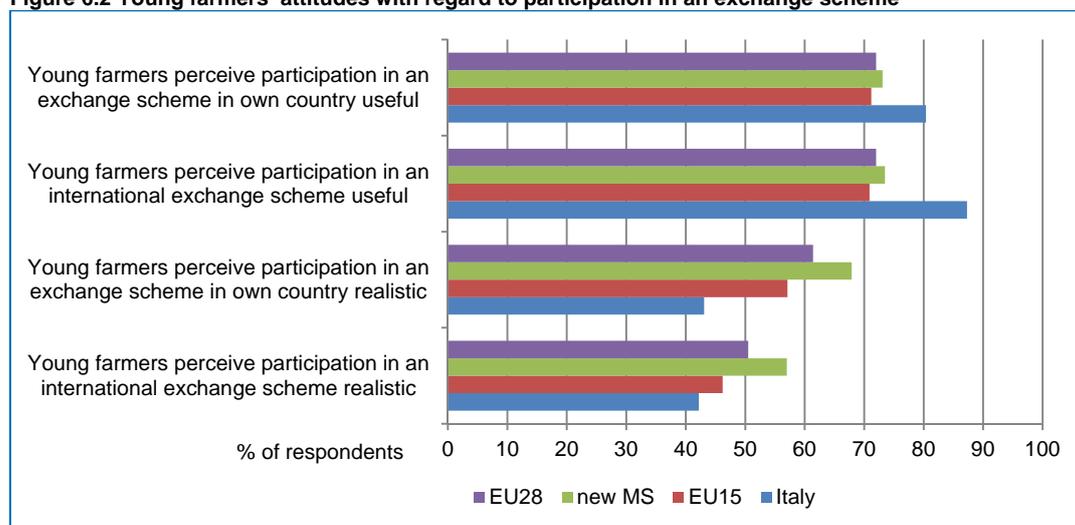
The interviewed young farmers were asked:

- If they consider participating in an exchange scheme in their own country useful;
- If they consider participating in an exchange scheme in their own country realistic;
- If they consider participating in an international exchange useful;
- If they consider participating in an international exchange realistic.

The figure below presents an overview.

OUTCOME: The perception of the interviewed young Italian farmers regarding the usefulness of participation in exchange schemes is somewhat higher than that of other young farmers in Europe, while the actual participation is considered to be less realistic.

Figure 6.2 Young farmers' attitudes with regard to participation in an exchange scheme



Source: Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte, 2015.

From the **focus group** discussion it emerged that learning in the field is a much more interesting to Italian young farmers than traditional classroom courses or even online training. When it comes to the specific types of exchange (national and international), national exchanges often seem to be of little interest to some of the respondents, whilst international experiences are of greater interest but seem to pose practical limitations (e.g. costs, time) to young farmers. Either way, the interest does not turn into actual participation: the offer is perceived as too complex from an organisational perspective (administrative requirements, time spend in preparing applications, cost of living, etc.) and as a result few young farmers participate in exchange schemes in the agricultural sector in Italy.

The experience of associations that provide exchange schemes showed how young farmers are less committed to exchange schemes than young professionals in other economic sectors in Italy. This is the experience of the management of Erasmus for young Entrepreneurs, where a certain resistance was noticed in the agriculture sector to acknowledge the usefulness of professional exchanges, if compared to a greater enrolment from other economic sectors in Italy. And yet, the exchange experiences have been very positive for both the associations managing them and the young farmers involved.

There seems to be a snowball effect of being exposed to international exchanges, even though short visits result in young farmers understanding the importance of such initiatives and actively

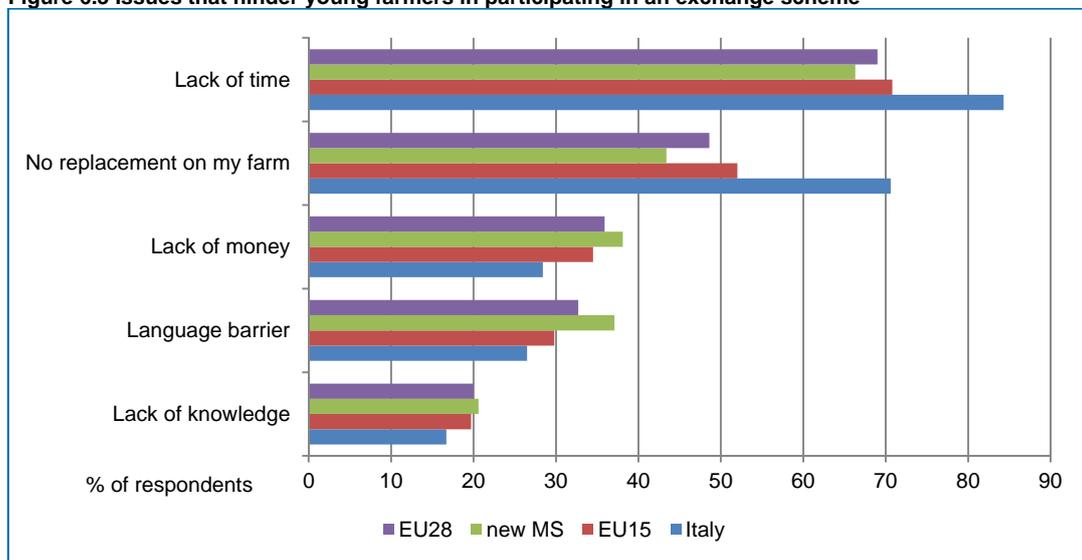
looking for further opportunities. The growing interest is also acknowledged by the Ministry of Agriculture, due to the unexpected success in terms of applications to some recent exchange programmes launched for a small number of female innovative farmers (not necessarily below 40).

6.3 Issues that hinder young farmers in participating in an exchange scheme

The interviewed young farmers were asked which issues were hindering them most in participating in an exchange scheme, e.g. lack of time, no replacement at their farm, language barrier, the costs of the exchange, lack of knowledge on the exchange. The figure below describes the results.

OUTCOME: Lack of time and having no replacement on the farm seem to be more important hindrances in participating in exchange schemes for the interviewed young farmers in Italy than for their peers in other EU countries. Other factors seem to be a bit less important.

Figure 6.3 Issues that hinder young farmers in participating in an exchange scheme



Source: Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte, 2015.

The **focus group** members add that the enthusiasm for innovative knowledge sharing practices (such as exchange programmes) emerging through the interviews is justified by the dissonance between need for innovative knowledge and practical training as discussed so far, and the frustration with the quality and availability of traditional support across the country. Lack of participation in exchange programmes in Italy do not therefore contradict the growing appreciation for such initiatives, but rather is due to the difficulties in leaving the workplace for a certain period of time (which is certainly a severe challenge for smaller businesses) and to the economic constraints be self –subsistent during an international exchange (aspects further discussed in the next session). To be appealing for young farmers in Italy, exchange programmes should be specifically tailored to the time and financial constraints of those interested in participating.

When it comes to the practical obstacles of enrolling into exchange schemes, participants agree on the importance of devoting time starting with the assessment and submission phases. Preliminary stages in the application can be lengthy and time available may be limited for those already working. A practical obstacle is the complexity of the participation process in terms of the ability to clarify the business case for the visit, understanding and preparing a detailed business plan and filling in online forms. Lack of fast Internet connection can also limit the information accessible, as well as hinder more lengthy processes such as online transactions.

Practical hindrances to participation can be removed, according to the focus group, by further strengthening the support provided to interested young farmers by the Intermediary Agencies, through dedicated one-to-many and one-to-one information services for the young farmers interested (a model similar to those adopted by temporary employment agencies). In addition, given the obstacles provided by costs to be covered by participants (subscription, travel and daily costs of living broad), exchanges could benefit from contractual arrangements which could ensure monthly payments to visitors, similarly to paid apprenticeships (so to avoid discrimination of participants on the basis of social and economic status).

6.4 Intention of young farmers of joining an exchange scheme

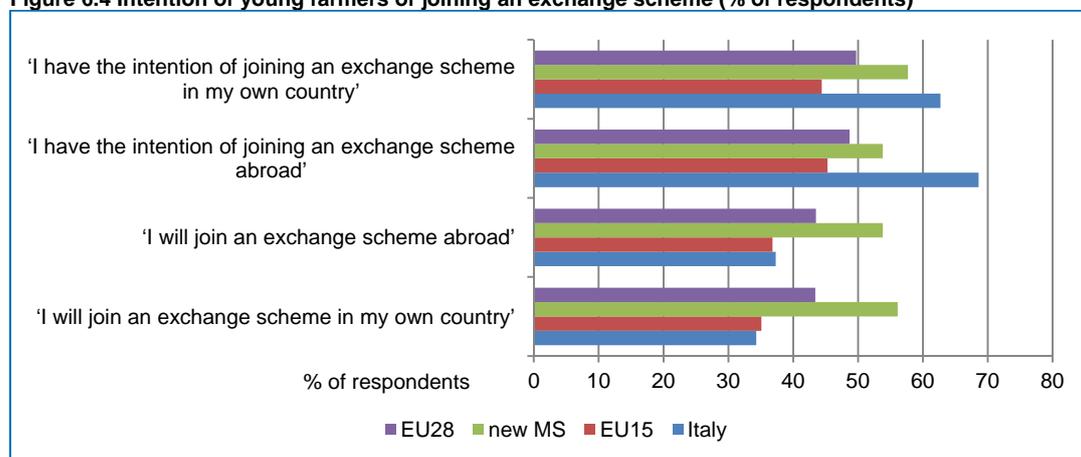
The interviewed young farmers were asked if:

- They have the intention of joining an exchange scheme in their own country;
- They will join an exchange scheme in their own country;
- They have the intention of joining an exchange scheme abroad;
- They will join an exchange scheme abroad.

The results are included in the figure below.

OUTCOME: Despite the identified bottlenecks, mentioned above (figure 6.3), the intention of the interviewed young farmers in Italy to participate in an exchange scheme seem to be higher than that of their peers in other EU countries. However, they are less convinced that they will actually join an exchange scheme. This probably means that the bottlenecks need to be solved before farmers will actually participate.

Figure 6.4 Intention of young farmers of joining an exchange scheme (% of respondents)



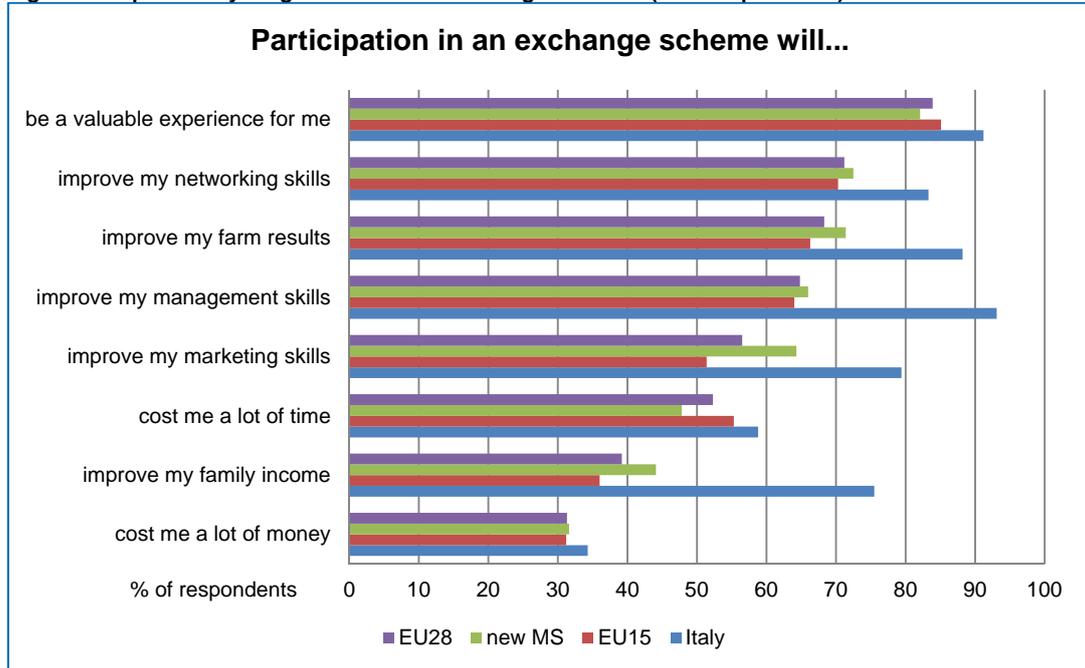
Source: Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte, 2015.

6.5 Opinion of young farmers about exchange schemes

The interviewed young farmers were asked their opinion of exchange schemes. They were asked if it would be a valuable experience for them, improve their skills (either management, marketing, networking skills), cost them a lot of time or money and if it would improve the family income or farm results. The figure below presents the results.

OUTCOME: The expectations of what an exchange scheme will bring the interviewed young Italian farmers are generally higher than the expectations of other young farmers in the EU.

Figure 6.5 Opinion of young farmers about exchange schemes (% of respondents)



Source: Ecorys in cooperation with LEI and Aequator Groen & Ruimte, 2015.

7 Focus group participants

The following people participated in the focus group:

| | Name | Organisation |
|----|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Mariella Santevecchi | Ministry of Agriculture |
| 2 | Maria Rita Tarricone | Ministry of Agriculture |
| 3 | Francesco Mirra | Ministry of Agriculture |
| 4 | Vincenzo Netti | CIA / AGIA |
| 5 | Daniela Giarin ⁴ | CIA / AGIA |
| 6 | Piergiorgio Ferrarese | Confagricoltura / ANGA |
| 7 | Francesco Camardo | COPAGRI |
| 8 | Fabrizio Zappavigna | COPAGRI |
| 9 | Simone Maini | COPAGRI |
| 10 | Claudio Pozzi | WWOOF |

Reporter and moderator: Matteo Bocci, Ecorys Brussels

Date focus group: 9 September 2014

Place: Rome, Italy

⁴ Participants tot he Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE), attended via phone from 12:30 (due to her impossibility to join earlier).



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