

Defining the Issue: Does agricultural economics research need to be more policy relevant?

John Cranfield

International Food Economy Research Group (inferg.ca)

Department of Food, Agricultural & Resource Economics

University of Guelph

...well, does it?

- YES!
- What a Director General once told me:
 - Easy to get bitten by the policy bug
 - Forget economics and economic analysis
 - DG's job is to get the minister re-elected
 - What matters is history and politics
 - Institutions & political economy
 - Multitude of rent seeking behaviour
- What is the role of an academic economist?

How are we relevant?

Layers of relevance & engagement

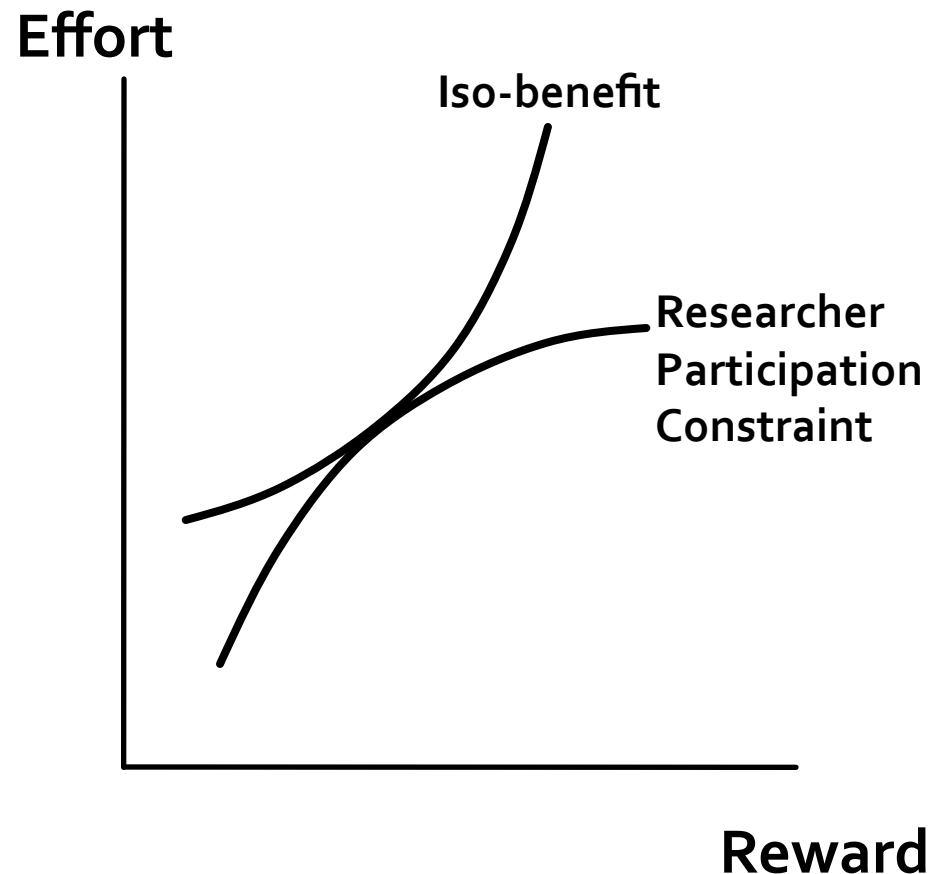
- Research
- Consultation
- *Ad hoc* advice
- Teaching
- Training
- Dissemination
- Engagement is critical
- Journal articles are (largely) irrelevant
- CAFRI (Amber Waves)
- Networks
- Presentations, seminars, media
- Policy Fora via networks, CAES, others, policy blog

Communication & analysis

- Black eye on communication
- “You don’t talk like an economist!”
- Tyner & Brinkman:
 - Be able to explain it to your grandmother
 - Write so you are not misunderstood
- Unlearn lingo and (re)learn policy speak
- Does not mean we entirely forgo analysis
 - ~~Numerical/quantitative~~
 - Qualitative
 - Contribute ideas & options to the policy process
 - What are the strengths and weakness of the options?
 - Institutional Economics
- Change of SOP: opinion not analysis
- Incentives are important

Alignment of incentives

- Incentives in academia:
 - Discovery of new knowledge (the pleasure of finding things out)
 - Tenure
 - Promotion
- From research to action
- Peer reviewable research is not necessarily incompatible with policy relevance
- Participation constraint



Coordination issues

ACADEMIC TIMELINES

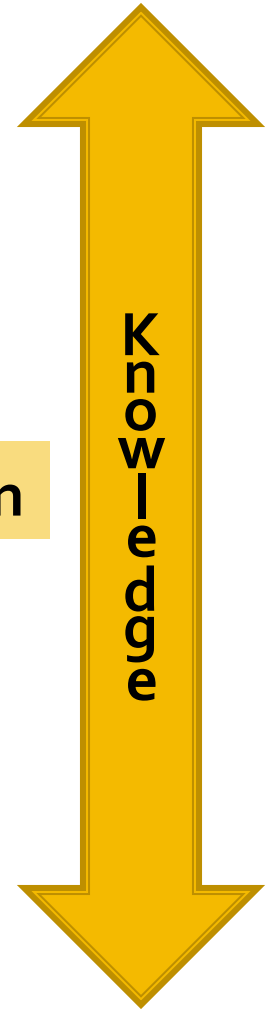
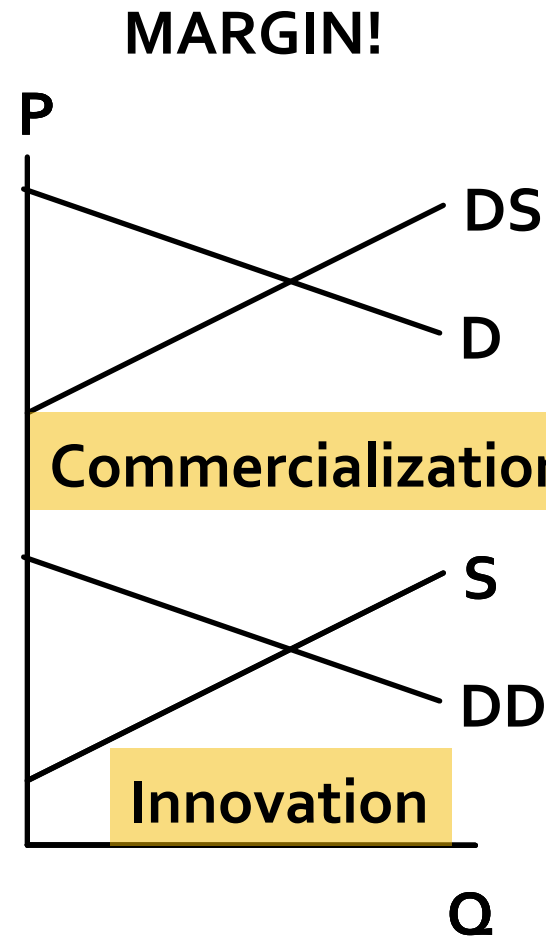
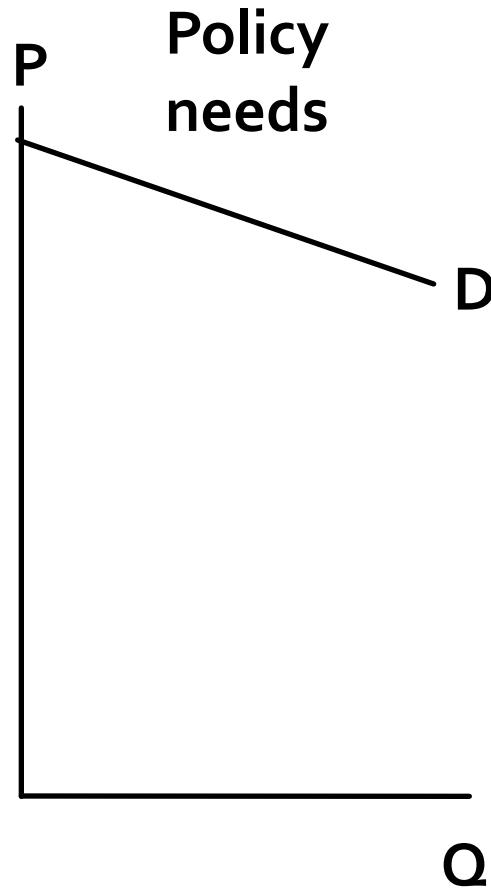
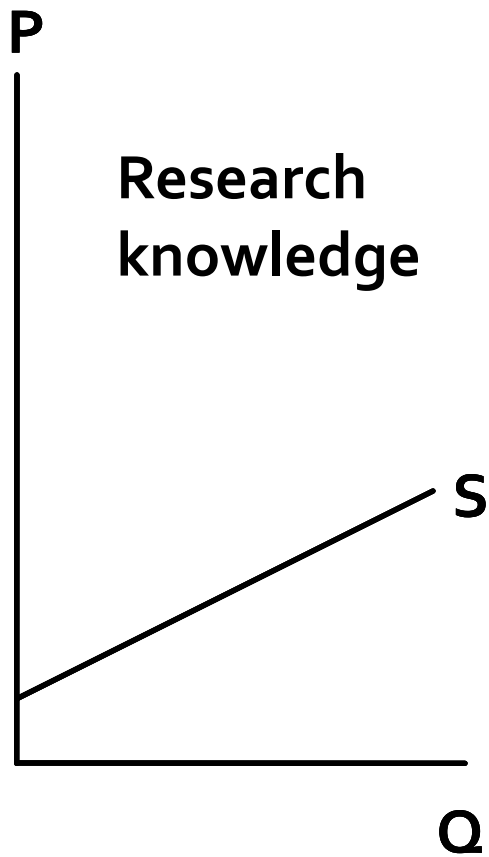
- Developing good ideas takes time
- Developing correct analysis takes even longer!
- Grad students ~~are slow~~ require appropriate training
- Peer review takes time
- Supply of knowledge can lag demand for policy info

POLICY NEEDS

- Policy process requires non-public discussion
- Information needs may not be apparent until well into the process
- Policy needs require quick turn around
- Demand for knowledge reflects priorities
 - Temporally varying

DOES SUPPLY EQUAL DEMAND?

No – but S & D are not in the same markets



Academics contribution to policy realm: Comparative advantage, credibility & focus

- Education & Training
- Building infrastructure
 - Commodity models
 - Technique & data
 - Survey design
- Policy options
 - Strengths & weaknesses
- Debunking myths
- Academic ≠ Advocate!
- Core functionality of discipline – APPLIED!
- Changing research interests: FARE; health
- Changing model of institutional support
- Research output as a public, club or private good?

Thank You!