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This research aims to examine how family farm viability, sustainability and resilience can be enhanced through co-operation. Family farm survival is considered to be largely determined by economic viability, however, aspects of sustainability and resilience also prove influential. Family farms, through various resilience strategies such as co-operation, can achieve viability and sustainability in novel ways. The co-operative is a longstanding business model within the agricultural industry, facilitating members to collectively improve their incomes by creating economies of scale; gaining market access; developing and creating new products and ideas, among other objectives. Given the particularly poor economic viability of Irish beef farmers, Producer Organisation (PO) legislation, largely based on co-operative model principles and guidelines, has been introduced in a direct attempt to enhance farm-level viability by rebalancing power in the supply chain. Other current policy objectives seek to increase the value of Irish beef. Therefore, this research focuses on a distinct values-based co-operative approach which incorporates aspects of both scale and product differentiation for application in the Irish beef context.

Data collection was conducted in two main stages. Firstly, an in-depth qualitative case study of a US values-based co-operative model was carried out to investigate its operations, benefits and challenges. Secondly, research was carried out to assess the appetite for such an approach in the Irish beef context, drawing on in-depth interviews and an analysis of stakeholder submissions.

Findings from the research reveal that a values-based co-operative approach can greatly enhance farm-level viability, sustainability and resilience. Lessons, practical issues and considerations are highlighted to inform how future Irish beef POs should be established both organisationally and structurally. Drawing on lessons from the case study and views expressed by stakeholders, a theoretical blueprint is presented for implementing a values-based co-operative approach in the Irish beef context.