



Land costs

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1 – Land: a special type of asset

- **The service life of agricultural land is indefinite** (\neq to capital and variable inputs): it can maintain its physical characteristics through time
- **Land cannot be depreciated**: it does not strictly qualify as a capital asset
- **In practice, land quality varies overtime** (+ or -), depending on several factors such as:
 - Nature and intensity of its use for cropping, pasture or other
 - Changes in climatic conditions and in the environment (physical and non-physical)
- A plot of land has a **fixed geographical position**
- **Land use and cover vary overtime**: conversion of agricultural to non-agricultural land for example

2 – Why valuing land costs

- **Land is an essential production factor** for cropping activities: as any production factor, it has to be valued to measure profitability
- A range of **costs are attached to land ownership and use**
- **For the land owner**, the selling or rental value of his land can represent a significant share of its revenues
- **For the farmer renting land**, rental costs usually represents a significant share of its total production costs
- Land values are also used for **fiscal purposes**
- **Land values affect and are affected by many factors**, among which input prices, net agricultural margins, etc. -> it is therefore key for policy purposes to properly measure land values and costs

3 – Land tenure types

- **Owned land** comprises:
 - Land owned by the farmer
 - Land owned by a group of persons, in the case of communal land
 - Land under concession, whereby an authority gives a person or group of persons the right to carry out farming activities for a pre-defined and often long period of time
- **Rented land** implies that:
 - The farmer pays a monetary rent in exchange of the use of the land
 - The farmer gives the land owner a share of its harvest in payment for the use of the land
 - The farmer provides goods or services to the land owner in exchange of the use of the land: labor to harvest the plots of the land owners, machinery, etc.
- **Land tenure type is often not formalized by a title of property or a rental contract** => challenge for a proper valuation

4 – Value of land: definition and drivers

- **Land value = market value of the land resources** used for agricultural production (including livestock), irrespective of the land tenure type
- Infrastructure not directly related to land resources, such as housing or warehouses, have to be valued separately
- **The value of the land depends on a multitude of factors, related to:**
 - Its assumed productivity, such as: soil acidity level, topography (slope, etc.) or orientation
 - The infrastructures that improve land quality, such as: drains, embankment or access to water (wells, etc.)
 - Its localization: distance to the main markets, proximity to roads or urban centers, existence of conflicts in the zone
 - The status of the land: private, communal, state-owned, religious
 - The land regulations: fiscal, land ownership structure and rights

5 – Land: expenses, investment, capital

- **Expenses** associated to agricultural land comprise:
 - Cost of the regular maintenance of the land, such as cleaning, clearing or embankment refection
 - Costs related to the use of the land, such as taxes or access rights to water
- **Investments** are expenses that aim at:
 - Increasing land resources: purchase of new agricultural land
 - Improving the quality of the land resources: construction of drainage systems, roads, creation of terraces or earthmoving works
- **Land capital:** value of the stock of agricultural land resulting from the flow of investments made on and for the land

6 – Land costs: definition

- **Land costs comprise:**
 - Expenses associated with the agricultural land
 - The cost of using the land for agricultural purposes:
 - Rental price if the land is rented
 - Imputed cost if the land is owned
- **Land costs exclude:**
 - Investments made on the land
 - Expenses associated with farm infrastructure not directly related to the land resources (housing, storage facilities, etc.)
 - Expenses associate to farm land but not agricultural land: maintenance and repair of warehouses, silos, etc.

7 – Land rental costs (1/2)

Recommended approach

- **Use the rental price effectively paid** by the farmer as stipulated in the rental contract
- **If the rent corresponds to a share of the harvest**, the cost is estimated by valuing the quantities at the producer price
- **The rental price is the best measure** of the opportunity cost of the land. It comprises by construction:
 - The cost of using the land, including taxes, permits and other expenses associated to the value/quality of the land
 - The cost of maintaining the land
 - The implicit value of the land, reflected in the yield which it generates

7 – Land rental costs (2/2)

Alternative approach

- **If the rental price is unknown** (informal contract, non-response):
 - The cost has to be imputed using standard market rates in the locality
 - Given the spatial variability of the land rental prices, it is necessary to choose locality-specific rates
- **If rental markets for agricultural land are too thin or inexistent**, market rates cannot be used. Possible alternatives are to:
 - Use official rates, where these exist, which often provide floor prices
 - Impute an rental cost based on the parameters of a hedonic equation
 - Estimate an opportunity cost based on the value of the land

8 – Cost imputation for owned land (1/3)

Recommended approach (from a theoretical perspective):

- **Determine the opportunity costs (OCC)** for the farmer associated with the ownership of the land: the flow of revenues that would have been generated had the farmer invested an amount equivalent to the value of his land in an alternative asset
- The opportunity cost is estimated as follows:
 - Step 1: **determination of the market value of the land**
 - Step 2: **determination of the annual return of the alternative investment** (often, long-term bond rates are chosen)
 - Step 3: **OCC = market value of the land x annual return**
- **Limits:** Value of the land? Alternative investment?

5 – Cost imputation for owned land (2/3)

Alternative approach (recommended from a practical viewpoint):

- **Impute a fictive rent to the land owner:** the rental price that he would have received had he chosen to rent his land rather than using it
- **Local rental rates can be used** for plots with similar characteristics, if a representative rental market for agricultural exists
- This approach implicitly assumes that the cost for the owner of using his land is equivalent to what he would have received as a payment for renting the land (opportunity cost / rationality principle)
- **This approach implicitly assumes that imputed rent is actually an upper bound of the net returns provided by the land:** if the net revenues associated with the ownership and use of the land for agricultural purposes are higher than rental revenues, the owner would be better off choosing the latest option

5 – Cost imputation for owned land (3/3)

- **Rental rates for farming land may be subject to local or national regulations**, specifying:
 - Ceiling rates, and
 - Floor rates (less often so)
- Using this administrative information makes an economic sense only if these rates are effectively used by a significant proportion of farmers
- **Regulated rates may be used to impute missing data**, if other auxiliary information is missing
- It is a good practice, when the estimations are made using regulated prices, to present overall results with and without these estimations
- **Practical problems** (which rate to choose) **and confidentiality issues** (will the farmer accept to respond ?) **arise when effective rates differ from legal rates**, exposing a lack of enforcement of the regulation

6 – Presenting data on land costs

- **Land costs are presented in a separate line** in CoP tables
- **Imputed costs for owned land and rental costs are generally presented separately**
- **Many countries present the economic indicators with and without imputed land costs, due to:**
 - **The high uncertainty** affecting the estimation of land costs
 - **The lack of robustness** of these estimations (strong variations depending on the method used)
 - Including imputed costs may sometimes lead to presenting strongly **negative returns**

7 – References

- **AAEA Task Force on Commodity Costs and Returns (2000).** *Commodity Costs and Returns Estimation Handbook*. United States Department of Agriculture: Ames, Iowa, USA.
- **Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (2016)**, Handbook on Agricultural Cost of Production Statistics, Handbook and Guidelines, pp.78-79. FAO: Rome.
- **Canada Statistics:** <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/21-013-x/2011002/t002-eng.htm>