

# An Exploration of Innovation Adoption and Family Farming Dynamics Throughout Intergenerational Transition

Sean Lally, MS

Family farming operations in the United States are the backbone of the American agricultural economy. Yet, these farms are threatened by corporate encroachment and sector wide intergenerational transition of ownership and the uncertainty of succession outcomes. This study used a set of theoretical constructs (centralization, formalization, interconnectedness, organizational slack, size) from Rogers's (2003) Innovation Diffusion Model of Structural Characteristics and Organizational Innovativeness to explore the dynamics between farm innovativeness and intergenerational family leadership and succession. The exploration was conducted through a multiple case study (Yin, 2018) of six family owned and operated produce farms within California's San Joaquin Valley. Intergenerational transition presents a unique opportunity to enhance the innovativeness of family farms and in doing so bolster their overall viability during periods of leadership succession. Data were collected from three sources (semi-structured interviews, direct observations, social media artifacts) over a three-month period in the spring of 2022. The findings illuminated three themes of intergenerational family farms and organizational innovativeness that bring nuance to the theoretical application of Roger's innovation adoption constructs relative to the intergenerational family farm sector. The three themes included: generational leadership positioning, formalization and centralization, and interconnectedness and ingenuity. These themes were drawn on to generate insights into and recommendations for the proactive integration of innovation adoption with intergenerational family farming leadership dynamics.

## References

- Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Free Press.
- Yin, RK (2008). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES

**Agricultural Education,  
Technology & Innovation**