

Round table : How to present economic experiments to research funders and policy makers?

Chaired by Marianne Lefebvre (University Angers)

With the participation of: Alban Thomas (head of the INRA Division for economic and social science SAE2, France), Francois Dessart (JRC – European Commission, EU Policy Lab), Yves Plees (European Commission, DG Agri, Evaluation and Studies Unit), Vanina Forget (Ministry of agriculture, CEP, France) & Jussi Lankoski (OECD Trade and Agriculture Directorate, Environment Division)

We report here the responses made by participants to three questions:

- (1) what kind of policy evaluations are conducted/ used in your institution?
- (2) Can you see complementarities between policy evaluation tools, including experimental approaches?
- (3) How could we advocate better the recourse to experimental approaches for agricultural policy evaluation?

1) In your institution

Despite the rapidly growing number of academic publications on economic experiments, and the success of experimental approaches for policy advice in various domains of public economics, the mobilization of such approaches in agricultural policy design and evaluation has remained surprisingly limited up to now. Where does your institution stand?

1.1) What is your experience with experimental methods: do you use experiments to inform your policy? do you report experimental studies in your publications?

1.2) What is the main driver / barrier for the spread of such methods in your environment?

Jussi Lankoski (OECD)

As a researcher at OECD, I have conducted a field experiment in Finland on conservation auctions and I used choice experiments to evaluate farmers behavior with respect to agri-environmental measures. The OECD has no barriers to the use of economic experiments in its programs. It also develops a horizontal program on behavioral economics.

The analysis provided in this workshop could maybe be presented in the farm level analysis network.

Vanina Forget (Centre d'Etudes et Prospectives, Ministry of Agriculture, France):

My unit conducts economic analysis for the ministry of agriculture. Most evaluations are ex-post and use both quantitative and qualitative methods. We do not conduct evaluations ourselves, we subcontract them. We have increased the rate of in itinere evaluations (during policy implementation phase).

Ex-ante evaluations are not common in our field (more frequent for trade analysis) and are usually based on models. We have not used experiments so far but we are very interested in the use of the methodology.

The CEP also writes policy briefs and a blog read by (French) policy makers: an idea is invite researchers to come and present results using this methodology

Barriers to experimental approaches: paying different farmers in different ways is problematic (ethical, social acceptability, equity between farmers)

Yves Plees (European Commission):

The EC Evaluation Unit conducts:

- ex-ante evaluation (called impact assessment -with very strict procedures-), mainly in-house

- Ex-post evaluation: conducted by contractualized independent evaluators, 8 to 9 calls for tenders each year Studies are also conducted within "framework contracts"

Methodology is never imposed:

- Researchers are free to propose a methodology
- Experimental methods are allowed
- There were very few responses to calls with experimental approaches so far

Francois Dessart (JRC):

The policy lab advocates the use of behavioral evidence for policy making. The unit was created 2 years ago (team of 5 persons). The policy lab does not run experiments but reviews literature quoting experimental approaches.

Barriers to experimental approaches: lack of awareness of policy makers of behavioral sciences (it has improved recently), the time frame allowed is short compared to the time needed to run experiments

Drivers: evidence-based policy making is gaining a lot of attention

Alban Thomas (French Institute for Agricultural Research):

There are 126 scientists in the Social science Division, of which around 25 economists doing experimental economics, 8-12 doing RCT, choice or field experiments

Inra also provides expertise for policy makers, not only about the CAP but also food safety, labelling, ecological footprint

Barriers to experimental approaches: Legal (we cannot do anything we want with individuals), ethical

INRA has decided to make public its databases: is this possible for experiments? How?

How to transfer results from developing to developed countries?

2) Complementarities with other evaluation tools

Good practices in policy evaluation include making use of the complementarities between different evaluation tools and triangulating the results drawn from different methods. As stated by Harrison (2014), "There are good, scientific reasons for the popularity of experiments, but the challenge is to keep a balanced eye on what [field] experiments can do that improves on, or complements, other methods".

2.1) In your opinion, what is missing in standard evaluation? Do you think that experiments can fill this gap?

2.2) Can you mention a specific case where you supplemented traditional evaluation tools with experiments?

Policy evaluation is not only the identification of the causal pathway and the measure of the net effect of treatment. We also have to measure efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, added value when EU does it compared to the member states doing it, and policy coherence. Therefore several methods are needed.

Contractors are usually specialized in the measure of efficiency and effectiveness.

We need more complementarities with standard approaches and experiments, e.g. produce experimental design from model or build model from experimental data

Complementary tools: theoretical frameworks, theoretical modelling, policy simulations, ex post evaluations, fuzzy logic etc.

3) Launching new projects

Researchers participating to this conference are interested in identifying with you the topics and questions in the field of agricultural policy that can best be addressed through economic experiments.

4.1) Do you have any topics or questions to suggest to researchers, to allow experiments to make a solid contribution to the policy-making process?

EC-DG Agri /OECD: the hot topic are collaborative measures, insurance tools, auctions, results-based, ecosystem service markets, nudges

4.2) Do you have any suggestions concerning funding opportunities? Does your institution offer financial support to projects where experimental approaches are relevant?

INRA: Flagship programs on e.g. climate change, food safety, ...with calls for proposals each year (open to international partnership)

4.3) What key characteristics should an economic experiment-focused proposal meet?

JRC: there is a need to conduct studies in different member states, not in all but in 5 to 10 different countries (typical selection). Contextualized results are important for policy makers.
Next call for tenders in 2018/2019