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Determinants of Farm Succession Preparedness Among Ageing Rural Farmers in Ondo West Local Government Area, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the level of farm succession preparedness and its socio-economic determinants among ageing rural farmers in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 150 farmers aged 50 years and above using a structured questionnaire. Farm succession preparedness was measured using a composite index based on intention to transfer the farm, identification of a successor, discussion with the successor, timing of handover, and preparation of legal documentation. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression. The results showed that although all respondents intended to transfer their farms, only 16.7% had prepared legal documentation, indicating generally low levels of formal preparedness. Most farmers planned to transfer their farms to their children, while a notable proportion had not yet identified a specific successor. Financial management ability and family resistance were identified as the most important factors influencing succession decisions, while financial constraints, health challenges, and family disagreements were the major barriers to implementation. Regression analysis revealed that educational attainment, farm size, and monthly income had significant positive effects on succession preparedness, whereas age and years of farming experience were negatively associated with preparedness. The study highlights a gap between succession intentions and actual preparation, suggesting the need for stronger institutional and advisory support to facilitate structured planning. Improving farmer education, financial literacy, and access to extension and legal services will enhance preparedness and promote smoother inter-generational transfer of farms in rural communities.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains a vital sector in Nigeria, sustaining rural livelihoods, contributing to food security, and supporting economic growth. Family farming systems dominate rural agricultural production, yet a demographic shift toward an ageing farming population is creating new challenges for the continuity and sustainability of these systems. In Ondo State, a growing number of farm operators are nearing retirement age without clear plans for transferring ownership and management, increasing the risk of farm disruption and intergenerational discontinuity (Adeloye, *et al.*, 2022).

Farm succession planning is the deliberate process by which farm owners prepare to transfer farm management, decision-making responsibilities, and assets to successors. When succession planning is proactive and structured, it helps preserve productive capacity, reduces the likelihood of intra-family disputes, and ensures that accumulated agricultural knowledge is not lost when ageing farmers exit. In contrast, weak or absent succession plans can lead to farm fragmentation, interrupted production, and diminished rural resilience (Arowolo *et al.*, 2017).

This study is grounded in Family Farm Succession Theory, which holds that effective succession depends on the interaction among three elements: the retiring farmer, the potential successor, and the farm as a business entity. This theoretical perspective recognises that succession

is influenced by socio-economic conditions, family dynamics, and the strategic requirements of the farming enterprise. Scholars emphasise that successful transitions require explicit planning, communication, and alignment of successor capabilities with the farm's ongoing needs (Pitts, *et al.*, 2009).

Supporting this core framework, Human Capital Theory suggests that individuals with higher levels of education and farming knowledge are more likely to engage in forward-looking behaviours such as succession planning because they can better assess future risks and opportunities. Studies in agricultural contexts indicate that formal education and access to advisory services increase farmers' propensity to adopt structured planning and effective decision-making practices. For example, research from Alberta, Canada, shows that farm operators with greater exposure to planning resources are more motivated to develop succession plans and identify appropriate successors (Purc-Stephenson & Aseda, 2025). In addition, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, which emphasises the role of diversified assets (human, social, financial, and physical capital) in building resilience, provides a useful lens for understanding how access to resources influences a farmer's ability to engage in long-term planning. Under this framework, households with greater financial stability and social support are better positioned to invest in succession planning as part of

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a broader strategy for sustaining livelihoods across generations.

Empirical evidence from Nigeria indicates substantial differences in succession planning practices across various farming systems. Studies of palm oil farmers in the Niger Delta region demonstrate that factors such as education, farm size, income, and perceptions of succession influence whether farmers prepare for succession and involve successors in management, even when formal documentation is absent (Ofuoku & Gbigbi, 2022). Similarly, research among older crop farmers in southwest Nigeria shows that successor involvement, life after retirement, and demographic factors impact succession intentions and behaviours (Adeloye *et al.*, 2022).

Despite these contributions, there is limited nation-specific research on the preparedness of ageing rural farmers in Ondo State for formal farm succession and on the socio-economic factors that determine their readiness. Understanding these dynamics is critical, not only for preserving farm continuity but also for informing policies and extension strategies that support smooth generational transitions in family farming enterprises. Therefore, this study seeks to assess the farm succession plans of ageing rural farmers in Ondo State, identify the barriers they face in implementing these plans, and explore potential strategies to support successful transitions that sustain farming practices in the region. Hence, the following research questions were raised to guide the research:

1. What are the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents in the study area?
2. What is the farmer's attitude towards farm succession planning among ageing rural farmers in Ondo State?
3. What are the factors influencing farm succession planning among ageing rural farmers in Ondo State?
4. What are the constraints faced by ageing rural farmers in implementing farm succession plans in Ondo State?

Hypothesis

HO1: There is no significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of farmers and farm succession preparedness among ageing rural farmers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Farm succession planning has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years due to concerns about the ageing farming population and the sustainability of family farming systems. Globally, succession is recognised as a complex process shaped by economic, social, and institutional factors that determine whether farms successfully transition to the next generation. A review of farm business models by Rech *et al.* (2021) shows that succession decisions depend on farm characteristics, institutional environments, and stakeholder relationships, and that continuity of family farms requires deliberate planning rather than informal arrangements.

Recent empirical studies have further highlighted the importance of identifying successors and preparing them for management responsibilities. Research by

Bertolozzi-Caredio *et al.* (2024) found that identifying a successor significantly influences farmers' strategic and management decisions, demonstrating that succession planning affects not only ownership transfer but also day-to-day farm operations and investment behaviour. In developing countries, the challenge of succession planning is often linked to socio-economic conditions. A study of older crop farmers in southwestern Nigeria reported that education level, resource availability, and household characteristics significantly influence succession intentions, indicating that both human and financial capital are critical determinants of preparedness for farm transfer (Adeloye, Torimiro, & Adebo, 2022).

Similarly, research on farm succession in smallholder systems has shown that income, secure land tenure, and access to farmer organizations positively influence succession decisions. Bavorová *et al.* (2024) reported that higher income and stronger institutional support significantly improve the likelihood of succession, while lack of labour and weak organizational participation hinder the process. Beyond economic factors, behavioural and social influences also play an important role. Purc-Stephenson and Aseda (2025) observed that farmers often delay succession planning due to emotional attachment to their farms, uncertainty about successors, and limited access to advisory support. Their study also found that access to training and planning resources significantly improves readiness to develop succession plans.

Institutional support systems, particularly agricultural extension services, are also widely recognized as important in strengthening farmers' decision-making capacity. Extension programmes provide technical knowledge, managerial guidance, and information on improved practices, which can influence long-term planning and farm management behaviour. Studies on agricultural extension and rural development have emphasized that advisory services enhance farmers' capacity to adopt innovations and improve farm productivity, which indirectly supports succession preparedness by strengthening the economic viability of farms. Evidence from developing regions further shows that socio-economic characteristics such as age, education, income, and farming experience consistently influence farm management and planning behaviour. Studies of farming households indicate that older farmers are less likely to adopt long-term planning strategies, while education and economic stability increase the likelihood of strategic decision-making and investment in farm continuity.

Despite the growing body of research on farm succession globally, there remains limited empirical evidence on succession preparedness among ageing rural farmers in many parts of Nigeria, particularly at the local government level. Most existing studies focus on perception or intention rather than actual preparedness, and few examine the combined effects of socio-economic characteristics, institutional support, and constraints within a single analytical framework. This gap highlights the need for more localized studies that assess succession preparedness and its determinants in specific farming

communities, which the present study seeks to address.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the southwestern agro-ecological zone of Nigeria, an agrarian community. The area has a high prevalence of family-owned farms, and the increasing age of farmers makes it a suitable place to investigate farm succession issues. This study adopted a cross-sectional, descriptive, and analytical survey design. The study population comprised all ageing rural farmers aged 50 years and above who were actively engaged in farming. A multistage sampling procedure was used to select respondents. In the first stage, five rural communities were randomly selected from the local government area.

In the second stage, lists of ageing farmers were obtained from farmer associations and extension agents in each selected community. In the final stage, proportionate sampling was used to select respondents from each community based on the size of the ageing farmer population, yielding a total sample of 150. Data were collected using a structured interviewer-administered questionnaire designed to capture information relevant to the study objectives. The questionnaire was face validated by experts in agricultural extension and rural development to ensure content and face validity.

Farm succession planning was operationalised using five key indicators: intention to transfer the farm, identification of a successor, discussion of succession plans with the intended successor, timing of farm handover, and preparation of legal documentation such as wills or formal agreements. Each indicator was scored

1 for “Yes” and 0 for “No,” and the scores were summed to form a Farm Succession Planning Index ranging from 0 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater preparedness for farm succession.

Factors influencing farm succession planning and constraints to its implementation were measured on a three-point Likert scale. For influencing factors, the scale was coded as 1 = Not Important, 2 = Moderately Important, and 3 = Very Important; for constraints, it was coded as 1 = Not a Constraint, 2 = Moderate Constraint, and 3 = Serious Constraint. Mean scores were computed and used to rank the variables, with a mean score of 2.0 or higher considered significant. Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were used to summarise respondents’ characteristics, succession attitudes, influencing factors, and constraints. Multiple linear regression analysis was employed to examine the relationship between socio-economic characteristics (age, gender, marital status, years of farming experience, type of farming, farm size, monthly income, and educational attainment) and the Farm Succession Planning Index. Statistical significance was determined at the 5% level ($p \leq 0.05$). The internal consistency of the succession preparedness indicators was tested using Cronbach’s alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.74, indicating acceptable reliability of the scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Farmers’ Socio-economic Characteristics

The socio-economic characteristics, as shown in Table 1, reveal the predominance of male farmers (62%), which

Table 1: Socio-economic Distribution of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	93	62.0
	Female	57	38.0
Age (years)	<45	7	4.7
	45–55	31	20.7
	56–66	96	64.0
	≥67	16	10.6
	Mean age = 58 years		
Marital Status	Married	76	50.7
	Widowed	26	17.3
	Divorced	24	16.0
	Separated	24	16.0
Farming Experience	<10 years	20	13.3
	10–20 years	99	66.0
	>30 years	31	20.7
	Mean experience = 21 years		
Type of Farming	Crop farming	93	62.0
	Livestock farming	32	21.3
	Mixed farming	25	16.7

Farm Size	<2 ha	25	16.7
	2–5 ha	92	62.0
	5–10 ha	32	21.3
	Mean farm size $\approx$ 4–5 ha		
Monthly Income	<₦200,000	9	6.0
	₦200,001–₦400,000	48	32.0
	₦400,001–₦800,000	66	44.0
	>₦800,000	27	18.0
	Mean income $\approx$ ₦528,000		
Education	No formal education	15	10.0
	Primary	51	34.0
	Secondary	84	56.0
Cooperative Membership	Member	39	26.0
	Non-member	111	74.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

reflects patterns widely reported in Sub-Saharan Africa, where men often control land and major farm assets, while women contribute significantly to labour but have less ownership and decision-making power (Peterman, Behrman, & Quisumbing, 2014). Gender differences in access to resources may influence succession decisions, particularly in cultures where inheritance norms favour male heirs.

The age distribution indicates that approximately 64.0% of respondents were aged 56–66 years, confirming that the farming population in the study area is ageing. This trend aligns with global concerns about the renewal of generations in agriculture. Zagata and Sutherland (2015) noted that ageing farm populations pose risks to the long-term sustainability of agriculture when younger generations are not sufficiently prepared or motivated to take over farm enterprises. In terms of succession planning, older farmers may delay formal arrangements while continuing to manage the farm, which can complicate the timely transfer of ownership and responsibilities.

Most respondents (69.0%) had extensive farming experience, averaging about 21 years. Experience can be beneficial because it adds to accumulated knowledge and skills; however, lengthy experience may likely reinforce traditional practices and slow the adoption of formal planning tools. Research on farm decision-making indicates that experienced farmers may rely more on informal knowledge systems and family arrangements than on structured planning mechanisms (Mignouna, Manyong, Rusike, Mutabazi, & Senkondo, 2011).

The farm size distribution shows that 62% of the farmers operate between two and five hectares, indicating a dominance of small- to medium-scale farms. This aligns with evidence that medium-scale farms are becoming increasingly important in African agricultural systems, often serving as a transition between subsistence and commercial production (Jayne, Chamberlin, & Headey, 2016). Farm size is especially relevant to succession planning because larger, more profitable farms are

more likely to attract successors and support long-term planning.

Income levels reported in this study suggest that a significant proportion of respondents operate economically viable farms. Financial capacity plays an important role in succession decisions, as economically stable farmers are better positioned to invest in legal documentation, successor training, and the modernisation of farm operations. Human Capital Theory also suggests that economic and educational resources improve planning behaviour and long-term decision-making (Purc-Stephenson & Aseda, 2025).

About 66% of the respondents had at least a secondary education. This is significant because Mignouna *et al.* (2011) found that education significantly increases the likelihood that farmers adopt improved technologies and management practices, including succession planning.

Finally, cooperative membership was relatively low, with only about one-quarter of respondents belonging to cooperatives. Farmer organizations play an important role in improving access to credit, markets, and information. Evidence from developing countries shows that cooperative membership significantly enhances farmers' productivity, bargaining power, and access to extension services (Abate, Francesconi, & Getnet, 2014). Low participation in cooperatives may likely limit farmers' exposure to training opportunities and advisory services that could support structured succession planning.

Respondents' Access to Extension

Respondents' access to agricultural extension services indicates a significant gap in support in the study area. Nearly half of respondents (49.3%) reported never having access to extension workers, 30.0% reported rarely accessing these vital services, and only 20.7% reported occasionally accessing them (Table 10). This distribution underscores a substantial lack of consistent contact with extension personnel, who are essential for disseminating up-to-date agricultural practices, technologies, and market information to farmers.

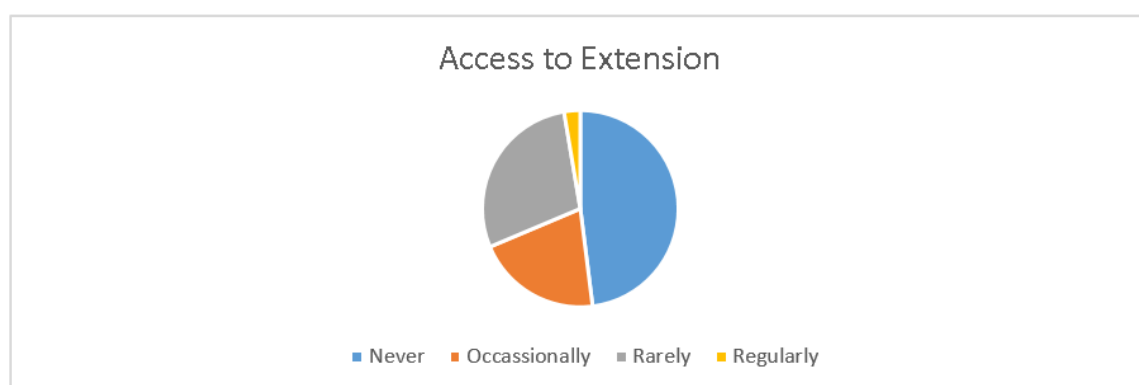


Figure 1: Respondents' Access to Extension

Source: Field survey, 2025

Farmers attitude towards farm succession planning

The attitude of ageing rural farmers in Ondo State towards farm succession planning demonstrates a high level of awareness and intent to ensure farm ownership is transferred appropriately when they are no longer able to manage it. All respondents (100%) expressed an intention to pass on their farms, with the majority (60%) planning to hand over ownership to their children, 12.7% to extended family members, and 21.3% not yet identifying a specific successor (Table 11). Most farmers (79.3%) have discussed their succession plans with their intended heirs, indicating a high level of preparedness, while 20.7% have not yet done so. The timing of succession varies among

respondents: 17.3% have already transferred ownership, 42.0% plan to do so within the next 12 years, while others foresee longer timelines or remain uncertain.

Regarding the mode of handover, over half (50.7%) prefer immediate full ownership transfer, 21.3% favor gradual involvement of successors in farm management, and 15.3% support shared management between themselves and their successors. Legal preparation for succession is notably low: only 16.7% have formal legal documents such as wills or agreements, 70% are undecided or not prepared, and 13.3% have no plans for legal documentation.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents on Farmers Attitude Towards Farm Succession Planning among Ageing Rural Farmers In Ondo State

S/N	Items	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1	Have you considered passing on your farm to someone else when you are no longer able to manage it?	Yes No	150 0	100.0 0.0
2	If yes, who do you plan to pass the farm on to?	Son/daughter Extended family member Hired worker/manager No specific person yet Other	99 19 0 32 0	60.0 12.7 0.0 21.3 0.0
3	Have you discussed your farm succession plans with the person you intend to pass it on to?	Yes No Not applicable	119 31 0	79.3 20.7 0.0
4	At what stage do you plan to fully hand over the farm to the next generation?	Already handed over In the next 12 years In the next 35 years When I am physically unable to work Not sure yet	26 63 23 20 18	17.3 42.0 15.3 13.3 12.0
5	What type of handover process do you plan to use for farm succession?	Gradual involvement in farm management Full ownership and responsibility at once Shared management between myself and successor Not yet decided	32 76 23 19	21.3 50.7 15.3 12.7

6	Have you prepared any legal documentation for the succession of your farm (e.g., wills, formal agreements)	Yes	25	16.7
		No	105	70.0
		In the process	0	0.0
		Not planning to	20	13.3

Source: Field survey, 2025

Factors Influencing Farm Succession Planning among Ageing Rural Farmers in Ondo State

The data in Table 3 presents the various factors influencing farm succession planning decisions among ageing rural farmers in Ondo State. The data reveal that financial management ability is the most influential factor ($\bar{x} = 2.04$), ranking first. This suggests that ageing farmers are more likely to entrust ownership of the farm to successors who demonstrate financial competence. Resistance from family members or stakeholders ranks second ($\bar{x} = 1.77$), highlighting the influence of interpersonal dynamics on

succession decisions. Disagreements or lack of consensus within the family unit can hinder planning, indicating the importance of fostering open communication and collaborative decision-making in succession processes.

Findings also revealed that traditionally valued factors like interest in farming ($\bar{x} = 1.38$), being a family member ($\bar{x} = 1.34$), and knowledge of farming practices ($\bar{x} = 1.30$) ranked lower. This shift is believed to reflect a pragmatic outlook in which successors are chosen not solely on kinship or familiarity with farming, but on their potential to sustain and grow the farming enterprise.

Table 3: Perceived Factors Influencing Farm Succession Planning

Items	NF		MF		SF		Mean	Rank	Remarks
	(F)	(%)	(F)	(%)	(F)	(%)			
Interest in farming	62	62.0	38	38.0	0	0	1.38	3rd	NF
Knowledge of farming practices	70	70.0	30	30.0	0	0	1.30	5th	NF
Relationship to the farmer (family member)	66	66.0	34	34.0	0	0	1.34	4th	NF
Ability to manage farm finances	13	13.0	70	70.0	17	17.0	2.04	1st	F
Resistance from family members or stakeholders	36	36.0	51	51.0	13	13.0	1.77	2nd	F

Source: Field survey, 2025

Grand Mean = 1.57

Constraints Faced by Ageing Rural Farmers in Implementing Farm Succession Plans

Ageing rural farmers in Ondo State encounter a range of constraints that hinder the successful implementation of farm succession plans. Financial constraints and health issues were identified as the most critical challenges ($\bar{x}$

= 1.66 each), reflecting the dual burden of economic hardship and declining physical capacity. These limitations significantly reduce older farmers' ability to engage in succession planning, consult legal or extension professionals, and adequately prepare their successors.

Family disagreements also emerged as a barrier ($\bar{x} = 1.64$),

Table 4: Constraints to Preparing a Successor

Items	NAC		MC		SC		Mean	Rank	Remarks
	(F)	(%)	(F)	(%)	(F)	(%)			
Lack of interest from potential successors	119		31	20.7	0	0.0	1.21	4th	NAC
Difficulty in transferring ownership	131	87.3	19	12.7	0	0.0	1.13	5th	NAC
Financial constraints	51	34.0	99	66.0	0	0.0	1.66	1st	C
Family disagreements	54	36.0	96	64.0	0	0.0	1.64	2nd	C
Lack of knowledge on legal processes	99	66.0	51	34.0	0	0.0	1.34	3rd	NAC
Health issues	51	34.0	99	66.0	0	0.0	1.66	1st	C

Source: Field survey, 2025

Grand Mean = 1.44

highlighting the importance of internal family harmony in ensuring a smooth transfer of farm responsibilities. Disputes over inheritance or successor selection can delay or derail the planning process, particularly in communal or extended family systems. On the other hand, constraints such as lack of legal knowledge ($\bar{x} = 1.34$), disinterest from potential successors ($\bar{x} = 1.21$), and difficulty in transferring ownership ($\bar{x} = 1.13$) were perceived as less pressing. While these issues still pose challenges, their lower ratings suggest they are less widespread or less immediate concerns than financial, health, and interpersonal factors.

Testing of Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of ageing rural farmers and their preparedness for farm succession.

The results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that several socioeconomic variables significantly influenced respondents' preparedness for farm succession. Educational attainment had a strong, statistically significant positive effect on succession preparedness ($\beta = 0.342$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that farmers with higher levels of education were more likely to make concrete preparations for transferring their farms. Similarly, farm size showed a positive and significant relationship with

succession preparedness ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that farmers managing larger holdings were more likely to plan for their farms' future. Monthly income also contributed positively to succession preparedness ($\beta = 0.156$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that greater financial capacity enhances farmers' ability and willingness to engage in structured planning.

In contrast, age ($\beta = -0.172$, $p < 0.05$) and years of farming experience ($\beta = -0.181$, $p < 0.05$) were negatively associated with succession preparedness. This finding suggests that older farmers and those with longer farming experience may be more reluctant to formalise succession arrangements or to plan, possibly due to attachment to farm control or reliance on informal family arrangements. Sex ($\beta = -0.061$, $p > 0.05$), marital status ($\beta = 0.048$, $p > 0.05$), and type of farming ($\beta = -0.083$, $p > 0.05$) were not statistically significant predictors of succession preparedness, indicating that these characteristics did not substantially influence the level of planning observed among the respondents.

Overall, the regression model accounted for approximately 41% of the variation in farm succession preparedness ($R^2 = 0.41$), indicating moderate explanatory power and suggesting that socio-economic characteristics play a significant role in shaping farmers' readiness to plan for generational transfer.

Table 5: Regression Results for Determinants of Farm Succession Preparedness

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Constant	1.482	0.421	—	3.52	0.001
Sex	-0.082	0.074	-0.061	-1.11	0.269
Age	-0.014	0.006	-0.172	-2.33	0.021*
Marital Status	0.041	0.055	0.048	0.74	0.461
Farming Experience	-0.019	0.008	-0.181	-2.41	0.017*
Type of Farming	-0.062	0.049	-0.083	-1.26	0.209
Farm Size	0.214	0.052	0.298	4.12	0.000*
Monthly Income	0.0003	0.0001	0.156	2.08	0.039*
Educational Attainment	0.317	0.067	0.342	4.73	0.000*

Source: Author's Computation, 2025. Significant at 5% level. $R^2 = 0.41$ Adjusted $R^2 = 0.37$ $F(8,141) = 12.26$ $p < 0.05$

CONCLUSION

The study underscores the importance of deliberate farm succession planning for the long-term sustainability of family farming and rural livelihoods. Without clear preparation, farms may face uncertainty, conflict, or decline when ageing farmers withdraw from active management, which can affect productivity and local food systems. A limitation of the work is that it was conducted within a single local government area and relied on self-reported data, which may limit the extent to which the results can be generalized. Nevertheless, the evidence is useful for agricultural extension services, policymakers, and farmer organisations seeking to

support ageing farmers. Greater attention should be given to farmer education on succession planning, improved access to advisory and legal services, and programmes that encourage early preparation of successors to ensure smoother generational transitions and the continued viability of family farms.

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