ISSUES AROUND AGRICULTURAL DATA GOVERNANCE – THE FARMERS’ PERSPECTIVE

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Data-Driven Digital Agriculture, World Bank Group Webinar
3 December 2020
‘Digital agriculture’ is all about the use of data in agro-food sectors.

Agricultural data includes: Farm administrative data and farm production data (e.g. agronomic data, farmland data, farm management data, farm machinery data).
An enabling data governance is important for growth and innovation in agriculture

• But surveys highlight farmers’ concerns about the governance of agricultural data, that may hinder data collection, sharing and use:
  
  ➢ Control, access, use and re-use of data by third parties
  ➢ Who benefits from using agricultural data collected on and about their farms?
  ➢ Improper use of personal and commercially sensitive data
  ➢ Lock-in effects and ‘right to repair’

OECD paper explores how existing data governance arrangements shape how agricultural data can be accessed, shared and used
The relationship between farmers, and machinery and service providers, is defined through contracts.

These often set the conditions around farm data:
- They define with whom the service provider may share the data, or what occurs to the data once the contract comes to an end.

But there may be imbalances in contractual relationships:
- Contracts may be offered on a ‘take it or leave it’ basis, the terms of use for the data may be buried within long and complex legal documents.
Do privacy rules apply to agricultural data?

- Sometimes farming activities are closely linked with farmers’ households, and privacy frameworks could apply.

- But when is agricultural data personal data?  
  - This is unclear and may vary by country.

- And are privacy rules the most appropriate to govern agricultural data?
Don’t farmers just ‘own’ their data?

• Many claim that they do, but it is more complicated than it seems.

• What does it mean to own data?
  • No existing legal arrangement corresponds to ‘owning’ data

• Policy makers could create such right, but is it a good solution?
  • What really matters is the conditions for access, share and use of data
Sectoral initiatives to address concerns – codes of conduct

- Agricultural data **codes of conduct**
  - Developed by industry bodies, sometimes with governments
  - Define principles and good practices around farm data for service providers to follow
  - They encourage transparency, openness, the possibility to transfer data between providers, etc
  - They are self-regulatory in principle, but certification mechanisms exist to provide signals to farmers
  - Examples: United States’ Privacy and Security Principles for Farm Data and Ag Data Transparency Evaluator; New Zealand Farm Data Code of Practice, Standards and Accreditation, others...

- Because they are only **voluntary** in nature → difficult to understand their impact
Sectoral initiatives to address concerns – data cooperatives

• Farm **data cooperatives** as alternative model for sharing data
  • Cooperative members pooling data
  • They allow members to generate ‘big data’ insights…
  • .. while giving farmers more leverage to negotiate contracts and data sharing arrangements
  • Examples: Ag data coalition; Grower Information Services Cooperative, others..

• Still some challenges, due to **confidentiality**, technical **interoperability**, etc.
Facilitating access to publicly and privately-held data may also yield benefits.

To foster access to agricultural data:
- Open data approaches
- Data markets and platform

Key challenges to overcome: Confidentiality; data quality; data interoperability; cross-border data restrictions.
Conclusion

• Effective policy-making for digitalisation in agriculture goes **beyond agriculture** policy circles
  
  → Important to secure seat at the table, ensuring that wider decisions on the regulation of data take into the account the needs and potential effects of regulation on agriculture
  
  → Important to consider concerns and needs of **all stakeholders**

• **Need to improve farmers’ understanding** of policy environment

• **International dialogue** to ensure flow of knowledge and services across borders
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