

Article

# From Farmers' Entrepreneurial Motivation to Performance—The Chain Mediating Effect of Entrepreneurial Learning and Entrepreneurial Ability

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**Abstract:** Farmers' entrepreneurship is an important measure to achieve the stable development of rural areas. However, the performance of farmers' entrepreneurship is generally low. How to improve the performance to promote farmers' sustainable entrepreneurship has become the primary problem. Therefore, based on the entrepreneurial process theory, this paper takes entrepreneurial farmers who participated in the cultivation of new vocational farmers in Sichuan Province from 2018 to 2021 as the research object, collects 329 valid sample data through questionnaires, and empirically tests the impact of farmers' dual entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance, as well as the chain intermediary role of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability. The results show that: survival entrepreneurial motivation and opportunity entrepreneurial motivation both have significant positive impacts on entrepreneurial learning, entrepreneurial ability, and entrepreneurial performance; entrepreneurial learning plays a complete intermediary role between dual entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance, entrepreneurial ability plays a complete intermediary role between dual entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance, and entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability play a complete chain intermediary role between dual entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance. The research expands a new perspective on the path and mechanism of entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance, and proposes measures to stimulate farmers' entrepreneurial motivation, improve the entrepreneurial training system, and build a learning and exchange platform, which are of great practical significance to improve farmers' entrepreneurial performance.

**Keywords:** survival entrepreneurial motivation; opportunity entrepreneurial motivation; entrepreneurial learning; entrepreneurial ability; entrepreneurial performance



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## 1. Introduction

In the context of rural revitalization, driven by a series of policies, such as Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Supporting the Entrepreneurship and Innovation of Returned Rural People to Promote the Integrated Development of Rural Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Industries, rural, agricultural and farmers' entrepreneurial activities are more frequent. Among them, farmers' entrepreneurship has become an important way to stabilize farmers' employment, activate rural resource elements, drive rural economic development, and solve the "three rural" problems. Farmer entrepreneurship refers to the process in which farmers rely on informal family organizations or establish new organizations to seek development opportunities, invest a certain amount of capital, and finally create value and strive for development by expanding their existing production scale or engaging in new production activities [1], which helps to increase their income. However, most farmer entrepreneurs are engaged in agriculture-related entrepreneurship [2]. Restricted by their own cultural level, entrepreneurial resources, and enterprise scale, as well as the relatively complex market control mechanism due to the particularity of products and services in the agricultural field [3], farmers' entrepreneurial performance is generally

low, and entrepreneurial failures are common [4]. Therefore, how to improve farmers' entrepreneurial performance, achieve entrepreneurial success, and promote the long-term stable development of rural areas has widely concerned domestic and foreign scholars.

Entrepreneurial motivation is the driving force generated by entrepreneurs in the process of entrepreneurial activities [5], which can guide the behavior of entrepreneurs towards set goals [6], thus having a positive impact on improving entrepreneurial performance. Entrepreneurial motivation is divided into survival entrepreneurial motivation and opportunity entrepreneurial motivation, of which survival entrepreneurial motivation refers to entrepreneurial activities farmers are forced to engage in due to poverty and lack of other employment options, whereas opportunity entrepreneurial motivation involves capturing business opportunities and taking the initiative to carry out entrepreneurial activities [7]. Research has shown that different entrepreneurial motivations will lead to different entrepreneurial behavior processes and results [8], and the entrepreneurial process model explains this theoretically. The entrepreneurial process model focuses on exploring the behavioral mechanism in the entrepreneurial process, that is, taking entrepreneurs as the center to coordinate the dynamic balance between the elements of entrepreneurs, organizations, resources, and opportunities so that the entrepreneur's motivation will affect the choice of entrepreneurial behavior and ultimately affect entrepreneurial performance. Entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability are two kinds of entrepreneurial behavior that cannot be ignored. Farmers start their businesses almost all "from scratch". Their entrepreneurial opportunities can strengthen entrepreneurial learning [9], and most farmers will identify entrepreneurial opportunities, obtain learning resources, and continuously enhance their entrepreneurial abilities to achieve entrepreneurial performance through imitation, communication, or acceptance of guidance from others [10]. In addition, entrepreneurial ability itself is also considered to be a key element of the entrepreneurial performance model [11]. In a market environment full of uncertainty and fierce competition, entrepreneurial ability such as opportunity identification is particularly important to entrepreneurial results [12].

Therefore, based on entrepreneurial process theory, this paper constructs a path mechanism of "entrepreneurial motivation—entrepreneurial learning—entrepreneurial ability—entrepreneurial performance", and explored the chain intermediary mechanism of the influence of farmers' entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance. Additionally, this paper focuses on the following three issues: first, the relationships between farmers' survival entrepreneurial motivation and opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial learning, entrepreneurial ability, and entrepreneurial performance; second, in the context of China, the relative strength of the impact of two different types of entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial learning, entrepreneurial ability, and entrepreneurial performance and the reason analysis; and third, the independent intermediary role and chain intermediary mechanism of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability between the two different types of entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance. The discussion of the above issues will enrich research in the field of farmers' entrepreneurial performance, and provide a theoretical basis for solving the problem of farmers' poor entrepreneurial performance.

## 2. Literature and Research Hypothesis

### 2.1. Entrepreneurial Process Theory

The entrepreneurial process theory holds that the entrepreneur, as the center of entrepreneurial activities, is the key factor affecting the factor balancing and entrepreneurial success, and that his (her) entrepreneurial motivation will affect the choice of entrepreneurial behavior that maintains the dynamic balance, thus affecting the entrepreneurial performance, so as to form a logical framework of "motivation-behavior-result". The study of the entrepreneurial process originates from the definition of the entrepreneurial process, which has been shown to be dynamic and complex [13]. Linear model research was carried out according to the characteristics of dynamics; the entrepreneurial process emphasizes

enterprise growth, which is divided into the pre-entrepreneurial stage, entrepreneurial stage, early growth stage, and late growth stage [14]. Depending on the characteristics of complexity, the entrepreneurial process emphasizes the interaction between elements. After that, scholars realized that the entrepreneurial process is both dynamic and complex, so they conducted nonlinear research and proposed that the entrepreneurial process depends on the coordination and matching of entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial teams, opportunities, organizations, resources, environment, transaction behaviors, and other elements, which is a process of seeking dynamic balance [15–17]. It can be divided into four parts: motivation, opportunity identification, resource acquisition, and performance [18].

At the end of the 20th century, academia began to systematically study and summarize the entrepreneurial process model. Due to the uncertainty of entrepreneurship, the linear model cannot accurately describe the behavior of entrepreneurs and the cycle of each entrepreneurial stage in the process of entrepreneurship, so Gartner [19] conducted a nonlinear study and proposed a four-element model of the interaction between individuals, organizations, environments, and processes, laying the foundation for follow-up research. At the end of the 1990s, scholars began to further explore the nonlinear model of the entrepreneurial process. Focusing on environmental factors, Sahlman [15] proposed a four-element model of people, opportunities, trading behaviors, and environments with adaptation to the environment as the core. In the same year, Timmons [16] proposed a three-element model, that is, to achieve the dynamic balance of opportunities, resources, and entrepreneurial teams, and that treats the entrepreneurial process as a combination of behaviors that constantly pursue balance. The above entrepreneurial process models are all factor equilibrium models, which emphasize the coordination, balanced development, and role of each factor, and this equilibrium is a short-term equilibrium; however, the factor-dominant models use one element as the dominant factor to coordinate the relationships between other elements, and the equilibrium they seek is relatively long-term [20]. For example, Wickham [17] proposed a learning-based entrepreneurial process model, which assumes that the four elements of entrepreneurs, opportunities, resources, and organizations interact with each other, and takes entrepreneurs as the core for coordination and matching, while entrepreneurial organizations are learning organizations that need to constantly achieve element balance and organizational development through “learning by doing”.

Wickham’s entrepreneurial process model treats entrepreneurs as the core. Entrepreneurs need to confirm entrepreneurial opportunities, manage entrepreneurial resources, and lead entrepreneurial organizations in the entrepreneurial process. Then, the entrepreneur’s factors, such as entrepreneurial motivation, will affect the behavior choice in the process. In addition, the entrepreneurial process is a learning process. Entrepreneurs and organizations need to improve their entrepreneurial ability through continuous learning to cope with risks in the process, seize opportunities in uncertain markets, optimize resource allocation and stimulate organizational potential. In general, entrepreneurs will have entrepreneurial learning behavior to improve their entrepreneurial ability in the process of balancing opportunities, resources, organizations, and other elements, and this entrepreneurial behavior is driven by entrepreneurial motivation, so as to maintain the dynamic balance of entrepreneurial elements and achieve entrepreneurial success.

## 2.2. Farmers’ Entrepreneurial Motivation and Performance

Farmers’ entrepreneurial motivation refers to the driving force behind farmers’ entrepreneurial behavior, which is the factor that motivates entrepreneurs to seek and seize opportunities to achieve entrepreneurial success [21]. According to the “push and pull” perspective of entrepreneurial motivation [22], survival entrepreneurial motivation is oriented by the thrust of maintaining a livelihood, while opportunity entrepreneurial motivation is oriented by the pull of increasing income [23]. Farmers’ entrepreneurial performance refers to farmers’ subjective evaluation of the business they have created and the degree

of achievement of their entrepreneurial goals [24], including overall satisfaction, expected targets, profit level, the level of return on investment, and sales.

Wickham's theory of the entrepreneurial process holds that entrepreneurs are at the center of entrepreneurial activities, with the important task of identifying opportunities, integrating resources, and leading the organization—actions that are related to the performance of start-ups. The entrepreneurial motivation possessed by entrepreneurs is the psychological tendency or motivation to stimulate, maintain, and regulate individual behaviors towards a certain goal, which is the key factor affecting entrepreneurial goals, entrepreneurial behavior choices, and results and stimulating the potential of entrepreneurs [25–27]. In general, motivation has the function of stimulating, directing, and maintaining. Although the motivations of entrepreneurs vary widely, it is generally confirmed that entrepreneurial motivation has an impact on entrepreneurial performance [28]. Firstly, entrepreneurial motivation can trigger entrepreneurial search behavior to collect entrepreneurially related information, identify entrepreneurial opportunities, and integrate resources and develop opportunities through value judgment [29], thereby improving entrepreneurial performance. Secondly, farmer entrepreneurs will set entrepreneurial goals based on entrepreneurial motivation [30], and entrepreneurial motivation can guide individual behavior toward these goals. Survival entrepreneurial motivation drives farmer entrepreneurs to carry out entrepreneurial activities to maintain family livelihoods; failure to start a business will mean the loss of economic resources. In order to maintain the normal operation of the family, entrepreneurs will aim to increase income and create results [31]. The opportunity entrepreneurial motivation to achieve greater profits drives farmers to take the initiative to start a business [32], in order to seek higher pursuits above the level of survival needs [33], create greater economic benefits, achieve economic growth and expand employment. In summary, whether it is survival oriented or opportunity oriented, entrepreneurial motivation has the characteristics of pursuing high performance. Finally, entrepreneurial activities need persistence. According to the maintenance function of motivation, entrepreneurial motivation determines the persistence of individual entrepreneurs [34]. Entrepreneurship persistence is the key factor for entrepreneurs to maintain entrepreneurial activities, take advantage of business opportunities to obtain potential economic benefits and finally achieve entrepreneurial success [35]. This paper proposes the following hypotheses.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** *Farmers' survival entrepreneurial motivation has a positive impact on entrepreneurial performance.*

**H<sub>2</sub>:** *Farmers' opportunity entrepreneurial motivation has a positive impact on entrepreneurial performance.*

### 2.3. Mediating Role of Farmers' Entrepreneurial Learning

Entrepreneurial learning refers to the process by which entrepreneurs accumulate and generate knowledge in entrepreneurship and use this knowledge for opportunity identification and development, resource acquisition and utilization, organization construction and development, etc. [36]. This paper holds that the essence of entrepreneurial learning is a kind of learning behavior adopted by entrepreneurs to improve human capital and entrepreneurial performance, and it divides farmers' entrepreneurial learning into three dimensions: imitation learning, guiding learning, and communication learning [37].

According to Wickham's entrepreneurial process theory, the entrepreneurial process is a process of continuous learning, and entrepreneurs need to adjust various elements to achieve balance through "learning by doing". Entrepreneurial motivation is the most direct driving force for entrepreneurs to learn from entrepreneurship, and studies have shown that the learning methods and behaviors adopted by farmers in the entrepreneurial process are directly related to entrepreneurial motivation [38], that is, the entrepreneur's learning behavior changes with the entrepreneurial motivation in the entrepreneurial activity [9]. The 2001 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) pointed out that survival entrepreneur-

ship is passive entrepreneurship that is forced by life and has no other choices, while entrepreneurship itself is a high-risk economic activity, and entrepreneurial failure is the norm [39]. To maintain the sustainable development of new start-ups, entrepreneurs need to immediately deal with various risks and challenges in the process of entrepreneurship; then, they must learn from entrepreneurship and accumulate experience and knowledge. Opportunity entrepreneurial motivation is a positive factor for entrepreneurs to actively carry out entrepreneurial activities based on the pursuit of personal values and preferences. Opportunistic entrepreneurship focuses on opening up new markets and requires entrepreneurs' human capital to be higher than the overall level [40]. Therefore, they have a stronger willingness to learn and are more willing to engage in entrepreneurial learning to improve their abilities in opportunity identification, resource acquisition, operation management, etc. This leads to the following assumptions.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** *Farmers' survival entrepreneurial motivation has a positive impact on entrepreneurial learning.*

**H<sub>4</sub>:** *Farmers' opportunity entrepreneurial motivation has a positive influence on entrepreneurial learning.*

Based on the analytical framework of "element-behavior-result" in the entrepreneurial process [41], the individual behavior of entrepreneurs will have a significant impact on the outcome of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial learning is a behavioral process of constantly exploring, developing, and expanding relevant entrepreneurial knowledge based on entrepreneurial experience and external information [42], which has a significant role in promoting organizational and individual performance [43]. First of all, imitation learning refers to learning by observing and imitating others' entrepreneurial behaviors, providing entrepreneurs with general rules and strategies to cope with new situations [44]. In addition, imitation learning can enable entrepreneurs to quickly acquire and accumulate relevant knowledge and effectively deal with external uncertainties [45] to improve performance [46]. Secondly, guiding learning refers to the learning process in which entrepreneurs receive guidance from "mentors" to increase knowledge and skills and change entrepreneurial behavior. The process is personalized [47], which can effectively help entrepreneurs solve entrepreneurial problems and improve entrepreneurial performance. Thirdly, communication learning refers to formal or informal communication and cooperation with other people in formal or informal social networks [48]. It can enable stakeholders to understand entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial opportunities [49], and shorten the distance with stakeholders in the communication process, so as to more easily access entrepreneurial resources [50]. This leads to the following assumption.

**H<sub>5</sub>:** *Farmers' entrepreneurial learning has a positive impact on entrepreneurial performance.*

According to Wickham's entrepreneurial process theory, entrepreneurs are at the heart of entrepreneurial activities and will start a series of considerations and actions driven by motivation, and dynamic learning is the key to the normal operation of entrepreneurs and their organizations [51]. Specifically, motivation, as the internal driving force for farmer entrepreneurs to carry out entrepreneurial activities, is the starting point and impetus for individual entrepreneurial behavior [52], but entrepreneurship itself is a high-risk activity [39], which requires corresponding support such as technology, knowledge, and resources. However, due to the constraints of resources and cultural level, farmers are more likely to encounter entrepreneurial difficulties [53], and entrepreneurial learning is the key measure to solve this dilemma. Overall, strong entrepreneurial motivation plays an important role in entrepreneurial learning, which in turn helps to solve farmers' entrepreneurial predicaments [54] and determines farmers' entrepreneurial performance. This leads to the following assumptions.

**H<sub>6</sub>:** *Farmers' entrepreneurial learning has a mediating role between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance.*



**H7:** *Farmers' entrepreneurial learning has a mediating role between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance.*

#### 2.4. Mediating Role of Farmers' Entrepreneurial Ability

Entrepreneurship ability is a high-level ability, which mainly includes various personality characteristics and knowledge skills for entrepreneurs to successfully perform their job responsibilities [55]. It is a combination of various qualities that entrepreneurs need to establish and operate a business [56]. Based on this, this paper divides farmers' entrepreneurial ability into five dimensions: opportunity ability, commitment ability, conception ability, financing ability, and operation ability.

Entrepreneurial motivation can stimulate and maintain the ability of entrepreneurs to integrate resources, identify and grasp opportunities, and formulate and adjust strategies [37]. According to Wickham's entrepreneurial process theory, entrepreneurs shoulder the responsibility of balancing entrepreneurial elements and developing organizations and need to improve their entrepreneurial capabilities to achieve entrepreneurial goals. Entrepreneurs will develop their entrepreneurial ability driven by entrepreneurial motivation, but there are differences in the demand for entrepreneurial ability improvement for different entrepreneurial motivations [57]. Survival entrepreneurial motivation is based on the push factors, and the driving factors are poverty and lack of better job choices [58,59]. Driven by push factors, individuals generate entrepreneurial motivation. However, individuals with survival entrepreneurial motivation tend to have poor entrepreneurial abilities, such as risk-bearing ability and innovation ability [60]. In order to obtain sustainable income, entrepreneurs will improve their entrepreneurial ability through various ways to deal with entrepreneurial problems to maintain entrepreneurial activities. Opportunity entrepreneurial motivation is based on the pull factors, which are valuable individual resources that determine the economic, social, and environmental performance of enterprises. Such resources can mobilize the formation of specific capabilities [61]. In the entrepreneurial context, the pull factors form the entrepreneurial capabilities required for entrepreneurial success. In general, entrepreneurs, regardless of their entrepreneurial motivation, should continue to actively gain entrepreneurial knowledge and industry experience, and accept improving their skills as the norm of entrepreneurship [62]. This allows us to put forward the following hypotheses.

**H8:** *The survival entrepreneurial motivation of farmers has a positive impact on entrepreneurial ability.*

**H9:** *The opportunity entrepreneurial motivation of farmers has a positive impact on entrepreneurial ability.*

The key to achieving high entrepreneurial performance lies in effectively integrating resources, identifying and developing entrepreneurial opportunities, and managing and leading organizations [63]. Entrepreneurial ability is a dynamic collection of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to maintain entrepreneurial behavior that contributes to entrepreneurial success [64] and high entrepreneurial performance. Specifically, opportunity ability means the ability of individuals to identify and develop entrepreneurial opportunities [65]. It can capture market and customer needs, help solve problems, and directly affect entrepreneurial performance [66]. When farmers start their businesses, they need start-up funds. In the process of operation, they have a rigid demand for working capital [67]. Therefore, capital is the key factor for success in entrepreneurship. However, farmers generally face the problem of capital constraints in their entrepreneurship, and financing is an effective way to solve the shortage. Therefore, financing capacity has an impact on entrepreneurial results. Commitment ability reflects farmers' adherence to entrepreneurial goals and plans [68], emphasizes responsibility for stakeholders, and drives entrepreneurs to achieve good performance. When faced with a complex and changing entrepreneurial environment, entrepreneurs with the ability to conceive can immediately adjust their strategies to promote

the realization of entrepreneurial goals [69]. The success of entrepreneurship cannot be separated from the effective operation of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs with high operation ability can effectively integrate resources, manage production and services, motivate organizational members, develop social networks, continue to solve various problems in the process of entrepreneurship, and finally achieve the expected results of entrepreneurship [70]. This leads to the following hypothesis.

**H<sub>10</sub>:** *The entrepreneurial ability of farmers has a positive impact on entrepreneurial performance.*

The difference in entrepreneurial motivation will affect the ability of entrepreneurs in the entrepreneurial process, and entrepreneurial abilities will further affect the process and results of entrepreneurship [71]. Specifically, in the process of entrepreneurship, clear entrepreneurial motivations drive entrepreneurs to improve their professional, communication, and operational management capabilities through various channels to ensure that entrepreneurial companies can have good performance [72]. Entrepreneurship motivation, as an internal driving force, helps to stimulate entrepreneurs' interpersonal skills and resource acquisition capabilities and encourages entrepreneurs to achieve their expected entrepreneurial goals [73]. Regardless of the entrepreneurial motivation of farmers, it will affect their entrepreneurial ability at different stages. According to Wickham's entrepreneurial process theory, as the helmsman in the entrepreneurial process, the entrepreneur determines the direction of the future development of the enterprise, so the entrepreneurial ability of farmers can predict the outcome of the entrepreneurial enterprise to a certain extent. This allows us to put forward the following hypotheses.

**H<sub>11</sub>:** *The entrepreneurial ability of farmers has a mediating role between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance.*

**H<sub>12</sub>:** *The entrepreneurial ability of farmers has a mediating role between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance.*

### 2.5. Role of Chain Mediation of Entrepreneurial Learning and Entrepreneurial Ability

Entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial ability is not all innate endowment but can be acquired through learning [74]. Moreover, entrepreneurial learning is a key source of entrepreneurial ability improvement [75]. Cai, Tang, Ma and Gao [76] believed that entrepreneurs can make up for the lack of knowledge and enhance entrepreneurial ability by choosing different entrepreneurial learning methods, thereby improving entrepreneurial performance, and entrepreneurial ability plays an intermediary role between entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial performance. In addition, entrepreneurial learning itself, as a kind of entrepreneurial ability, will also play a positive role in the innovative and entrepreneurial performance of enterprises [77].

Based on the perspective of dynamics, the entrepreneurial process is dynamic and uncertain, and the entrepreneurial knowledge that entrepreneurs have is extremely limited, which will inevitably drive entrepreneurs to continue learning to improve their entrepreneurial ability, and then be able to cope with various difficulties [78].

Based on the perspective of experience learning, entrepreneurs' previous experiences will be transformed into entrepreneurial knowledge through a certain mechanism, and the increase in knowledge will make up for the shortcomings of their entrepreneurial ability and further affect entrepreneurial performance [42,53,79].

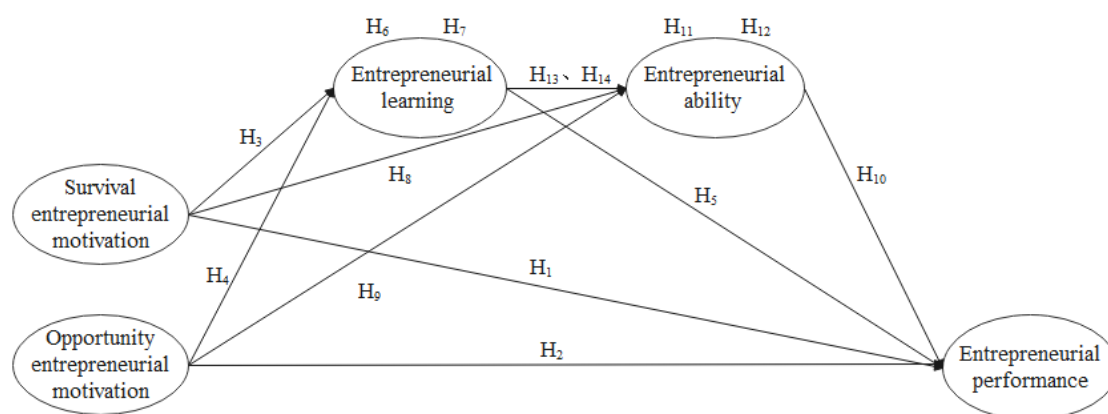
Based on the perspective of resource scarcity, dual learning can help break down the information barriers in the entrepreneurial process, enhance entrepreneurs' management and information acquisition capabilities, and then encourage entrepreneurial farmers to achieve their entrepreneurial goals and improve their entrepreneurial performance [10]. It is difficult for farmer entrepreneurs to support their entrepreneurial activities with their innate characteristics alone, so they need to improve their entrepreneurial ability through education and the accumulation of experience driven by their motivation in the

entrepreneurial process, and then improve their entrepreneurial performance [80]. This leads to the following hypotheses.

**H<sub>13</sub>:** *The chain double intermediary composed of farmers' entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability has an intermediary effect between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance.*

**H<sub>14</sub>:** *The chain double intermediary composed of farmers' entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability has an intermediary effect between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance.*

Based on the above analysis, the research model was constructed, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Research model of farmers' entrepreneurship.

### 3. Research Design

#### 3.1. Research Sample

This paper took entrepreneurial farmers who participated in the cultivation of emerging professional farmers in Sichuan Province from 2018 to 2021 as the research object and obtained data with research methods such as questionnaire surveys and sample interviews.

According to the economic development level of cities in Sichuan Province and the distribution of farmers' entrepreneurship, and considering the principles of research convenience and feasibility, samples from six representative prefecture-level cities in Sichuan Province, including Chengdu, Mianyang, Chongzhou, Bazhong, Ganzi, and Aba, were selected for a questionnaire survey, and samples from Chengdu and Ya'an were selected for a sampling interview. Before the formal investigation, the preliminary test of the reliability and validity of each variable was completed, and then the questionnaire was issued for the formal investigation. The two surveys finally resulted in 400 questionnaire responses, of which 329 were valid, for an effective sample rate of 82.25%.

In the survey sample, male entrepreneurs accounted for 76%, which shows that although a series of policies have been issued to encourage various groups to engage in entrepreneurship, the entrepreneurial group is still dominated by men, a fact inseparable from the social division of labor that has females take care of household and family duties. From the age distribution, it can be seen that young and middle-aged people were the main force of the entrepreneurial army, accounting for 88.4%, and this group demonstrated high entrepreneurial passion. From the distribution of academic qualifications, it can be seen that the academic qualifications of the entrepreneurial group were concentrated in high school and above, accounting for 84.8%, of which the bachelor's degrees and above accounted for 12.8%, which shows that compared with before, the academic qualifications of entrepreneurial farmers have significantly improved, reflecting the spillover effect of China's nine-year compulsory education. From the distribution of experience, it can be seen that among the farmer entrepreneurs, the number of inexperienced entrepreneurs was relatively small, with 31.9% lacking entrepreneurial experience, 43.8% lacking work



experience, and 41% lacking entrepreneurial training experience, indicating that more farmer entrepreneurs are prepared and have a certain accumulation of experience. Educational background, entrepreneurial experiences, working experiences, and participation in training all show that entrepreneurial farmers are striving to improve their comprehensive quality to reduce entrepreneurial risks; thus, farmers' entrepreneurship is shifting from traditional impulsive to more rational forms of entrepreneurship.

### 3.2. Variable Measurement

#### 3.2.1. Farmers' Motivations for Entrepreneurship

This paper draws on the research of Kuratko, Hornsby and Naffziger [81] to measure the survival and opportunity entrepreneurial motivations of farmers. The scale has a total of eight items, four of which are used to measure the survival entrepreneurial motivation and the other four to measure the opportunity entrepreneurial motivation. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value for the survival entrepreneurship motivation scale was 0.76, while that for the opportunity entrepreneurship motivation scale was 0.81.

#### 3.2.2. Farmers' Entrepreneurial Performance

This article draws on the scale developed by Cooper and Artz [24] to measure the entrepreneurial performance of farmers. Entrepreneurial performance is a single-dimensional construct, including five items. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value for the entrepreneurship performance scale was 0.86.

#### 3.2.3. Farmer Entrepreneurial Learning

This article draws on the relevant research of Jones, Macpherson, Thorpe and Ghecham [82], Ozgen and Baron [83], Taylor and Thorpe [84], and Xie and Huang [69], which divided farmers' entrepreneurial learning into three dimensions: imitation learning, guided learning, and communication learning, including 10 items. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value for the entrepreneurial learning scale was 0.86.

#### 3.2.4. Farmers' Entrepreneurial Ability

This paper draws on the relevant research of Man, Lau and Chan [55] and Xie and Huang [69], which divided the entrepreneurial ability of farmers into five dimensions: opportunity ability, commitment ability, concept ability, financing ability, and operation ability, and contained a total of 16 items. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value for the entrepreneurship ability scale was 0.89.

The research items (in Appendix A) were all measured on a Likert five-point scale, from 1 to 5, respectively, for "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", and "agree" to "strongly agree". Among them, the controlled variables were gender, age, educational background, entrepreneurial activities, work experience, and entrepreneurial training.

### 3.3. Common Method and Reliability and Validity Tests

#### 3.3.1. Common Method Deviation Test

In this paper, the Harman single-factor test method was used to test the common method variance, and exploratory factor analysis was performed on all items of the questionnaire by principal component analysis. It was found that the first principal component explained 27.77% of the variance, which was far less than the recommended value of 50%. This indicates that there was no serious common method bias [85].

#### 3.3.2. Reliability Test

To test the reliability of the scale, statistical analysis SPSS22.0 was used. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire, and the KMO value was used to judge whether it was suitable for factor analysis. In this research, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value and KMO value for all variables were greater than 0.6, indicating that the questionnaire had good reliability and was suitable for factor analysis.

### 3.3.3. Validity Test

To test the validity of the scale, Amos23.0 was used to perform confirmatory factor analysis of the data. The specific data are shown in Table 1. Among them, the value of  $\chi^2/df$  was much less than 5, the value of RMSEA was less than 0.1, the values of CFI and IFI were both greater than 0.9, and the values of NFI, GFI, and AGFI were all greater than 0.85. The data showed that the fitting indicators were all up to the standard, indicating the fitting validity of the basic model was good. In addition to the basic model containing five variables, the study also examined four alternative models to compare the pros and cons of the models. The data in the basic model were better than the indicators in the alternative models, indicating that the basic model had good discrimination validity. According to the fitting validity and discriminative validity, the basic model designed in this study was acceptable.

**Table 1.** Model confirmatory fitting results.

Model	Description	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	IFI	GFI	AGFI
Basic model	Five-factor model	1.42	0.04	0.96	0.86	0.96	0.88	0.85
Model 1	Four-factor model	2.36	0.06	0.85	0.76	0.85	0.78	0.75
Model 2	Three-factor model	2.48	0.07	0.83	0.75	0.83	0.77	0.74
Model 3	Two-factor model	2.98	0.08	0.77	0.69	0.77	0.72	0.68
Model 4	Single-factor model	5.29	0.11	0.50	0.45	0.50	0.56	0.51

Note: Basic model: survival entrepreneurial motivation, opportunity entrepreneurial motivation, entrepreneurial learning, entrepreneurial ability, entrepreneurial performance. Model 1: survival entrepreneurial motivation + opportunity entrepreneurial motivation, entrepreneurial learning, entrepreneurial ability, entrepreneurial performance. Model 2: survival entrepreneurial motivation + opportunity entrepreneurial motivation, entrepreneurial learning + entrepreneurial ability, entrepreneurial performance. Model 3: survival entrepreneurial motivation + opportunity entrepreneurial motivation, entrepreneurial learning + entrepreneurial ability + entrepreneurial performance. Model 4: survival entrepreneurial motivation + opportunity entrepreneurial motivation + entrepreneurial learning + entrepreneurial ability + entrepreneurial performance. “+” means to combine.

## 4. Data Analysis and Regression Results

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis and Correlation Analysis

The mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficients of all variables in the study are shown in Table 2. Among them, gender, age, educational background, entrepreneurial experience, professional working experience, and training were the control variables. From Table 2, it can be seen that survival and opportunity entrepreneurial motivations are significantly positively correlated with entrepreneurial performance, entrepreneurial learning, and entrepreneurial ability.  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ ,  $H_3$ ,  $H_4$ ,  $H_8$ , and  $H_9$  were initially verified. Entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability are significantly and positively related to entrepreneurship performance, so  $H_5$  and  $H_{10}$  were initially verified.

### 4.2. Hypothesis Testing

#### 4.2.1. Regression Results of Direct Effects between Variables

To verify the above hypotheses, this paper used SPSS to perform regression analysis on the variables, and the results are shown in Table 3.

The direct effect of survival entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance was 0.15, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.05, 0.26], excluding 0; the direct effect of opportunity entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance was 0.23, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.11, 0.35], excluding 0. This shows that both survival entrepreneurial motivation and opportunity entrepreneurial motivation have a significant positive impact on entrepreneurial performance, so  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  are further proved. Both survival and opportunity entrepreneurial motivation can encourage farmers to achieve good entrepreneurial performance, because entrepreneurial motivation can affect the designation of entrepreneurial goals [30], that is, having a clear entrepreneurial goal is more reliable than aimless entrepreneurship. In addition, the direct effect of opportunity motivation on entrepreneurial performance is greater than that of survival motivation, so opportunity motivation has a greater impact on entrepreneurial performance. This is be-

cause compared with survival motivation, entrepreneurs with opportunity motivation have higher risk preference, entrepreneurial awareness, financing ability, product innovation, and self-efficacy [86], so that they can better accomplish their entrepreneurial goals.

**Table 2.** Mean, standard deviation, and correlation analysis results for various variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Gender	1										
Age	0.11	1									
Education	−0.07	−0.24 **	1								
Entrepreneurial Experience	0.04	0.18 **	0.03	1							
Work Experience	0.15 **	0.08	0.03	0.20 **	1						
Training Experience	−0.01	0.10	0.01	0.30 **	0.30 **	1					
Survival Motivation	0.06	−0.15 **	−0.04	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.76				
Opportunity Motivation	0.11 *	−0.07	0.04	0.18 **	0.13 *	0.01	0.39 **	0.81			
Entrepreneurial Learning	0.09	−0.03	−0.08	0.11	0.16 **	0.17 **	0.32 **	0.40 **	0.86		
Entrepreneurial Ability	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.17 **	0.09	0.20 **	0.17 **	0.37 **	0.58 **	0.89	
Entrepreneurial Performance	0.02	0.00	−0.02	0.10	0.23 **	0.19 **	0.18 **	0.23 **	0.35 **	0.55 **	0.86
M	1.76	3.91	2.47	1.68	1.56	1.59	4.07	4.37	3.86	3.78	3.26
SE	0.42	1.35	0.84	0.47	0.50	0.49	0.76	0.68	0.63	0.55	0.76

Note:  $n = 329$ , \* means  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* means  $p < 0.01$  (two-tailed); the numbers in brackets on the diagonal are Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for each variable.

**Table 3.** The direct results of survival entrepreneurial motivation, opportunity entrepreneurial motivation, entrepreneurial learning, entrepreneurial ability, and entrepreneurial performance.

Direct Effect	Effect Value	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Survival entrepreneurial motivation → Entrepreneurial performance	0.15	0.05	0.26
Opportunity entrepreneurial motivation → Entrepreneurial performance	0.23	0.11	0.35
Survival entrepreneurial motivation → Entrepreneurial learning	0.24	0.16	0.33
Opportunity entrepreneurial motivation → Entrepreneurial learning	0.37	0.27	0.46
Survival entrepreneurial motivation → Entrepreneurial ability	0.11	0.03	0.19
Opportunity entrepreneurial motivation → Entrepreneurial ability	0.30	0.21	0.38
Entrepreneurial learning → Entrepreneurial performance	0.38	0.25	0.50
Entrepreneurial ability → Entrepreneurial performance	0.72	0.59	0.84

The direct effect of survival entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial learning was 0.24, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.16, 0.33], excluding 0; the direct effect of opportunity entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial learning was 0.37, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.27, 0.46], excluding 0. This shows that both survival entrepreneurial motivation and opportunity entrepreneurial motivation positively affect entrepreneurial learning, so  $H_3$  and  $H_4$  are further proved. Both survival and opportunity entrepreneurial motivation can enhance the learning behavior of farmer entrepreneurs, as the saying goes that “Understanding what you want can help you understand what you should do”. Additionally, according to the direct effect value of the two types of entrepreneurial motivation, compared with the survival entrepreneurial motivation, the opportunity entrepreneurial motivation has a greater role in encouraging farmers’ entrepreneurial learning behavior. The reason is that the motivation for opportunity entrepreneurship comes from the internal needs of individuals to pursue self-development [87], and opportunistic entrepreneurs are more willing to take the initiative to engage in entrepreneurial learning in order to fulfill their self-realization needs.

The direct effect of survival entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial ability was 0.11, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.03, 0.19], excluding 0; the direct effect of opportunity entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial ability was 0.30, and the

95% confidence interval was [0.21, 0.38], excluding 0. This shows that both survival entrepreneurial motivation and opportunity entrepreneurial motivation positively affect entrepreneurial ability, so  $H_8$  and  $H_9$  are further proved. Zhang [72] pointed out in the research that entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial ability change in the same direction, and different types of entrepreneurial motivation have different effects on different dimensions of entrepreneurial ability. Entrepreneurship ability can be the ability acquired by farmer entrepreneurs at the present or in the future. Inherent ability is a key element for judging farmer entrepreneurs in terms of starting a business, and potential is a decisive factor that determines the long-term development of farmers' entrepreneurial careers. Therefore, motivation can enable a person to comprehensively evaluate their own inherent ability and continuously improve their future potential. With the data compared, opportunity entrepreneurial motivation has a greater impact on farmers' entrepreneurial ability.

The direct effect of entrepreneurial learning on entrepreneurial performance was 0.38, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.25, 0.50], excluding 0; the direct effect of entrepreneurial ability on entrepreneurial performance was 0.72, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.59, 0.84], excluding 0. This shows that both entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability positively affect entrepreneurial performance, so  $H_5$  and  $H_{10}$  are further proved. Entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial competence, both active entrepreneurial behaviors, can yield entrepreneurial results. Research showed that entrepreneurial learning can help entrepreneurs make scientific decisions and adapt to circumstances in the process of entrepreneurship, thus generating good entrepreneurial performance [88], while entrepreneurial ability can facilitate smoother entrepreneurial activities [89]. This reveals that farmers' entrepreneurship is not a one-time activity. On the contrary, entrepreneurs need to be persistent in learning and improving their skills, use these skills to improve the enterprises they founded, and then they can achieve good entrepreneurial results. This process highlights the necessity of carrying out entrepreneurship training for farmers.

#### 4.2.2. Test of Mediating Role

To test the mediating role of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability between entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance, SPSS plug-in PROCESS was used, and the bootstrapping method was used to repeat sampling 5000 times to construct a 95% unbiased correction confidence interval. Model 4 in PROCESS was used to test the separate mediating effects of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability, and Model 6 in PROCESS was used to test the chain-type mediating effects of entering the two mediating variables of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability at the same time. The specific results are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Test of chain mediation effect of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability.

Action Path	Direct Effect Value			Intermediary Effect Value		
	Effect Value	95% Confidence Interval		Effect Value	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Limit	Upper Limit		Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Survival entrepreneurial motivation → Entrepreneurial learning → Entrepreneurial performance	0.07	−0.04	0.17	0.09	0.05	0.14
Opportunity entrepreneurial motivation → Entrepreneurial learning → Entrepreneurial performance	0.11	−0.02	0.24	0.12	0.06	0.19
Survival entrepreneurial motivation → Entrepreneurial ability → Entrepreneurial performance	0.08	−0.02	0.17	0.08	0.02	0.14
Opportunity entrepreneurial motivation → Entrepreneurial ability → Entrepreneurial performance	0.02	−0.09	0.13	0.21	0.14	0.30
Survival entrepreneurial motivation → Entrepreneurial learning → Entrepreneurial ability → Entrepreneurial performance	0.08	−0.02	0.17	0.09	0.05	0.13
Opportunity entrepreneurial motivation → Entrepreneurial learning → Entrepreneurial ability → Entrepreneurial performance	0.02	−0.10	0.13	0.12	0.08	0.17

The mediating role of entrepreneurial learning between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance was tested. The mediating effect of entrepreneurial learning between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance was 0.09, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.05, 0.14], excluding 0, indicating that entrepreneurial learning plays a significant mediating role between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance. Additionally, after joining entrepreneurial learning, the direct effect of survival entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance was 0.07, and the 95% confidence interval was [−0.04, 0.17], including 0, showing that the direct effect of survival entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance after adding the mediating variable is not significant, that is, entrepreneurial learning has a completely mediating effect between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance, and  $H_6$  is proved. Therefore, when entrepreneurial learning is added as an intermediary variable, survival entrepreneurial motivation mainly affects entrepreneurial performance through entrepreneurial learning.

The mediating role of entrepreneurial learning between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance was examined. In Table 4, the mediating effect of entrepreneurial learning between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance was 0.12, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.06, 0.19], excluding 0, indicating that entrepreneurial learning has a significant mediating role between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance. After joining entrepreneurial learning, the direct effect of opportunity entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance was 0.11, and the 95% confidence interval was [−0.02, 0.24], including 0, indicating that the direct effect of opportunity entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance is not significant after adding mediating variables, that is, entrepreneurial learning has a completely mediating effect between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance, and  $H_7$  is proved. Therefore, when entrepreneurial learning is added as a mediating variable, opportunity entrepreneurial motivation mainly affects entrepreneurial performance through entrepreneurial learning.

The mediating role of entrepreneurial ability between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance was tested. In Table 4, the mediating effect of entrepreneurial ability between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance was 0.08, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.02, 0.14], excluding 0, indicating that entrepreneurial ability has a significant mediating effect between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance. After adding entrepreneurial ability, the direct effect of survival entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance was 0.08, and the 95% confidence interval was [−0.02, 0.17], including 0, indicating that the direct effect of survival entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance after adding mediating variables is not significant, that is, entrepreneurial ability has a completely mediating role between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance, and  $H_{11}$  is proved. Therefore, when entrepreneurial ability is added as a mediating variable, survival entrepreneurial motivation mainly affects entrepreneurial performance through entrepreneurial ability.

The mediating role of entrepreneurial ability between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance was tested. In Table 4, the mediating effect of entrepreneurial ability between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance was 0.21, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.14, 0.30], excluding 0, indicating that entrepreneurial ability has a significant mediating effect between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance. After adding entrepreneurial ability, the direct effect of opportunity entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance was 0.02, and the 95% confidence interval was [−0.09, 0.13], including 0, indicating that the direct effect of opportunity entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance after adding mediating variables is not significant, that is, entrepreneurial ability has a completely mediating role between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and

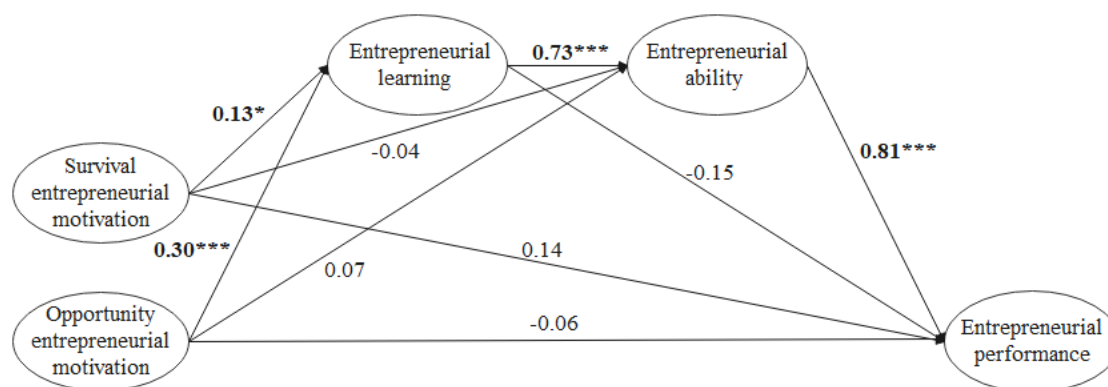


entrepreneurial performance, and  $H_{12}$  is proved. Therefore, when entrepreneurial ability is added as a mediating variable, opportunity entrepreneurial motivation mainly affects entrepreneurial performance through entrepreneurial ability.

The chain mediating role of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance was tested. The chain mediation effect of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance was 0.09, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.05, 0.13], excluding 0, indicating that entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability play a chain-like mediating role between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance. After adding the two mediating variables of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability at the same time, the direct effect of survival entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance was 0.08. The 95% confidence interval was [−0.02, 0.17], including 0, indicating that entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability play a completely chain-like intermediary role between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance, and  $H_{13}$  is proved. Therefore, when two intermediary variables of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability are added at the same time, survival entrepreneurial motivation mainly affects entrepreneurial ability through entrepreneurial learning and then affects entrepreneurial performance.

The chain mediating role of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance was tested. The chain mediation effect of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance was 0.12, and the 95% confidence interval was [0.08, 0.17], excluding 0, indicating that entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability play a chain intermediary role between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance. After adding the two mediating variables of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability at the same time, the direct effect of opportunity entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance was 0.02, and the 95% confidence interval was [−0.10, 0.13], including 0, indicating that entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial power have a complete chain mediating effect on the role of opportunity entrepreneurial motivation in entrepreneurial performance, and  $H_{14}$  is proved. Therefore, when two mediating variables of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability are added at the same time, opportunity entrepreneurial motivation mainly affects entrepreneurial ability through entrepreneurial learning and then affects entrepreneurial performance.

In order to test the robustness of the chain mediation between entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability, Amos' structural equation model was used to process the data, and the results are shown in Figure 2. It can be seen that after entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability enter the model at the same time, the direct effects of survival entrepreneurial motivation and opportunity entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance are not significant, and the chain mediating effect of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability is significant. That is, entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability play a complete chain mediating role between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance, and entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability also play a complete chain mediating role between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance.  $H_{13}$  and  $H_{14}$  are verified.



**Figure 2.** Structural equation model of chain intermediary effect. Note: The values in the figure are standardized path coefficients. \* is  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* is  $p < 0.001$ .

## 5. Conclusions and Discussion

### 5.1. Research Conclusions

Based on the entrepreneurial process theory, the research constructed a chain intermediary model of “entrepreneurial motivation-entrepreneurial learning-entrepreneurial ability-entrepreneurial performance” based on a sample of 329 entrepreneurial farmers and systematically explored the important roles of independent learning and ability improvement in the process from farmers’ entrepreneurial motivation to entrepreneurial performance. The research’s main conclusions are as follows. (1) Both survival entrepreneurial motivation and opportunity entrepreneurial motivation positively affect entrepreneurial learning, entrepreneurial ability, and entrepreneurial performance. (2) The effect of opportunity entrepreneurial motivation on other variables in the model is more significant than that of survival entrepreneurial motivation. (3) The independent intermediary effect and chain mediating effect between opportunity entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance are significant, and the fully intermediary effects are exerted; the independent intermediary effect and chain intermediary effect between survival entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial performance are significant, and they play a completely intermediary role.

### 5.2. Theoretical Significance

Firstly, the research on the influence mechanism of farmers’ individual entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial performance has been enriched. Early research on farmers’ entrepreneurial performance usually focused on the impact of external factors such as policy support and social networks on entrepreneurial performance [90], and the internal mechanism of action was mostly focused on exploring the influence of individual characteristics of farm entrepreneurs, such as human capital, social capital, and entrepreneurial ability [4,73], lacking the exploration of the critical path between “motivation” and “result” [91]. Based on the entrepreneurial process theory, this study concludes that entrepreneurial motivation, as the internal driving force of entrepreneurial activities, can encourage farm entrepreneurs to learn entrepreneurship through “pushing” and “pulling”, thereby improving entrepreneurial ability and achieving their entrepreneurial goals. This study not only responds to the call of Luo and Zou [92] for dynamic research on farmers’ entrepreneurial performance, but also reflects the path mechanism for improving farmers’ entrepreneurial performance. It fills the gap in research on the process of entrepreneurial motivation externalizing into entrepreneurial performance.

Secondly, the empirical research on entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability as a chain intermediary mechanism was expanded. In the past, research on entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability focused on exploring its impact on entrepreneurial success as a pre-dependent variable [37], or as a result variable to explore the choice of learning style [93] and the way to improve ability [57], etc., and rarely studied the

linkage roles of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability as intermediary variables. However, as key factors for the success of entrepreneurship, it is extremely important to study how to stimulate entrepreneurial learning behavior and enhance entrepreneurial ability. From the perspective of process, this paper discussed the motivating factors that drive entrepreneurs to learn entrepreneurship and the results achieved by engaging in learning behaviors and improving entrepreneurial ability, and found that entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial ability are important paths linking entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial achievements.

Finally, the study enriched the theoretical and empirical research on farmers' entrepreneurship in the Chinese context. This study placed farmer entrepreneurship within the context of rural revitalization, which is in line with the Chinese context and social dynamics in the new era. During this period, more farmer entrepreneurs have generated opportunity entrepreneurial motivations to achieve their personal ideals, and this higher-level pursuit has played a more significant driving role in farmers' entrepreneurial learning, entrepreneurial ability, and entrepreneurial performance. In addition, the study found that the development of entrepreneurial activities not only depends on the enthusiasm of entrepreneurs, but also requires that entrepreneurs continuously learn and improve their comprehensive capabilities to ensure that enterprises can smoothly transition from "young" to "mature" and achieve entrepreneurial success. This study revealed the distribution of different entrepreneurial motivations in the Chinese context and the complex mechanisms that drive entrepreneurial behavior into entrepreneurial performance.

### *5.3. Practical Implications*

Firstly, farmers' motivations to start a business should be stimulated. The article emphasizes that both survival and opportunity entrepreneurial motivations can positively affect farmers' entrepreneurial behaviors and entrepreneurial results, and the effect of opportunity entrepreneurial motivation is significantly better than that of survival entrepreneurial motivation. Therefore, when formulating policies, relevant government departments should focus on stimulating farmers' entrepreneurial motives (especially opportunistic entrepreneurial motives [30]), establish good social customs, and rationally guide farmers to start entrepreneurial businesses.

Secondly, the farmer entrepreneurship training system should be improved. Entrepreneurial learning plays a completely intermediary role in the path from motivation to performance, which fully illustrates the importance of learning to entrepreneurship. For farmer entrepreneurs, the relatively formal and systematic training courses they can access are activities such as technical guidance and skills training carried out by relevant departments [73]. Thus, the training department should improve the training system, continue to study and improve training courses, invite professional training lecturers, carry out various training activities, and provide farmers with more professional and scientific entrepreneurial knowledge. Concrete work should be done, instead of just formalities.

Finally, a communication and learning platform for farmer entrepreneurs should be built. Offline, relevant local departments should take the lead in launching various platforms for meetings by farmer entrepreneurs to share and communicate experiences, and invite "grassroots entrepreneurial stars" to share their experiences. Online, relevant departments, associations, and other organizations should build a knowledge-sharing platform for farmer entrepreneurs to help them form social networks that facilitate the group's experience sharing, information exchange, and cooperation.

### *5.4. Research Limitations and Future Prospects*

Firstly, there are limitations to the data samples and measurement methods. The data were mainly derived from a sample in China's Sichuan Province, and although Sichuan Province is one of the provinces where farmers return home to start a business, future research can expand the existing scope to the whole country to make the sample more representative. In addition, although the measurement scale has good reliability and

validity, the use of self-evaluation will inevitably have a subjective effect. In future research, financial indicators and non-financial indicators can be included for measurement [94].

Secondly, the research focused on the internal mechanism of the individual and lacked the exploration of boundary conditions. While the study uncovered the intrinsic path to farmer entrepreneurship and attempted to find ways to solve problems and succeed for farmers themselves, it did not pay attention to the transformative factors through which this path works. In future research, we can further explore the boundaries of entrepreneurial motivation affecting entrepreneurial behavior or entrepreneurial process behavior choices affecting entrepreneurial performance, such as environmental dynamics [95], entrepreneurial resilience [96], etc., so that the research conclusions can more accurately solve the problems encountered in the entrepreneurial process.

Finally, the combined internal and external influences were not explored in depth. Based on the entrepreneurial process theory, the research explored how entrepreneurs can transform entrepreneurial motivation into entrepreneurial performance through entrepreneurial behavior, and clarified the internal mechanism of the entrepreneurial process. However, according to AMO theory, individual performance is affected by the combined effects of ability, motivation, and opportunity [97], so entrepreneurial performance is not only related to the entrepreneur's motivation and ability, but also affected by the external environment [98]. Therefore, in future research, internal individual factors and external environmental factors can be included in the in-depth exploration of entrepreneurial performance to increase the comprehensiveness of the research.

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## Appendix A

Variable	Item
Survival Entrepreneurial Motivation	I want to become rich through entrepreneurship
	I want to ensure my life through entrepreneurship
	I want to make life comfortable for myself and my family through entrepreneurship
	I want to earn pension through entrepreneurship
Opportunity Entrepreneurial Motivation	I like challenges and want to make a career
	I want to realize my self-worth through entrepreneurship
	I want to prove my ability through entrepreneurship
	I have entrepreneurial desire or interest

Variable	Item
Entrepreneurial Performance	My career has reached the expected goal
	High overall satisfaction with the business created
	The profit level of my business is good
	The return on investment of my business is high
	The sales of my business are good
Entrepreneurial Learning	I often learn from others' behaviors and actions through observation.
	I often learn from others' behaviors and actions through imitation
	Learning from others through observation and imitation has a great impact on my entrepreneurial process
	I often get guidance from "experts" (such as expert consultants, high-quality professionals, tutors, etc.)
	The guidance of others can help me solve the key problems in the process of entrepreneurship
	The guidance of others can enable me to obtain emotional support (such as improving entrepreneurial self-confidence and strengthening entrepreneurial faith)
	I often learn through formal communication or cooperation with others (such as business dealings with suppliers, official dealings with government agencies, etc.)
	I often learn through informal communication with others (such as chatting, gathering, outdoor activities, etc.)
	Communication and cooperation with others help me obtain information on completing entrepreneurial tasks and coping with challenges
	Communication and cooperation with others enable me to gain emotional support (for example, improve entrepreneurial self-confidence and firm entrepreneurial belief)
Entrepreneurial Ability	I can identify potential market areas
	I can assess the strengths and weaknesses of potential business opportunities
	I can seize high-quality business opportunities and implement them
	I can tolerate various pressures and unexpected changes in my work
	I will persist even in the face of adversity
	I keep my promise to be fair, open-minded and honest in marketing activities and enterprise management
	I can connect relevant ideas, questions and observations from different sources
	I will timely adjust the strategic objectives and business ideas of the company/cooperative
	I can accurately reposition the company's position in the market
	I can develop effective ways to finance
	I can use various ways to finance
	I can get financial support from the government
	I can effectively lead, supervise and motivate employees
	I can reasonably allocate various resources such as people, talents and materials within the enterprise
	I can build and maintain relationships with people with key resources
	I can take timely measures to solve the problems and difficulties in the company's operation

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