

farms differed in the way labor was specialized and configured, reference to income did not identify them. Both income and years of agricultural experience are often used to characterize family farms. Our results indicate that these do not adequately account for differences among farms with regard to resource use.

Conclusion

Organizational theory contends that the organization's structure reflects the organization's strategy for managing differences in production. We selected two organizational variables — task specialization and configuration — to distinguish farm types. Using data on farms on the westside of the San Joaquin Valley we grouped farms into five organization types. We then applied an ANOVA to discrete and continuous measures of farm structure including acres farmed, labor use, gross income, type of ownership, and operator residency to determine whether farm types differed with regard to these characteristics.

Our results indicated that farm types identified through task specialization and configuration differed with regard to many structural characteristics. Those characteristics for which farms did not significantly differ were in many cases criteria for other classifications systems. In particular, differences in type of ownership, relationship of manager to owner, residency of operator, type of financing, and years of agricultural experience did not correspond to differences in organization type. Full- and part-time labor and years of computer use were the strongest measures of difference among the organizational classes we identified.

Organizational classifications which reflect differences in resource use may be the most appropriate to assess the impact of different farming systems on the environment and society. These classifications provide significant measures of differences between farms which use labor differently to balance the varying conditions of production. In addition, organization types provide a means for depoliticizing the discussion of farm structure which is presently mired in abstract notions of family versus corporate management. Organizational variables represent traits inherent to all production organizations and, consequently, can be used to classify all farms regardless of differences in production system, ownership, or location.

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