

# “Farmitization”<sup>©</sup>:<sup>1</sup> Can agriculture take root for economically displaced Greeks?

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## Abstract:

There is growing evidence that migration to rural areas and adoption of an agricultural livelihood is one way jobless Greeks are attempting to survive the economic crisis. This research aims to provide a deeper look at the reality behind and viability of the supposed Greek “back-to-the-land” movement by exploring the experiences of individuals farming, or considering farming, in the crisis. This paper presents findings from 50 in-depth interviews, two focus groups, participant observation, and media analysis conducted between Oct. 2013 and Apr. 2014. The interviews and analysis highlight the complex nature of the movement, distinguishing it from previous counterurban migrations and contradicting the story told in the media. Many individuals are adopting agriculture without migrating from urban areas; instead they are already living in villages or commuting from cities to their farms. Further, it emerged that the majority of interviewees are only able to consider farming because of prior family connection to the land, suggesting that success may depend on this resource. Significantly, agriculture has positive psychological impacts and is contributing hope, as well as sustenance, to individual livelihoods. Further, many perceive it as an alternative to leaving Greece and a way to preserve Greek culture. However, agriculture is not economically viable for all the individuals interviewed, and serious economic, education and governmental barriers must be resolved.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, counterurbanization, back-to-the-land, economic crisis, Greece

## Introduction

With one in four jobless and unemployment highest in Greek urban centers (Hellenic Statistical Authority 2014), there is anecdotal evidence that professionals are migrating to rural areas and adopting an agricultural lifestyle in an attempt to survive the economic crisis. The movement has been documented by numerous Greek and global media sources, including the New York Times, BBC, and Aljazeera (Donadio 2012; Moss 2012; Psaropoulos 2013). In a recent video blog, “Farming in Crisis,” one new snail farmer declares passionately: “Our only hope lies in the countryside, and in farming” (Foodpolitics’s Videos Blog 2013). The idea that agriculture is the solution to the crisis, appealing in part because of the aging farmer population and shrinking Greek villages, has captured the

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<sup>1</sup> “Farmitization”<sup>©</sup> is a term coined by Dr. Evangelos Vergos to describe a society’s movement towards farming, as opposed to a “counterurbanization” movement to rural areas.

imagination of many Greeks. A study conducted in 2012 on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture found that 68% of individuals randomly polled in Thessaloniki and Athens are considering, or preparing, for migration to villages (GRReporter 2012; Keep Talking Greece 2014). Over half of these respondents indicated that they are planning to get involved in agriculture. In September 2013, the Kapa Research Group surveyed users of the Internet channel, [www.ka-business.gr](http://www.ka-business.gr), and found that the highest percentage of respondents (97.2%) believe that creating incentives for agricultural entrepreneurship is a “correct” approach to lowering Greek unemployment to pre-crisis levels (Lepidou n.d.). Some Greek scholars are echoing the idea; in his recent book, *Back to the Village: The Answer to the Crisis is Agriculture Production*, Anthanasios Theodorakis argues that “Greece needs a new economic model that will rely on agriculture, stockbreeding, fishing and silviculture” (Theodorakis 2012, summarized 989 in Manolas 2012). This model, he posits, will offer the path forward through the crisis.

Others disagree with this perspective (Manolas 2012), contending that in-depth research about the reality behind the urban exodus and viability of the farming movement is required (Gkartzios 2013). While agriculture is the only sector where percentage employment has grown since the start of the crisis, rising from 11.4% in 2008 to 13.8% in 2013 (Hellenic Statistical Authority 2014, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2013), the total number of people employed in the sector has fallen during that time from 516,900 to 493,900 (ibid). And though agriculture provides an undocumented food source for many, it currently comprises only 3.3% of Greece’s GDP, falling significantly behind service and tourism (European Commission 2014).

The need for further research is also demonstrated by examining the scholarly literature, or lack thereof, on the subject. In one of the only studies published about the Greek urban exodus, “‘Leaving Athens:’ Narratives of counterurbanization in times of crisis,” Gkartzios emphasizes the lack of urban-to-rural migration studies that have been conducted in Greece, and during times of crisis generally (2013). He and other migration scholars, call for further story-based research about counterurban movements resulting from non-ideological factors (Gkartzios 2013; Halfacree 2006; Mitchell 2004; Paniagua 2002). Further, Gkartzios and others highlight the need for research focused specifically on urban-to-rural migrants who are adopting agriculture in Greece and elsewhere, as well as the experiences of migrants after they have arrived in new locales. Beyond the academic need, policy makers throughout Greece, the EU, and beyond, are in search of solutions to the Greek and Southern European crisis.

Overall, gaps in our knowledge about the Greek farming movement persist and a large part of the story remains untold. Therefore, this exploratory research aims to build on previous counterurbanization literature and improve understanding of the current situation in Greece by capturing and exploring the perspectives of individual who are farming, or considering farming, in the crisis. What do their common experiences indicate about the viability and reality of farming in the crisis? Does agriculture appear to be a worthwhile investment from a development perspective?

### **A Review of the Literature: Counterurbanization and the Greek Agriculture Context**

Very little counterurbanization research has been conducted specific to Greece, particularly research that focuses on the back-to-the-land contingent. While Greek scholars and agriculture experts are aware of, and beginning to explore the trend, there have been no studies published to date that examine the experience of new, crisis-motivated farmers. This hole reflects the general absence within counterurbanization literature of studies investigating non-ideological back-to-the-land movements and post-migration experiences.<sup>2</sup> As British migration scholar Halfacree points out, “There is very little work that explicitly attempts to draw out the back-to-the-land strand within counterurbanization” (Halfacree 2001, 2006). Generally, the literature that does focus on “back-to-the-land” movements centers on North America (Gkartzios 2013; Halfacree 2006; Mitchell 2004), where the long-term urbanization process has had ample time to generate a corresponding ideological backlash. As a result, many studies about back-to-the-land movements find that pro-rural ideology is a fundamental motivation and that moving back-

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed and comprehensive review of counterurbanization literature as it pertains to Greece, see Gkartzios 2013.

to-the-land often “hinges” on the adoption of a rural livelihood (Gkartzios 2013; Halfacree 2006; Mitchell 2004). In general, as Clare Mitchell argues in her seminal literature review, “Making sense of counterurbanization,” the term “counterurbanization” has been used to describe a vast array of complex movements, and research on the subject focuses almost exclusively on migration motivations (2004). Her work illuminates the need for small-scale investigation not only to better capture individual choices and circumstance, but also to learn more about what happens *after* urban-to-rural migrations, a need that is echoed by Burchardt (2012) in his investigation of in-migration to rural areas of Britain.

Our study begins to fill that gap through its qualitative approach to understanding urban-to-rural migrants’ experiences *after* adopting an agricultural lifestyle. Additionally, it builds on the innovative research conducted by Gkartzios, which compiles and documents the narratives of 17 Greek urban-to-rural migrants, breaking from the counterurbanization trends described above to examine and establish a crisis-motivated urban exodus in Greece (2013). Further, by focusing on Greece, a country that has undergone relatively recent urbanization (Beopoulos & Skuras 1997; Damianos, Dimara, Hassapoyannes & Skuras 1998), this study and Gkartzios’s research examine urban-to-rural migrations occurring beyond the North American, Anglophone context and conceptualization of land.

Understanding the difference between North American and Greek (or more broadly Southern European) land holdings requires examining Greece’s unique land distribution history. Unlike the United States, and much of North America, Greek agriculture is still oriented around the small family farm. In January 2014, the average Greek farm was 7.2 hectare (European Commission 2014), while the average American farm holding is around 180 hectare (USDA). Further, Greek farms are generally comprised of many small pieces of land distributed around a village center, rather than large square chunks as in the US. As discussed in *Greek Agriculture in a Changing Urban Environment*, the current Greek land holding pattern was “decisively” shaped “by the long process that established the family farm as the core of agriculture production” (Damianos, Dimara, Hassapoyannes & Skuras 1998). The process began in the late 1800s when the government distributed one hectare pieces of land to males, and was later intensified in 1923 when plots were given to Turkish-Greek migrants, mostly in 4 to 6 small pieces at different distances from the village centers, to ease the transition associated with the “Great Population Switch” (Damianos, Dimara, Hassapoyannes & Skuras 1998). This land distribution process, paired with Greece’s relatively late urbanization, created a connection between rural and urban spaces that remains today. Because significant urbanization did not occur in Greece until the late 1950s, within the current generation, many Greeks still farm, or have access to, the mosaic of small farm plots given to their relatives a century ago (Beopoulos & Skuras 1997; Gkartzios 2013).

## Methods

This paper presents results from 43 qualitative, in-depth semi-structured interviews with new, aspiring, and “old-time” farmers,<sup>3</sup> eleven interviews with Greek agriculture experts, two focus groups, and participant observation conducted between October 2013 and April 2014. Farmer interviewees ranged from age 17 to 66, with an average age of 35 and the majority under 43. Interviewees were asked to describe their motivations for and experiences farming, social and economic aspects of their lives, as well as their farming methods, future farming goals, fears and expectations and their overall opinion of agriculture in Greece. Interviews were conducted primarily in-person; three were over Skype. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to two hours.

Subjects were selected using the “snowball sampling” technique (i.e. Iosifides, Petracou, Kontis & Lavrentiadou 2007). Sampling began at the American Farm School (AFS) in Thessaloniki, Greece, a school that is well-known throughout the country and has drawn global attention for its “Continuing Education” agriculture seminars (Donadio

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<sup>3</sup> Farmer interviewees were classified as “new,” “aspiring,” and “old-time” farmers based on the following criteria: new farmers are those who began farming since the start of the economic crisis in 2008, aspiring farmers are those who are seriously considering farming (i.e. enough to enroll in agriculture classes), and “old time” farmers have been farming for longer than 15 years.

2012; Moss 2012), and therefore attracts many people interested in turning to a career in farming. Interviews were conducted with individuals from a variety of locations throughout Greece, including Athens, Thessaloniki, Halkidiki, Volos, and Delphi. Because the research goal was to gain a clearer understanding of the reality of the farming movement, there was no effort to focus on a particular kind of farmer, type of agriculture, or rural region. Rather, interviews were selected based on their self-identified agricultural involvement in response to the question “Have you started farming in the past five years, or are you planning to start?” Additional interviews were conducted with old-time farmers and agriculture experts throughout Greece to gain a broader perspective on the movement.

Interviews were recorded, and transcribed. When possible, interviews were conducted in English (the native tongue of the researcher), otherwise interviews were interpreted “on the spot” from Greek to English by translators trained by the researcher. During transcription, the accuracy of the translation was verified. Interviews were then analyzed using open coding to bring out the main themes. Since this research is qualitative, the numbers we share are not statistically valid due to the small sample size, and nonrandom selection of research subjects; however they have been included to demonstrate the level of consensus among interviewees around certain themes. The main themes are presented below, often in farmers’ own words, following the method Gkartzios (2013) uses in his recent exploration of Greek urban-to-rural migrant narratives.

### **Themes of Farming in the Crisis**

This section summarizes the main commonalities and challenges that emerged throughout the interviews. Interviewees’ diverse backgrounds illuminate the complexity of the movement. By contrast, the fact that most have a prior family connection to farmland demonstrates the importance of previous land ownership in considering farming during the crisis. Serious economic and government policy challenges exist. However, individuals are supporting themselves off their land, and benefiting psychologically from farming. Finally, experts and new farmers see farming as a profession that offers an alternative to leaving Greece. Many believe that a return to producing high quality, Greek-marketed products is the most promising path towards small-scale farming’s economic success.

#### **1. Complexity of the Movement**

Through interviews, the complicated and unique nature of the Greek “back-to-the-land” movement became clear. For interviewees, moving to a rural area and getting involved in agriculture are often two separate decisions. Rather than simultaneously deciding to move to a village and start a farm, many interviewees are either living in villages already, or commuting from urban areas to their land. To illustrate: nineteen of the interviewees had started farming since the beginning of the crisis. Of these nineteen, only five had migrated to rural areas and only one of these five had moved for economic reasons. Many interviewees explained that while the crisis played a motivating role, their interest in farming or migration to rural areas, was spurred by ideological reasons as well:

*The idea [to farm] was always there, but...I guess...I always thought about it romantically. The crisis just motivated me to actually do it – I decided to start with something simple and then try my luck.*

As a result of the fluidity between urban and rural life, for many interviewees turning to farming does not mean drastically changing their lifestyle:

*My village is in the center of Greece, within a few hours of Athens and Thessaloniki, so I am always able to get back to the city. I usually go the village for 10 to 15 days, come back to Athens for a week. From my perspective, the farming life allows you to do that, at least from fall to late spring.*

*You understand, I'm not from the city and come to village to do farming... I was from a village where all the people were farming.*

The variation in their residence location meant that interviewees represent a broad demographic – with education levels ranging from Lyceum (Greek equivalent of high school) to Masters programs abroad. Similarly, age and relationship status varies among interviewees. Generally people are either single and entrepreneurial, or married with children and struggling to find a way to support their families:

*I wasn't planning on [farming]...but since my other construction job couldn't provide me with the profit I needed for raising my family, I had to turn to that. What was I supposed to do with three children?*

However there are also those who fall outside these categories, including sixty year olds trying to revitalize their parents or grandparents farms and teenagers who are dreaming of going into agriculture instead of academics. Overall, a wide range of Greeks appear to be considering farming for both economic and ideological reasons.

## 2. Family Land and Support

Despite the many differences among interviewees, almost all of them (41 out of 43) had a family connection to the land. Further, the majority indicated that family connection plays a significant roll in one's ability to successfully farm, or even consider farming:

*There is no way I could have done anything without my dad [because] without money, you can't do anything. And here in Greece, money is basically family...it's about the connections...All [the back-to-the-land stuff is] a fairy tale! Either you have [land, money and connections] or you don't!*

*Without inheritance of land, [new farmers] can't do anything, they are actually dead as farmers.*

It seemed that the most successful farmers are those going back to family land that is already, or has recently been, in production. Owning land reduces the amount of capital required to invest in a new farming operation, and those with established farms often have family members in the area who provide knowledge, making up for lack of hands-on agriculture experience.

*It was a great opportunity because they offered me the land and they had the equipment...I didn't care about the crisis because everything was ready... the trees were there, and it was already planned.*

*It was kind of lucky because...the farm was already profitable... [and farming is] something that I've known how to do my whole life. I inherited the farm from my dad, that's why I know things from when I was little.*

*If you have a village to go to, then great. But if you don't have the fields, equipment, etc. you'll be very lucky to succeed.*

The only two interviewees without family land explained that starting their operations requires significant economic investment – more than they are able to afford on their own. One is an aspiring farmer still in need of 60,000 Euros, and the other has been able to purchase land to establish his farm, but remains in debt over three years later.

While interviewees universally agreed that inheriting family land is beneficial, some described challenges with establishing efficient farm businesses on family land due to the small, scattered nature of Greek farms:

*We may have 100 stremata [equivalent of 10 hectares] but we have it in 70 little pieces, so it's more costly, more gas, more equipment, we spend more time going from one to the other. With this problem, it's kind of heroic to be making money...as a farmer.*

Finally, though interviewees are generally dependent on their families' land and financial support, they are not always welcomed back by their village community or family. However, many dismissed the unsupportive reaction they encountered from fellow villagers or their family members. Others described changes in their families' and villages' perspective over time:

*Unfortunately, I'm a city boy so... people there are mocking me because of this.*

*I overheard my grandmother asking my father "Aren't you ashamed that your son is farming?" I don't care. She just doesn't see how the realities have changed.*

*My family went crazy, asking 'What are you going to do there? Why are you leaving?' But then as time went by, every single one of them thought I made the right decision.*

### 3. Economic Challenges

Family land can only help so much, and few interviewees are thriving financially from agriculture alone. Among the nineteen new farmers, seven indicated that 100% of their income comes from farming. The remaining twelve either consider themselves unemployed, or are waiting to make a profit from their production as their initial investment in farming has not yet yielded an income. Throughout interviews, people often expressed worry, and occasional hopelessness, about their economic prospects.

*To be honest... I would say [beekeeping contributes] 40%...actually...we really need for the income to come from beekeeping mostly.*

*Money is the problem...Farming is the plan, but if I find another job...to be exactly honest with myself, I will take it for two or three years to make some money.*

Most frequently, interviewees indicated that their financial problems arise from market challenges, though high input costs also play a role. New and old time farmers alike share frustration with the middlemen involved in selling their agricultural product and the lack of information about which products have the highest demand:

*The problem is with finding places to sell products. Remember, I'm a salesman the past year, but it's very difficult to find ways to get around the middlemen.*

*[The middlemen] are the money. The money for us is very little. They take some of the money for themselves, and pay us about 2 or 3 months later. If they don't find somewhere to sell our products, they put it in the garbage and we don't get [a] penny.*

*There are too many dealers, too many buyers, and in the process of selling, the farmer can hear for the same product, at the same time, ten different prices!*

Despite the economic challenges, among those interviewed there remains a faith that the land will always provide. Many reported that they are able to "get by" financially, and that farming contributes significantly to their income and/or ability to survive. Many interviewees perceive that a large amount of their food comes from their gardens, fields, or village neighbors, with some estimating that they produce up to 90% of their food, especially during the summer months. As one farmer put it,

*Up until today, farming never failed anyone.*

#### 4. Negative Government Impact

Many farmers and agriculture experts connect their financial struggles with poor government policy, and expressed resulting concerns about farming's future. Aspiring and new farmers cited difficulties planning their farming businesses, mainly due to the ever-changing farmer taxes, which make investments unpredictable. Meanwhile, "old-time" farmers struggle to adapt to the new economic reality created by the crisis and the resulting (however necessary) changes in government policy.

*In Greece, it is not stable, every year something new happens, so there is great uncertainty.*

*While they're changing the tax policy you don't know if after five years it's good for a farmer to farm.*

Many interviewees saw the government as responsible for the lack of capital and farming knowledge, the two resources new farmers most need:

*Because of lack of support from government anyone who is a totally new farmer with no experience or inheritance of equipment or land is going to get totally destroyed because the government doesn't help and [the new farmers] don't know to proceed to make money from farming.*

*The government doesn't help at all, never came to check the land, to tell us what's best to plant here... We had to discover all this stuff on our own. We emphasize that the government hasn't helped at all!*

Although the government has set up programs intended to support new farmers, particularly the "New Farmer Program,"<sup>4</sup> many criticize the effectiveness of the programs, saying that they are complicated and expensive to join and do not provide adequate funding to truly start a new farm business.

*Now the programs are just starting, but it's very difficult to join. I have gathered the papers needed for signing in, but there are so many papers that they need and so much going through the government and stuff, so I don't know if I will be a member in those programs, but I hope I will.*

*[The government] subsidies are ridiculous. For the New Farmer Program...they give you 17,500 Euro. [But you] have to subtract 1,000 Euro for paying the office, money for taxes, and then you have to commit for 10 years, so you end up with 1500 Euro per year. And they do not allow you freedom...It's ridiculous. The plan is really for guys whose parents were farmers, and who got the farm from them and want to expand it; it's not a program [from which] to start something from scratch. It's bullshit.*

#### 5. Psychological Impact

So, why and how are new and aspiring farmers sticking with agriculture despite the above challenges they have encountered thus far? Some interviewees feel they have no other option financially. However, the few interviewees who farm for purely economic reasons seemed defeated and unlikely to continue farming if something better appeared. One farmer who started mainly because he was fired from his previous work, admitted:

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<sup>4</sup> The New Farmer Program is run by the Ministry of Agriculture and provides 17,500 Euro for new farmers that meet the requirements, which include a ten-year commitment to farm, no previous produce sales, and 20 hours of farming education. The program is open for registration a few months every five years.

*The truth is till now I find it a little difficult to deal with [farming] professionally... because it is a job that doesn't give you any instant profit.... I don't feel well, sentimentally. "Anhos" we call it in Greek... It's a situation when you fall down, psychologically, you feel like all things are bad. It's all bad.*

For many individuals, economic necessity is not enough to make farming worthwhile. What keeps them invested and interested in agriculture are the less tangible aspects that they love about farming:

*I don't want to be rich from this job, I want to be independent. I like farming because I'm my own boss!*

*Being close to nature is the biggest reward.*

*I don't know [why I like farming]! It's like asking why are you in love with women? I don't know...*

Farming and village life has reduced the stress that many feel, both about daily life and the crisis overall. Some saw farming as freeing them from the "modern jail" of a nine to five office job.

*I input the farming and remove stress...The rhythm of the city...causes you problems, even if you don't have something...everything is going so fast.*

*At the end of the day, you're tired, but you don't hate everyone...it is more psychologically healthy.*

Farming does more than reduce the daily stress caused by urban living – it is making a deeper impact by giving people hope, direction, and a productive outlet in the pervasive economic crisis. Failed, flourishing, and aspiring farmers alike often indicated that farming offers them an encouraging path through the difficulties ahead.

*If I start beekeeping, it will bother me less than I am unemployed.*

*When you are in the fields and look at the sky.... always the sky it was blue, it is blue and it's going to be blue all the time, and the sea the same. No crisis changes the sky and the sea. And I don't see [the] crisis.*

## 6. Preserving Greece's Identity and Future

A number of those interviewed perceive a link between agriculture and preserving the Greek way of life, economy and community in the face of the crisis. Young interviewees, in particular, felt that turning to agriculture was one of the only ways they could live in Greece and avoid being part of the widespread "brain drain." Some expressed concerns that they may be forced to leave the country if farming does not work out.

*My decision to come back was an ideological choice. I realized that I had to stop pretending that everything was o.k. in Greece and come back to do something to try to change the situation. I didn't want to be part of the brain drain.*

*We are thinking of going abroad... because our circumstances are hard and there is no money for starting our farm. My husband... has an interview for a job in Germany next week... The current situation doesn't seem to move forward.*

*[Farming] is difficult. But, where can one go? Where can we go? America? No. We love our country and want to stay in Greece.*

Further, experts and some entrepreneurial young farmers see a return to traditional, innovative and ecologically produced Greek products as key to making small-scale farming economically viable and accessing adequate market demand. From their perspective, success depends on harnessing and selling “Greek-ness.”

*We have gifted land here in Greece. We have the sun, and everything. This is the product of the land – not variety, farming, or anything; the weather and the sun.*

*There is currently a switch from quality versus quantity. New guys, like me, with Internet knowledge, new marketing techniques, can become high clientele...agriculture producers by making great, superior products... We have to switch to more endemic Mediterranean products, and turn them into a market niche.*

*[I did organic] because I see a future in this. With the conventional thing in ten or twenty years they will be forced to be organic. So I will be the leader.*

In spite of the many challenges that lie ahead, some expressed hope for farming in the future given the increased interest in agriculture as a livelihood:

*Until now, farmers have been put down because of their job...but now that more people are turning to farming and trying to get money from it... there is going to be more respect.*

*If the economic situation improves, farming will be a top job.*

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

The shared experiences of those interviewed for this study only represent a small portion of those involved in the current Greek “back-to-the-land” movement. However, this qualitative, exploratory research reveals challenges and complexities that have hitherto been undocumented, and are important for Greek and international officials and agricultural institutions to understand as they move forward on agriculture policy in Greece and elsewhere throughout Europe. Further, this research expands counterurbanization literature, addressing gaps in our knowledge and deepening our conception of back-to-the-land movements.

Significantly, the wide range of people interviewed for this study shifts current understanding of who is taking part in the Greek farm movement. While the media primarily focuses on educated young adults who have *both* left urban areas and adopted farming (as in Donadio 2012), people already in villages or planning to remain in cities are clearly engaged in, or contemplating, agricultural work. Consequently, not everyone will be approaching farming with the same needs, education level, and agricultural knowledge – which is why government policies such as the “New Farmer Program” may be perceived as ineffective. Further, interviewees’ demographic and geographic diversity also broadens previous conceptions about what “back-to-the-land” movements look like. Rather than agricultural adoption hinging on migration to rural areas, as Halfacree and other migration scholars have posited (Paniagua 2002; Halfacree 2006), new Greek farmers are remaining in cities and commuting to their farms *or* going “back-to-the-land” simply by starting to farm in villages where they already live. This is perhaps due to a few factors: First, because of the role that the economic crisis plays in motivating agriculture activity, individuals are ultimately choosing to farm for economic, rather than pro-rural, reasons. Therefore, a decision to farm is not necessarily related to a desire to live in a rural area. Second, Greece’s small geographic size means that villages are often within an easy two or three hour commute. And third, as discussed in the literature review, Greece’s relatively recent urbanization has kept connections to villages of origin strong. The influence that these factors likely have on the unique back-to-the-land movement unfolding in Greece supports Gkartziotis hypothesis that countries with non-Anglophone urban development paths experience different forms of counterurbanization (2013). Therefore, instead of seeing a traditional counterurbanization process involving physical movement to rural areas, we are observing what we have

termed “farmitization”: a movement towards the farming profession, which does not have to involve a change in residence.

On the other hand, although the “farmitization” process unfolding in Greece differs from previous urban-to-rural movements, the psychological appeal and benefits of farming that interviewees described echoes motivations and sentiments discovered in previous counterurbanization research. In a study about urban-to-rural migration in Spain, Paniagua also identified a desire to “be their own boss” as a major factor attracting urban dwellers to the countryside (2002). This is the exact same phrase used by one farmer quoted above, and echoed by many others throughout interviews.

Interviewees’ reliance on family land also supports Gkartzios’ finding that family connections offer critical support and enable individuals to consider a lifestyle change (2013). Whereas Gkartzios observed the importance of family connections in urban-to-rural migration, our research suggests that family land is the primary reason interviewees can consider agriculture. As the interviewees’ quotes indicate, new Greek farmers with village ties have an advantage because of the knowledge, tools, and funding that often come with their connections. On the other hand, only two individuals who started farming without land were located for this research, despite extensive search through American Farm School connections. Both experienced significant financial barriers to their success, contradicting media pieces (Moss 2012; Foodpolitics’s Videos Blog 2013) and word-of-mouth stories about successful farmers who started from nothing. Therefore, those considering farming in the crisis must be aware of and realistic about their resources and limitations prior to starting; as one new farmer says above: the idea of creating a successful farm without connections is a “fairy tale.” Gkartzios (2013) also points out the restricted options available to those without family land if they want to adopt a rural life. Overall, our research indicates that before starting farming businesses and programs, aspiring farmers and policy makers should consider the importance of prior owned land carefully, and ensure adequate support for individuals who want to start farming without land. Low-cost land rental government programs already exist, but knowledge about such programs does not appear to be widespread.

The advantage and geographic flexibility that family land provides supports the argument of Greek sociology scholars that because Greek “urban and rural spaces were never truly disconnected,” there is significant “social and geographical mobility [for] Greek farmers who migrated to urban areas but never lost their rural connections” (Gkartzios 2013, p. 161 citing Damianakos 2002). Related, the fact that many interviewees are returning and attempting to revitalize their small, scattered family plots may explain the enthusiasm and faith in high quality, Greek-marketed products encountered in interviews. Farmers can charge more for these value-added products, and thereby increase their economic yield from otherwise inefficient and insufficient family plots.

However, contrary to the findings of Gkartzios, and other research about the importance of social capital for individuals in transition (Iosifides, Petracou, Kontis & Lavrentiadou 2007; Kim 2013; Wei, Miyakita, Harada, Ohmori & Ueda 2000) interviewees’ economic success appeared to be independent from the level of emotional support provided by family and other villagers. This was demonstrated by the general indifference interviewees seemed to feel about social disapproval regarding their new profession. Again, this indifference could be because interviewees are not necessarily part of the social groups where they farm, as is the case of those who commute from the city, or because the main support they need and depend on their social networks for is only physical and/or monetary. Additionally, the Internet may reduce the dependence of younger farmers on their parents and farming relatives for knowledge.

Moving beyond the academic implications, taken together, the individual perspectives summarized in this paper indicate that farming has the potential to be a viable livelihood, though serious challenges exist. Although farming is clearly economically difficult for many individuals, it does currently support some interviewees, suggesting that it has the potential to sustain others. This appears to be particularly true for new farmers who have previous

connection to family land, and strive to produce high quality, unique products. Significantly, through this research it emerged that farming is positively impacting people's psychology, providing them with a productive outlet for their time and energy, giving them hope and direction when they are running into barriers elsewhere, and inspiring innovation, creativity and a push to preserve Greek culture. Through farming, people are using resources, primarily land and labor, which would go to waste otherwise. In a moment when around sixty percent of Greek young people are unemployed, the benefit of having an option or at least feeling like there is a way out (even if in reality farming is hard) is noteworthy. In fact, it is mainly because farming inspires such hope in individuals, while also providing them with sustenance, that we conclude that agriculture is a worthwhile investment from a development perspective. On the other hand, our research also exposes some of the major challenges that new farmers face, which include economic instability, lack of capital, insufficient farming and marketing knowledge, and poor government policy. What remains unclear is whether interviewees, and other new farmers throughout the country, will be able to overcome these barriers to support themselves financially and sustainably off the land over the long term.

Answering these key questions requires time and investigation on a larger scale. Taking a more economic approach and assessing the market potential for an agriculture expansion is critical, as is research about the scope of the movement. Long-term study focused solely on new farmers' viability would be a more effective way of determining whether this lifestyle change is feasible. However, a significant challenge facing research that assesses new farmers' success is determining what constitutes livelihood viability. In designing the questions for this study, the "livelihood sustainability" concept, which takes into account economic, social, and environmental factors to determine overall viability (as outlined by Flora et al. 2004), was used as a framework. It is recommended that further research on new farmers' experiences takes the framework into account and more systematically applies the concept, particularly in light of the numerous environmental challenges that currently pose threats to Greece's agriculture system such as climate change, soil salinity and resulting water shortages (Barbayiannis, Panayotopoulos, Psaltopoulos & Skuras 2011, references therein).

In the short term, the farmer perspectives captured through this study indicate that if individuals are going to succeed in agriculture, especially without family land and connections, they need to be provided with the tools and support necessary to overcome financial barriers. As demonstrated through the quotes above, many interviewees believe that the government must change its approach in order to better help new farmers access capital, adequate markets, and experiential farming knowledge. While places like the American Farm School can help those with sufficient financial resources address these challenges, the most economically desperate still need access to free education opportunities. This is where the government can pair with agricultural education institutions and redirect the funding currently going towards ineffective policies, such as the New Farmer Program, towards providing scholarships and start-up funds for those who are interested in attending courses to develop their farm businesses. Further, the government should consider implementing subsidies that support the development of innovative, high-quality agriculture products, thereby enabling passionate young Greeks to carry out their ideas and remain in the country.

Greece is lucky that in spite of recent urbanization and large-scale agriculture's expansion, the country still maintains a strong small-scale, family-run farm system. This research, along with the widespread Greek media coverage and increased AFS enrollment, shows that young people are interested in taking advantage of, and revitalizing agriculture in Greece. The next step is figuring out how to best harness both the land system and the enthusiasm. It is a significant challenge, but the Greek government and other investors in Greece should not miss the chance to keep these young people in the country, especially in light of the brain drain that has been prevalent throughout Greece's modern history. Moreover, investing in agriculture preserves the agrarian landscape that draws Greeks and tourists to the country. If the innovation, inspiration, and hope encountered through this research are allowed to go to waste, that would be a fatal error on the part of those in power in Greece, and a tragedy for the Greek people. As the Greek poet Odysseus Elytis wrote, "If you take Greece apart, you will in the end see that an olive tree, a grapevine, and a boat remain. With these things, you can put her back together."

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