



Students' intentions to engage in agriculture: A case study of the University of Mostar, Faculty of Agriculture and Food Technology

Zrinka Knezović, Marija Lasić, Elma Sefo, Predrag Ivanković

¹ University of Mostar, Faculty of Agriculture and Food Technology, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Abstract

The paper investigates factors that influence the agriculture students' intention to start their own entrepreneurial activity in the agricultural sector after completing their studies. Understanding the motivation of young professionals is crucial for ensuring the renewal of rural areas and the modernisation of agricultural production. The research applied binary logistic regression to determine the influence of a set of independent variables on the probability of choosing an entrepreneurial career (dependent variable). This model includes the following independent variables: demographic characteristics (gender, age, family farming experience, and the area they come from), students' academic and farming profile (average grade during studies and previous experience in agriculture), and psychological factors (propensity to risk and loss and the importance of social support). The research was conducted through an online survey among 62 students of the Faculty of Agriculture and Food Technology University of Mostar in 2026. The research showed that previous experience in agriculture positively correlates with entrepreneurial intention (p 0.034, Odds Ratio 11.982*), while socio-demographic characteristics and study success provide a deeper insight into the structure of future agricultural leaders. The results obtained are consistent with previous research. They provide a basis for the creation of specific educational and incentive-oriented agricultural policies focused on young agronomists, with the aim of reducing entry barriers into the sector and encouraging innovative entrepreneurship. Despite the strategic importance of agricultural production, attracting young professionals to direct entrepreneurship remains one of the key challenges for rural development.

Key words: Agriculture, Entrepreneurship, Students, Binary logistic regression.

Introduction

Modern agriculture faces serious challenges, from climate change to the need for digital transformation, which places highly educated young professionals at the forefront of new developments. Although the agricultural sector offers significant potential for innovation and entrepreneurship, the interest of young people in participating directly in this branch of the economy is questionable. The issue of students' readiness to actively engage in agriculture after graduation is becoming crucial for the sustainable development of rural areas and national food security. Nainggolan and Rommel (2023), according to (Coopmans et al., 2021; May et al., 2019; Meuwissen et al., 2021; Morais et al., 2018; Rech et al., 2021; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2021; Zmija et al., 2020), state that these factors go hand in hand with promoting generational renewal of farms. Many graduates encounter extensive theoretical knowledge during their studies, but they often face uncertainty when it comes to practical application and market competitiveness.

The rural exodus and the perception of agriculture as a physically demanding and economically precarious job further complicate this transition from the education system to the labour market. On the other hand, the emergence of "smart agriculture" and the availability of various EU incentive funds are opening up new opportunities for young agronomists. Understanding the factors that motivate or demotivate students is key to creating better educational policies and long-term economic strategies. The strategic development of agriculture in Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently based on the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BiH (2023-2027), which serves as a key framework for the modernisation of the sector and its alignment with the European Union's agricultural policy (CAP). One of the priorities of this plan is generational renewal, i.e., keeping young people in rural areas through encouraging entrepreneurship. One of the measures that encourages this is the measure "Starting a business by young farmers". In the Federation of BiH this measure has become extremely popular. For example, in 2025 significant funds (over BAM 7.7 million) have been secured to co-finance investments by young farmers (100% of the investment), with individual grants of up to BAM 50.000. The funds are intended for the purchase of mechanisation, basic livestock, raising perennial plantations, and construction of economic facilities. The goal is to reduce the initial financial risk, which is the biggest obstacle for students and young people. The strategy strongly encourages the introduction of IT solutions in agriculture (so-called smart farming) where young experts with a university

degree have a comparative advantage over older generations. When applying for public calls, young entrepreneurs often receive additional points, which makes it easier for them to access grants compared to other applicants. These incentives directly affect the willingness of students to return to family farms or launch their own "start-ups" in agriculture after their studies, because the state increasingly recognises that without professional staff there is no competitive production.

At its session held on 1 November 1994, the Senate of the University of Mostar adopted the Decision on the establishment of the Faculty of Agriculture, which enabled the continuation of the long-standing tradition of education in agriculture. The study is organised according to a three-cycle system as an undergraduate study lasting three years, a graduate study lasting two years, and a doctoral study that also lasts three years. Undergraduate and graduate studies are performed for two study programmes - the studies of Agriculture and Food Technology, as well as Nutrition (graduate).

In recent years, the reasons for enrolling in studies have changed. Motives for enrolling in a certain university study come from the perspective of future employment (Smith, 2013). According to Zrakić and Grgić (2015), the education system is expected to guarantee the use of "generic" employability skills that are adaptable to changes in the work environment. They also emphasise the importance of training students to take responsibility for their own actions (according to Godemann et al., 2011; De Hann, 2006), while shaping their own future (according to Burmeister et al., 2012). All of this can be learned through a well-planned curriculum, which integrates skills for employment with an effective learning strategy (Fallows & Steven, 2002). Although it could be considered the domain of many research areas, self-employment has not been the subject of intensive study. Ideas from related fields were primarily used to develop a solid framework for researching self-employment. In general, the findings showed that factors which explain one phase of the self-employment experience do not necessarily explain others. More substantively, the findings indicate strong effects of socio-structural variables, particularly those related to family, as well as the effects of previous experience in self-employment.

Employability as a concept is defined by Hillage and Pollard (1998) as the ability to obtain and maintain a fulfilling job, and more specifically, employability is the ability to move independently within the labour market in order to realise one's potential through sustainable employment. Rothwell et al. (2009) state that perceptions of employability were good but, within this, respondents placed significant emphasis on the brand and reputation of the university. The results indicated the potential for further research with refined scales, especially a combined scale of employability and ambition. The authors introduce employability through national policy, specific industries, and individual abilities, distinguishing between what an individual possesses (skills)

and what the market offers (demand). The influence of adverse economic conditions on the importance of this topic is emphasised. The authors investigated whether and to what extent the self-perception of employability is influenced by the respondents' attributes such as cultural background, gender, or the possibility of doing professional practice.

According to Janković and Novakov (2012), almost 38% of students from the sample in Serbia enrolled in agricultural studies for some other reason than the desire to study the chosen study programme, which speaks in favour of the general impact of the process of deagrarianisation and the general decline of interest in agricultural studies that occurs in all developed countries, but also the perception of young people regarding agriculture as a profession. Bezinović et al. (1998) pointed out that the key to successful study is satisfaction with the study and students' interests, as well as their motivation. According to the same authors, academic success is a complex phenomenon that is a function of numerous factors, many of which are outside the individual. The causes of failure can be objective reasons such as financial difficulties, inability to obtain a scholarship, poor learning conditions, poor organisation of studies, and the like. According to Brkić and Žutinić (2000), comparative analysis is based on the respondents' sociodemographic characteristics, such as age, gender, level of education and type of school, occupation and professional background of parents. Young people are introducing innovations into production, from new practices to innovative tools and the digitalisation of agriculture (Perez et al., 2016). According to Grgić et al. (2017), 65% of students at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zagreb would like to start their own business in agriculture. Čop et al. (2025), according to Zaremohzzabieh et al. (2021), state that young people who have previous experience in agriculture show a greater tendency to engage in agriculture. They also point out that previous research mainly investigates risk preferences among farmers and the perspective of young educated professionals who have yet to make a decision about their future is ignored. According to Coopmans (2021) and Dessart et al. (2019), many factors such as the legislative framework, social community, the quantity and quality of land, infrastructure, and labour and capital available to farms influence the decision to engage in agriculture in the future.

This paper explores students' attitudes towards their future careers, examining their willingness to take risks and start their own production. The aim of the research is to identify key barriers, such as lack of support or risk aversion, but also to highlight the advantages that higher education brings in the modernisation of villages. The emphasis was on identifying factors associated with students' intention to pursue a career in agriculture. The final results of this research can serve as a basis for a stronger connection between the academic community and the real agricultural sector.

Material and Methods

The research was conducted on a sample of students at the University of Mostar, Faculty of Agriculture and Food Technology, study of Agriculture. Data were collected via a structured survey questionnaire consisting of 10 closed-ended questions via the online platform – Google Forms, which was taken from the research by Nainggolan and Rommel (2023) and adapted. The survey focused on students' attitudes towards engaging in agriculture after completing their studies, i.e., their inclination towards agricultural entrepreneurship, and a maximum of 10 minutes were required to complete the survey. The survey questionnaires were sent by email to the students' addresses with a link to the survey and an accompanying request and explanation that completing the questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous and that the answers would be used for scientific and educational purposes. The closed-ended questions allowed the respondents to choose between the answers offered, which ensures objectivity and easier quantitative processing. The questionnaire was designed to collect sociodemographic data and specific information relevant to the research objectives. A review of the scientific and professional literature related to the topic of this paper was secondary research. The collected data were processed using two levels of statistical analysis. Response frequency and percentages (%) describe the basic characteristics of the sample and arithmetic mean and standard deviation (Knezović, 2019). This provided a clear overview of general trends within the group of students studied. Binary regression analysis was applied to determine the influence of independent variables on a specific dependent variable (with a binary outcome of intentions to engage in agricultural entrepreneurship yes-1/no-0, which is the natural logarithm of the odds ratio). According to Peng et al. (2002), logistic regression is suitable for testing statistical hypotheses about the relationships of a binary dependent variable with multiple independent variables. This method enabled the prediction of the probability of a certain student's attitude based on the independent variables (predictors) to be analysed: gender, place of residence, age (3 categories), farming done by at least one parent, average study grade (scale of 5), loss aversion, importance of social support, personal experience with agricultural activities, and risk preferences.

The basic logistic regression model looks like this:

$$\ln\left(\frac{P(A)}{1-P(A)}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot X_1 + \beta_2 \cdot X_2 + \dots + \beta_k \cdot X_k$$

In logistic regression, the odds ratio and correct classification are of the greatest interest. The above equation shows that logit is actually the logarithm of the odds ratio. The odds ratio indicates how many times more likely one event is to occur than another (Švoger, 2002). In the case of a dichotomous variable, such as gender, the odds ratio in binary logistic regression indicates how many times more likely it is that a discrepancy occurs in one gender than in the other. If it is a variable with multiple modalities, then the odds ratio refers to the reference category that can be chosen between the first and last categories of a certain variable (Mrnjavac & Benčić, 2014). For the purposes of regression analysis, multicollinearity between independent variables was performed. The survey was conducted in the period from 2 March to 31 March 2026. The survey was completed by 62 students. Data processing was performed in Microsoft Excel 2019 and Statistical package IBM SPSS 27.

Results and Discussion

The sample (Table 1) included more male respondents 36 (58.1%), the average age of respondents being 22.5 years (min. 18, max. 26, $s = 2.13$). Majority of respondents came from rural areas 44 (71%). There were more students whose parents were not farmers, namely 33 (53.2%). The highest number of responses was recorded for an average grade of 3.00 to 3.50, namely 19 (30.6%). The average grade of respondents was 3.52, and the standard deviation $s = 0.64$, which is very similar to the research conducted by Čop et al. (2025). 50 respondents analysed had experience in agriculture (80.6%). Almost identical responses were for the dependent variable 'Intention to engage in agriculture in the future' after completing their studies, as 49 students responded affirmatively (79%). These results are similar to the research by Nainggolan and Rommel (2023), and according to Grgić et al. (2017), half of the respondents stated that they wanted to start their own business. 44 respondents (71%) were willing to take risks, and slightly fewer respondents (34 or 54.8%) were willing to take losses, which indicates a higher sensitivity to losses. As many as 53 respondents (85.5%) emphasised the importance of social support, although it was not specified in what form.

Tab. 1 - Predictor variables included in the binary logistic regression model/ Sample description

Predictor variables	Variables	Code	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	0	26	41.9
	Male	1	36	58.1
Family from a rural area	Urban area	0	18	29
	Rural area	1	44	71
At least one parent is a farmer	No	0	33	53.2
	Yes	1	29	46.8
Average grade during studies	Below 3.00	0	11	17.7
	From 3.00 to 3.50	1	19	30.6
	From 3.50 to 4.00	2	17	27.4
	From 4.00 to 4.50	3	12	19.4
	Above 4.50	4	3	4.8
Risk propensity/ Risk taking	I am ready to take the risk	0	44	71
	I'm not ready to take the risk	1	18	29
Importance of social support	Social support is not important to me	0	9	14.5
	Social support is important to me	1	53	85.5
Experience in agriculture	I have no experience so far	0	12	19.4
	I have experience	1	50	80.6
Age	18-21	0	19	30.6
	21-23	1	20	32.3
	23-26	2	23	37.1
Loss aversion	I am ready for losses	0	34	54.8
	I'm not ready for losses	1	28	45.2

Binary logistic regression was used to examine the characteristics (predictors) associated with the intention to practice agriculture after completing studies (dependent variable) on the labour market. Multicollinearity between independent variables was not noted. The model as a whole is significant (less than 0.05) and the independent variables in the model have a significant influence on the investigated outcome. Omnibus test of Model Coefficients $\chi^2 = 22.922$, and sig. 0.006. Based on the results of the Hosmer and Lemeshow test model, Table 2, a statistically insignificant Chi-square indicator was obtained (it should be greater than 0.05), which indicates that the model was well adapted to the data ($\chi^2 = 5.478$, sig. 0.705, df = 8).

Tab. 2 - The Hosmer and Lemeshow test of goodness-of-fit

Chi-square	df	Sig.
5.478 +	8	0.705

Tab. 3 - Classification table of the binary logistic regression analysis

Observed		Predicted		
		Intention		Percentage correct
		No	Yes	
Intention	No	6	7	46.2
	Yes	2	47	95.9
Overall percentage				85.5

The hit ratio in the classification table shows that 85.5% of all the outcomes were correctly predicted by the performed model (Table 3). Overall percentage of 85.5% shows the predictive accuracy of the model.

Tab. 4 - Model summary

Step	-2 likelihood	Log &Cox Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	40.756a	0.309	0.481

Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than 0.001

Nagelkarke R Square was 0.481, which means that 48% of the variables explained the model and this confirms the adequacy of the model. The final model explains between 30% (Cox and Snell R Square) and 48% (Nagelkerke R Square) of the variance of the dependent variable (Table 4).

Since all tests indicate that the model is well-adjusted and predicts well, logistic regression follows.

The first column in Table 5 shows the coefficients of the binary logistic regression while the second column represents the odds ratio, which is in the logistic regression and the element being interpreted. S.E. shows the stability of the coefficient. A small standard error means that repeated sampling would probably give a similar coefficient. It ranged from 0.5 to 1.344 (Table 5). Wald is the value of the test itself. The higher the number, the less likely it is that the influence of that variable is random (for the variable experience in agriculture, the highest value is 4.696). From Table 5 with the results of the binary logistic regression, it is evident that only the independent variable 'Experience with implementing agricultural activities' affects the intention to engage in agriculture after graduating from college, based on significance (p 0.034) which should be less than 0.05. The results are consistent with previous results by other authors (Čop et al., 2025; Nainggolan & Romeel, 2023). Other independent variables did not show statistical significance and did not affect the dependent variable. Although it could be expected that people who are more prone to risk would show greater tendency toward entrepreneurship and an intention to engage in agriculture, in this study they did not show a statistically significant relationship,

nor in the aforementioned works by Čop et al. (2025) and Nainggolan and Rommel (2023). The same authors cite insufficient experience in the market environment as possible reasons.

Tab. 5 - Results of the binary logistic regression

Independent variables (Predictors)	Model				
	B	Odds Ratio	Sig.	S.E.	Wald
At least one parent is a farmer	-0.013	0.987	0.992	1.344	0.000
Average grade during studies	0.670	1.955	0.180	0.500	1.795
Risk propensity/ Risk taking	-1.714	0.180	0.109	1.068	2.575
Importance of social support	1.461	4.309	0.215	1.177	1.539
Experience in agricultural activities	2.483	11.982*	0.034	1.146	4.696
Age	-0.458	0.633	0.463	0.623	0.539
Loss aversion	1.542	4.672	0.109	0.961	2.572
Gender	-0.031	0.969	0.976	1.062	0.001
Family from a rural area	0.445	1.560	0.731	1.292	0.119

*p < 0.05

Variables 'Risk propensity/ Risk taking' and 'Importance of social support' should not be completely rejected based solely on their p-values. Although they did not reach statistical significance, their coefficients and strong effect sizes (e.g., an Odds Ratio of 4.309 for social support) suggest substantial practical importance. It is highly recommended to discuss these variables as potentially critical factors that future research with a larger sample size would likely confirm. Half of the employed in rural areas of Serbia are engaged in agricultural activities within the framework of family farms, and unemployment in rural areas is characterised by a very high participation of the long-term unemployed, according to Janković and Novakov (2012). They also point out a whole series of influential structural factors, such as general socio-economic underdevelopment of the local environment, underdevelopment of infrastructure (transportation, utilities, telecommunications, etc.), underdevelopment of services, inability to transport, remoteness, passivity in the local environment (aging population, lack of cultural and entertainment facilities, lack of perspective, lack of local dynamics, etc.), greater exposure to natural disasters, etc. Brkić et al. (2002) point out that agriculture is not given adequate attention

and students' attitude towards vocational education for farmers is closely related to their professional aspirations regarding family farming. According to Thephavanh et al. (2023), young agribusinesses identified three significant limitations of agricultural information and extension services that hinder commercial agriculture or young agribusiness in Laos: inadequate work of extension staff (43.2%), lack of coordination and consumer education (33.8%), and limited nature (28.4%) and scope (36.5% technical and 18.9% non-technical) of information provided. They also point out that regarding the nature of the information provided, agro-entrepreneurs suggest more practical activities, follow-up, and monitoring as well as more visualisation and innovations such as the use of posters and videos. According to Zaremohzzabieh (2021), the results in students' attitudes towards agriculture as a career differed by gender and place of residence for all predictors, except for the conditions of facilitating resources. Also, according to Carroll (1987), an interesting conclusion about gender is that the data shows that there are fewer women in pure self-employment (company owners), but more of them in the family business category (e.g., the owner's wife working in the company). According to Coopmans et al. (2021), better insight is needed into whether early involvement and socialisation in agriculture, including the transfer of tacit knowledge, should be replaced, for example, by training and education programmes. These programmes should not only aim at building technical knowledge about food production, but also at developing accounting, management, and entrepreneurial skills. Young people are ideal catalysts for the development of the agricultural sector, given their readiness to adopt new ideas, concepts, and technologies. Further research is needed on the propensity of young people to adopt modern agricultural practices. Key points for future development are longitudinal monitoring: checking whether students actually remain in the profession after 5 or 10 years, modernisation: focusing on digital agriculture and highly educated personnel, and inclusivity: increasing the focus on the role of young women in agribusiness (Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2021). They also report that a positive attitude was the strongest predictor. Students who believe that a career in agriculture will be beneficial to them and their communities are more likely to work in this sector. Students' attitudes are influenced by a growing number of factors in general, and on the other hand, most factors have similar effects (Ostović et al., 2017).

Conclusion

After conducting a survey among students of the Faculty of Agriculture and Food Technology University of Mostar, a binary logistic regression was conducted with the aim of determining the influence of nine independent

variables on students' future involvement in agriculture after graduation. More than half of the respondents expressed a desire to engage in agriculture independently after graduation. It is concluded that students' decisions about entrepreneurship and intentions to engage in agriculture depend significantly only on working experience in agriculture, and not on risk appetite, as could be assumed. Therefore, attention should be paid to students' practical experience in the market and financial environment for better assessment and greater security, and this can certainly be an incentive for changes and improvements in the curricula. Attention should be paid to education, such as business planning, access to credit and agricultural insurance, as well as better promotion, such as encouraging careers in agriculture and transparency of the system. It is recommended to develop specific strategic and national policy measures, such as targeted start-up grants and subsidised risk insurance, to mitigate perceived barriers and enhance the attractiveness of the agricultural sector for young professionals. Further targeted policy measures must be aimed at enabling the work of small businesses and young people in general, and promoting greater familiarity with agriculture. Universities should also maintain an active recruitment campaign to facilitate the creation of employment opportunities for urban and rural agricultural students. Students may be further encouraged to venture into agricultural activities knowing that there is university and government support. A better understanding of the factors that shape students' decisions about future careers can raise awareness of where programmatic efforts are likely to be most effective, and help educational decision makers respond to students' motivational needs when recruiting and retaining staff. Besides including agriculture students from other institutions in the survey, future research could be expanded to encompass some other variables to enrich the field of research. These results serve as a basis for further research on the complexity of interactions that affect the practice of agriculture, with the caveat that the small sample size may be a limitation of the study.

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Намјере студената да се баве пољопривредом: Студија случаја Агрономског и прехранбено-технолошког факултета Свеучилишта у Мостару

Зринка Кнезовић, Марија Ласић, Елма Сефо, Предраг Иванковић

*Свеучилиште у Мостару, Агрономски и прехранбено-технолошки факултет,
Мостар, Босна и Херцеговина*

Сажетак

Рад истражује факторе који утичу на намјеру студената пољопривреде да започну сопствену предузетничку активност у пољопривредном сектору након завршетка студија. Разумијевање мотивације младих стручњака је кључно за обезбјеђивање обнове руралних подручја и модернизацију пољопривредне производње. У истраживању је примјењена бинарна логистичка регресија како би се утврдио утицај скупа независних варијабли на вјероватноћу избора предузетничке каријере (зависна варијабла). Модел укључује следеће независне варијабле: демографске карактеристике (пол, старост, искуство у пољопривреди у породици и подручје из којег потичу), академски и практични профил (просјечна оцјена на студијама и претходно искуство у пољопривреди) и психолошки фактори (склоност ка ризику и губитку и значај социјалне подршке). Истраживање је спроведено путем онлајн анкете међу 62 студента Агрономског и прехранбено-технолошког факултета Свеучилишта у Мостару 2026. године. Истраживање је показало да претходно искуство у пољопривреди позитивно корелира са предузетничком намером ($p < 0,034$, Ods Коефицијент 11,982*), док социо-демографске карактеристике и успјех у студијама пружају дубљи увид у структуру будућих пољопривредних лидера. Добијени резултати су у складу са претходним истраживањима. Резултати рада пружају основу за креирање специфичних образовних и подстицајних пољопривредних политика усмјерених на младе агрономе, са циљем смањења баријера за улазак у сектор и подстицања иновативног предузетништва. Упркос стратешком значају пољопривредне производње, привлачење младих стручњака у директно предузетништво остаје један од кључних изазова за рурални развој.

Кључне ријечи: пољопривреда, предузетништво, студенти, бинарна логистичка регресија.

Corresponding author: Zrinka Knezović
E-mail: zrinka.knezovic@aptf.sum.ba

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