

Contribution pour la session organisée « Evaluation des politiques agricoles : évolution des objectifs, des méthodes et des données »

Le rôle croissant des approches expérimentales dans l'évaluation ex-ante et ex-post des politiques agricoles

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The increasing role of experimental approaches in ex ante and ex post agricultural policies evaluation

The mobilization of economic experimental data in agricultural policy design and evaluation is gaining importance. Experimental data are generated in a controlled setting with different variations but always with a randomized assignment of participants to treatment and control groups. In contrast to “naturally-occurring” observational data, experimental data are obtained through a rigorous experimental protocol. This allows for a clearer identification of impact and causality and results which are potentially replicable in different contexts or with different types of participants. Several types of economic experiments may be used to ex ante or ex post evaluate agricultural policies. They vary according to: experimental subjects (from students to policy stakeholders, here farmers), the environment in which the experiment takes place (laboratory, lab-in-the-field, or farmers’ natural context), and the type of experimental setting (discrete choice experiments, experimental games with or without financial incentives, or the real-world implementation of the policy to be tested through randomized control trials).

The increasing use of experimental approaches for agricultural policy evaluation can be explained by the fact that such methods answers to some of the new challenges associated with the needed adaptation of CAP evaluation toolbox (Colen et al, 2015, 2016). Indeed, policy-makers are increasingly accountable for CAP spending and the emphasis is put on more evidence-based policy recommendations. More attention is granted to cause-effect relationships of policies and to the additionality of their effects. Since it is difficult, and not always possible, to identify a quasi-experimental situation for which outcomes can be compared to a proper counterfactual in observational data, building an experimental situation is another way to have a counterfactual to demonstrate and measure impact. Moreover, behavioral analysis, often making use of economic experiments, have highlighted the need to understand better the decision context beyond the simple

¹ The three authors are co-founders of the Research network on Economic Experiments for the CAP (REECAP network). REECAP is a EU-wide informal consortium created in 2017, open to those who wish to promote behavioural analysis and economic experimental designs for the ex-ante and ex-post evaluation of European agricultural policies. REECAP’s objectives is to contribute to the constant improvement of European agricultural policies, by providing robust results on their net impact, but also by helping to design well-adjusted and effective policy interventions.

profit maximization assumption, in order to predict economic agents' responses to different policy instruments and to design more efficient and cost-effective policies.

We will present examples of recent work showcasing the interests of experimental approaches and the complementarity with other evaluation tools in the following areas: i) The role of behavioural factors in farmers' decisions and reactions to agricultural policy, as well as the evaluation of policy designs taking account of these behavioural biases; ii) The ex-ante evaluation of innovative measures and incentives that could be mobilized by the CAP to achieve its goals; iii) The ex-post evaluation of CAP measures through field experiments and randomized controlled trials.

We will also discuss some of the many methodological challenges related to the generation of experimental data in the context of the agri-food sector: for example the ethical concerns relating to the set-up of randomized control trials (RCTs) especially in Europe, the issue of representativeness linked to the control of sampling and assignment biases in particular when organizing field experiments with farmers, the choice of the right balance between internal and external validity of chosen experimental protocols, etc. We will try to have a general view beyond the CAP. We propose to present efforts which are done to promote and develop experimental approaches for agricultural evaluation through REECAP (Research network on Economic Experiments for the CAP) a European-wide informal consortium, but also what is done at the CBEAR (Center for Behavioral & Experimental Agri-Environmental Research) a USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) national Center of Excellence, or elsewhere in the world.

We will also question the need of building a shared experimental data platform or shared experimental data bases. Open to researchers, experts and policy makers, such a shared platform could indeed offer many services. It could centralize and make available already obtained experimental data, it could be useful to coordinate studies or replications of experiments in different countries or different contexts, it could increase the dissemination and eventually the impact of experimental results and may foster the integration of experimental data into "simulation models" or any other agricultural policy evaluation tool, etc.

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