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Poster 2

IS THERE A WEAKEST LINK? AN APPLICATION OF THE INNOVATION VALUE CHAIN CONCEPT TO ONTARIO FARM BUSINESSES

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Innovation is a central element of the farming sector's competitiveness. Analysing how farmers innovate and whether weaknesses in the innovation process limit adoption of new technologies and practices is thus of direct practical value to farm businesses. For policy decision makers and service providers, such analysis of the innovation process generates value through guiding program and service development. However, the innovation process is complex, with many factors determining success.

We used the innovation value chain concept to structure the process and develop specific research questions. The innovation value chain concept breaks down the innovation process into three stages, idea generation/knowledge sourcing; idea conversion/knowledge transformation; and idea diffusion/knowledge exploitation. The concept postulates that the weakest stage of the process, i.e. the weakest link of the chain, determines innovation success. We suggest 'strongest link' and 'average score on all three links' as competing hypotheses.

Data were collected through an online survey administered by Ipsos Agriculture and Animal Health among Ontario farmers in April 2013. Sample size is 405. The innovation value chain links were measured through a scale with nine questions, three for each stage. Innovation output was measured as adoption of 'new to the farm' technologies and practices with two levels of extent based on a list of 34 product development, production process, organizational and marketing innovations.

The hypotheses have not been tested yet, as data cleaning proved to be laborious and time consuming. However, preliminary findings suggest that the scores for each of three stages of the innovation value chain are not closely correlated. That means that farm businesses that are relatively strong in one stage of the innovation value chain may indeed be relatively weaker in others. The 405 farms in the sample reported the following 'great extent' innovations in the four innovation areas: 104 in marketing, 140 in organization/business management, 407 in production process and 137 in product development.