

Europe's new farmers

Innovative ways to enter farming and access land



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“The European Parliament recalls that, in order to achieve sustainable agriculture, young farmers must be able to invest and acquire agricultural land.”

European Parliament, *Own-initiative report on the implementation of CAP young farmers' tools in the EU after the 2013 reform*, May 2018

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Foreword

I am not a farmer, but I could become one!

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I am not a farmer and, for the moment, do not want to be a farmer. But do I know a lot of farmers and a lot of people who want to farm. Farming is an indispensable profession. We need farmers who love farming and earn a decent living with their work.

When I was studying Environmental Science at the University of Girona, I loved cooking. Every Saturday morning, I went to the local market for fresh food to inspire tasty meals. My simple thought was that farmers enjoyed a good place in society, farming happily with plenty of dignity. Not until the end of my degree, when I began investigating the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) in Europe, did I discover how serious the farming crisis was.

For my field work, I had to interview farmers in a traditional farming valley close to Girona. My first shock was that most of the farmers were pessimistic and full of complaints. They believed that public policies were bull and that food prices were driven down by big companies. Many were prepared to close down their farm; they were encouraging their children to pursue anything but farming. I was totally disoriented about the present and the future of my fresh food at the market and about the destiny of the rapidly declining farming population.

That was in 2003. I decided to study different realities in order to understand what was wrong with the system, why such an essential livelihood was undervalued by society and even by farmers themselves.

One of my intuitive assumptions was that there was a new wave of motivated people who want to farm but are not from a farming background. I was observing new and innovative farms. Most of them were farming organically, selling directly to the consumer, and running relatively small operations. By producing food, sometimes adding value, and selling directly, they were closing the circle. This new approach seemed to attract a new generation of farmers, most of them from an urban background, with university degrees. There were also a surprisingly high number of women. At that moment I realised that there was an emerging generation of new peasants—modern peasants, if you like: farmers

with and without a farming background, with the shared ambition of making farming a real and worthwhile way of live.

After all these years of listening, talking, researching, teaching, writing, discovering and travelling, I am pretty sure that there is a movement of people willing to produce and to consume food in a different way. They are more conscious, more active, more optimistic and healthier. The crisis of the farming sector has become an open door for creating new realities. Are the people prepared to take on this huge task? The increasing demand for organic and local food is creating new spaces for a vibrant generation of people who believe in an alternative food system. But this pathway is not easy for new entrants into farming.

The obstacles are numerous and difficult to overcome. First and foremost is the matter of access to land. Being a farmer means having available land to work, and this is one of the main hurdles new farmers face. Secondly, there is the challenge of understanding and finding a place in the farming sector. Most traditional farmers have grown up on a farm and learned how to farm since childhood. Acquiring enough knowledge and experience to run a farm is another big step for newcomers. The third challenge is to develop a market. As a new farmer, you have to create a new group of clients for the farm to be profitable, which most do through the local food system. There are other complex issues like the high cost of starting up, access to credit, massive amounts of paperwork, the low status associated with farming, or lack of support from existing farmers and institutions.

To help new entrants get over these hurdles, plenty of new and inspiring initiatives have flourished around Europe. In this publication you will find some of the most innovative examples created to help new entrants fulfil their dream of being a farmer. These experiences are the seeds of a new way of supporting farm renewal. We need to foster creative proposals and policies to facilitate a new generation of farmers to feed our society sustainably. The reality shows the diversity of actors involved. Most are non-profit organizations, but there are also cooperatives and public bodies, all willing to articulate a novel system of support based on common sense, ecological ethics and human values.

I am happy that this publication will foster greater knowledge of the challenges and innovative experiences of people and organizations supporting new ways of entering agriculture. This was my utopia fifteen years ago and, today, we are closer to making it a reality.

About the authors

This booklet has been written by members of the European Access to Land network, as part of a European partnership focused on promoting access to land for agroecological farmers.

The European Access to Land network brings together grassroots organisations from across Europe to share experiences and promote the significance of access to land for agroecological farming and generational renewal. Established in 2012, it functions as an informal network of about 15 organisations. The network's main objectives are to consolidate and disseminate initiatives on access to land, and to put land issues in the spotlight. To that end, it organises information and experience-sharing, fosters cooperation between members, and facilitates broader communication.

For two years, our organisations have researched the realities and experiences of new entrants in six European countries. We have also researched farm incubators and other mechanisms supporting entry into farming and access to land for new farmers. We have in particular collaborated with RENETA, the French network of farm incubators. This publication presents our results. It analyses the profile of new farmers in several countries, and the role they can play to renew farming and develop agroecological food and farming systems. It also presents the portraits of ten new farmers and displays a range of good practices to get inspiration from.

Supported by:



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Introduction

¹ Source: Eurostat, Farm Structure Survey, 2013, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Farm_structure_survey_2013_-_main_results#Farm_managers_by_age

² European Innovation Partnership (EIP)-Agri Focus Group, *New entrants into farming: lessons to foster innovation and entrepreneurship*, Final report, 3 May 2016 <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/focus-groups/new-entrants-farming-lessons-foster-innovation-and>

³ See EIP-Agri, final report, 2016, *ibid.* See also: Jeunes Agriculteurs andt MRJC, *Création d'activité par les entrepreneurs HCF: besoins spécifiques, leviers d'action et complémentarité des dispositifs d'accompagnement*, 2013; D'ALLENS G. and LECLAIR L. *Les néo-paysans*, Reporterre/Seuil, 2016; Monllor Neus, *Young farmers: pathways, practices and attitudes in a new agrosocial context. A comparative exploration of young farmers' practices and attitudes between Southern Ontario (Canada) and Girona area in Catalonia (Spain)*, University of Girona, 2011, at: www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/70011; Flament S, Macias B, Monllor N, *Incorporación de los jóvenes al campo en España*. Estudio para Mundubat y COAG, 2016, pp. 44-5.

⁴ France is one of the countries where newcomers are a well-identified and well-studied group. In 2013, they constituted 30% of new entrants receiving the Common Agricultural Policy young farmers' grant.

⁵ See EIP-Agri, final report, 2016, *ibid.*

European farmers are a greying population. More than half of European farmers will retire within 10 years, while only 7% are under the age of 35.¹ Many senior farmers have no successors in their family, and have no identified successor outside of it. The question of who is going to be the next generation of European farmers is a very pressing one. Who will grow our food? Who will sustain rural economies and communities? Who will maintain open landscapes for everybody to enjoy?

There is also a major challenge in ensuring both the continuity and the necessary evolutions between the generations of farmers. How to avoid losing precious soil quality and know-how held by the current generation of passionate farmers? And how to allow new farmers to develop more agroecological forms of farming?

Within the new generation of farmers, most new farmers are direct successors, also called "continuers", i.e. young people taking over the family farm. But intra-family farm succession—which for centuries has been the dominant form of entry into farming in Europe—is losing ground. Increasingly, the children of farmers opt for other careers, as many view farming as a profession requiring considerable working time and hard physical labour while earning little income and receiving little public recognition.

On the other hand, on the ground, a growing number of people are seeking to enter farming, without a family farm and sometimes even without prior experience with farming. These new farmers may be defined as "newcomers" to farming, or ex novo new entrants.² Many of them turn towards agroecological forms of farming and favour innovation—organic farming, short supply chains, community-supported agriculture, and on-farm food processing—which increase on-farm added value, while contributing to local quality food, jobs and environmental protection.³ The exact number and potential of these newcomers is not well-known, as only a few countries have collected data and conducted studies about them.⁴ It is also recognised that there is more of a continuum than a divide between continuers and newcomers.⁵ Many newcomers indeed have some connection with farming, through relatives, a rural background, on-farm experience, etc., while some continuers may decide to continue farming but not take on the family farm, or to transform it radically (e.g. from a specialised farm to mixed farming, or from conventional to organic).

⁶ European Commission, *Needs of Young Farmers*, final report, November 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/external-studies/2015/young-farmers/final-report-1_en.pdf; EIP-Agri Focus group, *New Entrants into farming*, 2016, *ibid.*; European Parliament, "The state of play of land concentration in the EU - how to facilitate access to land for farmers?", own initiative report (2016/2141(INI)), rapporteur: Maria Noichl, 30 March 2017; European Parliament, report on the implementation of CAP young farmers' tools in the EU after the 2013 reform (2017/2088(INI)), own initiative report, rapporteur: Nicola Caputo, 2 May 2018.

Our organisations are grassroots groups working to facilitate farm succession and entry of a new generation in a number of ways:

- training and advising young farmers and aspiring farmers,
- advising senior farmers and landowners to facilitate farm transmission,
- acquiring farms in order to make them available to new entrants, especially newcomers, under favourable terms,
- advocating for the preservation of existing farms and their transfer to a new generation,
- advocating for better support mechanisms for new entrants and progressive entry into farming.

Our vision is that of a Europe with multiple farms, farmers and local food systems, making European food and farming systems more resilient, creating jobs and activities in the countryside, providing safe, high-quality food, preserving the environment and contributing to lively rural communities.

Our daily experience in advising and supporting new farmers, particularly newcomers, highlights the considerable hurdle of accessing land for farming. Access to land is now widely recognised as the number one obstacle to entering farming in Europe.⁶ Yet, the situation remains little-known and little-studied. Moreover, most public policies supporting new entrants, at the local, national and European level, are conceived for continuers and fail to address the specific needs and challenges of newcomers. And most agricultural policies give little consideration to land market regulations and specific mechanisms to facilitate access to land for new farmers.

This report aims to share our experience and analyses of the situation for new farmers and their access to land in our countries. It also presents a number of new farmers, to highlight their diverse backgrounds, difficulties and pathways into farming. All of these portraits also emphasise their enthusiasm, innovativeness and dedication to becoming a farmer. They also illustrate various ways in which they access land, often with the support of farmers' organisations or various civil society movements. Based on these country studies and new farmers' portraits, we then attempt to present an overview and characterise these novel ways to access land for farming. The report ends with an exploration of farm incubators, which constitute one of the growing innovations to help new farmers (particularly newcomers) enter farming, including by providing start-up access to a plot of land. ●

Country studies

Belgium

Maarten Roels Terre-en-vue

⁷ FIAN Belgium, Pour un meilleur accès à la terre en Belgique et en Europe, September 2014, p26. See: www.fian.be/FIAN-publie-une-etude-sur-l-acces-a-la-terre-en-Belgique-et-en-Europe

Who are new entrants?

In Belgium, there are few statistical data on the profile of young and new farmers. With only 5% of farm holders under the age of 35, Belgium's farming population is one of the oldest in the European Union. As elsewhere in Europe, fewer and fewer children of farmers want to take over the family farm, and there is a general lack of new entrants into farming, due to the poor prospects of making a decent living and the difficulties involved in getting started as a farmer.

However, Belgium is seeing a rise in newcomers into farming, i.e., people entering agriculture without having a prior background in agriculture or direct connection with a family farm. Again, the lack of data and analyses on the number, profiles and needs of these new farmers constitutes a major obstacle in the renewal of farming generations⁷. However, information obtained from organisations working directly with these farmers shows that there are roughly two groups of newcomers:

- youngsters who directly after secondary school prepare to become a farmer by doing trainings, following specialised courses and participating in farm incubator projects; and
- people deciding to change careers in order to enter farming.

This second group in particular shows the greatest growth. The first group has the most difficulty accessing land, because often they have a very limited network and little capital to rely on, whereas the second group is more likely to have a strong network and some capital they have been able to acquire during their previous career.

Newcomers mostly choose to start small scale farms that require low investment and offer relatively high profitability rates. They often look for citizen support through community-supported agriculture (CSA) or self-harvesting systems, and also seek ways to collaborate with other farmers through farmer cooperatives. Citizen support allows for sharing the climate- and management-related risks, and cooperatives make marketing their produce easier and allow them to learn from more experienced farmers. Recently, we have also observed a trend of newcomers seeking to take over an existing farm that has no identified successor. This is also an interesting way to limit risks as it allows them to tap into an existing group of consumers and to learn from the transferor.

Other new entrants tend to develop projects that are closer to their parents' farm model. However, we are seeing a growing trend of farmers from farming families who start organic farms or convert their parents' farms into organic farms.

⁸ See: www.landwijzer.be

⁹ See: www.crabe.be

Farming schools and courses

The large majority of Belgian new entrants into farming go through specialised training schemes before launching their farms or even before testing their skills through farm incubators. These farming schools and courses are an important step for many new entrants.

A number of initiatives, such as Cense équi'voc or Terre & Conscience, organise introductory courses, often with field visits, to enable aspiring new entrants to see and get a sense of what farming is about before deciding whether they want to enrol in a professional course.

The Mouvement d'Action Paysanne (MAP) is a small farmers' union and a member of Via Campesina. It has established a training scheme called Ecole Paysanne Indépendante, which provides year-long courses, mostly through evening classes, to enable aspiring farmers to learn about peasant farming in general, or about specific topics such as organic vegetable growing, farm management, etc. The courses include farm visits and practice and enable students to certify as professional farmers, and hence to be eligible for CAP support. The Ecole Paysanne Indépendante also provides advice and support for aspiring farmers, to help them develop their professional project and get started.

In Flanders, the organic farming school De Landwijzer⁸ is a specialised training centre for organic and biodynamic agriculture. For 20 years, it has been offering professional training through a curriculum of either one or two and a half years, including both theoretical knowledge and practice. The training is mostly geared towards small-scale vegetable growing. It consists of one day per week of teaching, and at least two days per week of practical internship. De Landwijzer also organises courses to introduce aspiring farmers to the farming sector.

In Wallonia, Le Crabe⁹ is an NGO that aims to promote access to culture and the learning of sustainable production and practices. Amongst other things, it offers a one-year programme for new farmers who learn both theoretical and practical aspects of organic farming. The programme promotes both horticultural systems and small livestock farms.

Both De Landwijzer and Le Crabe have a growing number of students. They offer courses that allow the students to become autonomous in their projects and at the same time plug into a large network of farmers who can provide them with advice, which is particularly important for newcomers. Their year-long courses are recognised by the state, which enables graduates to be eligible for the CAP young farmers' aid.

¹⁰ Read more on the farm lease contract: www.accesstoland.eu/Policy-environment-156

The difficulty of accessing land

As in other European countries, access to land is one of the main obstacles to entering farming in Belgium. Land sales are scarce and often farmers have made arrangements long before the land is for sale. Moreover, average land prices range from €30,000 to €50,000 per hectare, placing them among the highest in Europe and out of reach for most new entrants.

The most common way for new entrants to access land is through renting, especially since new entrants tend to have small farms, which is the category of farm that rents most of its land. As in the case of land sales, when farm leases come to an end, tenant farmers often already have arrangements with neighbouring farmers to transfer the lease contract. New entrants and newcomers mostly come on the scene too late to enter the process. In some cases, the transfer of the farm lease involves paying "key money", which is an illegal but very widespread practice.

Another difficulty with renting land lies in the rigid character of the conventional farm lease contract, which has barely changed since its creation in 1969¹⁰. The farm lease contract gives tenant farmers strong guarantees: it sets a maximum rent price protecting the farmer, establishes the freedom of culture which gives them total decision-making power on their farm practices, and gives them a pre-emptive right to buy if the owner wants to sell the land. As a result, once the land is rented, its market value drops by up to 20 percent. Many landowners resent these impacts on their ownership rights and are reluctant to rent their land: some prefer to leave their land unused rather than renting, and if willing to rent, most will opt for short-term, oral leases which place farmers in very precarious conditions, without the security to farm the land from one year to the next or any guarantee regarding the rental price.

Newcomers' innovative pathways into farming

A- Starting as a CSA farmer

Community supported agriculture (CSA) has become an important trend for newcomers in Belgium. There are different dynamics to be distinguished. In Flanders, the CSA Network was launched in 2009 after a very successful start of the first CSA farm "Het Open Veld" in 2007 near Leuven. Currently, more than 50 new farms have joined the network producing and marketing in a very similar way. Almost all of these farms are run by newcomers to farming, most of whom attended the same courses in the De Landwijzer farming school.

CSA in general and the Flemish CSA Network are indeed very attractive for newcomers. CSA farmers ask their consumers to pay at the beginning of the year and to share the risks run by the farm. If the harvest is smaller due to climate or pest issues, the consumers accept that. CSA farms that become members of the network also

¹¹ See: www.terre-en-vue.be and www.accesstoland.eu/Terre-en-vue

¹² See: www.delandgenoten.be and www.accesstoland.eu/De-Landgenoten

¹³ See: www.land-in-zicht.be

benefit from the CSA meetings held once every few months on a specific theme, allowing them to learn from each other. This system facilitates technical discussions and grouped purchases of seeds, tools, etc. New farmers are supported by "senior" farmers, which gives them the support they need to overcome the first difficult year of launching a new farm.

In Brussels, a separate network called GASAP has also been launched, largely inspired by the French AMAP system. The main difference is that the GASAP Network looks for consumers to connect them to farmers. One farmer has several groups that sign up to buy his produce. The GASAP Network has allowed several new entrants to start their farm and encourages farmers to support each other.

CSA farmers typically test their abilities by starting to produce on a small, manageable plot of 0.2 to 0.4 hectares. This allows them to test the land, their yield and the willingness of consumers to engage. Every year more land is cultivated, more varieties of fruits and vegetables are grown and more consumers join the community. This pathway allows farmers to enter farming in stages, gradually ramping up their production, without having to move from a farm incubator to their actual farm.

B- Renting land from community land trusts

In Belgium, two organisations are dedicated to facilitating access to land for organic farmers. Terre-en-vue¹¹, established in 2011, operates in the Wallonia and Brussels regions. Its mission is to help all farmers with professional, sustainable farming projects that aim to feed the local population while respecting the principles of organic agriculture on human-scale farms. Terre-en-vue supports new farmers, established farmers who need more land in order to diversify or gain more autonomy, and farmers who are looking for successors. More specifically, Terre-en-vue can help new entrants gain access to land in two ways: it can either buy land or it can help them to find a landowner who is willing to rent or sell them land. Terre-en-vue also collaborates with public authorities and landowners seeking to sell or rent land to agroecological farmers.

De Landgenoten¹² (which means "fellow countryman" in Dutch) aims to provide access to farmland for professional organic farmers in Flanders because it believes they have a central role in current and future food safety and food security. De Landgenoten was created in 2014 by 17 organisations united to bring together resources—through shares and donations—to purchase land in Flanders that could be managed as organic farmland across many generations.

In 2000, a local community land trust, Land-in-zicht, started to gather support and funding (donations and loans) to enable a couple of farmers to acquire land. It supported the establishment of De Zonnekouter farm, and later the acquisition of a piece of land for De Kollebebloem farm¹³.

C- Farm incubators

Several farm incubators started in Belgium since 2013. In our context, farm incubators (or "test farms") are small plots of land that are being provided to people who wish to:

- experiment farming in real conditions, by being in charge of a plot and activity,
- self-assess their skills and farm plans, whether it is their technical plans (e.g., choice of crops and farming techniques) or their business plans (production, marketing, etc.), and
- improve their abilities to run farming projects.

The types of projects range from vegetable production to herbal plants and seed growing. The model applied in Belgium is very much inspired by the French model of farm incubators, called "Espace Test agricole".

Point Vert in Modave is the first Belgium farm incubator, established in 2013 as part of a Leader + project. It involves the local municipalities, agricultural school, and Créajob, a business incubator. In 2016, Graines de Paysans started as the second farm incubator, in Brussels, as part of the Boeren Bruxelles Paysans project focused on promoting food production and local food systems in and around Brussels. The same year, Les Jardins de Hottemont, a third test farm located in Ramillies, launched its first call for candidates.

D- Starting a new farm on a large estate

Recently, we have seen two new trends emerging for newcomers:

- large rural estate owners offer temporary space to young farmers who want to start a new farm, allowing them to run a "real-life, full-scale" farming experiment, or
- they offer temporary contracts to new entrants as an experiment in working together, with the aim of installing the new entrants long term.

These two trends seem very similar but have diverging consequences. The nature of the contract is a key factor in their difference.

In the first case, landowners offer a precarious contract because they want to avoid entering into a conventional farm lease contract, in order to maintain their freedom. In general, newcomers are drawn to the free access to the land, but once they master their activity, they want to find a long-term solution, through buying or renting under a conventional farm lease contract. Once they have greater confidence in their abilities and have successfully developed a consumer group, newcomers then have the needed capital to buy or the legitimacy to obtain land through land trusts such as Terre-en-vue or De Landgenoten. This model is attracting a growing group of landowners.

In the second case, the landlord is willing to rent the land

long term but first wants to test whether the new entrant is a reliable tenant. A precarious free contract ("Commodat") is being signed with a fixed date for an evaluation, after which a long-term contract is signed or a new company is established in which both the landowner and the new entrant are shareholders. This allows for a long-term partnership to be set up without entering into a conventional lease contract.

Land for newcomers: the experience of Terre-en-vue

During its five years in existence, Terre-en-vue has had contact with many aspiring new farmers, most of whom are newcomers to farming. The majority of newcomers who contact us are not ready to start their own farm yet. They are often in the early stages of developing their experience and skill. Terre-en-vue has therefore transferred many demands for land to partner organisations which offer guidance, courses, on-farm training, farm incubators, etc. On the other hand, new entrants who are technically and financially ready to launch their farms can be assisted fairly smoothly.

Terre-en-vue is well known amongst new entrants and aspiring new entrants, and many partner organisations refer them to Terre-en-vue for their land search. Sometimes, Terre-en-vue seeks to identify new entrants who have a high potential for success in setting up a new farm, either as a candidate for farm succession or to bid for a public tender. It then turns to existing training courses, on-farm training sessions and farm incubators to identify potential candidates.

One particular challenge is finding land that is for sale or whose rental contract is coming to an end, where landowners are willing to give priority to new entrants rather than selling or renting to a neighbour and enlarging existing farms. To that end, Terre-en-vue is working towards expanding its network of farmers. It is also planning to develop a network of "land whisperers", in order to stay informed with regard to potential land for sale or contracts to be transferred.

Terre-en-vue also organises collective information sessions, called TupperTerre, bringing together new/ aspiring farmers and landowners willing to rent out their land. At these events, one aspiring farmer presents her/his project to a group of Terre-en-vue members and supporters, who are often connected to broader networks.

François Sonnet is a good example of a smooth pathway to accessing land. He is a typical newcomer and career changer, who worked for 10 years in ICT before deciding to take up farming. He followed a course at De Landwijzer organic farming school and did his on-farm training at a brilliant new vegetable farm in Flanders (Het Open Veld). He then came to a TupperTerre session where he presented his project to Terre-en-vue members in his home-town region. By focussing on the ideal spot for his new farm, Terre-en-vue found an organic farmer willing to rent him land exactly where he dreamed of launching a farm. ●

France

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¹⁴ Mutualité Sociale Agricole (MSA), Tableau de bord de la population des nouveaux exploitants agricoles en 2014, 2015, www.msa.fr/lfr/etudes-statistiques. This figure excludes farm holders who started farming on a farm considered too small to provide a main income, as well as farm holders whose main income is earned outside of farming.

¹⁵ In 2014, 7% of entries into farming were wives of an established farmer, who formally enter farming as well. Over half of them get established under a business partnership with their husband. Source: MSA, 2015

¹⁶ For the Ministry of Agriculture, an "HCF" is someone entering farming who has no family relationship with the farm transferor or a relationship going beyond the third degree of family relationship.

¹⁷ See European Innovation Partnership Focus Group on New entrants into Farming, Final Report, 2015.

Who enters farming in France?

Every year, about 13,000 people enter farming in France, a figure that stood at over 20,000 per year 20 years ago.¹⁴ Agricultural institutions distinguish two main categories of new entrants into farming:

- Continuers, who come from a farming family and get established on the family farm¹⁵
- New farmers getting started outside of a family farm (called Hors cadre familial, or HCF), consisting of two subgroups:
 - > those not from a farming family (called Non issus du milieu agricole, or NIMAs);
 - > those who are from a farming family or background but are not getting established on the family farm (because they have a different project, opt for another region, or join a farmers' cooperative, etc.).

In 2013, new farmers getting started outside of a family farm constituted 30% of subsidised new entrants (up to 70% in certain areas). If we consider all new entrants, including those who do not receive the young farmer grant, the figure is higher but not known. The category of new farmers getting started outside of a family farm (or "HCF") now is a well-recognised category in France. The Ministry of Agriculture and other institutions have developed a definition¹⁶, a statistical apparatus and specific policy measures for this group. They view it as a source of generational renewal and innovation for the farming sector.

Many organisations promoting alternative agriculture emphasise that "HCF" is too broad a group. They prefer to focus on those who are true newcomers to farming. However, analysis, such as research by the EIP Group on new entrants¹⁷, shows that "newcomers" include a diversity of profiles and backgrounds, whose connection with farming is more a continuum than a clear-cut divide.

Most new entrants start out in partnership with an established farmer, and 56% get started in partnership with a family member (e.g., husband and wife) or in a farmer's cooperative.

While the number of new entrants is higher in France than in many European countries, it is not enough to ensure generational renewal. Indeed, the number of farmers retiring each year (30,000)

¹⁸ Agreste, Enquête sur la structure des exploitations en 2007, Chiffres et données Agriculture n°201, p73, www.agreste.agriculture.gouv.fr/IMG/File/resultat201.pdf

¹⁹ See: ASP, 2004; CEP, 2011; CGAAER, 2016

²⁰ ASP, 2004

²¹ F. Lefebvre, Démographie agricole: La France doit-elle craindre l'avenir, Demeter 2009.

far outweighs the number of new farmers entering agriculture (13,000). The farming population is aging: 38% of farm holders are over the age of 55, and only 9% are under 35. Furthermore, according to a national study conducted in 2007, less than a third of farm holders over the age of 55 know who their successor would be.¹⁸ The issue of generational renewal mostly concerns small- and medium-size farms.

Newcomers to farming: main features

Studies of newcomers at the national level are few in number and somewhat outdated.¹⁹ Those that exist show that:

- Only 10% of newcomers are from an urban background; most come from rural areas, with or without farming experience and connections.
- This 10% play a part in “normalising” the farming profession, as a chosen occupation rather than a fate or obligation. They may be farmers for some time and have another career before or after.
- They have a better capacity to understand the needs and expectations of society at large and to connect with urban people and consumers.
- They tend to focus on high-added value farming and niche farming (organic agriculture, on-farm processing, farm shop, multi-activity, etc.). As a corollary, they tend to get started on smaller farms than continuers, due to the high cost and difficulty of securing land (see below).
- 9 out of 10 are still farming after 10 years.²⁰ A prospective study estimates that this group (“newcomers”) could represent half of French farmers by 2050.²¹ Despite recent reforms to better match the needs and specificities of new farmers, public institutions and policies are still falling short of providing adequate support (see below).

Partial studies offer additional insight into the newcomer profile.

Sample study Of newcomers (JA and MRJC), 2013

In 2012-13, the Young Farmers' Union and Rural Christian Youth Movement conducted a study on 230 new farmers getting started outside of a family farm. They were either preparing their entry into farming, getting established or already established.

- Not a spur of the moment decision: 60% had planned their entry into farming for at least 4 years. Nearly half have a family member who is or was farming, and 40% have experience as a farm worker;
- More women: 35% of the respondents are women (on average women represent 27% of French farmers, and only 19% of young farmers under the age of 40);
- Highly educated: 66% have an academic degree outside of agriculture, and 43% have an academic degree in agriculture;

²² Elsa Pibou, “Paysans de passage. Les fermiers du mouvement Terre de Liens en France,” Ph.D. thesis, 2016

²³ See Portraits of farmers: Franches Terres and Radis & Co, 2017 in this publication.

- Attachment to their place of residence: 74% wish to start their farm in their local canton, county or region, and 78% manage to do so;
- “Atypical” and niche projects are not always realised. Newcomers tend to focus their plans on organic agriculture, on-farm processing, vegetable growing and atypical cultures (medicinal plants, old breeds, etc.) and direct sales, far more than other farmers. There is, however, a significant gap between their plans and their actual farming practices.

% of farmers interviewed	Wishing or planning to do	Actually doing
Vegetable gardening	23%	15%
Arable crops	9%	14%
On-farm processing	34%	20%
Farm shop / sales point	39%	15%
Organic production	63%	34%

They remain well above average for organic agriculture, but do not all realise their plans for on-farm processing and direct sales. More than planned also end-up doing “typical” crop production and cattle-farming. Many also diversify their activities beyond agriculture: 20% process their products, 7% provide on-farm educational and cultural activities, and 5% develop agritourism.

Profile of newcomers advised by Terre de Liens

Every year, Terre de Liens advises about 1500 prospective farmers, mostly newly established and mostly newcomers to farming (about 60% of them). Most farmers on Terre de Liens farms (72%) started farming outside of a family farm, many with no prior background in agriculture.²² While we do not have comprehensive quantitative or qualitative analyses of the profiles of these farmers and prospective farmers, we can attest to their considerable interest in farming and the many obstacles they face in their effort to start a farming business. Primarily, they struggle to access land, sometimes for years.²³

Many of these farmers also struggle to define a viable and sustainable project that ensures good living conditions and income. Many have projects that are considered not viable by conventional agricultural institutions: too small a surface area, too many products, too much non-farming activity (e.g., educational projects), and/or uncommon activities (e.g., horse ploughing, rare varieties, etc.).

They are often ineligible for public subsidies and mostly receive support from associations promoting alternative agriculture. Some also take years to be fully accepted by the local community or neighbouring farmers.

We also know that there are major regional differences in the profile of new farmers getting started outside of a family farm, the share of newcomers among them, and the types of projects they have. There are also important regional differences in terms of existing organisations and institutions advising new entrants and newcomers and facilitating their entry into farming.

How does one enter farming in France?

1- Formal agricultural training

There are two main training programmes open to newcomers to farming:

An initial training course, which begins at the secondary school level

Teenagers can choose to join an agricultural secondary school which provides training to become either a farm holder or an agricultural advisor or technician. Most pupils pursue their agricultural studies after their A-level, or continue training through an apprentice programme. There are few newcomers in agricultural secondary schools, particularly in the emblematic production sectors (horticulture, livestock farming). Nevertheless, these newcomers who had an early calling for farming represent a significant share of newcomers who actually enter farming.

Vocational retraining for career changers

This training is provided by adult training centres, usually located in agricultural high schools. The programme consists of short training courses (9 to 16 months) aimed at giving trainees the necessary foundation to start a career in agriculture, as a farm worker or farm holder. The curriculum includes:

- theoretical courses (accounting, management, plant and living biology),
- specific courses, including field work: zootechnics, soil study, range management, etc.
- insight into the professional and local context, and information from various stakeholders who are usual partners of French farmers (e.g., SAFER, Agricultural chamber).

Instructors are often a mix of teachers from the agricultural secondary school and outside professionals and farmers. The training also includes internships that lead to the production of written work, such as "analysis of an operating system" or "my

project to enter farming" for those wishing to become farmers.

This training or retraining is a pre-requisite for receiving official support and subsidies for new entrants. However, it is not enough to ensure sufficient knowledge and skills needed to pursue farming serenely and sustainably. Teachers and instructors generally recommend consolidating one's training through practical farming experiments, particularly as farm workers. As highlighted by an Alsatian instructor: "It is always difficult to convey to them that once they have completed their training, it's like they have their license but don't know how to drive." In some regions, at the end of their training, trainees are given the opportunity to gain practical experience through a network of host farms.

In France, this standardised training programme in agricultural secondary schools is central to the path to farming for new entrants. Indeed, from the start, newcomers have to make a choice: do they want to enter farming with public aid and support, or outside of this official path? Aid for new entrants, provided by the State and regional governments, include a grant based on the main characteristics of the project (area, type of farming, etc.), as well as access to subsidised loans. Today, many features of the projects most often carried out by newcomers—e.g., organic farming, direct sales, agroecology—are taken into consideration in determining aid for new farmers. But many newcomers are reluctant to apply for such aid, which they view as bureaucratic and controlling or even "judging" their farm project.

Not all new entrants can receive subsidies. Eligibility is determined by a set of criteria, some of which are strict or even discriminatory: one must be under the age of 40, start farming on a minimum surface area of land (considered necessary for "viable" farming), have an agricultural qualification, and commit to being a farmer for a certain duration, reaching a minimum output and income within four years, and completing all training courses recommended by the public authority administering the subsidy, etc. Today, new entrants passing through the official, subsidised channel are a minority (about one third). The criteria regarding age and minimum qualification are among the most cited obstacles.

2- Progressive entry into farming

Many newcomers choose to enter farming progressively, in the sense that they start with a small-scale activity and plot, which they gradually expand over time, as land or commercial opportunities arise. Progressive entry into farming is often promoted in regions where access to land is easier. In regions under strong land pressures, there is a risk that the new entrant remains stuck for years in a situation whereby farming does not constitute a full-time job and income or is not viable in the long-term, for lack of sufficient land.

Progressive entry into farming is now officially recognised as one of the entry paths into farming and is eligible for public support

²⁴ See the CNASEA study (2004), the MRJC booklet (2010), and the JA & MRJC study (2013) cited above.

²⁵ See Structures' Policy in France: Controlling the right to access farmland, www.accesstoland.eu/Structures-Policy-in-France

and subsidies. The criteria in terms of land surface area and income are lower than for "conventional" entry into farming. However, candidates have to be sure of being able to reach their objectives as a "full-fledged" farm in the medium term, failing which they will have to pay back all or part of the aid.

At the end of the vocational training, we see two main situations:

- Some trainees are able to find land quickly through their family, their local and professional network, or with the support of a municipality, and they soon enter farming.
- Other trainees (the majority) enter a phase of project maturation. This may involve employment as a farm worker on one or several farms, going into an apprenticeship, doing more or less informal on-farm internships, or entering an incubator farm. Some have to go back to their previous jobs (for financial or other reasons). This period is a time of particular frailty for future farmers. Many end up abandoning their farming projects, either because they find themselves cut off from their agricultural activities and networks, or because they opt to become a farm worker.

The time needed to mature and fulfil a farming project can span months or even years. It often involves making local contacts and seeking professional and expert advice on the project. The harder land is to find, the longer this period tends to last. In Alsace, where farmland is particularly expensive and rare, it takes an average of 3 to 5 years of actively searching for land to find an adequate plot or farm.

Access to land is a major challenge for newcomers to farming

Because they do not inherit a farm, newcomers struggle to get access to land. Land is indeed hard to find and very expensive, and securing farmland to rent or buy requires good knowledge of the land market and strong local relationships. All recent studies highlight that land is one of the two main obstacles (along with financing) faced by new farmers seeking to enter farming outside of a family farm.²⁴

In France, access to and use of farmland is regulated by official agencies. They decide who and how one can establish or expand a farm. Alongside the SAFERs which regulate access to land ownership, additional regulations govern the right to farm available land. In order to gain access to farmland through a lease or sale, or to expand a farm holding beyond a certain limit, an operating permit is required. The aim of this "farm structure control policy"²⁵ is to ensure that land goes to active farmers and that farms are neither too small nor too large.

²⁶ According to FN Safer, it currently takes an average of 6 years to reimburse one hectare of land. In regions where land pressure is high, such as Alsace, it may take up to 30 years, in SAFER, Le prix des terres 2015.

²⁷ Terre de liens, Newcomers in Search of Small Farms: How to Match the Discrepancy on a Market of Large Farms?, February 2017, www.accesstoland.eu/IMG/pdf/newcomers_in_search_of_small_farms.pdf

²⁸ 90% of respondents to the JA & MRJC study, 2013.

²⁹ The CNASEA study thus differentiates between "local" and "migrant" HCFs, based on the analysis that the degree of connection with the local community is key to starting out in farming. See also TDL Nord Pas de Calais, "Le renouvellement des générations en zone de fermage", Report, February 2016.

²⁹ The CNASEA study thus differentiates between "local" and "migrant" HCFs, based on the analysis that the degree of connection with the local community is key to starting out in farming. See also TDL Nord Pas de Calais, "Le renouvellement des générations en zone de fermage", Report, February 2016.

The main difficulties related to land are the following:

- Access to information and local connections: newcomers struggle to find information about land available for sale or rent. If they do, they are often faced with owners / retiring farmers who would rather sell or rent to a neighbour than to someone from the "outside" with little prior experience. Many aging farmers also do not consider their farm viable in the long run and think the only option is to sell it for the expansion of neighbouring farmers. As a result, they do not advertise their farm for succession and have to be convinced to take this path.
- Insufficient financial means: in many instances, the financial burden of buying land and farm buildings is such that new entrants cannot pool the funds needed (either on their own or through banks), or it will take an entire professional life to pay it back.²⁶
- "Atypical" projects: many newcomers plan to pursue alternative forms of farming (e.g., organic production, pluri-activity, very small farm). Despite recent policy improvement, such projects are more likely than conventional projects to fall outside the existing criteria or frameworks determining eligibility for public subsidies and land access.
- Search criteria not aligned with the actual land market: many newcomers seek smaller surface areas than what is available on the market. Many are also looking for other types of farms than what is on offer (e.g., more vegetable gardening and small fruits and less dairy farming). This may be because they want a small, high added-value farm, because they do not immediately have the skills to run a large farm, because they wish for a better work / life balance, or because they cannot afford a large farm. Many also have their sights set on a small farm because they continually hear that there is no land available and that they will not have the skills to handle a larger, more complex project.²⁷

As a result, most newcomers are tenant farmers.²⁸ They also tend to have smaller farms than other new entrants (by about a third). New entrants getting started outside of family farms and who are not subsidised have smaller farms (2.5 times smaller) than subsidised new entrants, a corollary to their focus on niche farming. In most cases, they find land thanks to their own personal and professional network and with the support of the SAFER. Several studies show that local connections are key in both identifying land opportunities and securing the land.²⁹

Improved but still inadequate public policies

Only 1 out of 3 new farmers receives public subsidies (i.e., a young farmer grant and corollary loans). Some do not ask for aid: either they do not want it for ideological reasons or they are discouraged

³⁰ CGAAER, 2016, p13

³¹ This includes many women who formally enter farming in association with their husband.

³² See Assises de l'installation (Inpact, Confédération paysanne, Jeunes Agriculteurs), 2013; Cour des comptes, 2011; CGAAER, 2016; Siméon, 2013.

³³ CGAER, 2016

by the administrative procedures. Others do not meet the criteria: their surface area is too small, they are too old (over 40), or their business plan is not "profitable" enough, etc. This is particularly true of newcomers. Those not receiving subsidies represent over half of new entrants in terms of work input, and a third in terms of farmed surface area.³⁰ Half of new farmers who do not receive subsidies are women.³¹ New entrant businesses that do not receive subsidies have a "survival rate" of 85% after 5 years, versus 95% for those that do receive subsidies.

There is growing recognition of the fact that newcomers have the potential to foster generational renewal, bring innovation to the agricultural sector (in particular with regard to agroecology), improve the image of the farming system, and better meet social needs with regard to food and farming. Recent reforms of agricultural policies have better incorporated new forms of farming (e.g., direct sales, on-farm processing). We are also seeing renewed public support for farm succession, for instance through increased public aid and the incentive to transfer organic farms to organic farmers. Despite these improvements, however, there is still a need for further progress. A growing number of civil society organisations, academics and public institutions³² are calling for further adaptation of French public policies to new challenges in the farming sector:

- The current policy is not aimed at maintaining a strong farming population. A recent report from the Ministry of Agriculture forecasts the departure of 161,000 farmers by 2022, with only 71,000 new farmers taking their place.³³ At the same time, it clearly shows that poor farm succession leads to the simplification of farming systems and the growing use of waged labour. This often leads to job loss, less diversity of food production and/or increased land abandonment.
- The current young farmer subsidy is criticised for largely missing its goal, with only one third of new entrants receiving it. As noted above, a number of new farmers are not eligible, and many others do not wish to apply for it. Instead of being a catalyst for new entries into farming, this aid mostly benefits young farmers continuing on the family farm. It is sometimes even misused for intra-family farm transfers and tax rebates.
- Public policies and subsidies and extension services are still mostly tailored to continuers and "typical" farming projects. Improvements are needed in order to better address the needs and specificities of newcomers: a longer period of entry into farming, atypical production models and business plans, over the age of 40, and lack of connections in the farming sector, etc. ●

Further resources

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Italy

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³⁴ Eurostat, Key farm variables [ef_kvage], 2010. In 2010, 24% of farm holders were in the 55-64 age group, while 37% were over the age of 65.

³⁵ See for instance: "I nuovi contadini: giovani e laureati, praticano l'agricoltura 3.0" (The new farmers: young, graduated, practicing farming 3.0) published in the web magazine of the Universal Exposition of Milan 2015: <http://magazine.expo2015.org/cs/Exponet/it/lifestyle/i-nuovi-contadini-giovani-e-laureati-praticano-l-agricoltura-3-0>. Or France 24 video report: Why Italian graduates are choosing life on the farm, February 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=B29EuKANqmE For a specific example, read the story of Vincenza Ferrara in the case studies produced by the European Innovation Partnership Group on New Entrants, 2015: <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/focus-groups/new-entrants-farming-lessons-foster-innovation-and>

³⁶ A first such study was conducted by the National Institute of Agrarian Economics (INEA) on Youth and generational renewal in Italian agriculture, 2013, <http://dspace.crea.gov.it/handle/inea/458>

New entrants in Italy

The emerging picture is far from reassuring for Italian agriculture: in 2010, only 5% of farmers were under the age of 35, while 61% were over 55 years old.³⁴ This places Italy among the EU countries with the lowest percentage of young farmers and the highest rate of older farmers, indicating a very pressing problem of generational renewal. Since 2012, there has been a slight uptick in the number of farms run by young farmers. The replacement ratio, i.e., the ratio between the number of farm holders under the age of 35 and the number of farm holders over the age of 55, was 8% in 2010, up from 4% in 2007. But it is still significantly lower than in France (20%) or Poland (52%).

In the past five to ten years, there has been renewed interest in farming among young people. This can be seen in the increase in young people registering for vocational and academic training in agricultural domains, as well as in stories of young people choosing to enter farming—some taking over the family farm and others coming from an urban background. This trend is usually attributed to the economic crisis, which prompts young people to turn to family businesses or self-employment opportunities in farming. It is also tied to the environmental and natural components of farming, which match the lifestyle expectations of many young people today. While the media tend to describe these new farmers as young, including a good share of women, often university graduates, and with prior experience in the service sector³⁵, existing evidence about who these new farmers are is only anecdotal. We lack more systematic study of their number, profiles, farming activities, needs and results³⁶.

On average, young farmers in Italy farm on 17 hectares of land, above the national average of 12 hectares. They tend to differ from older farmers in that they aim for diversification and differentiation, incorporate new technologies, and make eco-friendly production choices. On average, their farms provide a better income than those of older farmers. Indeed, young farmers are more likely to make productive investments, develop multi-functionality, adopt technical innovation and diversify their sources of income through external part-time work and starting new activities such as agritourism or processing. Their farms are often family farms, relying on intergenerational work and support. All of these characteristics increase their resilience on the market.

Education level is rising in the new generation of farmers, although the vast majority of degrees and diplomas are not in the field of agriculture. This suggests that little importance is placed on technical education in farming, and underscores the presence of many part-time farmers in the sector. However, this diversified training can constitute a growth factor for agriculture by bringing new business management skills and farming ideas to the sector.

Formal and non-formal education for a new generation of farmers

There are both formal and non-formal education and training programmes for farmers, which differ in their aims, content, target groups and diplomas / recognition of skills. None of them support new entrants beyond the training period or help them build their livelihoods during the start-up period.

Agricultural vocational school

(secondary school / high school diploma):

Vocational school provides technical training and a diploma permitting access to university. It usually caters to the educational needs of teenagers between the ages of 14 and 19. It is focused on agrarian techniques and structured as work-linked training (alternanza scuola-lavoro) as of the third year. These schools usually have their own educational farm presenting a broad range of activities.

Agronomy faculty and related fields

(first degree, postgraduate and Ph.D.):

Completing a course at the faculty of Agronomy allows students to deepen their interest in the environment, agriculture and agronomy. The faculty offers three different curricula: agriculture, food and environment. This degree does not, however, prepare students for the profession of farming and or offer a strong practical foundation.

Course to be recognized as professional farming

entrepreneur (Imprenditore Agricolo Professionale – IAP):

According to Italian legislation (D.Lgs. no. 99 / 29.03.2004), a professional farming entrepreneur (IAP) is one who, having professional knowledge and skills, dedicates at least 50% of their working hours to agricultural activities (on their own or as a partner) and earns at least 50% of their overall work income from agriculture. Being recognised as an IAP is the basis for receiving subsidies from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). IAP courses are offered periodically by training organisations authorised by the regional governments. They are often dispensed as distance education, through on-line courses with no practice at all. The programme usually covers the following topics: the market, public institutions

³⁷ See: www.aiablazio.it/blog/corso-teorico-pratico-di-agricoltura-biologica-per-aspiranti-agricoltori

and policies, farm accountancy, the business plan, cooperatives, international market and competition, legal forms of business entities, and cooperative chains, etc.

Informal training is very diverse, ranging from WWOOFing (still quite new in Italy) to courses organised by rural development and cultural associations. Very few of these courses are recognised or monitored by governing bodies for quality standards and diplomas. They mostly cater to hobby farmers and are seldom concerned with training participants in the practical skills needed to start commercial farms. They are usually short in duration, lasting two or three months at most.

Recognising the need for a different approach to farming education and training, AIAB Lazio organised a course for future farmers in 2016.³⁷ Offering a combination of theoretical and practical content, the course was taught by established farmers from the most prominent local organic farms. It was structured around 16 meetings, half of which were field visits. The aim was to fill the gap left by conventional training at agricultural schools, by focusing on actual farm management and facilitating the interaction between established farmers and new (prospective) farmers, mostly from an urban background. The course was structured to recreate the “human” link among generations.

Policies supporting young farmers and new entrants

As a member of the European Union, Italy benefits from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) measures supporting young farmers. Specific measures are included both in rural development programs, which in Italy are administered at the regional level, and in the Fund for the Development of Youth in Agriculture established in 2006. Since 2013, additional aid also comes in the form of direct payments from the first pillar of the CAP.

The issue of young farmers was introduced in the first radical reform of the structural funds in 1988. The National Strategic Plan (Piano Strategico Nazionale - PSN) emphasizes the need to integrate the tools supporting new entrants with those that encourage business development plans and business growth. To this end, the Plan identifies a series of measures known as the “youth package” (Pacchetto giovani), which aims to provide a set of specific incentives for farmers under the age of 40: start-up aid, but also help developing a business plan and other support services and advice.

In the Lazio region, for example, CAP measure 6.1 “Business start-up aid for young farmers” translates into a lump sum payment of €70,000 for new entrants up to 40 years old. Young farmers have to present a business plan to receive the funds, which has to include a commitment to invest at least 60% of the aid in tangible and

³⁸ Introduzione alle misure del PSR del Lazio 2014-2020 (Introduction to the RDP of Lazio Region, 2014-2020 www.agricoltura.regione.lazio.it/binary/agriweb/agriweb_allegati_schede_informative/WEB_opuscolo_definitivo_PSR.pdf)

intangible assets. This measure can be coupled with other measures of the rural development programme, such as diversification of activities.³⁸

The 2013 CAP reform introduced a direct payment for young farmers (YFP) as part of Pillar I. Italy has opted to allocate 1% of the direct payment envelope to the YFP, which takes the shape of additional aid in the amount of 25% of the average direct payment, per hectare, for up to 90 hectares.

The Fund for the Development of Young Farmers started with a €10 million fund, which was later reduced to €5 million. Its role includes promoting the attractiveness of agriculture and business culture through scholarships and training courses, facilitating access to credit, and supporting research through cooperation with research institutes.

Access to Land

In Italy, farm holders over the age of 65 manage one fourth of all farmland, i.e., roughly 3 million hectares. A well-designed and concrete set of strategies are urgently needed to ensure that this land continues to be farmed and is transferred to a new generation of young farmers.

However, the agricultural land market is characterised by poor land mobility: the amount of yearly land sale hardly reaches 2% of the total surface area. Many retired farmers and landowners have a “wait and see” attitude: if they do not have an identified successor, they keep their agricultural property as an idle asset, waiting for it to be assigned, often to a new non-agricultural use. Moreover, leasing farmland is not common in Italy; only 35% of the surface area utilised for agriculture is rented (Eurostat, 2010).

Farm transfer within the family is a strong factor in favour of generational renewal. Based on statistical surveys, the sons and daughters of 30% of farmers intend to take over the family farm in the future, and if extended to the wider family, 59% of the family farms could find continuity within the family framework.

In addition to the transfer within the family, the entry of young people coming from non-farming families should be promoted, for instance by supporting both the newcomer and the transferor, as well as advising on this specific extra-family succession.

According to partial studies and anecdotal evidence, the main hurdles faced by new entrants into farming are in the following areas:

- Access to credit and subsidies, which is the number one obstacle for many new farmers;
- Access to land to buy or rent.
- Access to markets

³⁹ See: Access to Land in Italy, policy environment www.accesstoland.eu/Policy-Environment-56

⁴⁰ See: Access to Land in Italy, policy environment www.accesstoland.eu/Policy-Environment-56 and the story of the Rome coordination for Access to Land: www.accesstoland.eu/Rome-Coordination-for-Access-to-Land. Also discover the case of the Coraggio cooperative: www.accesstoland.eu/Coraggio-Cooperative-Rome and through our documentary film, Land for our Food, 2016: www.accesstoland.eu/Our-film-The-Land-for-our-Food

⁴¹ Read further in the Italy country study of our report: Access to Land, Supporting access to land for farmers in Europe: Experiences and potential of local authorities, September 2017, www.accesstoland.eu/Local-authorities-role-to-secure-access-to-land-for-farmers. Read also the case of Arvaia CSA mobilizing land from the municipality of Bologna, www.accesstoland.eu/Arvaia-CSA-mobilising-land-from-the-municipality

- Access to advice and extension services: many young people are not familiar with policy measures and services available to support their entry into farming;
- Accessibility of services in rural areas, notably transport and public services (healthcare, in particular).

In 2012, the government adopted a law on the sale of state-owned agricultural land, in order to cover the increasing public debt and promote jobs and economic activities in the countryside (Law No. 27 of 24 March 2012). In 2014, the decree “Terre vive” opened up the opportunity to sell and lease 5500 hectares of public land, with priority given to farmers under the age of 40.³⁹ The initiative was controversial, with many calling for the land to be leased rather than sold, preferentially in smaller, more affordable plots. In the Lazio region, a strong grassroots mobilisation, in which AIAB Lazio was involved, started in 2014. As a result, local authorities (ARSIAL and Rome Municipality) chose to offer public land through public calls for land leasing, with priority for young farmers.⁴⁰

Beyond these calls for public land sales or leasing, access to public land could be a major entry path for new farmers in Italy. Over 700,000 hectares, i.e., 5% of the total utilised agricultural surface area, is public land. Although not well developed and often still a difficult path, several examples show that engaging with local authorities may help identify land opportunities or get access to public land.⁴¹ AIAB Lazio also supports new entrants by providing information about public policy, creating a strong network between new farmers and established farmers, together with consumers and technicians, and sharing knowledge about the agricultural world. ●

Further resources

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Romania

Katelyn Baker-Smith and Meike Fienitz Eco Ruralis

⁴² European Union, European Commission, Eurostat. (2012). *Agricultural Census in Romania*. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Agricultural_census_in_Romania and Davidova, S., & Thomson, K. (2013). *Family Farming: A Europe and Central Asia Perspective* (Rep.). Retrieved from www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Europe/documents/Events_2013/FF_EUCAP_en.pdf and Redman, M. (2010, September). *Securing Public Benefits from Subsistence Agriculture in Romania* (Rep.). Retrieved www.rudi-europe.net/uploads/media/Case-Study_Romania.pdf Page 2

⁴³ Eurostat, agricultural census, table 6.1

⁴⁴ Romania, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. (2014, July 1). *National Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020 Period*. Page 59

⁴⁵ Redman, M. (2010, September). *Securing Public Benefits from Subsistence Agriculture in Romania* (Rep.). Retrieved www.rudi-europe.net/uploads/media/Case-Study_Romania.pdf Page 2

Romania is home to over 4 million farms, the highest number in all of Europe, accounting for almost one third of all European Union farms. The vast majority of these farms are small by any definition, whether size, production or economic output: holdings smaller than 10 hectares account for 98% of all farms; about 2.7 million farms are family operations; 91% have an economic output of less than €2000 per year.⁴²

With 61% of agricultural holders over 55 years old, the question of new entrants is a pressing one.⁴³ So, who are the people currently entering farming in Romania? What can we say about their needs, the obstacles they face and the support they receive?

Who are new entrants?

The profiles of new entrants in Romanian agriculture are rather atypical. The two main documented groups are foreigners practicing large-scale, corporate agriculture, and poor elderly people seeking to improve their livelihood by producing their own food. While we know that intra-family farm succession is in crisis, there does not seem to be a movement to consolidate and renew generations in Romanian peasant farms.

1- Lack of data

Overall, Romania lacks information regarding the number, age, origin, etc. of its new farmers. First, the land cadastre is incomplete, which means that there is no public disclosure of who becomes a land owner. Currently only about 15% of all properties are registered in the cadastre.⁴⁴ This makes it very difficult to track land usage and thus new farmers; however, it also creates an obstacle for those seeking to consolidate land for agroindustry and other negative practices.

Second, subsistence farming is not considered work by the Romanian government and is thus counted under the so-called Non-Observed/Non-Registered economy.⁴⁵ As a result, agricultural holdings that are mainly for subsistence are excluded from data gathering, even though they amount to at least 75% of Romanian farms. Even the agricultural census executed for the European Union did not touch upon the subject of new farmers, but instead focused on the farms themselves (in terms of size and economic output).

⁴⁶ Eco Ruralis. (2015, July 29). Information note on the Padova Agricoltura S.R.L. Case Study. Retrieved from www.ecoruralis.ro/web/en/Home/News/3/1917

⁴⁷ Bran, M. (2012, May 1). Farmers from western Europe look to Romania for pastures new. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from www.theguardian.com/world/2012/may/01/western-europe-farmers-move-romania

⁴⁸ For a more detailed presentation of Provision farm, see Eco Ruralis' report on Farm Succession, pp. 18-19: www.accessstoland.eu/IMG/pdf/farm_succession_report_eco_ruralis_en_web.pdf

⁴⁹ Salasan, C., & Fritsch, J. (2009, August). The role of farm activities for overcoming rural poverty in Romania. In *Structural Change in Europe's Rural Regions*. Retrieved from www.iamo.de/fileadmin/documents/sr_vol49.pdf

⁵⁰ Romania, National Institute of Statistics. *Romanian statistical yearbook 2013*. Retrieved from www.insse.ro/cms/en/content/romanian-statistical-yearbook-2013

⁵¹ "Internal migration determined by permanent residence changing, by age group and area." *Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2013: Population*. Retrieved from www.insse.ro/cms/files/Anuar_statistic/02/02_Populatie_en.pdf

⁵² Alam, A. (2005). *Growth, Poverty, and Inequality: Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. Retrieved from http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMACEDONIA/Resources/Growth_Poverty_and_Inequality.pdf

Eco Ruralis has prepared a questionnaire to be distributed to its almost 2800 members that will hopefully begin to shed light on this aspect of agriculture.

2- Foreigners

Starting in the early 2000s, individuals from across Europe began to notice and take advantage of Romania's excellent soil and cheap land. They typically bought significantly more than the average Romanian parcel, often purchasing hundreds of hectares at a time. Eco Ruralis classifies this as land grabbing, which we define as "large acquisitions or long term leases and concessions of lands from public or private entities for the development of large agro-industrial projects or for speculative purposes."⁴⁶ One emblematic example was Maxime Laurent, a young Frenchman whose family owned 300 hectares in France but felt they had no future there. Therefore, they shifted their efforts to Romania where they purchased 1400 hectares. As Laurent stated, "Here you can do a lot with quite limited resources."⁴⁷

Yet not all foreign entrants in Romanian agriculture have negative impacts. Lars Veraart and Robyn Bors-Veraart who are from the Netherlands and the USA, respectively started farming on Provision farm, in Transylvania. The farm is operated according to organic, agroecological practices and works closely with the community, creating a space where villagers can conduct paid workshops for visitors on traditional building, cooking, storage, and other aspects of peasant knowledge.⁴⁸

Overall, even with many reports on foreign acquisition of land in Romania, there is still no systematic data publicly available on these holders. Anecdotal evidence shows that the majority are engaged in land grabbing with little regard for the environment, local community, or economy.

3- Elderly people and the unemployed

While there is no overall official data, the largest group of new entrants may well be that of "elderly people [who], after retiring or losing employment, start agricultural work."⁴⁹ According to the Romanian National Institute of Statistics, the average monthly payment to Social Insurance Pensioners is 776 lei (€174).⁵⁰ In order to supplement this meagre income, many retirees turn to small farming plots to produce their own food. Between 2007 and 2012, about 140,000 people over the age of 55 moved from urban to rural areas.⁵¹ There also is a great deal of anecdotal evidence of this phenomenon, as witnessed by the Eco Ruralis team during trips to member farms and villages.

A similar group of new entrants are individuals who have been laid off from work or are facing financial difficulties and are thus seeking to grow their own food in order to limit their expenses.⁵²

⁵³ Cavicchioli, D., Bertoni, D., Tesser, F., & Gianfranco Frisio, D. (2015). What Factors Encourage Intrafamily Farm Succession in Mountain Areas? *Mountain Research and Development*, 35(2), 159. Retrieved from www.bioone.org

⁵⁴ Nemenyi, A., & Rossier, R. (2011). Cultural and Ethnic Determinants of Land Use and Inheritance in Romania. *Eastern European Countryside*, 16, 184-190. Retrieved from www.degruyter.com

⁵⁵ Read the full report here: www.accesstoland.eu/Farm-Succession-in-Romania

⁵⁶ Kerekes, K., & Pakucs, B. (2013). Occupational Choices of Romanian Rural Youth. *Eastern European Countryside*, 19(December), 72.

4- The lack of successors for peasant farms

In Romania, as in the rest of Europe, farms used to be passed on to family members, which ensured a steady stream of new entrants and maintained farms. Currently, however, as a 2010 study demonstrates, there is only a 26.5% intra-family farm succession rate in Romania.⁵³ A similar picture emerged in a 2009 study in four Romanian counties, which determined that while 77% of heads of farms thought their farm would continue after their retirement, only 40% had potential successors and of these, only 80% wanted to pursue farming--indicating an overall succession rate of just under 25%.⁵⁴ As detailed in a recent Eco Ruralis' report on Farm Succession⁵⁵, this does not bode well for the future of farming, since intra-family succession has numerous benefits including greater land stewardship, knowledge exchange and economic security.

Evidence also shows that fewer and fewer youth are choosing agriculture as their future occupation. In a study of youth in Cluj County, only about 1% chose agriculture as their desired future career⁵⁶. Meanwhile, agricultural education is declining. Between 2000 and 2011, the number of agricultural high schools dropped 40%, with only 67 agricultural schools remaining in the whole of Romania. The rate of graduates from these schools also fell 44% in the same period.

Nevertheless, the very first signs of a counter-trend may just be becoming visible, as Eco Ruralis and other Romanian organisations in the sustainable agriculture realm are seeing small but growing expressions of interest from young people about farming.

What are the needs of new entrants?

1- What are the main obstacles in entering farming?

As in most European countries, it is very difficult for new farmers to access land and enter farming, due to a number of factors.

It is difficult to identify landowners from whom to buy or rent land

The lack of land registry in Romania also makes it difficult for future farmers to find out which land is for sale and who the owners are. Moreover, land is very fragmented. Romanian law dictates that all children equally inherit their parents' land unless otherwise specified. This has resulted in plots being owned by three, four or more individuals who must be located and included in the proceedings.

Land is expensive for farmers

While Romanian land prices are low by most European standards, the prices are far beyond the reach of the average individual, as a direct result of foreign entrants pushing land prices up. With average prices in 2015 ranging between €2000 and €7000 per

⁵⁷ Bazavan, S. (2016). Romania agriculture outlook: Farmland prices continue to grow in 2016. *Business Review*. Retrieved from www.business-review.eu/news/romania-agriculture-outlook-farmland-prices-continue-to-grow-in-2016-111240

⁵⁸ Romania, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. (2014, July 1). *National Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020 Period*. Page 60.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Page 52.

⁶⁰ In Section 4.2 Needs assessment, pp 8 - 101.

hectare⁵⁷, while farmers' incomes average €1.60 per hour⁵⁸, the vast majority of land is hardly affordable for new entrants. In addition, as acknowledged by the National Rural Development Programme, "Financial services are generally less accessible to enterprises from rural areas and the agricultural sector (especially for small farms), with high credit costs."⁵⁹

New entrants need continued access to education and vocational training.

Without the benefits of intra-family knowledge passed on from infancy, individuals require supplemental trainings and information to make up for the gap. While agricultural high schools are closing down, new forms of agricultural education and training are needed. These need to be affordable and located throughout the country, for farmers to be able to access them.

2- Needs identified by the Romanian government

The government has explored the needs of new entrants and the obstacles they face. The National Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020⁶⁰ thus indicates:

- Agricultural advisory services are insufficient, particularly affecting young and small farmers. There should not only be better access but also tailored services.
- There is a lack of research and research-based innovation. More research and innovation would produce better services, environmental effects, and production.
- Aging farmers are a growing problem, and more young farmers are needed.
- Subsistence and semi-subsistence farmers need greater support and investment, including for business plans and storage facilities.
- Cooperatives and associations should be encouraged, especially when it comes to markets, sales and accessing subsidies.
- Short agri-food chains must be created and promoted as this will allow small farmers to access markets and increase their incomes.
- Farmers need easier and greater access to loans with favourable terms and conditions.
- "[T]he risk of intensification and abandonment of agricultural activities puts a high pressure on biodiversity". Farmers should be encouraged to practice traditional extensive agriculture to preserve biodiversity and the environment.
- There is overall inadequacy of services and infrastructure in rural areas that lead to a diminished quality of life.
- "[T]he agricultural education infrastructure is insufficiently developed to meet the needs of teaching and putting into practice agricultural knowledge".

What is done to support young farmers and new entrants?

The National Rural Development Programme sets out some measures aimed at the establishment of advisory services and training for the new entrants and provides funds to help young farmers get established. These include:

- “Support for vocational training and skills acquisition action” via the provision of short vocational courses
- “Advisory services for farmers, young farmers and small enterprises in rural areas” to help them draft the business plan, improve economic viability, etc.
- “A business start-up aid for young farmers”, which aims at increasing the income of holdings managed by young farmers in order to encourage young people to stay in the rural area and to foster the rejuvenation of the agricultural sector. Eligible beneficiaries are young farmers who fall under the category of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), e.g., the economical size of the farm must be between €12,000 and €50,000 standard output.
- Direct payments for young farmers: young farmers up to the age of 40 receive 25% increased support in the first 5 years. Farmers on very small farms are eligible.

Training and advisory services are provided locally by the 41 County Agricultural Chambers (CACs), which are coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and their branches at the municipal level: the 500 Local Agricultural Consultancy Centres. Besides the CACs, other institutions provide advisory services on specific topics (e.g., access to funds) or to a specific audience (e.g., refresher courses).

While the attempt to support new entrants can be seen as very positive, the programme has serious shortcomings. First of all, the public advisory system is in a difficult financing situation, affecting the availability and quality of the services provided. On average, the consultant / beneficiary ratio is 1:5000. The main beneficiaries of the public advisory and training services are SMEs and only a small percentage of family farms. Second, the process of applying for financial support is extremely bureaucratic. Young farmers in particular have no experience in bureaucratic matters and thus often fail to access these funds, resulting in Romania not using up the budget provided by the EU. Moreover, funds are not paid up front, meaning that farmers have to get a loan from a bank, for which they have to provide loan security, which many new entrants cannot do. Furthermore, if their investment plan goes wrong, they will not receive the funding and end up indebted or even bankrupted. Thus, the funds are mainly attractive for established farmers with good financial stock that they can use for investment

and get repaid through development funds afterwards. Finally, even if small farmers do manage to receive funds, this obliges them to grow their business in quantitative terms. The program does not take into consideration the social dynamics of rural communities and that further quantitative growth of a single farm may have negative consequences on the viability of other farms and new entrants. It also does not accept qualitative growth, for example generated by switching to organic farming. Thus particularly new entrants who engage in agroecological food production struggle to comply with this growth criterion. In short, while the National Rural Development Programme contains some measures meant to assist new entrants, in practice most of this money is never used, and what is used tends to go to recipients who did not really need it, or it obliges new entrants to pursue unsustainable industrial food production.

Apart from the governmental support, peasant and family farms can also access advisory services provided by about 730 NGOs. They cover a range of topics such as animal breeding, food processing, food industry, arable crops, protection and preservation of forests, soil and water.

Conclusion

With an aging farming population and the majority of holders not having a successor, new entrants are set to play a vital role in the future of Romanian agriculture. Yet due to lack of data, little is known about who is currently entering farming. In order to better support young farmers and new entrants, more data is desperately needed.

The two most visible groups currently entering farming are foreigners, often involved in land grabbing and setting up large agri-businesses, and poor elderly Romanians. However, if the current number of small farms is to be maintained, farming has to be made more attractive to young people. Providing access to land, along with affordable loans, is one priority in this respect. Another is improving access to information and vocational training to enable those with no farming background to enter. While the Romanian government is aiming to assist young farmers through the National Rural Development Programme, this support is highly insufficient due to a lack of financial resources; it benefits the wrong recipients and pushes farmers towards industrial food production. More accessible, less bureaucratic support which rewards sustainable cultivation practices is therefore needed to encourage the still small number of those expressing an interest in entering farming. ●

Spain

Maria Diaz, Laia Batalla, Vanesa Freixa Rurbans

⁶¹ Source: Institute of National Statistics (INE), 2013.

⁶² Flament S, Macias B, Monllor N, Incorporación de los jóvenes al campo en España. Estudio para Mundubat y COAG, 2016, p 44-5.

⁶³ Source: Eurostat 2010.

⁶⁴ Soler C and Fernandez F, Estudio estructura de la propiedad de tierras en España, 2015.

⁶⁵ Source: INE, 2013, quoted in Flament S, Macias B, Monllor N, 2016.

⁶⁶ The following paragraphs of this section are based on a 2014 case study on Rurbans and Terra Franca, written by Neus Monllor, with input from Vanesa Freixa, for the Access to Land Network. See:

⁶⁷ MONLLOR Neus, *Young farmers: pathways, practices and attitudes in a new agrosocial context. A comparative exploration of young farmers' practices and attitudes between Southern Ontario (Canada) and Girona area in Catalonia (Spain)*, University of Girona, 2011, available at: www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/70011

An ageing farming population

Ageing is a general trend in the European population, particularly noticeable in the farming sector. In 2013, 66% of Spanish farmers were over the age of 55, while only 3% were under 35, down from 6% in 2003⁶¹. These figures point to a faster decrease of the number of young farmers in Spain, where the overall farming population is declining.

The index of generational renewal is now 4.5%, down from over 10% ten years ago⁶². This highlights the major challenge faced by Spanish agriculture in terms of new entry into farming, and the continuation of farming.

One of the factors explaining the lack of new entries into farming is the relatively small size of the average Spanish farm (24 hectares in 2010), with 53% of the farms being under 5 hectares⁶³. Often, these farms are not considered viable, by both new entrants and established farmers themselves. In many instances, ageing small farmers gradually sell or rent parts of their land to neighbouring farmers as they stop using them, rather than transferring the whole farm to a new generation. In Spain, over a span of just ten years, 300,000 small farms have disappeared, the equivalent of 83 farms per day⁶⁴, which goes hand in hand with farm consolidation and land abandonment.

Who are new entrants?

There are few available statistical data and analyses on new entrants in Spain, their profile, entry paths into farming, farm plans, strengths and difficulties. What is known about young farmers under the age of 35 is that most of them (73%) are men and only 40% have agricultural training. On average they farm 26 hectares, but over 40% of them have set up on a small holding of less than 5 hectares⁶⁵.

Family succession remains the primary pathway to entering farming, but its share is diminishing. Alongside this group, we are seeing the children of farmers starting new farm businesses, separate from the family farm, as well as the entry into farming of newcomers who do not have a family background in agriculture⁶⁶.

An increasing number of new farmers, both farmers' children and newcomers, are shifting to what can be called a new agrosocial paradigm, as shown by recent PhD research⁶⁷. They are farmers

⁶⁸ Monllor N, 2011, *ibid*; Flament S, Macias B, Monllor N, 2016 *ibid*; own experience of Rurbans.

⁶⁹ Figures of new farmers who registered in Catalonia in 2012 thus show a slight increase in the number of young farmers and women, according to data based on responses to the Unique Farming Declaration (DUN), Generalitat de Catalunya. This data is not fully representative of the phenomenon of newcomers as it does not include new farmers who do not register officially when getting established.

rooted in their community and local area, who believe in diversified production and on-farm activities, promote environmentally-friendly practices, engage in cooperation (e.g., equipment sharing or distribution schemes), experiment with low-cost and less intensive technologies, and try to reduce the capital intensification embedded in conventional farming.

There is evidence from different sources that this group is increasing, but it is difficult to quantify with precision, or to know what they represent in terms of food production. Partial studies and direct experience⁶⁸ show that newcomers tend to be older, more educated, more urban and more often female than continuers⁶⁹; they often have previous experience or training in another sector. In terms of farming businesses, newcomers tend to farm on a small-scale, avoid making big investments in the early stages, sell directly to consumers and introduce innovative practices. They also have a strong sense of autonomy, and seek ways to be more independent from banks, companies (chemicals, seeds, etc.) and expensive machinery.

These new peasants are renewing agricultural and rural practices, and offer the prospect of maintaining agriculture on a human scale. By providing high-quality, local food and taking care of the environment, they meet rising social demands. Over the past ten to fifteen years, different parts of Spain have indeed experienced a push from consumers wanting to eat local food and to make a social contract with farmers in their area. CSA groups, self-harvesting, farmers' markets, or community-based finance have flourished, propelled by new impetus since 2008, with the financial and social crisis and related mobilisations.

A common feature of new agroecological farmers is that they mostly enter farming from outside the traditional tracks, and with no public support, at least initially. Indeed, public policies are not adapted to their profile, and require them to meet the standards of conventional farms (specialisation, minimum surface area, mechanisation, etc.). As a corollary, not all new peasants enter farming through the official pathway, by registering as an agricultural worker in the social security system. Indeed, some are not sure that they will succeed or will want to continue. Others do not see the need for registration. Some decide to register officially only when they need to ask for public subsidies (such as the CAP young farmers' grant).

⁷⁰ Flament S, Macias B, Monllor N, 2016 ibid

Sample study of new farmers, 2016:

In 2016, Mundubat and COAG published a study on the entry into farming of young people in Spain, conducted by three young researchers specialising in new farmers and newcomers⁷⁰. The study includes a qualitative analysis of 325 new entrants under the age of 45 who entered farming after 2000, based on a survey, focus groups and interviews. The study shows that:

- The average age for entering farming is 30;
- 58% come from a farming family, 42% are newcomers to farming;
- 68% come from a rural background, while 32% have urban origins;
- Only 56% received formal agricultural training. Most learnt informally with family members, other farmers, or through practice. 44% have a university degree or equivalent;
- 25% are market gardeners, partly due to the high costs (land, equipment) of starting other farm activities;
- 40% respect environmental practices, and the rate is even higher among newcomers;
- 45% engage in direct marketing, and 49% in complementary activities to farming, such as on-farm processing of produce;
- 52% are continuing on the family farm, while 46% started a new farm business;
- 57% received the young farmers' grant, but it often took a year or two for them to receive the payment.

Profile of aspiring farmers trained by the School of Shepherds of Catalonia:

The main mission of the School of Shepherds of Catalonia is to foster a generational renewal of traditional peasants in Catalonia. We bring together young people from diverse backgrounds who have a real calling in order to provide them with vocational training to become cattle breeders. Almost none come from a farming family, so most have to start from scratch in terms of knowledge, practical experience and access to land.

The School's curriculum lasts for 5 months, with one session starting every year in spring. Between 2009 and 2016, the School received 335 applications, out of which it selected 132 candidates. The main characteristics of the School's students during this period are as follows:

- Average age: 31
- 99% are newcomers, mostly with urban origins (56%)
- 20 to 35% were women, depending on the year
- 51% had prior vocational training, while 42% had attended university
- 35% were working before entering the School; 39% were unemployed.

⁷¹ Source: INE, 2013 and Eurostat, 2013.

⁷² Spanish Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAGRAMA), Study on Land Prices, 2012, available at: www.magrama.gob.es/es/estadistica/temas/estadisticas-agrarias/Encuesta_Precios_Tierra_2012_tcm7-298705.pdf

All of these new farmers are very attached to reviving the spirit of peasant life and their ways of managing agriculture and cattle.

Access to land and other key obstacles faced by new farmers

Access to land:

Access to land is one of the main obstacles to entering farming for young and beginning farmers. This is true for both continuers and newcomers to farming: the former need to obtain land from the previous generation, and may seek additional land to rent or buy, while the latter are starting with no land and often no local connections to assist in securing land.

The first difficulty is simply to find available land. Most of it is indeed in the hands of ageing farmers: over half of farmland is managed by farmers over the age of 55, and nearly a third by farmers over 65. In contrast, only 6% of the total land area is managed by farmers under age 35⁷¹. A large generational transfer is therefore needed to enable new farmers to enter the sector.

Farmland is also concentrated in medium-size and large farms, many of which live off public subsidies rather than generating enough income through their production capacity. Since the main part of these subsidies is based on the area of farmland managed by the farmer, the tendency is to hold onto land and attempt to increase one's holding through additional land purchases or leases, which means that new farmers are often not in a position to compete.

Another factor is the reluctance of landowners, including retired farmers, to sell or rent their land. Farmland holds significant emotional value, and many families prefer to keep land abandoned rather than sell or lease land to someone they do not know. If they do sell or rent, it will preferably be to a neighbour or local farmer. Moreover, many landowners consider it less risky to rent land to an established farmer than to a new entrant, who may have trouble paying the rent consistently.

Finally, land prices are high and largely unaffordable for new farmers. Between 1998 and 2008, land prices increased by 200%, and thereafter stagnated or decreased in relation with the financial crisis. In 2012, the average land price in Spain was €9.705 / ha, with significant disparities from one region to another: e.g., the average price is €3.909 / ha in Aragon, €12.258 / ha in Catalonia and €59.159 / ha in the Canary Islands (2012).⁷²

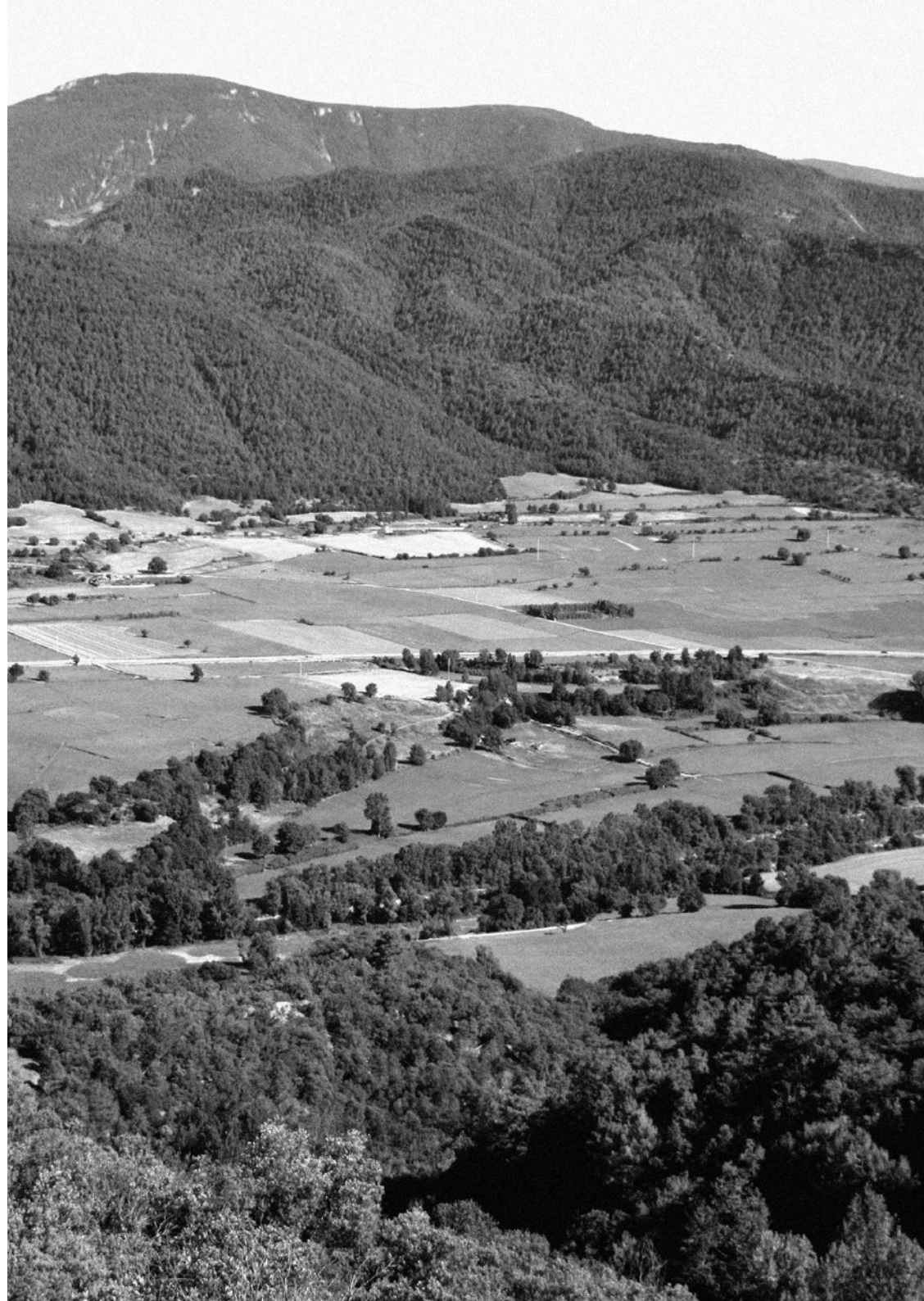
Due to high land pressures today in many parts of Spain, the easier pathway for new farmers is to start with organic vegetable gardening, which only requires a small area and is also easier in terms of initial equipment and skills.

Other key obstacles include:

1. Difficulty gaining access to local markets: some consumers' organisations and shops seek local food, but they are a small minority. Logistical challenges are also key.
2. Poor public advisory services to accompany their professional and entrepreneurial pathways, while taking into consideration their specific strengths and needs.
3. Lack of financial means (bank loans, subsidies) and difficulty gaining access to financing.
4. Difficulty defining a business plan to organize their project before and during the start-up years, in terms of developing viable and profitable forms of farming.
5. Heightened competition among small-scale farmers due to low food prices and their lack of competitiveness on the food market.
6. Lack of political organisation: the new peasantry has started to network and seek political representation in their interest, but it is still very weak. ●

Further information

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United Kingdom

Rachel Harries Soil Association
Tom Carman Real Farming Trust

⁷³ Agriculture in the UK, Defra, 2013 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agriculture-in-the-united-kingdom-2014

⁷⁴ Entry to and Exit from Farming in the United Kingdom: Final Report, ADAS, 2004 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130123162956/http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/economics/foodfarm/reports/documents/Entry.pdf>

⁷⁵ Future Farming Review, Defra, 2013 www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/211175/pb13982-future-farming-review-20130709.pdf

⁷⁶ Informal exchanges with Liz Bowles, Head of Farming and Astrid Toner, Producer Outreach Manager, Soil Association, May 2016

Ageing farming population

Like many countries across the EU, the UK is also facing an aging farming population. The average age of farm holders was 59 years old in 2013, with the number of younger farmers at an all-time low - only 3% of farm holders are under 35 years of age, compared to 7% in 1990.⁷³

According to a 2004 report, entry rates into the sector (2% over the previous 5 years) are much lower than exit rates for retiring farmers (18% over the previous 5 years), with the total numbers of farmers and farm businesses declining.⁷⁴ Across the board, there is a lack of jobs in the sector that provide an entry for a new farmer wanting to train or learn on the job, and there are multiple challenges for new farmers wanting to start their own business.

While some agricultural colleges report increased numbers of applicants, they provide little training in organic approaches or fruit and vegetable based horticulture. As a result, new entrants are increasingly turning to unaccredited and informal training programmes, for which although anecdotally successful, there is little consolidated quantitative evidence of the demographic or career progression for total participants.

Who are new entrants?

There is no legal or agreed definition of new entrants in the UK. Officially, the UK government calls all those 'wishing to enter careers in agriculture at any stage, including both successors from a farming background and first generation farmers', 'new entrants' and so does not take into account the challenges facing a completely new farmer with no family farm estate or business to inherit.⁷⁵ However, it is common for more informal new entrant support programmes to consider new entrants as those that do not come from a farming background.⁷⁶

There is very little statistical information on the make-up of new entrants to farming, for example, how many come from outside of farming, gender, ethnic diversity etc. Furthermore, the picture differs significantly between farming systems: mainstream to organic or agro-ecological; from large to smaller enterprises and with differences between horticulture and agriculture.

For example, the large scale horticultural labour sector in

⁷⁷ Soil Association Organic Apprenticeship Scheme survey, 2012 "A survey of applicants in 2012 revealed a high proportion (83%) aged between 21 and 39 year, educated to degree level or higher (77%), 15% already having a farming qualification in horticulture, and a fifth from farming families."

⁷⁸ Read also: Harry Greenfield and Tom Carman, The Real Farming Trust, Small Scale Farming and Land Access: Micro-dairies in the UK, February 2017, www.accessstoland.eu/IMG/pdf/uk_small_scale_farming_-_microdairies.pdf

⁷⁹ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130123162956/http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/files/defra-stats-foodfarm-landuselivestock-farmstats-diversification-release2010-201201261.pdf>

⁸⁰ www.farmingfutures.org.uk/blog/facts-and-figures-organic-agriculture-european-union

the UK is dominated by temporary, low paid, unskilled jobs on corporate owned enterprises. These farms with large-scale intensive practices have reduced entry opportunities and contributed to the unattractiveness of horticulture as a career.

However at the same time, within smaller scale organic and agroecological farming, and especially growing, we are seeing increased interest from new entrants. The Soil Association Future Growers scheme has trained over 80 new organic growers in a decade and has an interest list of another 800. But these new farmers are not necessarily recognised in official figures.

Alternative and civil society programmes can give an idea of the characteristics of new entrants and their needs. The following characteristics come from applicants and anecdotal evidence rather than a study of successful new entrants⁷⁷:

- They are aged 25 -35 years old
- Many are career changers
- They are highly qualified, to degree level or higher, often in an unrelated subject.
- The majority are not from farming families
- Many have very little or no commercial on-farm experience
- They cite community farming and permaculture as influences and interests
- There tends to be more interest in horticulture over agriculture
- They may be relatively technically skilled in growing, with skills initially developed in a domestic setting rather than a commercial scale.

Production type is varied amongst new entrants. Horticulture is often favoured but is known to be difficult to establish a livelihood in. There is also an interest in dairying or micro-dairying as whilst still expensive in infrastructure, is relatively cheap compared to setting up in other farming types⁷⁸.

While little information exists specifically on new entrants, young farmers are recognised as a group, and more is known about their make-up and behaviour. For example, they are more likely to diversify - almost 30% of farmers between the ages of 25 and 54 had some form of diversified activity on their holdings.⁷⁹ Besides, European figures report that organic farmers are more likely to be younger.⁸⁰

Training for agroecological farmers

Up until the 1980s, many organic and other growers had learned their trade in horticultural colleges, which have since closed or been amalgamated into the larger agricultural (land-based) and further education (FE) colleges. While some of these FE colleges do offer horticulture training, the focus is on amenity or sports horticulture, landscape gardening, and nursery production rather than fruit and

⁸¹ Alderson, R (2016) Moss Brook Growers venture forth, *The Organic Grower* - No 34 Spring 2016

vegetables. Those that do offer organic training often do so as hobby courses for back garden growers.

Within the agricultural colleges, large scale vegetable production is more likely to be covered in livestock or arable systems as part of a rotation, with organic seen as a marketing niche rather than a holistic production system. Formal commercial organic horticulture production training is very thin on the ground. This lack of full time professional courses means the UK is falling behind in its technical growing expertise compared to the rest of the world.

There is also a gap in training provision in business or commercial skills for new entrant growers (and farmers). Whilst these skills can be learned while setting up, demands on time for farming mean that developing learning how to and ensuring that a new business is financially viable can be a lower priority. This is particularly evident in understanding costs of production for various produce, and is an area that is of increasing concern to farm support organisations.⁸¹

Alternative training for new entrants

As a reaction to the reduction in the number of available courses, there are many informal learning experiences that new entrants tend to participate in to take the place of formal learning – part time courses, programmes from civil society or informal traineeships like those offered through small farms that diversify into education and training; and or peer-to-peer learning experiences through organisations like Soil Association, Organic Growers Alliance and Land Workers Alliance. There are also hobby courses available in some areas such as horticulture, which are serving a purpose, but do not go far enough for what is required for people to make a living from commercial agro-ecological livelihoods.

Although not exhaustive, the following provide a sample of what is available in the UK:

- Biodynamic Agriculture College – runs a work-based learning diploma (previously the Biodynamic Apprenticeship) over two years.
- The Kindling Trust – provides a first taste of farming through its Land Army, a five day commercial growing course and runs two incubator farm projects. Based in and around Manchester.
- LandBase – launched in 2017, offers a variety of short and long term courses for landworkers, including orchard skills, running a small farm or market garden.
- Newcastle University – one of few educational establishments offering a high level accredited masters degree in organic food systems.
- Organiclea – offers various programmes for horticulture training on a thriving market garden on the edge of London, including

accredited food growing courses, starter farm programmes and support.

- Soil Association Future Growers - established in 2007 (as the Organic Apprenticeship), this scheme offers training and support to find work-based placements for training aspiring organic fruit and vegetable producers. Over 80 people have been trained.
- Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) – the only specialised MSc in Organic Farming in Scotland, run as a distance learning course.

Ongoing support

There are a range of support needs for new entrants, such as mentoring, business planning, understanding tax and employing people, creating routes to market or finding the right legal structure. Of note is the need for mentoring, but also the challenges in delivering this. New entrants are often time-poor, and there are few opportunities in the growing season to engage in a level of mentoring that would be beneficial. In addition, the pool of available mentors is very small and spread thinly across the UK, so even if there is a will to mentor, pairing at a local level isn't always possible.

A range of support programmes for agroecological new entrants are starting to emerge, with some good successes. However, run by third sector and civil society, they are often subject to grant funding. Much support is also focussed on social enterprises and those offering education, therapeutic or community benefits.

- CSA Network UK – offering mentoring for community supported agriculture
- Fresh Start Land Enterprise Centre – offers sector based business academies for new entrants, with more emphasis on livestock and a pilot land matching service
- Funding Enlightened Agriculture – runs innovative funding schemes to support the food and farming sector as well as offering advice.

To a certain extent there is an ideological disconnect between the agroecological farming sector and the mainstream farming world, which offers a range of support to new and young farmers. This means that many agroecological new entrants are not aware of and are missing out on a wide variety of support mechanisms that could benefit them. More work needs to be done to break down these barriers and bring new entrants across both sectors together.

New entrants and access to land

New entrants in the UK face a range of problems in relation to land that are exacerbated by the UK's highly priced and unregulated

⁸² Local authorities in the UK have at their disposal a number of levers to support access to land for new entrants. The main one is the county farms system, but others exist and have good potential. Read further in the United Kingdom country study of the following report: Access to Land, Supporting access to land for farmers in Europe: Experiences and potential of local authorities, September 2017, www.accesstoland.eu/Local-authorities-role-to-secure-access-to-land-for-farmers

⁸³ Read the stories of two young UK growers who started farming thanks to land partnerships: Jamie Carr and Kate Collyns, in this publication.

⁸⁴ Farming UK website, quotes from unreferenced Barclays report

land market. Typically (although not always), the demand from new entrants is for smallholdings as entering on a small scale can allow an individual to test a business model and slowly build markets.

- Land prices prohibit new entrants from buying land
- The lack of a comprehensive land registry means it is difficult to identify owners
- Land in rural areas is rarely advertised, so without family or community connections new entrants find it hard to access 'word of mouth' opportunities
- New entrants often start out on very small areas of land limiting the potential to earn a sustainable livelihood
- Smaller areas of land are often more expensive
- New entrants tend to look for land in their own locality, due to lack of funds to move, or dependency on alternative (or partner's) incomes.
- Local authority land in rural areas is managed along very conservative lines so new entrants with alternative plans (organic, CSA, niche markets) are not taken seriously⁸²
- Lack of affordable housing in rural areas is a major issue for new entrants (indeed all farmers)

New entrants face many challenges even with small parcels of land, price being a major factor. There are also site infrastructure challenges, irrigation being of most concern, but also for basic buildings with many traditional farm buildings having been developed for diverse income streams meaning little is available for farmers to start with, or they must provide it themselves.

However, it is worth flagging up that innovative solutions are emerging, particularly for horticulture or small scale businesses, for example through 'land partnerships' where larger farms or estates (private owners) provide individually negotiated tenancies or arrangements, often for small scale horticulture enterprises⁸³.

New entrants and succession

Farm succession is a key issue and a potential source of opportunity for new entrants, particularly for smaller and family farms. Nearly half of UK farmers have no successor, through lack of either children or children lacking interest in farming, due to the hard work and low incomes. A further one in four claim they do not have anybody to leave their farm to and 16% believe they do not need a plan.⁸⁴

Many new farmers (new entrants or otherwise) see as the ideal entry point a whole farm tenancy to start their own new business. At the same time, older or retiring farmers could offer opportunities to form new partnerships, gradually building experience and potentially equity, if new entrants are willing to collaborate. However, this requires a cultural change in terms of how entry routes are seen, plus fiscal incentives, as well as

potentially new legal mechanisms and some support to encourage old and new farmers to work together. ●

Further resources

On training:

- Biodynamic Agriculture College: www.bdacollege.org.uk
- The Kindling Trust: <http://kindling.org.uk>
- LandBase: <http://landbase.org.uk>
- Newcastle University: www.ncl.ac.uk/postgraduate/courses/degrees/organic-farming-food-production-systems-msc/#profile
- Organiclea: www.organiclea.org.uk
- Soil Association Future Growers: www.soilassociation.org/farmers-growers/supporting-you/future-growers/
- Scotland's Rural College (SRUC): www.sruc.ac.uk/courses/72/organic_farming_msc

On support networks:

- CSA Network UK: <https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/mentoring/>
- Fresh Start Land Enterprise Centre: <http://freshstartlandenterprise.org.uk/academies-information/current-academies/>
- Funding Enlightened Agriculture: www.feanelwork.org

Portraits of new farmers

Franches Terres France Growing on public land in a water catchment area

Chloé Negrini, Thibaud Rochette and Véronique Rioufol Terre de liens⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Translated by Sally Sorel, Terre de Liens volunteer, February 2017.

⁸⁶ In the French context, newcomers are called "new entrants into farming outside of a family environment" ("hors cadre familiaux"). They are new entrants into farming who do not succeed a family member (up to the third degree) on the family farm. It may be somebody with no farming background or somebody from a farming family who does not take over the family farm. Read an analysis of the profiles and characteristics of newcomers in France in this publication.

Since 2013, in greater Amiens, in northern France, two newcomers to farming, Emmanuel Houeix and Gaëtan Vallée, co-partners of the farm Les Franches Terres, have developed organic market gardening in a peri-urban zone. They set up as a collective and farm public land owned by the city of Amiens, in the main area for the abstraction of drinking water. They now grow 11 hectares to produce vegetables which are sold locally, and ensure water and environment protection.

Newcomers into farming⁸⁶: two different profiles

Emmanuel, 38, comes from Amiens. While his uncle is a farmer in the Ardennes, in north-eastern France, his parents do not come from a farming background. Gaëtan, 35, is the son of an organic breeder in Normandy. He decided not to settle on the family farm. Emmanuel and Gaëtan were flat mates during their studies, which they did in the same school in southern France. They both have a 2-year higher degree in agriculture, with a focus on "Nature Protection and Management."

After graduating, Emmanuel became nature co-ordinator in an association for environmental awareness. With no note-worthy farming experience, but highly motivated, he then took a job as farm worker. He discovered that organic agriculture was a perfect match for his future plans. To improve his expertise and fine-tune his plan to enter farming, Emmanuel took a one-year training course in organic agriculture. He then worked for 3 years as a technician in market gardening.

Meanwhile, Gaëtan worked on several farms and for AMAP de Provence (Association for the Preservation of Smallholdings), a regional association promoting community-supported agriculture in Provence. Before joining Emmanuel in Picardie, he also passed specialised certification in organic market gardening. In 2009, Emmanuel and Gaëtan started having regular exchanges about farm models and technical choices, which naturally led to Gaëtan joining Emmanuel on his farm project.

Entering farming on public land: a long process

In 2008-2009, Emmanuel began looking for available land in his home region, Picardie, in northern France. The local context is

⁸⁷ In 2013, the price of non-rented land and pasture in the Somme department was €9050 per hectare, way above the national average of about €5000.

⁸⁸ The transfer of the lease usually involves a payment made by the new entrant to the farmer leaving the land. Although illegal, it is wide-spread particularly in Northern France and in the greater Paris area. See Terre de Liens Nord Pas de Calais, Le Pas de porte en agriculture: un frein à l'installation de paysans, 2016, <https://terredeliens.org/pas-de-porte-en-agriculture.html>

⁸⁹ A Farming Collective (called Groupement Agricole d'Exploitation en Commun or GAEC in French) is a farming partnership between physical persons, which enables several farmers to practice farming under conditions comparable with those existing in family farms. The overarching principle is that partners work together for the production and the distribution of the produce.

difficult because farm production is dominated by field crops which make it extremely difficult to buy land, as most farmers are large farmers with a good capacity to acquire more land. Furthermore, entry into farming is often synonymous with heavy debts: the price per hectare is high⁸⁷ and "key money", although illegal, is a widespread practice⁸⁸.

While working as a technician in market gardening, Emmanuel met Alexandre Platerier, the co-ordinator for Terre de Liens Picardie. Terre de Liens is a French organisation supporting access to land for organic, peasant farmers, through community mobilisation, advice to farmers, and direct land acquisition. In 2009, Alexandre informed Emmanuel about plots available in the town of Pont-de-Metz, in metropolitan Amiens. These plots were located in the zone closest to the main abstraction of drinking water for the city of Amiens. They were pre-empted by the city to assure land control in a sector where much is at stake, in terms of water protection and preservation of agriculture in a peri-urban zone.

In 2010, with the support of Terre de Liens Picardie, Emmanuel presented his project for organic market gardening on these farm plots. It was the start of long negotiations with community leaders and other local players. The difficulty was co-ordinating all those involved: the Chamber of Agriculture, different administrative departments in metropolitan Amiens (the economics department, the water department, and the urban planning department), the town of Pont-de-Metz, departmental authorities in charge of land stewardship, and the regional Public Health Agency. In addition, farmers already working the plots with tenancy-at-will leases had to be consulted. For the project to succeed, administrative procedures had to coincide with the schedule for the farmers' establishment: the municipality had to buy the land and modify the land-use plan so that tunnel greenhouses could be used. Mediation with local farmers, feasibility studies, and environmental impact studies were all necessary but time-consuming.

The regional Public Health Agency requested that a hydrogeological study be carried out before granting authorization, to ensure that Emmanuel and Gaëtan's entry would not impact water quality. This was a pre-requisite to modifying the Local Urbanism Plan. The initial entry date of 2011 came and went, victim to the unusual nature of the project: establishing farmers on public land, and what's more, a site for abstraction of drinking water. There were almost no similar cases in France, so local authorities had no precedent to determine whether and how to authorise leasing the land.

Finally, in April 2013, Emmanuel and Gaëtan set up a farming collective (GAEC⁸⁹), called GAEC Les Franches Terres. Immediately after, they began farming and received CAP start-up aid. Looking back on those 4 years, Emmanuel emphasises the importance of keeping the big picture in mind, being patient, and getting all the players involved.



⁹⁰ Environmental rural leases are classical farm leases in which are included a number of clauses aimed at guaranteeing agricultural practices respectful of the environment, the landscape and the soils. See: www.accesstoland.eu/Environmental-rural-lease

Getting off to a good start

Since 2013, Emmanuel and Gaëtan have farmed a market garden on 11 hectares, rented from the town through a rural environmental lease⁹⁰. They were helped by the young farmers' subsidy and a soft loan (subsidized loan). They also took out bank loans and received regional aid for the purchase of equipment. By settling on public land as opposed to purchasing land, Emmanuel and Gaëtan started off on solid footing, with more hectares and less debt.

Terre de Liens Picardie played a key role in the search for land, and as territorial mediator, be it with the town, the Chamber of Agriculture, or neighbouring farmers. The support of the Vice President of metropolitan Amiens, and that of the mayor of Pont-de-Metz, were crucial to the success of the project. Today, the land is classed as non-buildable, which complicates the storage of equipment.

A farm that respects the environment and is an integral part of its territory

Emmanuel and Gaëtan share the same views of farming. They see agriculture as integrating their own environmental concerns: pesticide-free organic farming, with long crop rotation of the 11

hectares, to eliminate risk to water abstraction. Some 40 different vegetables are offered for sale, grown on 5 hectares. To ensure a proper rotation, the remaining area is used to grow green manure crops (alfalfa and clover) and cereals.

As Gaëtan points out, the farm is a territorial project, involving multiple players: metropolitan Amiens, the local municipality, and regional farmers. Local dynamics are moving forward on several fronts:

- Economy: development of short circuits throughout the region
- Environment: organic market gardening and environmental leases
- Civics: the farm fosters social cohesion by reaching out to the public (i.e. harvest time), and opening to school groups,
- Training: the farm welcomes and serves as mentor for farm apprentices

Production is distributed through short circuits:

- Delivery to 2 AMAP (CSA) in Amiens, and basket drop-offs at a bar
- Direct sales every Friday at the farm, where other local producers can offer their products.

For the smooth running of their farming collective, the two partners have worked out "house rules", to lay a solid groundwork for co-operation and trouble-shooting. Issues such as time off and holidays are aired, so that a healthy balance can be maintained between professional and private lives.

Today, with some 200 families on the customer list, the objective is not to get bigger but rather to lighten the work load. Emmanuel and Gaëtan are debating whether to take on a new partner, now that an additional employee has joined the collective almost full time. Four years after they first started, the partners now work to improve certain crops technically, and can experiment more with different varieties. ●

Further information:

- Les Franches Terres: www.franches-terres.fr
- Terre de Liens: www.accesstoland.eu/-Terre-de-liens-

Radis&Co France

A collective of new farmers brings a farm back to life

Chloé Negrini and Thibaud Rochette Terre de liens

A market gardener, a cattle breeder, a cheesemaker and an artisan baker—all new farmers with a collective farming project—moved onto La Gorrnière farm in Montflours (Mayenne, France) in 2011, setting up their collective farming grouping or "GAEC" under the name Radis&Co.

Newcomers to farming

Yannick Rousseau, age 32, runs the milling and breadmaking operation. He is not from a farming family. His love of nature oriented him towards secondary school studies focused on agronomy and the environment. He then became a landscaper before deciding to make a change, experimenting with new ways of working. He did temp work, trained as a river technician, and then gained multiple experiences in market gardening as his interest in farming developed. In 2009, he obtained an organic farming specialisation certification.

Steve Milosevic, age 42, runs the dairy. Steve is not from a farming family, but he did spend time at his great grandparents' farm as a child, as well as summers at the farm of friends of his parents. After training in sales, one year of sociology studies and working various jobs, Steve arrived in Brittany where he met his partner, the daughter of organic farmers in Mayenne. He spent a year working on his in-laws' farm, also becoming very involved in activist circles and developing a wide personal and professional network.

His in-laws offered him the opportunity of taking over their farm, but he was drawn to farming in a collective rather than family framework. He pursued training and obtained a farming degree after completing an internship at a dairy farm. He then worked on different farms throughout the region to learn the specific trade of dairy processing. Steve sees his current professional life first and foremost as a social project that has taken shape around farming, without that being his original intention.

Robert-Jan De Vink, age 33, runs the market gardening operation. With his father, a horse trainer, Robert-Jan has always been in contact with animals. After earning a degree in biology, he became increasingly active in community advocacy, particularly

⁹¹ The initial group of five farmers became four in 2017 when Gwendal, one of the market gardeners, left the project.

around the issue of degrowth. Within this movement, he met the son of an organic farmer established in the Pyrénées Orientales, where he spent time WWOOFing, exploring his growing interest in the link between plants and non-conventional farming. He gradually formed connections with market gardener networks, such as CIVAM Bio 53. He met his three associates at events and discussions on collective farming practices. In order to enter farming, he trained with a new market gardener in 2008 while earning a farming degree through distance learning.

The fourth associate is Marc, age 32, who grows the grain crops and raises 14 dairy cattle of the protected, local Bretonne Pie Noir breed. He is a member of the municipal council of Montfleurs and very active in the local community.

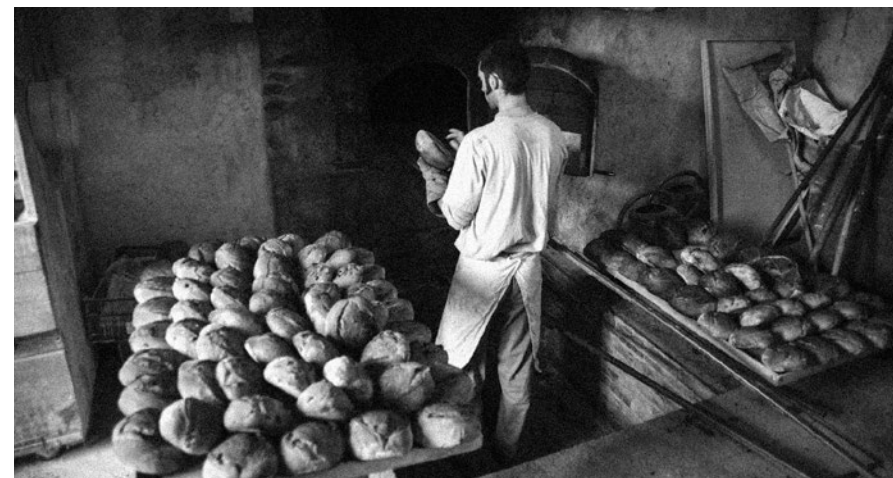
Origin of the collective project and acquisition of the farm

Yannick, Steve, Robert-Jan and Marc came together in 2008 within the scope of a collective project taking shape in Mayenne. From an initial group of about thirty people with a wide range of goals and backgrounds, five had a common vision for a collective farming project⁹¹. At the end of 2009, the group started looking for a farm for their collective project. The Chamber of Agriculture told them about La Gorrionière, a family farm that had been used for livestock breeding and was available for transmission. They visited the farm and fell under its spell.

So began the administrative and financial procedures with the SAFER, the Chamber of Agriculture, and banks. They were assisted by local organisations that support organic and small-scale farming (AFOCG and CIVAM Bio 53), which provided expertise and connected them with professional networks. In 2010, the newly created Terre de Liens Pays de la Loire joined the list of local players supporting and helping facilitate the project.

Foncière Terre de Liens purchased the farm in 2011: 38 ha (of the 42 ha that make up the farm today) including 22 ha of arable land, a house and several farm buildings, for a total of €335,000. A career-long (40-year) environmental rural lease was drawn up between Terre de Liens and the prospective farmers. The GAEC was officially created the same year—the culmination of the two-year preparation phase, during which all associates received the CAP aid for new farmers.

For Yannick, the primary difficulty was access to land. Partnering with Terre de Liens did of course reduce the considerable financial burden for beginning farmers, by sparing them major debt when starting out. For the four associates, however, the motivation for this partnership is not strictly economic: Terre de Liens and their project are closely connected, based on a shared vision of land as commons, agriculture and the importance of vibrant rural areas. The regional context also provided fertile ground for this farming project: most of the surrounding farms



are organic and complementary to each other; the inhabitants are sensitised to ecology and organic farming; and there is a tightly woven local community.

A diversified farming project, feeding the local community

Food autonomy is at the heart of the project, translated through the diversity of polyculture/livestock products and local marketing. While each associate is responsible for his own workshop, planning the development of the project as a whole is a collective process.

The GAEC is currently made up of four associates and four employees. The bulk of the 42 hectares are used as pasture for the cows, with an additional 2 hectares of vegetable fields, 3000 sq.m. of greenhouses, 6 hectares of wheat, 1 hectare of rye and 2 hectares of buckwheat. The 14 Bretonne Pie Noir cows produce 30,000 litres of milk per year.

The farm products are sold through:

- CSA systems: 140 baskets (“shares”) are distributed each week (i.e., 80% of produce sold)
- Institutional food services. To facilitate the ordering and supply process, GAEC Radis&Co is a member of the farmers’ association Manger bio 53, which serves as an interface between chefs, managers and farmers.
- BIOCOOP organic supermarkets for dairy products and one batch of bread
- A farmers’ market in the village
- Other farms that round out their baskets with products from GAEC Radis & Co.
- A market, for the dairy products

- Direct sale at the farm, for bulk meat bundles

The associates view La Gorronnière farm as more than an agricultural production site; it is also a place of social interaction, a gathering place for events and a learning environment. They are committed to the farm being connected and open to the community and region, and playing a part in revitalising the area.

- They have set up a farmers' market in the village,
- They hold cultural and organisational events at the farm,
- Marc was elected to the municipal council in the last election and is an active advocate for many local projects,
- With other parties, they helped create a fully reversible (meaning without land take, using lightweight buildings) artisan / small business and service area.

Collective organisation

Six years since creating the GAEC, the 4 associates have gained perspective in terms of how to organise their collective and balance work and private life. To improve their organisational approach, they hold regular group discussions and invite a specialist to lead sessions in non-violent communication. They organise on-call rotations for weekends and hire help for the Saturday morning market shifts. They also count five weeks of holiday per associate per year.

Since beginning their farming project, they have evolved both personally and in terms of their expectations. At first, the collective imagined living together at the farm, but they gradually chose to separate their work and personal lives.

They now aim to optimise distribution channels, avoiding small orders scattered across the region. More generally, they are trying to reduce their working hours since their economic targets are met. Ultimately, a new associate should also join the farm and the Radis&Co project.

By choosing a collective form for their farming activity, these new farmers reduced the risks of starting out and benefited from greater support (mutual support, advising, outside assistance, etc.). They are fully integrated in the local community, which they provide with high-quality, local food. They have also helped maintain a medium-size farm by diversifying its production while creating a number of jobs and new business activities. ●

Further information

- Radis & Co: <http://radis.et.compagnie.free.fr/>
- CIVAM Bio 53: <http://www.civambio53.fr>
- Terre de Liens Pays de Loire: <https://terredeliens.org/pays-de-la-loire.html>
- Manger Bio 53: <http://mangerbio53.restaurationdurable.fr/>

Cerere Cooperative Italy

The youngest farm cooperative... without the young farmers' grant

Marzia De Sanctis AIAB Lazio

In 2013, Lazio regional authorities issued the first call to tender on public land in 45 years. Three young people, students about to graduate from the agricultural college, submitted their project and won. What could be an emblematic case of the "back to the land" movement—where young, urban people establish a viable farm and live happily ever after—shows that, behind the scenes, things are more complex.

Emanuele and Luca's background

Emanuele and Luca, teenage friends aged 20 and 21, were both studying at an agricultural college. Neither of them is from a farming background, but both have always been interested in land, cattle and other living beings. Pushed by a curiosity that was not satisfied by conventional education, they started visiting farms with a group of fellow students on week-ends.

A call for tender on public land

In 2013, Emanuele and Luca were attending their last year of school when ARSIAL, the regional agency for agricultural development, issued a call for tender for four hectares of public land in Tarquinia, about 100 km north of Rome. It offered favourable conditions: subsidised rent for a renewable 15-year contract, combined with free rent for the first three years and a €15,000 grant to cover start-up expenses. Emanuele and Luca decided to submit a proposal, and joined forces with two other young people, including one woman, who was little involved in developing the proposal. They felt that they well met the criteria for the call to tender, which gave preference to young people and organic farming, and included a female quota.

The group submitted their proposal in 2014. They received no help from their college teachers, but did work with an external agronomist, whom they hired as a subcontractor and who became a key advisor and resource person for the farm project. They presented a plan to use the 4 hectares for horticulture, saffron production and snail farming. Their business plan included the

€15,000 grant from ARSIAL as well as a €70,000 payment from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), under the Young Farmers measure aimed at supporting the setting-up of young farmers.

The same year, Emanuele and Luca graduated from the agricultural college. Luca then enrolled at the University of Perugia to train as an agronomist while Emanuele started an apprenticeship to become a farm technician. At the end of 2014, they received good news: they had won the tender and been selected to rent the four hectares of land in Tarquinia. They decided to found a farmers' Cooperative, called Cerere, to jointly farm the land.

The Cerere farm

Between January and May 2015, the group went through all the administrative steps to set up their business, access EU funds and obtain organic certification. To achieve this, they sought the services of a professional accountant but received no advice or support from public bodies.

In springtime, the Cooperative started to farm, but the young farmers soon realised that the knowledge gained at school is insufficient: they did not have any practical experience with transplanting and did not know how to drive a tractor. Their first crop was a failure and they faced major logistical difficulties, even resorting to delivering some of their produce by bus. They then focused on organising sales and distribution through short supply chains and direct marketing.



Their winter crop was slightly better. The farmers were also meeting with AIAB Lazio, the Italian Association for Organic Farming in the Lazio region, which organises a weekly farmers' market in Rome. The Cerere farmers started taking part in the farmers' market without having to pay for their market stand. They also received support from another farmer, a member of AIAB Lazio, who buys some of their produce for resale.

But at this stage the Cerere Cooperative was blindsided by a major upset: a change in CAP subsidies. Indeed, according to the Lazio Region rules for the CAP subsidies 2007-2013, a new farming enterprise was eligible if it had been established less than 18 months before applying for funds. With the new CAP 2014-2020, the Lazio region changed the requirement, reducing the age limit for eligible farm businesses to 12 months. This is how the youngest Lazio farm cooperative established on public land was left with no CAP subsidies.

Without the €70,000 payment, it became impossible to invest in snail farming, hire an expert farm worker and buy a tractor. The cooperative had spent €9000 of the €15,000 ARSIAL grant on paying an accountant and agronomist advisor, and a further €6000 on irrigation system and young plants. The Cerere farmers reduced their initial plans and decided to focus on market gardening. They also resorted to a bank loan in anticipation of the CAP subsidies for organic farming, which they have applied for but not yet received.

For now, the Cerere Cooperative is surviving thanks to a social farming project. They manage a piece of land in the Rebibbia penitentiary in Rome, where they grow vegetables for the local market in Rome, working with two inmates and people from the mental health system. Since they are based in Rome, and Tarquinia is 100 km away, they are planning to produce a monoculture of tomatoes for wholesale. So far, none of the Cerere farmers have been able to become full-time farmers: for economic reasons, all of them still have other jobs in addition to farming.

Conclusions

The history of this cooperative is emblematic of how the determination and resourcefulness of new farmers may be at odds with a lack of formal training, lack of public support and poor management of EU funding. An alternative support network, strong personal will and skills, and mutual support among young farmers become key to the success of these emerging farms, which could benefit from easier access to public land and public support. ●

Brîndușa Bîrhală Romania

Setting up as a smallholder with no family farm

Meike Fienitz Eco Ruralis

Every hour, three farms close down in Romania. With economic viability such a serious struggle for small-scale farms, few young people are willing to make the choice to become farmers. Yet, in the Western Romanian village of Stanciova, Brîndușa Bîrhală and her partner are doing just this, gradually setting up a new small-scale farm. With more young people desperately needed to follow an ageing generation of farmers, their case is not only an important example for other aspiring young farmers, but also sheds light on the problems new entrants face and the support they need.

Brîndușa's background

For the first six years of her life, Brîndușa lived with her grandparents on a subsistence-level farm. However, when she was old enough to attend school, she moved to live with her parents in Bucharest. During her studies, she developed an interest in sustainable communities, going on to earn a Master's in Environmental Governance in Germany and a second Master's in Rural Development in Belgium.

Yet as much as she enjoyed studying abroad, she always knew that she eventually wanted to come back to Romania; she saw living in her native country as more challenging but also more rewarding. She wanted to work in rural development, particularly in the countryside where projects were actually taking place. For Brîndușa, starting a farm was not a conscious decision but rather something that happened out of a combination of need and pleasure. In 2014, she moved to Stanciova because she knew the local community and, out of necessity, she started to grow food for her own consumption. In order to generate an income, she then began to think about marketing some of her produce.

Setting up a farm - the needs

In the very beginning, her most urgent need was housing. Brîndușa and her partner Anselm received help from a local NGO that allowed them to stay temporarily in a renovated old house in the village, but they needed to find a permanent place to live. Access to land was another issue, particularly finding out which land was up for sale and whether their budget would allow them to buy it. In the

end, they found a plot simply by searching online, and they were able to buy it from their own savings.

A source of income was yet another important need, as it is very difficult to earn an income in the countryside until a farm is actually up and running. Brîndușa and Anselm solved this by alternately doing seasonal work outside Romania. Also, for one year, Brîndușa worked as a kindergarten teacher and became more connected in the village community. Up to this point, the couple has managed to educate themselves, however, Brîndușa anticipates that knowledge will likely become more of an issue in the future as they scale up their farm and will need to learn how to do things more efficiently.

Brîndușa's farm today

Today, Brîndușa's farm consists of 2000 sq.m. (0.2 hectares), the regular size of a local village garden plot. She and her partner have just finished building a small house on this land and for the past three years have been growing a variety of vegetables for their own consumption. This year, they are planning to market some of their produce. They are also experimenting with rare crops; for example, last year they tested industrial hemp cultivation, which they would like to continue this year. However, though a valuable crop, industrial hemp is almost impossible to grow as a small farmer due to restrictive legislation. They were aided by a local Romanian hemp promoter who is an active in bringing this tradition back to peasant communities.



So far, Brîndușa and Anselm have not done any on-farm processing of their produce, as the related regulations are very strict and they do not yet have the infrastructure to meet these standards. However, for the future, they have plans to process hemp oil in collaboration with other producers. Additionally, Brîndușa plans on setting up some low-impact rural tourism structures such as a camping site, which she also hopes to test-run this summer.

Mobilising resources

Brîndușa herself had some formal training through her studies at university, where she took classes on irrigation, organic gardening and organic farming, however, these were very theoretical. She got some practical experience while WWOOFing and also during a semester of studies in India, where hands-on classes were taught. Her partner, who is an agronomist, has brought further practical experience, but as Brîndușa says, most of her experience actually comes from learning by doing.

Her own network was the most important resource she mobilised along the way. It was crucial when building her house; for example, she had a "concrete party" to pour the foundation. Through her network, she also received professional assistance for constructing the roof structure, and people from the local community taught her organic production techniques adapted to local conditions. For public support such as subsidies or new farmer schemes, Brîndușa's project is still too small, but she hopes to be able to tap into these resources at some point in the future. Finally, WWOOF volunteers hosted by other villagers also contribute to the project every once in a while.

Access to land

Brîndușa and Anselm were able to find available land and acquire a small plot out of their own saving to start up their farm. At this stage, future challenges mainly relate to gaining access to additional land, since more land will be needed as the farm increases. There are some bigger farms in the village of over a hundred hectares which have more resources to buy any attractive plots once they come up for sale. Thus, buying more land will likely prove to be difficult for small players like Brîndușa and Anselm.

Instead, leasing will be Brîndușa's main strategy to access more land, preferably from people she knows who do not use all of their land. Another strategy will be to look out for plots that are de facto abandoned because of an unclear ownership situation and to lease these from whoever is currently, informally holding the rights to this land. Nevertheless, Brîndușa is optimistic about her farm project's future: "To have the power, the knowledge and the opportunity to feed other families with organic vegetables, wow, this is my dream to get there at some point". ●

Pascalau Adrian Nicusor Romania

Finding a balance as a young shepherd in Romania

Meike Fienitz Eco Ruralis

⁹² Baker-Smith, K.: Farm Succession in Romania. Who will take over the lands from an ageing peasant generation? April 2009, www.accesstoland.eu/Farm-Succession-in-Romania

Two thirds of Romanian farmers are over 55 years old, and only 7% are under 35⁹². Few young Romanians are interested in becoming a farmer, yet mobilising a new generation of farmers is a pressing issue. Pascalau Adrian Nicusor, called Adi, is one of the young people choosing to make their living with farming. In Rogojel, Transylvania, he single-handedly runs a growing sheep farm. His experience is highly informative, illustrating the problems faced by young entrants into farming and revealing the ways in which governments, society and civil society organisations can support them to make farming more attractive for young people.

Adi's background

Adi's family have always been shepherds. As a child, he helped his parents, attending school only once a month in person, as it was too far away, and studying from home the rest of the time. At age 14, he became a shepherd of his own, and since that time has always worked with sheep. He chose to be a shepherd because he wants to continue the family tradition, but more importantly, he greatly enjoys the work with the sheep. After he graduated from high school, Adi attended farmers' school for three months in the closest city, Cluj-Napoca.

Adi's farm

Now, at age 23, Adi owns 600 sheep on his farm is located in Rogojel, a small village of 718 inhabitants in northwest Transylvania. He raises his sheep on a total of 130 hectares, half of which he uses only in the summer. This portion is on common land belonging to a nearby village, Alunisu, which the people of Alunisu lease to him. During the winter, his sheep are at Rogojel, where he owns around 30 hectares and rents another 30 from private owners. In addition to sheep, Adi also has some pigs and grows potatoes, but these are entirely for his own consumption and are not sold.

Adi literally started from zero, but since those days his sheep farm has grown considerably, particularly in the last year, in which his flock almost doubled in size. Adi also built an addition to his barn to accommodate the larger number of animals, and he has continuously added more land to his project. If seen from these



numbers, Adi's farm is by now well-established and he himself is very satisfied with the way it is growing.

However, he is also facing serious challenges. The price for both lambs and cheese has fallen continuously over the last years, and there are very few buyers for wool. Some years ago, one kilogram of cheese could be sold for 15 Lei or even as much as 20 Lei (€4.30); but now just 12 Lei (€2.60) is considered a very good price. It is also getting harder every year to find enough buyers for the lambs. Adi used to sell some of his lambs to countries in the Middle East, but that exportation was stopped because of the unrest and wars in the region.

A few years ago, Adi had his farm certified as organic, hoping that this would get him a higher price for his products or at least draw more buyers. However, he no longer renews the certification as he said it changed neither the price he received nor the amount he could sell and was therefore a waste of money. Nevertheless, he continues farming in a traditional and mostly organic way, as to him it is natural and obvious that this is the best approach.

Securing Support

Public support in the form of subsidies was and continues to be the main resource Adi relies upon, besides his own experience and faith. The farmers' training he did after graduating from high school

was financed by the European Union, and every year Adi receives subsidies for his sheep. In 2016, this was 42 Lei (€9) per sheep but the amount changes from year to year. Not knowing in advance how much he will receive is a major issue, as it makes planning very difficult. Furthermore, a few years ago the subsidy money did not arrive on time, meaning that he could not buy feed for the sheep, was unable to fund the costs for the veterinarian and had his bank accounts blocked until the money arrived. Thus, subsidies are an important but highly insecure source of support. Apart from this, Adi has a good friend who is a veterinarian who helps him to get vaccines for the sheep.

Access to land

Access to land is also a major issue for Adi's sheep farm. Since he started out with only 10 hectares from his family and the number of sheep has grown continuously, he has had to add more land over time. He bought 20 additional hectares, but this was not easy because of his limited financial resources. Finding land to buy was also a time-consuming process, involving going around to ask people individually if they were willing to sell.

Even now access to land remains a major issue. On the one hand, Adi would like to have more land for his growing flock, but finds it hard to finance this with the price for his sheep being so low. On the other hand, even access to the land Adi currently uses is by no means secure. For the 30 hectares he rents in Rogojel from private individuals, there is always the risk that another bidder will offer a higher price. Since Adi depends on this land, he would be forced to go along and offer even more money. The lease for the common lands of Alunisu also has to be renegotiated every year, putting Adi in a highly insecure position.

Nevertheless, Adi holds on to his dream of being a shepherd. If there were no restrictions, he would want to have a maximum of 800 or maybe 1000 sheep. He would like to have more land and he dreams of being able to grow his own cereals so that his farm could be self-sufficient. He will work towards these goals just as he has done all that he has achieved so far, "All by myself, slowly but surely". ●

Anna Plana Spain

Making herself a place as a new shepherd in the Pyrenees

Paola Toribio and Maria Díaz de Quijano Rurbans

Anna Plana started her activity as a shepherd after a first career outside of farming. After training with the School of Shepherds of Catalonia, she started a small sheep farm. Over the years, by making herself known and respected in the local community, she was able to access more land and grow her flock. She now runs a successful business and employs one person.

Anna's background

Anna was born in Empordà in the province of Girona. She trained as a hairdresser and gardener, but admits that she never liked to study. She tried many different jobs which never managed to fulfil her dream of freedom. After spending some time in Menorca, she decided to enrol in the School of Shepherds with her boyfriend. The School of Shepherds offers practical training to new entrants who want to work as breeders and shepherds in Catalonia. Since then, she has always cared for her sheep. Anna has finally found what she likes and the job that fills her with happiness.

Anna's farm

Anna decided to stay and establish her farm in the region where she trained with the School of Shepherds. She wanted to start her project with the smallest possible economic investment. Her initial needs were to have enough money to pay for the self-employment tax and land for grazing.

Over the years, Anna increased her land area, and could thus also enlarge her flock. She started with a very small flock and now has 400 sheep and one employee. Since 2016, Anna has employed a woman who also graduated from the School of Shepherds. She helps her with the farm work and taking the flock to the pastures. Having a second person is very important for Anna, to be able to complete all of the different tasks and still have a decent personal life outside of work.

Anna's sheepfold and hay barn are made out of wood modules. This makes them cheaper than cement constructions and easier to enlarge. She went to France to see how structures on farms are built and decided to buy a wood-module sheepfold. Anna has used the subsidies for improving infrastructures to enlarge her farm



structures and build a hay barn, also using the same technique. She is now thinking about further increasing her flock and exporting lambs outside of Pallars Sobirà.

Becoming a farmer: step by step

Anna emphasizes that she has worked a lot and put a great deal of effort into making her project what it is today. Enrolling in the School of Shepherds was essential, providing the necessary initial training to start her project. The mission of the School of Shepherds of Catalonia is to foster a new generation of peasants and cattle farmers. The courses last five months. Students pay €500 for enrolment and receive room and board for the duration of the curriculum. The first month of training (128h) is focused on theory, with courses covering production, marketing, businesses skills, public aid, etc. The four next months are dedicated to on-farm practice, either on the farm or in summer pastures. Most farmers commit to providing effective training and sharing a range of knowledge and know-how with the trainees.

The School's training is officially recognised by the Department of Agriculture of the Catalan government and the Agricultural College. As a graduate of the School of Shepherds,

⁹³ In Llessui, the "mountain rights", i.e. the rights that allow you to use the mountain common land, are inherited.

Anna was eligible for the European CAP Young Farmers' subsidy, which was a great aid in achieving her objectives. Nine years later, Anna continues to complete short trainings to improve her project.

Another very important thing for Anna was her family's support: they have always trusted her and helped her when she needed it. The main difficulty that she faced was being a newcomer and a woman in an area dominated by men. Locals thought that a woman (and an "outsider" to Pallars Sobirà!) would not be able to set up and run a farm. It was not easy to stand strong and make her place in this atmosphere of distrust, but now Anna is one of them and respected and supported by the locals.

Access to land

Anna's main problem in accessing land is that very little land is available. Lleida Pyrenees is a region where shepherding is still an important livelihood and fairly widespread. As a result, there is a lack of available land for new entrants. Because locals also tend to be wary of outsiders, it is very difficult to find land to rent or buy for grazing.

At the beginning of her project, Anna did not have any land. She met an old shepherd from the village next to Llessui who did not use his land anymore. He agreed for Anna to use his land instead of him. Over seven years, Anna has finally managed to buy some land of her own; she also rents some additional land and has the right to use the common land that belongs to the municipality⁹³.

Anna started her project very slowly, with only a few animals grazing on a neighbour's land. She slowly managed to make herself known and respected by the locals, which definitely helped her when it came time to rent land from her neighbours. ●

Further information:

- Anna Plana: www.pasturem.cat/product-page/anna-plana-verdaguer
- School of Shepherds: www.escoladepastorsdecatalunya.cat/?lang=en and www.accesstoland.eu/-Rurbans-School-of-Shepherds-
- View the film produced by the Access to land partnership, The land for our food, 2016, which features Anna: www.accesstoland.eu/film-Land-for-our-food
- Read a case study about the School of Shepherds and access to land initiatives in Catalonia: www.accesstoland.eu/Rurbans-and-Terra-Franca-Catalonia

Kate Collyns The United Kingdom

A synergistic land partnership

Rachel Harries Soil Association

Kate Collyns is a new entrant in the south west of England. Coming to farming as a career changer, and wanting to establish her business in an area with exceptionally high land prices, she has benefitted from land, support and a synergistic relationship with an existing farm.

Kate's background

Kate Collyns runs a small market garden called Grown Green at Hartley Farm, in the south west of England.

Like many other new entrants, Kate came to farming as a career change. After university, she worked in publishing before leaving to do a master's degree in philosophy. Returning to publishing, she soon became frustrated with office-based work, and began volunteering for a conservation charity as well as becoming more interested in growing her own food at home.

However working on a magazine about organic lifestyles, opened her eyes to the impact of industrial agriculture on the environment. She became aware that if she wanted to adopt a green lifestyle she need to play a role in producing ecological and ethical food, and that organic farming was the way to do that.

Growing vegetables on a small scale at home with limited success, she was starting her organic career almost from scratch. After hearing about the Soil Association's Future Growers scheme, in 2008 she was one of the first to train as an apprentice on the two year programme.

Kate's farm

Since 2011 Kate has run a small market garden growing vegetables and herbs on a small area of land that she rents from Hartley Farm, a mixed farm just outside Bath and Bradford on Avon in Wiltshire. The farm has a cluster of other enterprises including a successful café and farm shop, a florists, carpentry workshop, bakers and microbrewery and horse livery.

Hartley Farm were looking for a grower to set up a vegetable business on the farm to supply the café and farm shop and had approached the Soil Association's Head of Horticulture Ben Raskin for advice. Ben knew Kate well, and introduced her to the farm. After a visit to assess the land, she decided she could make it work.

Kate set up her market garden, Grown Green @ Hartley Farm initially on just under 2 acres (0.8 hectare). She pays £175 per acre



(or 480€/ ha) (known as a peppercorn rent) which currently includes water (although this is under negotiation) and occasional use of the farm tractor.

Kate's start-up costs were around £7,000 (€7800) including £2000 (€2200) for polytunnels, a rotovator, compost and plastic pots. In 2015, Kate expanded her growing area and now rents two fields. One has seven polytunnels which she has erected herself and a small shipping container for storage and equipment. Kate has had to put up rabbit fencing.

Grown Green sells its veg to the farm shop and café, which receive produce picked the same day, but also to local shops and restaurants and wholesale to a market stall.

Kate made a conscious decision at the start not to sell directly to individual customers. After training on a farm that ran a box scheme she didn't want to take on the administration of offering weekly boxes that often end up being tailored to customers wants. She saw large amounts of wastage at farmers markets, which carry the risk of not selling everything and the cost of a stall.

She recognised the ease of wholesale, but with the benefit of very close relationships to her shop and restaurant customers, who are able to tell her story. It is in fact a more 'direct wholesale' and with that, she gets a better price. This model has allowed her business to expand gradually and Kate's confidence in crop planning to grow. Now she has more experience, she is exploring direct sales and how to make her food more accessible to wider groups people, for example through a local Food Assembly.

The market garden has a turnover £18,000 (€20,000) and is increasing its profits year on year. Kate works a four day week in the growing season, cutting that to roughly two days a week in the winter. She is able to pay herself salary, of about £9,000 (€10,000) for part-time, with the benefit that general expenses can be accrued to the business, such as running a car for deliveries.

Kate took on another grower for a couple of days a week to help with the ever-expanding workload. When she had a baby in 2017, she recruited someone three days a week to cover her maternity period.

Becoming a farmer: step-by-step

Kate trained to be an organic grower as an apprentice on the Soil Association's Future Growers scheme. Kate did her apprenticeship at Purton House Organics, near Swindon. Purton House Organics, a Soil Association licensee, sell their produce through a vegetable box scheme and their own farm shop, as well as supplying some local businesses through wholesale.

Rowie Meers, farm owner and Kate's mentor, saw offering an apprenticeship at the farm as a way to guarantee a committed employee for two seasons. She also wanted to encourage new young growers into the industry. Rowie also recognised that Kate's other skills in publishing and writing, would be an added benefit for the farm when devising new marketing material.

The Future Growers apprenticeship involved a two year paid work placement at Purton House, as well as attending seminars and farm visits with a wider cohort of apprentices. Kate's main challenge was living a 45 minute drive away from the farm.

The apprenticeship and on the job learning offered a good variety of practical experience in many areas of the farm plus one hour mentoring a week. Rowie also made a lot of extra effort to

dedicate time for looking at specific activities such as how the water pump worked, irrigation and propagation. She took Kate to local grower group, Thames Organic Grower meetings and paid for conferences.

One of the benefits of being a paid employee on a commercial farm was that Kate learnt a strong work ethic. It was crucial that the end product of that labour was something that would pay their wage.

The Future Growers scheme allowed Kate to spend time and network with her peers, a generation of new growers learning at the same time on other farms. She had access to other established growers and felt herself becoming established in the organic horticulture world.

She has maintained a close connection with Rowie, her mentor on the apprenticeship scheme, to compare growing experiences and marketing methods. She also continues to work at Purton Organics one day a week where she deals with box scheme administration. Hartley Farm owner and Kate's landlord, Richard Bowles was supportive right from the start, wanting the new business to do well.

She also accessed the Princes Trust Jason Kanabus Scheme that was set up to support new farmers. The scheme provided her with a business mentor and grant of £2000 (€2200) for the tunnels.

Kate set up Bath and Bradford on Avon Organic Growers (BABOG) with help from Ben Raskin -essentially creating her own support network that meets several times a year and arranges farm walks. She joined the Organic Growers Alliance and is now a member of the organising committee.

In 2011 Kate published a book Gardening for Profit that outlines how to go from back garden growing to running a commercial market garden. She regularly chairs and speaks at conferences and is involved in a research panel with the Land Workers Alliance and the University of Sussex looking at agroecological farming and access to land.

Access to land

Grown Green is situated in a very affluent area and like many part of the UK, open fields are in high demand by horse owners. A field next to the farm was recently on the market for £7,000 (€7800) for four acres (1,6 ha).

Kate's model of renting from an existing farm is part of a trend of land partnerships where a large farm or estate rents land to another farm often with synergistic benefits. These go beyond just land and include her proximity to her primary customers: the Hartley Farm café and farm shop, access to horse manure from the livery stable and spent hops from the brewery which she uses as mulch. She has support from the wider farm with ploughing and is part of a good social community rather than feeling isolated on a farm on her own.

Accommodation is an issue for Kate as much as many other growers who do not live on their farms. She has explored buying land on the farm to build a house, and was offered a plot of land a few fields away. However the farm is in the green belt and planning would only allow a new house immediately adjacent to current farm buildings, land which is not available for Kate to buy and build on.

Kate has the potential to rent more land and expand her business but is waiting to see how things change for her now that the baby is born. Renting land from an existing, diverse farm enterprise has allowed her to access land and markets, expand as and when she is ready and create a thriving new market garden business. ●

Further information

- Kate's farm: <https://growngreen.wordpress.com/>
- Kate's book: www.greenbooks.co.uk/Book/465/Gardening-for-Profit.html
- www.soilassociation.org/futuregrowers
- View the film produced by the Access to land partnership, The land for our food, 2016, which features Kate: www.accesstoland.eu/film-Land-for-our-food

Jamie Carr The United Kingdom

Piggyback farming as a way to access land

Alice Bowerman Soil Association

Jamie Carr started his business, Blacklands Organics in October 2016. It is a new vegetable growing enterprise in South Oxfordshire that sells at a farmers market in Oxford and wholesale to other local businesses. In a "piggyback farming" set up, he is renting land alongside an established horticultural grower, Pete Richardson of Westmill Organics who has been growing on the site for 20 years.

Jamie's background

Jamie has been working on and off farms since he was 15, starting with fruit picking summer jobs and other seasonal labour before trying his hand at greenwood work. In 2014 he returned to horticulture as an apprentice at Abbey Home Farm, Cirencester through the Soil Association's Future Growers programme. The programme enabled Jamie to work on a commercial vegetable farm alongside head growers and mentors Keith Denning and Andy Dibben, while attending training seminars and farm visits.

Jamie was brought up by parents who had an interest in the environment and always had an allotment. Initially he enjoyed being outside and working with tractors but as his knowledge increased he realised that the food system needed fixing. He believes that organic farming is closer to the answer than conventional farming and it is his aim to feed people good tasty food that is good for the land and positive for his family and way of life. Jamie also finds growing "technically fascinating" and is a self-defined "farming geek" who enjoys the scientific side to growing.

An affordable way into farming was essential for Jamie to follow his dream. With some savings he could have bought some land, but that would have left him with nothing to set up the business and infrastructure. It felt like an extremely big step to take, to choose the land and location as well as researching markets with little experience of business planning, adding to Jamie's family situation with the arrival of a new baby.

Jamie's farm

Blacklands Organics is two acres (0.8 hectare) and three polytunnels (about 0.2 acre, i.e. 0,08 ha) situated along side Westmill Organics an established horticultural business of about 40 acres. Jamie

plans to use a min-till permanent bed system with intensive plant spacing, based loosely on JM Fortier in Canada and other small market gardeners. After just four months Jamie is already seeing an increase of sales at his market stall as he gets to know his customers. Being positioned alongside a current grower wasn't Jamie's original plan but it has allowed him to access infrastructure as well as personal support and advice. This has been an unexpected and invaluable resource as it has allowed him to start earning even before most of the crops were sown.



Becoming a farmer: steps by steps

Jamie's apprenticeship at Abbey Home Farm gave him three seasons of experience growing for their farm shop and cafe, learning about the technical and practical sides of growing. The Future Growers programme included practical horticultural seminars with experienced growers and visits to many different farms which varied in scale and market. It enable future growers to learn more about the technical side of growing and different set-up models. There were many opportunities to create a network with existing growers as well as other "Future Growers" that were part of the scheme.

As Jamie started on his own path he has realised the variable nature of horticultural businesses depending on the market they sell to. Even after spending three different seasons on one farm, where each was differently affected by the weather and Jamie took on more responsibility each year, he has found that he was unprepared to start up his own business. He has not found help for start-ups or information on the economics of growing easy to access. Jamie's mentor helped him with his business planning during the last year of his placement and continues to be in-touch and offer advice. He also introduced Jamie to Thames Organic Growers (TOG), a local grower group, who exchange information, advice and experience and is actually where Jamie made the contact which resulted in the land opportunity.

Through Thames Organic Growers Jamie also made contact with Sonia Oliver, a local grower and went with her to her Stroud farmer's market stall so he could observe the prices, presentation and logistics. When the opportunity came up for the market in Oxford, this information was invaluable.

Jamie is certified by the Soil Association and has accessed their market information and technical guides. He has also enjoyed mixing with and learning from other farmers and growers at the conferences he attended, including the Oxford Real Farming Conference and Farm Hack.

Access to land

As he was coming to the end of his apprenticeship, Jamie attended a Thames Organic Growers meeting and mentioned, almost as a joke, that he was looking for land to rent or buy. This resulted in two offers of land with different set-ups. He had no set ideas of what the relationship might look like, but was open to the advantages that working with another grower could bring. Pete had land that he was renting but not cropping. They came up with the idea of "piggyback farming" where Jamie is renting the spare land directly from the land owner but placing his polytunnels alongside Pete's so the farms are truly intertwined. Jamie's formal relationship is with the landowner while he collaborates with Pete, and they have both been very supportive.

The advantages for the new entrant to "piggyback farming" over starting from scratch are numerous:

- The land was already certified organic and had been under a green manure so is in good condition and weed free.
- Physical infrastructure was already in place. Access to a pack house, delivery van, crates and market stall, water hook ups, hardstanding around the farm gate, tractor and machinery. Although Jamie will want to have his own eventually it is extremely useful to have access to these while he starts up and decides the best options for himself.
- Local links and knowledge of the current and potential routes to market.
- Sharing the transport for wholesale orders
- He is able to buy Westmill produce directly on a sale or return basis and cheaper as Jamie harvests it himself.
- Some paid work, an extra security while the business is establishing.
- Informal mentor and someone to bounce ideas off.
- A cottage across the road was available to rent from the same land owner.

Benefits for both the new entrant and established farmer:

- Extra skilled labour on site if either needs a job doing quickly.
- Can grow complimentary crops for example different successions.
- Can sell direct to each other, removing the need for wholesale and transport.
- Each can leave their business in the hands of the other, for example to go on holiday.

Negatives:

- Some competition, Jamie would like to have a roadside stall but Pete already operates one from the site.
- Lots of time and energy spent negotiating, discussing, communicating, building and maintaining relationships, particularly at the beginning.
- Informal arrangement, which is going well at the moment but they have not been through a busy season yet. Both Jamie and Pete are willing to put this time and energy in to make it work and have identified things where formality is worthwhile for example invoicing of time and produce but have kept others such as occasional use of the tractor informal. Perhaps the appointment of an arbiter would ensure that any disputes are dealt with fairly as there may be a slight imbalance of power toward the established farmer.

Jamie see's "piggyback farming" as a temporary but long term solution to his need for access to land. This is not his dream farm but it is a great place to trial things, develop ideas and skills. He

has already learnt so much about setting up a business, and aims to save money to buy land at a later date. When that time comes, he would like to stay running the business from this site while establishing infrastructure on his own land. He feels lucky to have spoken to Pete when he did as he was about to go it alone and start on a blank piece of land which would have been much harder work to develop a successful business.

Jamie is just starting out with his new business and is sure there will be many challenges along the way. However he feels that "piggyback farming" has given him an affordable way to access land and lots of other support. Combined with hard work he is confident it could result in a successful business, which provides good food for people while taking care of the land and the people working on it. ●

Further information:

- Westmill Organics: www.westmillorganics.co.uk
- Abbey Home Farm: www.theorganicfarmshop.co.uk
- Future Growers scheme: www.soilassociation.org/farmers-growers/supporting-you/future-growers

Innovative ways to access land

⁹⁴ See: European Commission, Needs of Young Farmers, final report, November 2015, <https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/external-studies/2015/young-farmers/final-report-1-en.pdf>; European Innovation Partnership Focus group, New Entrants into farming: Lessons to foster innovation and entrepreneurship, Final Report, 2016, <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/content/new-entrants-farming-lessons-foster-innovation-and-entrepreneurship>; European Parliament, "The state of play of land concentration in the EU - How to facilitate access to land for farmers?", April 2017, [www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2017\)602006](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=&reference=2016/2141(INI); Zagata, L. et al., Young farmers - policy implementation after the 2013 CAP reform, Scientific Report to European Parliament, Research for AGRI Committee, 2017, <a href=)

⁹⁵ See: Evolution of farmland prices between 1990 and 2014, in SAFER, Le prix des terres en 2015, p.18. See also, Eurostat: Agricultural land prices vary considerably between and within Member States, 21 March 2018: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-press-releases/-/5-21032018-AP>

⁹⁶ European Parliament, Report on the state of play of farmland concentration in the EU: *ibid.*, and Zagata, L. et al., *ibid.*

⁹⁷ European Parliament, Report on the state of play of farmland concentration in the EU, 2017, *ibid.* See also: European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC) and Hands off the land, Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and People's Struggles in Europe, April 2013, www.tni.org/files/download/land_in_europe-jun2013.pdf

Land: the number one obstacle to entering farming in Europe

Today in Europe, the number one obstacle to entering farming is access to land⁹⁴, i.e. the ability to find land under conditions secure and affordable enough for farming. Other major obstacles include lack of adequate training, access to capital, and access to markets.

Accessing land is difficult for new farmers across the European Union, despite significant national differences. In almost all countries, the same factors are at play:

Land prices:

Land is expensive to buy or rent, with major price increases over the past two decades.⁹⁵ In some countries, particularly near cities where the need for food production is greatest, land has become so expensive to buy that the income generated by agricultural production is not sufficient to cover the investment. New farmers are in competition with established ones, who are often in a better position to pay and to borrow from banks. They are also in competition with non-farmers looking for land for residential and leisure use (e.g. keeping horses). Rental prices often follow similar trends to purchase prices.

Late retirement:

Aging farmers tend to retire late and retain all of their land until they retire. This is due to today's longer life expectancy and the lack of adequate pension for farmers. This behaviour is incentivised by the Common Agricultural Policy which subsidises farmers based on the surface area they farm, thereby encouraging aging farmers to keep more land than they actually use.⁹⁶

Farm consolidation over entry into farming:

When a farmer retires, the land is likely to be absorbed by a neighbouring farm, rather than being kept as an independent farm, transferable to a new farmer. This is particularly the case on small- to medium-sized farms. Indeed, established farmers are often better positioned to acquire the land than new entrants. Besides, retiring small-holders too often doubt that their farm is transmissible and that a new farmer will want to take over. This results in land concentration, which has reached worrying level in many parts of Europe and in turns makes it harder for future farmers to get started.⁹⁷

Lack of tenure security:

In many countries, the security of tenure has deteriorated over the past decades. With increasing demands for land and rising prices, landowners indeed prefer to enter into shorter leases, which are not automatically renewable, and sometimes even opt for oral leases.

⁹⁸ From 1993 to 2013, the EU lost 21.4 million hectares, i.e. 12% of its farmland. Source: Eurostat, own table on the evolution of utilised agricultural area, 1990-2015, per country. See: www.accesstoland.eu/-/Infographics-Access-to-land-in-Europe-

⁹⁹ See Farm Succession Partnership, Farm Succession: Tools and methods to promote a successful farm succession, 2016, available at: www.accesstoland.eu/European-Farm-Succession-Conference See also: <https://www.accesstoland.eu/-/Organising-farm-succession->

This gives them more leeway to raise the rent more significantly and more often, or to take back the land and rent it or sell it with more profit. Lack of tenure security is a major obstacle for new farmers, particularly in countries such as Belgium and the UK where most farmers access land through tenancy. The lack of security makes it difficult to plan and afford on-farm investments (e.g. build a shed or a cheese-processing unit), to build stable relationships with customers, and to reap the benefits of soil improvement, etc.

Loss of farmland:

Overall, the surface area of farmland is diminishing in Europe.⁹⁸ This is mostly due to urban and infrastructure development, i.e. urban sprawl, building of highways and railways, commercial areas, secondary residential housing, etc. Much of this development affects some of the most fertile land in Europe, which is historically where many large cities are established. In mountain or remote areas, some farmland is also lost to land abandonment, and over time turns into scrub and woodland. As farmland shrinks, competition and prices increase, so that new farmers find it harder to find available and affordable land.

Additional difficulties for newcomers to farming:

Because they do not inherit a family farm, newcomers have to find and acquire land in order to get started. They are therefore primarily affected by all of the above difficulties. They also face additional difficulties linked to not coming from an agricultural background, and often entering farming outside of their home region. Information about land for sale or rent indeed largely passes through informal networks of neighbours, friends and fellow farmers. The equally important factor of trust works the same way. For a newcomer to acquire land, s/he must first develop local connections and gain local recognition. Landowners must trust that s/he will make good use of the land and be able to pay the purchase price or the rent.

The challenge of accessing land has gained new significance with the decline of what, for centuries, has been almost the sole way of entering farming—succeeding on the family farm. Access to land is therefore closely intertwined with extra-family farm succession⁹⁹ and the need for newcomers to farming. But the issue is more widespread and affects both continuers and newcomers, albeit in different ways. It results directly from our difficulty renewing farmer generations and changing the food and farming systems, away from a model that prioritises the specialisation of food production, on ever-larger farms in limited areas, at the expense of rural development, food quality and safety, job creation, community life and environmental protection.

¹⁰⁰ See for instance the portrait of Cerere cooperative (Italy) in this publication.

¹⁰¹ See for instance the portrait of the Franches Terres farmers' collective (France) in this publication.

¹⁰² Read more on the many levers at the disposal of local authorities and a range of good practices in: Access to Land Network, Supporting Access to Land for farmers in Europe: Experiences and potential of Local Authorities, 2017, www.accesstoland.eu/Local-authorities-role-to-secure-access-to-land-for-farmers

Innovative ways of accessing land

On the ground, a growing number of people are seeking to enter farming, with or without policy support. Over the past 10 to 15 years, a number of local initiatives have developed to enable farmers and aspiring farmers to gain access to land for farming. Many of them focus on farmers engaging in agroecological practices and local food systems. Some such initiatives have emerged from within farmers' organisations, others from rural development associations, consumers' groups, or local authorities. Some provide a helping hand to get farmers started; others offer long-term solutions. Below is a review of some of the novel pathways used by farmers to access land.

Accessing public land

In Europe, many local authorities—regions, counties, municipalities—own land, including farmland. For the past two decades, an increasing number of local authorities have also developed an interest in food and farming as part of their local development policies and/or sustainable development policies. This was initially due to a variety of reasons: promoting local quality food in public restaurants and local markets; developing a green belt to increase local food supply; supporting local businesses and job creation; promoting environmentally-friendly forms of farming as a way to manage environmental risks or preserve assets (e.g. water resources); or improving their food resilience as part of their climate change strategy.

Some local authorities have therefore adopted proactive policies to support access to land for farmers, often with a focus on young farmers and agroecological farmers. Their most direct action is to rent or sell public land to these farmers, under favourable conditions (e.g. long-term lease, affordable price, priority criteria for young or organic farmers¹⁰⁰). Sometimes this support takes the form of a starter farm, where new farmers get on their feet before moving to their own farm after a few years. Support sometimes comes with an expectation that the farmer will sell their products on the local market, provide for public catering or ensure environmental protection.¹⁰¹

There are many other ways in which local authorities can help farmers to access land: by providing information about land sales and leasing, by preserving existing farmland in urban development plans, by reclaiming abandoned land and making it fit for farming, by supporting farm succession, by providing or subsidising farmers' access to housing, and by helping set up a farm incubator, etc.¹⁰²

¹⁰³ See for instance the story of Fordhall Farm (UK): www.fordhallfarm.com/ and on our website: www.accesstoland.eu/Fordhall-Farm

¹⁰⁴ Some of the prime examples of consumers showing solidarity both through long-term commitments to buy the food produce and to invest in farmland are found in pioneer biodynamic farms in Germany. See The International Biodynamic Association, *Releasing the True Value of Land*, 2012, www.accesstoland.eu/Releasing-the-true-value-of-land

¹⁰⁵ See for instance: Terre de Liens: www.accesstoland.eu/Terre-de-liens, Terre-en-vue: www.accesstoland.eu/Terre-en-vue, Biodynamic Land Trust: www.accesstoland.eu/Biodynamic-Land-Trust, Nadace Pro Pudu: www.accesstoland.eu/Nadace-pro-pudu, Kulturland eg: www.accesstoland.eu/Kulturland, Ecological Land Coop: www.accesstoland.eu/Ecological-Land-Co-operative, or Danish Organic Farm Trust: www.accesstoland.eu/Danish-Organic-Farm-Trust

Accessing land through a community land trust or community finance

Over the past decade, a number of civic initiatives have emerged in (mostly Western) Europe to support agroecological farmers seeking land. These initiatives acquire farmland thanks to community investment or donations and rent it to farmers through long-term leases. This is a crucial form of support, as it enables farmers who do not have the necessary financial means, nor the local networks, to find land and access it under lasting and affordable conditions. In particular, this allows new farmers to get started with a smaller or no bank loan, and to focus their investments on business development (seeds, machinery, processing facilities, etc.) rather than on land and buildings.

Some community initiatives have emerged to address the needs of a specific farm or farmer, often at a time when the tenancy was to end or the farm was put up for sale. Some of these mobilisations were immensely successful, and managed to gather the full amount for buying the land and buildings in just a few months.¹⁰³ Financial support often comes from consumers and local residents, and may constitute a specific form of community supported agriculture.¹⁰⁴ Sometimes, these initiatives also use an online crowdfunding platform. These operations may rely on the landowner agreeing to sale at a fair price (rather than an inflated market value) and to wait until the full amount is collected. In many instances, these mobilisations were key to saving a local farm, and supporting the entry of a new farmer.

In other instances, regional or national community land trusts collect funds on a broader scale, not for a specific farm but to address the needs of agroecological farmers in the long run.¹⁰⁵ Usually, they hold land in perpetuity, to preserve it in farmland use and make it available for successive generations of farmers. Some are focused on one region or type of farming (e.g. biodynamic, organic). Often, these community land trusts do not only own and manage farmland, they also engage with (public and private) landowners willing to rent or sell land under favourable terms to farmers. They also advise and support farmers, and mobilise citizens around local food systems, land use and planning, and environment protection.

Besides renting land to farmers, or helping them find land and enter into favourable contracts, community land trusts often support them in many other ways: to network locally, to grow a local consumers' base, through on-farm participatory workshops, etc. They thereby contribute to new forms of solidarity with farmers, beyond access to land and the start-up phase.

¹⁰⁶ On land sharing and land partnerships arrangements, see: Fresh Start Land Enterprise Centre and their Land Partnership Handbook, Second Edition, 2015 <http://freshstartlandenterprise.org.uk/land-partnership/land-partnership-handbook-workshops-info/>. See also Shared Assets: www.sharedassets.org.uk/policy/setting-up-supportive-land-sharing-agreements/ and the experience in Belgium presented in this publication.

¹⁰⁷ See Fresh Start Land Enterprise Centre, Land Partnership Handbook, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ See the portrait of Kate Collins and Jamie Carr (UK) in this publication.

¹⁰⁹ Read case studies and analyses on farm incubators in this publication.

Land partnerships or land sharing arrangements

Another route to access land may be for a new farmer to enter into a mutually beneficial agreement with a landowner or established farmer who has land available and wants it to be used to develop a new, sound farming business.¹⁰⁶ Such landowners may be: large landowners with land available for use, new landowners wishing to make good economic and social use of their land, aging farmers wishing to gradually stop their activity and transfer their farm, or established farmers seeking to develop and diversify their activity as well as support new entrants.

The agreement may take many different business and legal forms: land tenancy, joint venture, share farming, piggyback farming, etc.¹⁰⁷ In some instances, the new farmer and the landowner or established farmer will be business partners; in other instances, the relationship will be closer to a classical land tenancy. In all cases, they will share a vision of mutual benefits and shared assets. Land partnerships may include a mix of farming and non-farming activities (e.g. forestry, tourism, renewable energy, housing development).

When the partnership is created on or near an existing farm, the new farmer will often benefit from several aspects of the established farm, in addition to gaining access to land: access to equipment (e.g. machinery, storage, irrigation), access to knowledge and support, and access to markets (e.g. selling at the farm shop).¹⁰⁸

Such cooperation may be conceived as a start-up phase, to help a new farmer get started, or may develop as a long-term cooperation. In some instances, land partnerships are used as a way to enable farm succession and the gradual transfer of the farm business and land to a new farmer or group of farmers.

Accessing land through a farm incubator

In ways similar to business incubators, farm incubators are a first step (often as part of a non-profit or social enterprise farming projects) that allows a number of new and aspiring farmers to access land while also providing them with business support and technical assistance. They may also potentially offer machinery and routes to market. The overarching theme is to support new entrants in steps to establishing stable livelihoods through land-based enterprises.

There are many different forms and scopes of farm incubators across Europe.¹⁰⁹ Most are meant for aspiring farmers who already have training and some practical experience in farming, seeking to gain more practical experience and test their agronomic approach and business ideas in a real-life setting and a secure environment.

A key component of farm incubators is to provide these aspiring farmers with access to land, usually a small plot, that they can farm autonomously, making their own decisions and bearing

¹¹⁰ See for instance our case study on CIAP (France) in this publication.

¹¹¹ On Larzac mobilization and farmland trust: www.accesstoland.eu/Larzac-community-farmland-trust-SCTL

¹¹² On the land occupation which gave way to Agricoltura Nuova Farm Coop, in Rome: www.accesstoland.eu/Agricoltura-Nuova-Farm-Coop

¹¹³ On land struggles in Andalusia, read: Land Access and Struggles in Andalusia, in ECVC and Hands off the Land, Land concentration, land grabbing and people's struggles, 2013, pp. 20-47, *ibid.* See also our case study on land occupations and new farmers' coop in Andalusia, 2016: www.accesstoland.eu/10-Land-struggles-in-Andalusia-Spain

¹¹⁴ See for instance: Land Grabbing in France: The case of Notre Dame des Landes Airport, in: ECVC and Hands off the Land, pp. 78-81, *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ See for instance the SoliLa land occupation in Vienna, in The politics of land and food in cities in the North, in: ECVC and Hands off the Land, pp. 82-113, *ibid.* And: www.accesstoland.eu/SoliLa-Land-occupation-and-movement-in-Vienna

¹¹⁶ Read in this publication the portrait of Anna Plana (Spain) and Adrian Nicusor (Romania).

the gains and losses from their activity. They often have access to land for a limited time period, typically one to three years, until they move to their own farm, join a farmers' cooperative, or opt not to become a farmer. For those who choose to start their own farm, having gone through a farm incubation is often a considerable help in finding land, as it allows them to grow a local social and professional network. This means they have better chances of not only knowing about available land, but also having the trust of landowners with land to sell or rent.

In some instances, farm incubators help new farmers to get started on their own farm, which enables them to start and expand their business step by step, while continuing to receive advice and support, and not yet acting as an independent business.¹¹⁰ In these instances, new farmers may have accessed land through purchase, on a family property, on public land, or with the support of a community land trust.

Land occupations

In the 1970s, emblematic land occupations—such as in the French Larzac¹¹¹ or in Rome¹¹²—highlighted the need to preserve farmland and maintain farms in active agricultural use for local food production and peasant farming. Thanks to sustained mobilisation and public support, they succeeded, often after decades, in gaining public recognition and rights to stay on the land.

Today, land occupations are still happening in Europe: in regions, like Andalusia¹¹³, with extreme inequality of land allocation; in areas where farmland is threatened by mining or large infrastructure projects (e.g. highways, railways, airport)¹¹⁴; or in urban centres where the remaining patches of farmland attract both greed and public interest¹¹⁵. These land occupations often face significant administrative pressure, and even repression. They may not succeed in securing land for new farms, or maintaining existing ones, but may enable young people to get a first experience as farmers. They also play a crucial role in calling public attention to land use: what is our land used for? Who can access it? Who are the users of the land? What are their rights and how are they being heard? How do we balance the need for food production and environmental protection versus other activities?

Reviving commons

Commons are land jointly belonging to a community and collectively managed by this community. In various parts of Europe, commons—mostly pastures and woods—still exist. For new breeders and shepherds, commons may be an essential part of their farming system, as this allows them to graze their herd on vast and diversified pastures, which they do not need to hold under individual ownership.¹¹⁶ For local communities and public authorities, allowing new breeders to graze the commons can be a

¹¹⁷ Definition adopted by Urgenci, the international network for community supported agriculture, 2016, <http://urgenci.net/the-european-csa-declaration-adopted-in-ostrava/>

¹¹⁸ See: Dottenfelder Hof: www.accesstoland.eu/Dottenfelder-Hof and Fordhall Farm www.fordhallfarm.com/

¹¹⁹ See for instance: Preserving a farm and so much more... - CSA Hof Pente, Germany, in Access to Land Network and Urgenci, Access to Land and Community Supported Agriculture: stories from Europe, June 2017, pp. 20-21, www.accesstoland.eu/Access-to-land-and-Community-Supported-Agriculture

¹²⁰ See for instance: Helping a farmer protect his land from speculators - Valderoure Farm, France, in Access to Land Network and Urgenci, 2017, pp. 31-33, *ibid.*

¹²¹ See for instance: Starting and expanding a small farm thanks to the 24 support of CSA members - Marcel Has CSA farm, Romania, in Access to Land Network and Urgenci, 2017, pp. 24-25, *ibid.* See also the case study on Les Champs des Possibles farm incubator in this publication.

way of maintaining human activities around the village and an open landscape, which brings added value for both the community's quality of life and tourism.

In order to use the commons, new farmers must obtain the rights by belonging to the local community or commoners' association. For local communities, this involves welcoming and trusting outsiders, and recognising the special value and status of common land. It may also involve collective workshops or public support to restore the commons for grazing or other uses.

Accessing land as part of community-supported agriculture

Community supported agriculture (CSA) is a direct partnership based on the human relationship between people and one or several producer(s), whereby the risks, responsibilities and rewards of farming are shared, through a long-term, binding agreement¹¹⁷.

Addressing the issue of land access often becomes an integral part of a CSA. Through a CSA, there is already a financial solidarity between consumers and farmers, to ensure high-quality, seasonal production. Extending this solidarity beyond enabling production to providing/safeguarding the means of production, such as land, is often viewed as natural, even though it may be hard to implement. Historic experiences of CSAs—such as Dottenfelder Hof in Germany or Fordhall Farm in the UK¹¹⁸—show that community engagement can successfully include or extend to securing land for farming.

To address land needs and issues, CSAs can mobilise their own resources and/or collaborate with access to land initiatives. Sometimes the CSA will acquire or rent the land with no outside support; sometimes it will create an ad hoc farm land trust, together with others¹¹⁹; sometimes it will go through an existing farm land trust, matching its values and objectives.¹²⁰

Even when the CSA is not directly involved in securing access to land and buildings, starting up as part of a CSA may help new farmers by providing them with a secure consumers' base and start-up money, thereby making business planning and other investments easier.¹²¹

In addition to these diverse ways of accessing land, new farmers adopt farming approaches and strategies that make it easier to find and acquire land. One approach is to set up as part of a farmers' collective. This is usually motivated by a variety of reasons: sharing a vision and workload, developing multiple activities on the farm (vegetables, breeding, processing, etc.), living as part of a collective, having on-farm replacement for the animals, etc. It may help with finding land since by joining forces, members of the collective will have more access to resources: local networks, financial capacity, bank loan, etc. It may also allow the group to set up on a larger farm than many single new entrants would dare to take on, which is key as many available farms are now medium-

¹²² See: Terre de Liens, Newcomers in Search of Small Farms: How to Match the Discrepancy on a Market of Large Farms?, 2017, www.accesstoland.eu/Recognising-the-viability-of-small-farms-and-their-territorial-impacts

¹²³ Read in this publication the case of Graines de Paysans farm incubator (Belgium). See also: The Soil Association, Access to land and small market gardens in the UK, 2017, and The Real Farming Trust, Small scale farming and land access: Micro-dairies in the UK, 2017, www.accesstoland.eu/Recognising-the-viability-of-small-farms-and-their-territorial-impacts

to large-sized farms¹²². At the same time, searching for land as a collective may be met with distrust by landowners and bankers, as this is still seen as a non-conventional approach to farming.

Another approach is for new farmers to set up on a very small farm. While it is common for new entrants to start up on smaller farms and expand over time, some new farmers specifically choose to go for high-added value micro-farms, smaller than a couple of hectares. This may open up land opportunities particularly in urban and peri-urban areas¹²³, as well as for land partnerships arrangements.

While these new and diversified ways of accessing land bear witness to the motivation and innovativeness of these new farmers, much rests on the shoulders of these new farmers and the farmers' organisations and civil society organisations supporting them. Major change is needed from within the farming profession, and in public policies at all level of governance to upscale these initiatives and invent new solutions so as to properly address the challenge of accessing land for a new generation. ●

Experiences of farm incubators

Point Vert Belgium

The first Belgium farm incubator, filling the gap between training and growing for local consumers

Maarten Roels Terre-en-vue
Véronique Rioufol Terre de Liens

¹²⁴ This case study is based on direct exchange with coordinators and participants in Point Vert, as well as on the presentation of Point Vert during the field visit on farm incubators organised in France by Terre de Liens, RENETA and the Access to Land network in March 2017.

Point Vert is the first farm incubator established in Belgium in 2013, as part of a LEADER+ project. It aims to support the entry of new organic growers by providing them with access to land, technical support, business support, and access to markets. It is the result of a strong partnership involving several local organisations with multiple skills and areas of expertise. With five years of experience, Point Vert has hosted diverse profiles of growers and farm experiments and has many lessons to share.

Background

Point Vert is the first farm incubator established in Belgium. Officially launched in June 2013, it was started by the Local Action Group (LAG - GAL in French) Pays des Condruses, as part of a LEADER+ project. The initiator, GAL Pays des Condruses, is an NGO grouping seven municipalities in the Province of Liège to promote sustainable transport, agriculture and landscape management.

Point Vert was started to help newcomers to farming, who come from outside of the farming world and want to start organic growing. They are indeed faced with many financial, technical and practical obstacles: training programmes often lack practical experience and are sometimes too far away; it is hard to take over existing farms; and access to land is expensive and difficult if you are not already connected with local landowners and farmers. Moreover, it may be difficult to develop a strong base of customers and to find the support and advice needed for the start-up years. A farm incubator offers a solution to most of these issues, as aspiring farmers can do a real-life, full-scale experiment in farming while looking for land, testing various marketing channels and making themselves known to local landowners and farmers.

Point Vert was conceived as a necessary step between training and setting up as a farmer. It aims to facilitate the entry into farming of new growers producing for local food chains, by supporting their access to land and start-up year(s). Though located in a remote area, Point Vert immediately met with great success.

Point Vert was strongly inspired by the French examples of

"espaces test" (farm incubators), from which it learnt much about governance, the financial model and managing calls for candidates.

Functioning

By joining Point Vert, participants gain access to:

- land: plots of 0.1 to 1 hectare on which they can produce and experiment with various crops and agronomic techniques;
- shared tools and infrastructures: polytunnels, a vegetable washing facility, a shed for storing equipment, a tiller, hoe, seed drill and other small machinery;
- technical advice, through a weekly meeting on their plot with a technical adviser;
- training in marketing, sales, accountancy, business planning and management, etc., according to their needs and priorities;
- marketing support: they can sell their produce through the on-site selling stand, as well as through a monthly local farmers' market, and a school restaurant. They can also connect with other local initiatives promoted by the GAL Pays des Condruses (Point Ferme, Hall Relais), as well as with local organic shops and CSAs.

Participants farm within the Point Vert structure for one to three years. During their time with Point Vert, they are able to experiment with various crops and production methods, build their skills and test whether they like them and obtain the expected results. They also have time and advice to experiment with various marketing approaches, all of them geared towards local consumers: the producers' market, local food shops, GASAPs (groups of CSA consumers), organic groceries, farm stand, etc.

Importantly, Point Vert also enables participating growers to share ideas and advice, help each other at busy times and grow a support network, that can be useful in the longer run. For example, one of the growers who completed his time in 2017 set up as a farmer after a one-year incubation and decided to join the farmers' cooperative established by a prior participant in 2016.

Participants

Between 2013 and 2016, Point Vert hosted 11 growers, including 4 women, with diverse profiles and growing projects. Most are newcomers to farming, and they are aged between 20 and 45. In the first year, three growers experimented with diversified vegetable growing—one on 1 hectare, the other two on 0.5 hectares. In later years, others focused on seed production, amaranth, traditional wheat varieties, strawberries, or plant nursery activities. Following a new call for tenders in 2017, 5 new farmers started in spring 2018: 2 in market gardening, 1 in plant nursery, 1 in plants for cosmetics, and 1 in herbal teas.

Out of the 11 growers hosted between 2013 and 2016, one is still running their farming experiment with Point Vert

(strawberries), 3 decided to quit farming, and 7 (including 3 women) started farming as independent growers or as part of a farmers' cooperative.

About half of the participants are job-seekers, others are self-employed and one was a student. Those who are job-seekers are eligible for a vocational training programme, subsidised by the Walloon Department for vocational training and employment. For 18 months, they remain under the status of job-seekers and are therefore eligible for unemployment benefits. They are also eligible for specific support and guidance from Créajob, a business incubator which has developed specific expertise in farm business incubation and is one of the project's partners. At the end of the 18-month period, they must indicate whether they want to enter farming or not.

Land

The Point Vert site consists of 6 hectares of public land belonging to the municipality of Modave, one of the members of the GAL Pays des Condruses. The land is rented for free to the GAL Pays des Condruses. The site is allotted in plots of between 0.1 and 0.5 hectares. The site also includes a rainwater retention basin, a pond, an irrigation system, and six polytunnels (total area of 700 sq.m). The land is certified organic.

Project management

Point Vert is coordinated by the GAL Pays des Condruses, with one full-time equivalent on the project: half-time for project coordination, and half-time for technical support and managing common areas and equipment. Funding has come from the EU (Leader+, ESF) and regional funds.

A number of direct project partners have a key role in the activities and success of Point Vert:

- Devenirs, a local NGO providing vocational training and support to job-seekers, is in charge of the training in horticulture and vegetable growing provided to participants. It is also in charge of reviewing and approving their crop plans and providing weekly technical support.
- CTA, the Centre for Agronomic Technologies, is a local agricultural school which prepares the soil before the first season, and can provide additional (paid) technical support, as needed.
- Créajob is a business incubator providing training and support for business planning, start-up and management. It also enables job-seekers to be registered as business start-uppers, providing them a secure administrative and financial environment to start their farm business: they remain eligible for unemployment benefits, while earning money as self-employed workers when they make a profit from selling the produce from their plot.

- Agricultural schools and training programmes such as Fermes Ecole, Le Crabe, etc. which are key to finding potential candidates
- Local food initiatives such as Point Ferme, Hall Relais, GASAP, etc. for facilitating marketing in a favourable environment.
- Terre-en-vue, a land trust which helps identify available land for participants who wish to enter farming at the end of their incubation.

Initial results

Since 2013, Point Vert has played a decisive role in supporting the entry into farming of six aspiring growers, and has expanded local organic food production in the region. It has further enabled seven more people to experiment with farming in real-life conditions, thereby helping them to gain new skills and refine their professional project.

Point Vert has also inspired other farm incubator projects that have developed in Belgium in recent years, in Brussels (Graines de Paysans) and in other parts of Wallonia (Les Jardins d'Hottemont, GAL Entre Sambre-et-Meuse). It now aims to play an active role in the development of a Belgian network of farm incubators (with an annual meeting, experience-sharing and a common website).

Some of the key learnings of Point Vert's experience so far include:

- There is a large number of potential candidates, only a few of whom will enter the farm incubator, and fewer yet who will choose to enter farming. It is important to assess the profile and motivation of candidates early on.
- Participants in the farm incubator are very diverse in terms of profile, prior experience, farming project, administrative status and needs. Tailored guidance and support is needed.
- Geographic proximity between the plot and where the participants live is a key to success.
- Point Vert was started based on the objective that growers would operate autonomously, as if they already were independent growers, but experience showed that not all of them had the technical and / or management skills to operate autonomously. Point Vert has tried to address this by:
 - > selecting candidates who are willing and able to work as independent growers;
 - > checking and approving the crop plan is an essential step;
 - > providing strong technical support (horticulture);
 - > intervening if things go wrong.
- GAL Pays des Condruces provided participants with major support in terms of marketing their produce, by enabling them to test various distribution channels and to network with local food retailers and consumers' groups.

- It is important to prepare for after the farm incubation, by identifying local land available for rent or sale, collaborating with Terre-en-vue for land searches, developing new business models to enable new growers to share equipment or set up business partnerships, etc. ●

Further information:

- Pays des Condruces LAG: www.galcondruces.be
- Point Vert: www.galcondruces.be/realisations/point-vert-espace-test-maraicher/ It includes regular updates on the farmers, and the web pages of those who entered farming.
- Hall Relais: www.galcondruces.be/realisations/hall-relais-agricole/
- Point Ferme Cooperative: www.galcondruces.be/realisations/point-ferme/
- Créajob: www.creajob.be
- Devenirs asbl: www.devenirs.be
- Centre of agronomic technologies (CTA): www.cta-stree.be

Graines de Paysans Belgium

New urban growers for the Brussels region

Maarten Roels Terre-en-vue
Véronique Rioufol Terre de Liens

Graines de Paysans is Belgium's second farm incubator, established near Brussels in 2016. It aims to support the entry of new vegetable growers and farmers on urban micro-farms in order to increase local food production and foster the transition towards agroecological farming. It is part of a broader project promoting local sustainable food production and consumption in Brussels.

Background

Graines de Paysans (meaning "Seeds of Peasants") is the second farm incubator in Belgium, initiated in 2016 and located in the Brussels-Capital Region. Graines de Paysans began as a project by the association Le Début des Haricots, a Brussels-based NGO whose mission is to promote sustainable farming and food production in the greater Brussels area, through promoting urban farming, public education about local food and farming, supporting the development of CSA groups, or setting up a plant nursery for urban gardeners.

Graines de Paysans started as part of a broader project called Boeren Brussel Paysans initiated by seven public authorities and civil society organisations to promote local sustainable food production and consumption in the Brussels region. It receives funding from the Brussels Regional Authority, the Brussels Environmental Agency and the EU (ERFD).

One of the triggers of the farm incubator is the success of a new urban farm located in southern Brussels, called La Ferme du Chant des Cailles. This farm combines a small cattle farm, a vegetable farm, a medicinal garden and collective gardens. From the start, people have queued up to become members of the farm and many potential new entrants visited the farm before deciding to take farming courses. Several of them came to do their on-farm training session on the farm. Another trigger has been rising interest in urban farming following conferences and local initiatives.

Description

Graines de Paysans is a farm incubator started in 2016 and based in Anderlecht, part of the greater Brussels region. The aims of Graines de Paysans are to:

- Set up a farm incubator to enable new farmers to start-up their farm business, thanks to personalised support and access to land, infrastructure and tools
- Inform and train those wishing to enter the farming profession
- Network Brussels-based farmers and promote agroecological farming in the region

Graines de Paysans launched a first call for projects at the end of 2015. The first seven candidates started in 2016. It currently hosts 6 market gardeners and 2 herbal tea growers, and in 2018 launched a new call for candidates to host two new growers who will start in January 2019. The aim is for Graines de Paysans to continuously host 5 to 10 projects per year.

Incubated farmers can test their farming experiment with Graines de Paysans for 1 to 3 years. For that time, they have access to:

- a plot of land of between 0.15 and 0.3 hectares
- infrastructures: polytunnels, cold storage, a shed, a plant nursery area
- equipment and tools: tiller, rotary harrow, plough, sprayer, etc.
- individualised support and guidance:
 - > before the season: to prepare the crop plan, the business plan, the financial plan and the marketing plan;
 - > during the season: agronomic support (monthly visit on the plot); support in exploring marketing routes and setting up a CSA group; support for the land search
 - > after the season: to evaluate the various aspects of the experience and plan for the next steps, including the possibility of extending the incubation period for one more year.
- access to markets: every Saturday, a producers' stand is organised near the production in two separate locations

Graines de Paysans particularly trains and supports growers and farmers who will work in an urban and peri-urban environments, where consumers live around the farm and are in want of green space, reconnection to the land, and new social contract with farmers. Besides, this type of farming operates on very small farming areas, which requires specific skills related to the rotation schemes and soil fertility management.

The farm incubator is also conceived as a way to showcase new models of farming (permaculture, self-harvesting schemes, etc.) to citizens who often have no connection to the food they eat. Moreover, while the general trend among the older generation of Brussels farmers is to export their produce, Graines de Paysans aims at engaging local farmers to produce more food for the city.

Land

Graines de Paysans is located on a total of 1.2 hectares of public land belonging to the municipality of Anderlecht. The farm incubator uses two separate sites, in Neerpede et au Vogelenzang. The existence of two separate sites has raised technical and practical challenges, for example, with regard to sharing equipment and tools. Project partners are currently discussing the possibility of (re)locating all the projects to one place, but this could only be done in winter, when no soil preparation, planting or harvesting is taking place.

The land is allocated to growers in small plots according to their needs. Incubated growers do not pay rent for the plot, but do have to cover the cost of using certain infrastructure and equipment. Due to the small areas available, and the objective of setting up urban micro-farms, the plots are mostly meant for market gardening, herbal plants and small fruits.

Terre-en-vue, one of the project partners whose mission is to facilitate access to land for agroecological farmers in the Wallonia and Brussels regions, starts advising incubated farmers in their land search from year one. Access to land is indeed particularly difficult in this urban context, due to housing, speculation and commercial areas, etc. The plan is for Terre-en-vue to look for at least 2 hectares per year to start up one or two farms per year. In certain cases, a call for projects will be organised when land is found. In other cases, partners will seek land for a specific project starting the following year.

Project management

The project is managed by Le Début des Haricots, with the support of the other partners of the ERFD project: the Municipality of Anderlecht, Bruxelles Environnement, which is the public agency managing Brussels parks and green areas, La Maison Verte & Bleue, which preserves and promotes the natural area of Neerpede, where the farm incubator is located, Terre-en-vue which secures access to land for agroecological farmers in Wallonia and Brussels, and Credal, which is a micro credit cooperative and advisory agency.

Terre-en-vue advises incubated farmers in their land search, and organises a general watch on land available for rent or sale. Credal advises incubated farmers on their business and financial plans. Incubated farmers may also choose to receive support from organisations specialised in advising job-seekers or workers in setting up a new business. ●

Further information:

- Graines de Paysans: www.grainesdepaysans.be/fr/bienvenue/
- Le Début des Haricots: www.haricots.org
- Terre-en-vue: www.terre-en-vue.be
- Crédal: www.credal.be
- La Maison verte et bleue: www.maisonverteetbleue.be
- Bruxelles environnement: www.bruxellesenvironnement.be
- Andelecht Municipality: www.anderlecht.be
- Boeren Brussel Paysans: www.goodfood.brussels/fr/contributions/projet-pilote-boerenbruxselpaysans-vers-une-agriculture-durable-pour-bruxelles

Les Champs des Possibles France

Supporting new CSA growers in the Paris area

Véronique Rioufol Terre de Liens

Les Champs des Possibles is one of the oldest farm incubators in France. The aim of Les Champs des Possibles is to promote entry into organic farming in the Ile de France region (around Paris) so as to help new farmers get started and increase local food production in this densely urbanised region. It also offers very comprehensive support to new farmers, in close collaboration with other local associations. Les Champs des Possibles has evolved significantly in just eight years, to include new profiles and address emerging needs and challenges. In particular, it has moved from offering incubation on one permanent site to setting up a network of host farmers and mentors in different parts of the region.

Background

Since 2006, the local CSA network around Paris—AMAP Ile de France—has worked on setting up an incubator farm to allow prospective growers to try out the CSA system. The need was identified through the analysis that the greater Paris area was lacking organic vegetable production, because it was difficult to start organic growing in that part of France due to land prices, competition for land and difficulties in the area of farm transfer.

The opportunity arose in 2009 when Jean-Louis Colas, farmer and board member of the AMAP network, retired. The French access to land movement, Terre de Liens, then bought his 73-hectare farm, rented most of the land and buildings to a new organic farmer and set aside two hectares which were rented to a newly established incubator farm: Les Champs des Possibles (meaning Realm of Possibilities).

Description

The incubator farm was established in 2009 on a first site located in Villenauxe la Petite, 100 km southeast of Paris. At the time, it offered aspiring farmers the opportunity to try out farming in real-life conditions, autonomously, for 1 to 3 years. Incubated farmers received access to:

- production means (land, equipment, etc.);
- a legal status (business number, social welfare);
- personal support to develop their cultivation practices, their

- business plan and accountancy, their life project;
- connections with customers (CSA groups, organic supermarkets, etc.);
- insertion in the local professional sector (organic farming association, SAFER, etc.);
- support to prepare their independent entry into farming (land search, business plan, etc.); even once the experimentation period is over.

Over the years, Les Champs des Possibles expanded its activities and services. It now offers two forms of incubation periods:

- an incubation period as an autonomous farmer: to test one's farming project in technical, economic and human conditions as close as possible to an actual entry into farming (1 to 3 years)
- an immersion period: to run a real-life experiment of the farming activity and develop the basic skills and know-how of farmers operating as CSA farmers, with stronger support from a mentor involved in managing the plot and decision-making about the crop plan, the business plan, etc. It enables the incubated farmer to gradually take up more responsibilities and become more autonomous.

Les Champs des Possibles also offers:

- training sessions on specific technical skills
- a beginners' training programme called Paysan Demain (Tomorrow, Farmer), consisting of six days of training, plus four periods of two-week internships on different local organic farms to learn about and try out various facets of farmers' work and activities.
- experience-sharing among new and established farmers
- publications

Participants:

Since its start, Les Champs des Possibles has hosted over 40 aspiring farmers. Initially specialised in market gardening, it later expanded to other farming activities such as cattle and cheese production, but retains a strong focus on market gardening. Participants come from all walks of life: some with prior practical experience in agriculture, others with little experience; some with a previous career, others beginning a professional life; some with urban origins, others from the countryside.

In Les Champs des Possibles, candidates are considered as start-up entrepreneurs who run their farming business autonomously, but in a secure environment and with adequate support. Thus, participants are not considered interns or apprentices, but independent farmers in the making. Those who were job-seekers when joining the farm incubator can keep their unemployment benefits, while starting to draw earnings from their

farm business. Participants contribute 10% of their turnover (pre-tax value) to cover the cost of the technical support and guidance provided by Les Champs des Possibles.

Currently, Les Champs des Possibles hosts 10 farmers: 6 market growers, 1 goat breeder, 1 cereal farmer and bread-maker, and 2 shepherds; some are in their first year, others in their third year.

Land:

The first site of Les Champs des Possibles was 2 hectares of land located on Toussacq farm, a 73-hectare organic farm which the then farmer was seeking to transfer. The French access to land organisation Terre de Liens acquired it and decided to rent the main part to two new farmers, and to keep two hectares to help with the establishment of the farm incubator. Terre de Liens rents out the plot to Les Champs des Possibles on a long-term lease. The site is allotted in different sizes of plots which are entrusted to incubated farmers according to their needs.

Over the years, Les Champs des Possibles has developed five other experimentation sites, all of them located on operating organic farms. As needed, it also uses public land as a supplement. Thus, two shepherds have been grazing their flocks on river banks and pasture areas owned by local public authorities. The initial Toussacq site remains the site for testing market gardening activities autonomously.

Project management:

The farm incubator has the legal status of a farming enterprise and is managed by a staff coordinator employed by Les Champs des Possibles. It operates in close coordination with several organisations:

- Les Champs des Possibles, an NGO, the main manager and prime entity responsible. In particular, it is in charge of advising and supporting incubated farmers;
- AMAP Ile de France, training and advice on the setting up and functioning of a CSA;
- GAB Ile de France, the local association promoting organic agriculture: training and advice on agronomic techniques, crop plan, etc.;
- CFPPA Brie Conte Robert, a vocational training centre that offers courses on agroecological farming. Provides training and advice on the farm plan, agronomic techniques, etc.;
- Terre de Liens Ile de France, land search, advice on the features of the local land market, advice on land contracts.

Initial results

Between 2010 and 2017, Les Champs des Possibles hosted 40 aspiring farmers for an incubation period, 10 of whom are still

incubated. Of the other 30, 14 entered farming, others decided to become farmworkers or to work in the food sector, while few decided to quit the farming and food sector. For the initiators of Les Champs des Possibles, it is important that the decision not to enter farming remains an option for an incubated farmer, and to make sure that it is not experienced as a failure by any party—the aspiring farmer, the mentor or Les Champs des possibles. Deciding not to enter farming, because you feel you are not made for it, or because you do not enjoy it as much as you thought, is a decision to be respected, and an important step towards deciding where to go next.

Les Champs des Possibles has proven a key component of the support and advice provided by the Pôle Abiosol to young and aspiring farmers in Ile de France: it helps them to test their activity in real-life conditions, to build connections with the very active local CSA network, and to receive the training and support they need. It also enables them to make themselves known locally to consumers and other farmers, and to build the professional and personal support network that are key to entering farming.

Les Champs des Possibles has evolved remarkably since its creation to address new needs and challenges and enlarge its scope of activities. It has evolved to include new productions and techniques. It has also moved from one permanent site to creating a network of farmers and mentors who can host a range of incubated farmers on different farms, according to their farming activities and the plans they want to test. Finally, it has established a cooperative of farmers, food entrepreneurs and rural artisans that incubated farmers can decide to join once they finish their incubation period. The cooperative mutualises key services (accountancy, wage payment, insurance, etc.) that enable start-up entrepreneurs to focus on their core activity and to set up in a secure environment. ●

Further information:

- Les Champs des possibles: www.leschampsdespossibles.fr
- Les Champs des possibles, Devenir Paysan: Reconversions professionnelles vers l'agriculture, 2016. It can be ordered from: www.leschampsdespossibles.fr/devenir-paysan-le-livre/
- AMAP Ile de France: www.amap-idf.org/
- Pôle Abiosol: www.leschampsdespossibles.fr/le-pole-abiosol/
Read also a case study at: www.accesstoland.eu/Pole-Abiosol-a-grassroots-platform-to-promote-entries-into-farming
- GAB Ile de France: www.bioiledefrance.fr
- Terre de Liens Ile de France: <https://terredeliens.org/ile-de-france.html>
- Toussacq farm on Terre de Liens website: <https://terredeliens.org/toussacq.html>
- RENETA, French network of farm incubators (called espaces test agricoles): www.reneta.fr

France

The CIAP peasant farming start-up cooperative

Véronique Rioufol Terre de Liens¹²⁵

¹²⁵ This presentation is based on conversations with one of the founders and several partners in the CIAP, along with reports and informational documents published by the CIAP.

The CIAP (Coopérative d'installation en agriculture paysanne), or Peasant farming start-up cooperative, is the only initiative of its kind in France. It helps launch new farmers through a combination of professional training and business start-up solutions, drawing on a strong network of local players and farmers. It aims in particular to facilitate the start-up process and social integration for newcomers to farming, that is, those not from a farming family. In a region dominated by livestock breeding, and where each new farmer launched is a victory, the CIAP has achieved excellent results in the span of just a few years.

Context

The CIAP was created in 2012 in Loire Atlantique, in western France, one of France's leading livestock regions with a very strong peasant farming tradition. It is one of the areas of France where Confédération paysanne--France's farmers union and member of Via Campesina--has the strongest presence. The project to set up a system to support and assist new farmers, especially those not from a farming background, was initiated within the Confédération paysanne, in close collaboration with the social and solidarity economy networks of Nantes.

Indeed, for newcomers to farming, a number of factors add to the difficulties of entering the profession, and are not sufficiently taken into account by conventional aid programmes for new farmers. Most newcomers have little or no practical farming experience, and they do not always have agricultural training. They not only have to find land without inheriting it from their family, but often come from a different region or locality than where they plan to start farming. Some have training and professional experience in a different field, and decide--at a variety of ages--to leave their former career for farming. Most want to develop projects that are considered atypical in the agricultural sector, e.g. organic farming, small holding, on-farm processing, direct sales, and combining multiple activities.

In keeping with the Confédération paysanne's creed "Neighbours, not hectares" (Des voisins, pas des hectares), the founders of the CIAP believe that the start-up phase is crucial and

place great importance on the involvement of the local authorities, networks and farmers in supporting and welcoming these new entrants.

Description

The CIAP has defined its mission as follows:

- To offer support for the challenges of getting started in farming, particularly for newcomers
- To support farming projects rooted in the area and community, that create added value and jobs
- To adapt to the different needs of new farmers, particularly the economic and social aspects
- To work in alignment with elected officials and localities by prioritising projects that protect the environment and biodiversity, short food supply chains, and provide food for mass catering or local markets, etc.

To fulfil this mission, the CIAP has developed three complementary tools to support farming start-ups. These tools are designed for new farmers with prior training/professional experience, who have a well-defined farming project, if possible within a determined locality.

Creative Farmer Internship

This one-year internship is open to anyone who wants to become a farmer and has 1) already defined their farming project, and 2) identified the locality in which they want to farm. The aim is for the intern:

- to put down roots in an area and develop a support group by forging ties with other farmers, customers, local allies/support programmes, elected officials, etc.
- to set up and customise their means of production: find and acquire land; renovate or adapt the farm buildings; prepare the land for crops; find distribution channels, etc.
- to finalise their farming start-up project, refining the technical, commercial, economic aspects, etc.

To this end, interns receive 200 hours of theory classes and 1600 hours of practical training. Those who are job seekers continue to receive their unemployment benefits; the others receive a training allowance of €650/month from the Conseil régional. Some interns are already on their (future) farm when the workshop begins, or settle in there over the course of the workshop.

The first step is to identify a mentor farmer who will be the new farmer's primary contact and support person: through visits and taking part in work at the farm, the intern gets to know their mentor. The mentor supports the new farmer with advice on the farming project, loaning equipment, and introducing her/him in the local community and professional networks, etc. In addition, each intern is expected to set up a local support group of at least three

people: the mentor farmer, a local elected official, and a resident/consumer. Each intern sets up their local group to fit their needs and provide support in the areas relevant to their project: finding land, setting up a CSA or point of sale at the farm, obtaining a bank loan, etc. The CIAP helps the interns identify a farmer mentor and set up their local group through its farmer networks and partner organisations (organic agriculture groups, environmental organisations, networks of elected officials, solidarity financing organisations, Terre de Liens etc.).

Interns also receive:

- 10 days of group training,
- personalised assistance and time for their administrative procedures
- a large quantity of hours for tailored training based on their specific needs: support in making technical decisions, improving their management skills, exploring marketing systems, thinking about how to organise their work, etc.

Farm incubators

The CIAP offers access to two farm incubators for organic market gardening – one on the campus of an agricultural school, and the other on premises belonging to a community of municipalities:

- in Saint Herblain, near Nantes: the agricultural school offers the use of 3 hectares of land and greenhouses, allowing 4 apprentice market gardeners to test their activity for a year, with the assistance of a technician who visits their production site once or twice a week. Through a variety of distribution channels, including a partnership with the organic supermarket Biocoop in Nantes, apprentice farmers can appraise different forms of short food supply chains.
- in Redon: the community of municipalities offers 2 apprentice market gardeners for a period of one year: the use of 2 hectares of land, 500 sq.m. of greenhouses, machines and tools, and the seedlings for their choice of production. The apprentices are assisted by a technician and receive advice from established market gardeners. They also meet regularly with a local group to learn more about the region and make preparations to launch their activity.

The future market gardeners in these incubators are also registered as “Creative Farmer” interns, with all of the assistance and support this internship entails.

Temporary business hosting:

As an incubator program, the CIAP offers this solution to farmers who want to start their business within a secure framework. Rather than starting out directly as self-employed agents, the CIAP “hosts” the business, placing them on its payroll for a renewable period of

¹²⁶ Read in this publication Tanguy Martin, Terre de Liens Pays de Loire, When a farm incubator and a community land trust cooperate to organise farm succession and entry of a newcomer to farming.

one year. With this system, the CIAP:

- provides new farmers with a legal and fiscal status that allows them to be covered by social security while they are starting-up their activity
- handles some of the administrative and accounting aspects, by paying invoices, collecting revenue from sales, doing the tax returns, etc.
- provides personalised assistance with both farming and administrative/financial aspects, through members of the cooperative and the farmer mentor;
- can co-sign a lease, in order to alleviate part of the financial burden and reassure the lessor or bank,
- can provide up to €40,000 of financing, for investments and a cash advance, which it borrows from a bank. In 2016, the CIAP provided €475,000 in financing for more than twenty start-up projects.

During the hosting period, the farmer and the CIAP are bound by a contract covering both the commercial terms and the support arrangement. At the end of the hosting period, the new farmer “buys back their business”: the profit (or loss) that their business generated during the hosting period is transferred to them, and they buy back the investments and cash advance financed by the CIAP. Participants are selected based on their project and their planning budget. The hosting costs them €500€/year, plus 5% of their sales and 3.5% of any financing received.

Hosting is a very effective way of allowing a farmer to launch their activity in stages, without initially making all of the investments in their own name. They can build up their experience, develop a network and marketing circuits, and sometimes accumulate inventory so that the operation runs more smoothly once they are on their own (or with an associate). Hosting also leaves the potential farmer room for error, or the chance to realise they do not want to be a farmer after all. In addition, hosting can facilitate farm transmissions, by reassuring the transferor, and if needed, covering the gap between the transferor's departure and the new farmer's arrival¹²⁶.

Local support groups

This is the trademark and a major strength of the assistance provided by the CIAP: new farmers develop close ties not only with their farmer mentor but also with a number of farmers in the area. Through the network of 200 farmer mentors, they receive support, advice and a helping hand, as well as extensive knowledge of the land, the soil, the area and local history. They may also have access to pooled equipment or collective points of sale. This transmission and solidarity between farmers helps those starting out to become firmly rooted in their own farm, the local area, and their community,

¹²⁷ The CIAP is now being solicited by new entrants who are from a farming background, but whose project aims to considerably change the farming operation they are taking over.

and to assume the multiple roles of a peasant farmer--providing food, protecting the environment, and fostering local cohesion, etc.

The CIAP also urges new farmers to form ties in the broader local community-- outside of farming--with elected officials, consumer groups, farming unions, rural development and environmental protection organisations, natural parks, organic supermarkets, etc. These connections are useful in strengthening and adapting the farming project to the local context. They also provide valuable support and advise in terms of finding land, collective work projects, etc. and help the new farmer create a social network and friendships that are important in weathering bumps in the road the first years, and breaking with the image of social isolation in the farming profession.

Participants:

In 2016, the CIAP welcomed:

- 80 Creative Farmer interns, between the ages of 25 and 55, of whom 40% are women and 88% are not from a farming background¹²⁷. Half of the projects were for livestock breeding (representing a wide range of animals), and the other half were for agriculture. 92% of the projects were for organic farming, and most aimed to use short distribution circuits.
- 5 market gardeners on incubators;
- 25 farmers in the temporary business hosting programme.

Project management:

The CIAP began in the Loire Atlantique county (département) of France in 2012, with later chapters opened in all counties of the Pays de la Loire region. In 2017, a regional structure was created to join the five CIAP chapters. The CIAP has also branched out into other regions of France.

First created as an association, the CIAP became a Cooperative Company of Collective Interest (SCIC) in 2013, meaning it is commercial company operated as a cooperative which aims to provide services for organisations and individuals. The CIAP is composed of five bodies: farming organisations, solidarity economy players, local authorities, citizens, and employees. It is directed by a cooperative council (15 members) and managed by 3 people, including one employee.

From the start, the CIAP has received public funding through professional training (return to employment by starting a business) and rural development programmes. Its annual budget is approximately €800 000, including for business hosting.

Results:

The support offered by the CIAP is an effective aid for recipients, facilitating the process of getting started in farming and providing a secure framework. In 2016:

- of the 40 people who completed the Creative Farmer internship: 16 started their farm activity immediately, 18 confirmed their plan to enter farming but wanted to take the time to prepare their project concretely (and 10 of whom sought temporary business hosting with the CIAP), and 6 decided to stop or to pursue a different career.
- of the 9 people who completed their period of temporary hosting: all 9 started their farming activity, and they all received a bank loan for their start-up.

From 2012 to 2016, the CIAP helped 60 new farmers get started in the region, representing a total surface area of 2100 hectares. Of the 60, 42 received the young farmers' subsidy. Half of these cases involved the creation of a new farm, 26% took over an existing farm, and 23% were collective projects.

In addition to helping new farmers through the start-up phase, the CIAP carries out far-reaching work in the areas it operates in:

- it activates solidarity and cooperation between farmers, citizens, elected officials, consumers, etc.;
- it promotes the transition of farming and food systems to quality products, short circuits, and environmental protection;
- it works with retiring farmers to give them hope in being able to pass on their farm to a new farmer, as many small livestock farms are closing, and facilitates extra-family farm transmission;
- it supports local authorities in their projects: creating farm incubators, maintaining farms and agricultural jobs, setting up farmers to supply food for institutional catering, etc.

With many new farmers today coming from a very different background than in previous generations, the CIAP aims to give them every chance at success, using training and business start-up tools combined with a strong network of farmers and local players. By reinventing transmission between farmers by adapting to the needs on both sides, it is helping conserve a vibrant network of farms that bring quality products, jobs and solidarity to their communities. ●

For further information:

- CIAP Pays de la Loire (PDL): <http://ciap-pdl.fr/>
- La Confédération paysanne, "La CIAP installe et s'installe dans les Pays de la Loire, in Campagnes solidaires", March 2015, www.confederationpaysanne.fr/actu.php?id=3377
- Paul Bonhommeau, "De l'installation à la transmission. Quelles réorientations de la politique d'installation ?" May 2007, www.agter.org/bdf/fr/corpus_chemin/fiche-chemin-145.html
- Presentation of the CIAP on the Coopératives des Pays de la Loire website: <https://cooperer-paysdelaloire.coop/ciap/>
- Céline Clément, "Donner à ceux qui ne sont pas issus du monde agricole", in Terre-net.fr, April 2018, www.terre-net.fr/actualite-agricole/economie-social/article/donner-davantage-leur-chance-a-ceux-qui-ne-sont-pas-issus-du-monde-agricole-202-136827.html



France

When a farm incubator and a community land trust cooperate to organise farm succession and entry of a newcomer to farming

Tanguy Martin Terre de Liens Pays de Loire¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Case study translated by Sally Sorel, Terre de liens volunteer, 2017.

As Gerard, an organic breeder in the Pays de Loire, neared retirement age, he decided to transfer ownership and preserve organic agriculture. He contacted 2 associations, Terre de Liens Pays de Loire and the CIAP, a co-operative promoting peasant agriculture. For over 3 years, they assisted him in finding a successor and in managing the economic and real estate aspects of the farm succession. The project succeeded even after a first candidate defected, thanks to the tools put in place and the players mobilised.

Key players

CIAP 44 (Coopérative d'installation en agriculture paysanne):

A cooperative grouping organisations involved in peasant agriculture and socially responsible economic initiatives. Its goal is to foster farming by men and women who work daily to develop a region, respect the environment, and offer quality products. CIAP does it mainly by favouring access to farming for people from non-farming backgrounds.

Terre de liens Pays de la Loire (TDL PDL):

A regional non-profit association, Terre de Liens coordinates and supports initiatives to access and manage farm land. The aim is to encourage ecological and socially responsible activity in rural areas. The farms acquired through Terre de Liens will never be sold, but instead are rented to farmers through a rural environmental lease. Terre de Liens thus assures that farming will continue in rural areas, that jobs will be created, and that farmland -our common good- will be preserved.

Presentation

In the Pays de Loire region, 2000 farms are lost every year. Paradoxically, numerous people of all ages would like to become farmers in the region. The problem is that they are not from farming families, and have neither the strong social networks nor the

financial means to take over a farm. To compound the difficulty, banks and the majority of farmers are convinced that small farms are not profitable and cannot be passed on. This leads to further concentration of farmland. Administrative, financial and even professional bodies are powerless to stem the tide. That is why organizations are striving to innovate, by transposing and adapting measures that already exist outside the agricultural sector.

Gerard, who raised organic dairy cows, was close to retirement age. With no children interested in taking over the farm, he started looking for a buyer, rather than sell the entire farm to his non-organic farming neighbours. As a member of the trade union Confédération Paysanne, Gérard wanted to uphold his commitment: "We want neighbours, not hectares". However, with the European milk industry in full crisis, very few neighbours believed in the viability of his 30-hectare farm. Most thought the double was a strict minimum. Gerard stuck to his guns, and contacted several organizations for assistance, in a race against time as his retirement date approached.

Transferring ownership of a farm means transferring two distinct entities:

- the farm land and buildings, and
- the farming business.

Terre de Liens is involved with the first; CIAP with the second. These two organizations know each other well and share the same fundamental values and action plans. Both aim to foster the territorial integration of newcomers from non-farming backgrounds. This is achieved by building local support groups, namely peasant farmers, local inhabitants and elected territorial officials.

The two organizations began by shortlisting prospective candidates already known to them, to determine if the farm site matched their future project. They accompanied candidates on visits to the farm and assured the liaison with Gérard. One name soon moved to the top of the list: Odile.

Assisted by Terre de Liens, Odile and Gérard launched a local communications campaign to publicize their plan for farm succession. They thus started to seek financial backing from the region's inhabitants. By investing in Terre de Liens, inhabitants would indeed enable it to buy the farmland that Odile would then rent long-term. This, in turn, would ease the financial burden on Odile when she took over the farm.

At the same time, CIAP met with a group of neighbouring peasant farmers to provide support for Odile as she began working alongside Gerard. This support took the form of a "Creative Peasantry" training program offered by CIAP. This comprehensive training programme is financed by the Regional Council (Conseil Régional), not from the agricultural budget but from the job-training budget. It involved the support of neighbouring farmers and a host

of accredited training programs. Next, CIAP invested in a small pre-fab building for cheese-making, under one of Gérard's farm hangars. Odile began to learn cheese-making and carried out a small market study to determine the feasibility of direct sales.

After 9 months, Odile decided not to take over Gérard's farm, and discontinued the venture. This was a difficult decision for all the parties concerned, as commitment had been strong. Nevertheless, it was agreed that failure is a possibility that must always be considered if a project is to move forward in good conditions. This is an important rule, acknowledged and respected by Terre de Liens and CIAP. The pre-fab cheese-making lab was reallocated for another CIAP project in the department. However, transferring the lab did lead to costs that the CIAP had to bear. The right to fail therefore has a cost that must be factored in with the success stories.

CIAP and Terre de Liens regrouped and began looking for a new candidate. Meanwhile, Gérard and Terre de Liens continued to solicit citizens' savings for the project. After several fruitless contacts with different candidates, Marc broke the deadlock. Marc lived in a neighbouring region. Having spent all his childhood holidays on his uncle's farm, he wished to become a dairy farmer, but had no access to family farmland. In early 2015, Marc joined the "Creative Peasantry" program and started working with Gérard on the farm.

Gérard retired on schedule, in summer 2015. However, Marc had not yet finalized the administrative paperwork which would allow him to enter farming and access public funding. CIAP thus became the official farm operator. When Marc officially entered farming, in early 2016, he took over CIAP's operating investments. Meanwhile, Terre de Liens became owner of the farm and rented it jointly to Marc and CIAP. CIAP withdrew from this joint lease when Marc officially took over, without having to sign a new lease. Today, Marc is a Terre de Liens farmer, raising organic dairy cows. As for Gérard, he has become an administrator for Terre de Liens and CIAP.

Ways and means

Tapping into facilities already available to the non-farming sector was crucial to the successful outcome. Seldom used in agriculture, these tools need to be generalized and adapted to the challenges facing French agriculture today.

- **Incubators:** The project and its perennity can be tested. Incubators also bear the administrative burden of the farm business until the new entrant officially enters farming and accesses public aid.
- **Citizens' savings:** By separating land ownership from the farm business, the newcomer avoids heavy investment costs.
- **Mobilizing funds from job training programs:** By seeking financing outside the agricultural sector, the newcomer can also hone his non-farming skills, like marketing and product transformation.

By "thinking outside the box" to adapt existing facilities to local needs, deadlines were easily met for the farm successions.

Our approach and our values:

- **Support and back-up:** Do WITH not FOR. Empower the players!
- **The right to error, the right to failure:** Fear of failing should not prevent action. However, make sure you have the financial means to face setbacks, and communicate with partners who may be tempted to bow out.
- **Get everyone involved:** The hands-on involvement of neighbouring farmers allowed Odile and Marc to learn valuable new skills. And, thanks to the financial commitment of local citizens, Marc acquired the land loan-free. Despite the small production area, he was able to earn an income immediately.

Factors of success and difficulties

The close ties and mutual confidence between CIAP and TDL enabled them to implement this innovative package with no advance planning. Gérard's forward thinking, his involvement and his patience were all crucial. Had the situation been different, other financial packages would certainly have been required to transfer ownership, i.e. piggy-backing (by the SAFER or a local authority). Such complex administrative and financial packages would have jeopardised the chances for success.

Searching for a second candidate for the farm was a risk factor for all the players. Gérard could have been forced to postpone his retirement. Terre de Liens would have had to inform investors the deal was off; it could have been compelled to return the savings collected. Fortunately, CIAP was able to use the pre-fab laboratory for another project. Otherwise, the investment would have seriously impacted its bottom line. With 2 successive candidates, the workload was doubled for both associations and for Gérard, with no corresponding increase in resources.

Conclusion

This project secured a long-term job in an environmentally responsible sector, and strengthened social cohesion in a rural area. Beyond that, the project proved that despite widespread bankruptcies in the French dairy industry, small environmentally-friendly production units can be passed on. Small players may even fare better than big ones.

To secure farms for other newcomers, the set-up used here is being reproduced on two land acquisition projects by Terre de Liens Pays de Loire, in partnership with CIAP.

This project could not have succeeded without the mobilization of a territory to save a small organic farm. The show of citizen solidarity reflects the determination to defend, encourage, and foster a long-term model of food production that will assure food security and sovereignty. ●

Spain - Catalonia

El Viver de Rufeá, a municipal farm incubator

Maria Díaz de Quijano and Laia Batalla Rurbans
Joan Muntané El Viver de Rufeá

The Rufeá farm incubator is part of a project to promote the peri-urban area of Lleida, called "l'Horta de Lleida". The Horta de Lleida is an area of about 12,000 hectares that has expanded with the city, to produce the food needed to feed Lleida's citizens. This area is very important from a traditional and historical point of view, characterised by small plots, farm houses, irrigation systems, etc. which make this a unique landscape with its own identity.

Background

Over the past decades, the Horta has been threatened by urban sprawl. Its production has become more and more focused on the exportation of fruits (peaches, pears) and cereals. Today, only 1% of the Horta's surface area is dedicated to horticulture rather than cereals and fruits production. All of this has led to a gradual deterioration of the relationship between the urban and rural environments. Lleida's Horta is no longer valued by the population because it is perceived as an area of no benefit for the citizens since the entire production is exported. Thus it is now necessary to reclaim the value of the Horta and the relationship it creates between the city (consumers) and the farmers (producers).

The Horta project aims to promote the agricultural area as a benefit for the city as a green area, providing healthy food production and supporting the local economy. The municipality has initiated several actions in two main directions:

1. to make citizens aware of the specificity and benefits attached to the Horta, so that they value the tradition of the Horta de Lleida and consume local products, thereby also preserving the agricultural landscape;
2. to support farmers in producing healthy food and developing new market strategies.

The Rufeá farm incubator

El Viver d'Agricultors de Rufeá is a farm incubator project established in Lleida in 2014, with three objectives:

1. to create new jobs in the farming sector and diversify agricultural production in the area,

2. to promote local products, and
3. to disseminate the cultural and traditional importance of the Horta for the city of Lleida.

Rufeá enables new entrants to access a plot, between 1 and 2 hectares of land depending on their project, and to use the irrigation system to grow vegetables or crops. This incubator helps new entrants develop their farming project by reducing the initial investments required to buy or rent land. At the same time, it is also open to established farmers who want to try out new ways of diversifying their production.

Functioning

The program lasts for 5 years. The municipality rents the assigned plot of land to the new entrant for up to 5 years. The rent is €0 in the first year and €400/ha/year from the second year; this fee is meant to cover the costs of the irrigation system. New entrants receive technical support (on the agroecological production and pest control) as well as business and marketing support from experts (usually retired business owners) who work as volunteers.

New entrants can also use the irrigation system and have a shed at their disposal to store their production and machinery. Rufeá does not provide them with tools or machinery, but does offer contact information for people who may be able to lend or sell them what they need. It also gives them information about collective purchases.

Rufeá is very young, and the first projects still have two years to go until their contracts end. Nonetheless, Rufeá is considering the possibility of extending the contracts to the new entrants for a few more years. Another option to support their entry into farming at the end of the program will be to work closely with EcoSuma, a local non-profit organisation that works to recover farmland that has been abandoned. EcoSuma acts as an intermediary between the landowner and the farmer.

The municipality of Lleida is also planning a project to recover abandoned farm plots, of which there are many in the Lleida area. These plots have a negative visual impact on the landscape. The municipality wants to recover them by proposing that they be used by the new entrants who have worked in Rufeá.

Participants

New entrants who wish to participate in the program are required to have studied agriculture or have some farming experience. They have to present a project describing their planned activity, the market where they will sell their products, the expected income and expenses for the first years. Two technicians and a Lleida municipal councillor then select the new entrants based on their plans and an interview. Before signing the contract, each new entrant is asked to register as a self-employed worker or join an association in the

agricultural sector. New entrants also commit to leaving the land in the same condition they found it in, or better.

Rufea's structure

The Rufea incubator is funded by the municipality of Lleida. Rufea has one technician, working one third of a full-time equivalent, paid by Fundació Lleida 21, a private foundation created by the municipality of Lleida to foster citizen participation in projects on environmental sustainability, as a way to develop the local Agenda 21. The municipality of Lleida manages the Rufea project through this foundation. The yearly budget of the project is around €12,000 which covers the cost of water, the irrigation system, maintaining the space (clearing, etc.) and the technician's compensation.

Land

Rufea farm incubator is located at the Partida de Rufea, on a 100-hectare rural property that used to be a military farm and now belongs to the municipality. The municipality hosts several projects on the estate, including the Rufea incubator and allotments. Rufea incubator has about 8 hectares of land, for which it has a contract for temporary land use.

Participants in the farm incubator manage between 1 and 2 hectares, depending on their project. A key component of the land is the irrigation system, which is made available by Rufea.

As the land belongs to the municipality, it bears no cost for use of the land, which allows Rufea to lease the land to aspiring farmers at very low rent.

Results so far

When Rufea was created in 2014, three projects started. One new entrant gave up after two years, as he realised that farming was not a job that suited him and the results were not what he had planned. The two other projects are ongoing. One of the projects has some difficulties, but the new farmer continues to be very motivated and has a good outlook. He has focused his project on producing boxes of vegetables that he sells directly in Lleida and Barcelona, and to groceries that are seeking fresh products. The other project is going well. The farmer focuses on few products that he sells to organic wholesalers. His production is based on carrots, tomatoes and Catalan onions called calçots.

In November 2016, there was a new call for candidates. Rufea selected two more candidates who started their project in 2017. One of them has experience on his family farm but needs to extend his production to sell at the weekly market in Lleida. The other has experience in non-farming businesses and is planning to produce organic vegetables (carrots, tomatoes, onions, etc.) for groceries and other interested vendors.

Conclusions

In just three years, Rufea has learnt the following lessons:

- Access to land is important but is not the only factor. Starting a new farming enterprise requires great effort and certain abilities.
- Start small. At first, it is better to plant few plants and sell little, which allows the farmer to gradually meet market demand and reduces risks. The market will meet you at the same time you meet the market.
- All projects must have four basic rules:
 1. Price: the price must be fair but also competitive.
 2. Quality: without quality, there is no way to compete with other producers; this is true for the quality of both the production and packaging.
 3. Service: take care of your consumers.
 4. Visibility: communicate! ●

Further information:

- El Viver de Rufea: <http://urbanisme.paeria.cat/sostenibilitat/horta/viver-dagricultors-de-rufea>. This includes a presentation of current farmers incubated by Rufea.
- EcoSuma: <https://associacioecosuma.wordpress.com/>
- Punt Eco: <https://www.punteco.cat/>

EHNE-Bizkaia Spain – Basque Country

A peasant farmers' union playing an incubator role

Maria Diaz de Quijano Rurbans

EHNE-Bizkaia is a Basque peasant farmers' union established in 1976, whose objective is to foster food sovereignty and support peasant farmers. While it is not an incubator, it does fulfil an incubator role in terms of facilitating the entry of new agroecological farmers through training, mentoring, support and connection with the public land bank.

Background

EHNE-Bizkaia (Euskal Herriko Nekazarien Elkartasuna – Farmers Solidarity of the Basque Country) is a peasant farmers' union established and legalised in 1976-1977. Its main objective is to foster food sovereignty in the Basque Country, with a local agroecological production that guarantees food quality, environmental protection, jobs and vitality in rural areas.

EHNE-Bizkaia fulfils an incubator role in terms of facilitating entry into agroecological farming, in ways that correspond to some of the roles fulfilled by many farm incubators. It does not have a specific incubator program but offers training, personal mentoring and a continuous support to all prospective farmers. Access to land is facilitated through the Basque Country Land Bank, which is run by the public administration as a result of the historic struggle of EHNE-Bizkaia.

Training

EHNE-Bizkaia organises different types of trainings. They offer regular yearly trainings, as well as short trainings which vary according to demand from the public.

The regular training consists of a complete course in agroecology (2 days per week for 4 months), which they offer one, two, or three times a year. It has four modules: ideology, agroecology, diversification of production, and entry into farming (including regulations and subsidies). It is a practical training including a large component of personal mentoring. Daily courses take place on the farms participating in the project. In this way, the training also provides personal mentoring.

The short trainings can be in the form of an afternoon conference or 5- to 8-day courses. Conferences can cover issues such as how to create consumers' cooperatives, services in rural

areas, etc. The 5- to 8-day trainings cover more practical subjects such as the training of shepherd dogs, pruning, artisanal soap production, bread production, etc. EHNE-Bizkaia organises the courses they think will be useful, but also responds to specific requests from their constituency.

The trainings organised by EHNE-Bizkaia have a twofold objective. On the one hand, they are meant to transfer knowledge and advice on the respective subjects. On the other hand, they aim to foster the exchange and sharing of knowledge and experiences between different social groups.

EHNE-Bizkaia tries to offer training at no cost, so that everybody can access training regardless of their financial situation. However, they sometimes ask for a symbolic contribution (e.g., €30 for the 4-month training on agroecology).

Personal mentoring

EHNE-Bizkaia offers open personal mentoring for everyone. Personal mentoring is usually done by phone, since mentors have their own farm and are rarely present in the office. Everyone can have access to mentoring at no cost: new entrants and farmers, young and old people, members and non-members of EHNE-Bizkaia.

EHNE does a physical visit to the farm where the new entrants want to start their project. In these cases, EHNE conducts an agroecological assessment of the farm, including a draft crop and business plan. This agroecological plan of the farm is a suggestion that EHNE makes to the new entrant as part of its mentoring activity. The new entrant can then decide if s/he will carry out the project as recommended by EHNE, or take a different approach.

One EHNE lawyer also provides personal mentoring to people seeking advice on land purchase and rental. The lawyer provides an indication of fair prices on the local land market, lists paperwork that needs to be done, etc. This service is free of charge.

Another EHNE staff member provides distribution and marketing support. EHNE-Bizkaia also organises training on marketing for new entrants and farmers interested in the subject. EHNE-Bizkaia also gives advice on the group purchases of machinery, the best places to buy equipment, sales, etc.

The personal mentoring offered by EHNE has no maximum duration: people can ask for advice as many times as they need it for as long as they want.

Participants

Training and personal mentoring is offered to:

- New entrants.
- Farmers that have been working for a long time. They are usually interested in the farm business training.
- Society at large.

Functioning

In its training and personal mentoring section, EHNE-Bizkaia has two full-time equivalents, shared between four people:

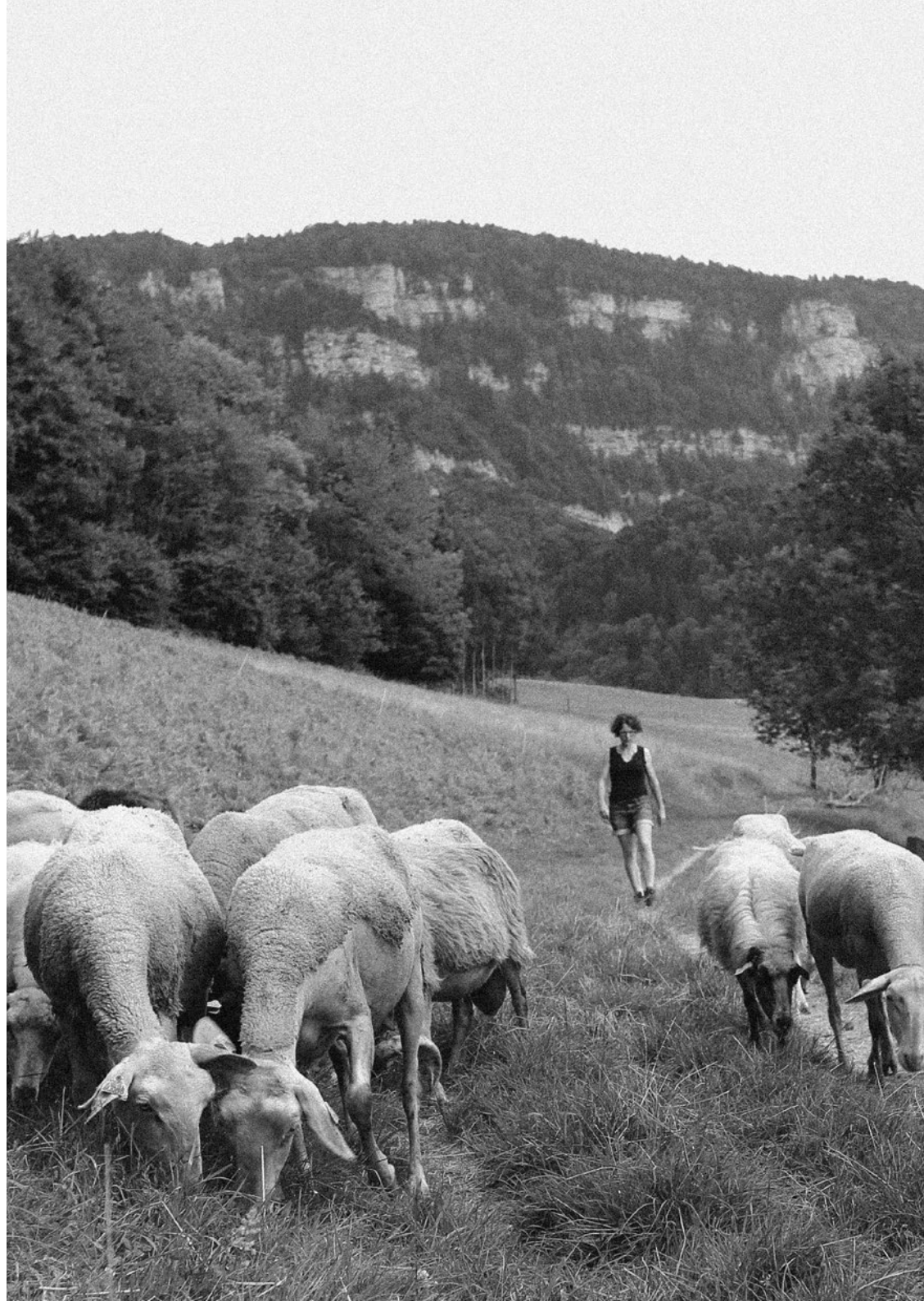
- One person handles the administrative tasks, justification of funds, etc.
- Another person organises the trainings and does some of the personal mentoring.
- A third person does the other part of the personal mentoring.
- The fourth person does the mentoring on distribution and marketing.

The yearly cost of the training and personal mentoring as well as the coordination of these services are covered by three sources of funding:

- Membership fees. EHNE-Bizkaia has around 1000 members who pay a quarterly fee of €50.
- Services. EHNE-Bizkaia offers different paid services to the farming sector. These services include legal consultancy, tax advice, labour consultancy, insurances, engineering, information on and management of subsidies, and dairy facilities (they set up, maintain and fix facilities for milking sheep, goats and cows).
- Awareness-raising projects on agroecology and food sovereignty. These projects rely on international cooperation funding and always include a training dimension. ●

Further information:

- EHNE-Bizkaia: <http://www.ehnebizkaia.eus/>
- Basque Country Land Bank (Fondo de Suelo agrario): www.bizkaia.eus/home2/Temas/DetalleTema.asp?Tem_Codigo=6639&idioma=CA&dpto_biz=2&codpath_biz=2



Kindling Trust FarmStart UK

The first UK farm incubator

Rachel Harries The Soil Association

FarmStart is a farm business incubator just outside Manchester. The project provides a supported route into farming for brand new entrants in the North West of England, by offering access to affordable land, shared equipment, training and access to markets, allowing them to build up skills and experiment with organic growing on a larger scale.

Description

FarmStart is a project of the Kindling Trust, aimed at supporting entry into farming for organic growers, particularly newcomers to farming, as well as at promoting local food production and local food systems.

FarmStart has two sites where new entrants can access land in different ways. The first site launched in 2013 and was the UK's first organic farm business incubator. It is at Abbey Leys Farm, 24 kms south-west of Manchester. The land is flat, fertile and certified organic. The focus is on field-scale growing with staple crops that need little protection for example kale, onions and squash, providing FarmStart participants with a taste of commercial growers' experience. They take on small 1/8 to 1/4 acre (0,05 to 0,1 hectare) sections to trial their growing skills and business ideas and if they prove viable, they can expand each year. Some growers work on their own, others with friends or family, and depending on what they grow and how much land they take on, spend a couple of days each week tending their crops.

The second site, FarmStart Woodbank is located in the heart of urban Stockport, and is part of Woodbank Park, a new urban agriculture hub that's joining up community gardening with commercial food production. Farmstart Woodbank is currently a 1.5 acre (0.6 hectare) site with two large polytunnels, land that has been newly bought into production. Woodbank is aiming for year round cropping and to specialise in tender, higher-input crops for example early peas and tomatoes and cucumbers during the summer and salad leaves during the winter.

Origins

FarmStart began as part of The Kindling Trust's practical and strategic work to create a fairer, healthier & more sustainable food system. In order to achieve this The Kindling Trust believe changes are needed across the whole food system - the production, the

distribution, the demand/market for sustainable food and creating relationships between different communities of buyers and growers. They have created a 'symbiotic model' of projects to address this and benefit each other:

- The Land Army takes volunteers to local organic farms, supporting growers at busy times whilst providing skills, physical and mental health benefits and educating people about sustainable food production.
- Farmstart: the UK's first organic incubator farm, growing a new generation of sustainable growers through training, access to land, equipment and support.
- Manchester Veg People and Veg Box People, pioneering co-ops growing fairer markets for ecologically sustainable food.
- Access to local organic food as a right not a privilege - supporting schools to change their menus to include organic vegetables and working with local GPs offering a 'growing, cooking and veg bag' package to increase health and wellbeing.

The Kindling Trust started FarmStart, a model from US/Canada, particularly as a solution to:

- The impact of food and farming on soil health, declining biodiversity and climate change.
- Enable restaurants and the public sector to find local food by increasing the amount of local organic growers.
- The rising average age of farmers in the UK, currently 54-58 - to grow a new generation of sustainable growers.
- Access to farming as a career for those not from a farming background.
- As a next step for people who had been involved in volunteering on farms to give it a go themselves.

Functioning

Methodologies for training

Prior to joining the FarmStart project new entrants can complete the Kindling Trust's four day Commercial Organic Growers Course, although this is not a requirement for joining FarmStart. This course is taught by local organic growers who have a range of expertise, from building soil health to finances and crop planning, and takes place on their farms and at the FarmStart sites.

The FarmStart programme is a mixture of hands on experience and classroom based training. The initial classroom based training consists of four one-day sessions in February and March. It covers crop planning, organic standards and record-keeping, soil fertility, soil management, weed control, estimating yields, pricing and harvest techniques. Additional sessions later in the year include working with volunteers, marketing, produce

handling, market stall training and visits to two other farms.

From the beginning of March trainees at Woodbank spend a day at the site doing hands on work alongside the co-ordinator, this increases to two days a week as the season gets busier; this has to balance with trainees work commitments. Abbey Leys FarmStarters get their practical experience on their own sections at Abbey Leys, with a weekly walk around their section with their mentor, either the co-ordinator or an experienced grower, to review their plans and gain advice.

Available resources

At both sites participants have access to any infrastructure already installed, such as storage and some shared tools. At FarmStart Abbey Leys other equipment, such as irrigation hose and ground cover sheeting and netting is dependent on the crops chosen and therefore the responsibility of each participant, but they can be sourced and ordered by the co-ordinator and bought in bulk with other new growers. When needed contractor services for larger machinery work can be brought in for example to plough.

Support to marketing

FarmStarters are able to market their produce through the other Kindling Trust projects, Veg Box People (a workers co-operative) and Manchester Veg People, a co-operative of local organic growers, buyers (restaurants/cafes, caterers and the public sector) and workers established to provide fair markets to new and existing organic growers. Unicorn Grocery (a well-established independent retailer and workers co-op) buy produce from both sites as well as providing training on produce harvesting, handling and storage.

Programme duration

The programme at FarmStart Woodbank is for a year, but can increase to two years if the trainees do not yet feel ready to go on to their own site, are making progress and continuing to find the hands on training useful. At Abbey Leys the trainees can grow on the site for up to five years. In the first year they take on 1/8 acre (0.05 ha) while they see if farming suits them and trial their idea. In future years they can either continue developing their skills on 1/8 acre (0.05 ha), or if they have shown that they are managing that area and that their business idea is successful they can increase by 1/8 plots depending on available land.

Networking

The Kindling Trust is embedded in local networks through instigating and organising the Feeding Manchester and Stockport networks, bringing together farmers, community food projects, activists, policy makers, independent retailers/caterers and educators locally to overcome the challenges of creating a fairer

and more ecologically sustainable food system. These connections can help FarmStarters run their project, as well as develop their farm in the long run.

Participants:

Overall 27 people have participated in the FarmStart programme over the four years, some for a year before deciding that the time (or farming) isn't right for them, others have continued on to jobs with existing growers, are growing on other sites or work in other food related projects. Past participants have an equal male/female mix and are mainly: Manchester based, not trained in growing and looking for a career change, there has been a variety of ages from mid-20's to mid-50s. A large proportion of the participants work in part or full time jobs that they fit their growing around, at the weekends and evenings.

The Kindling Trust encourages any potential participants to volunteer through the Land Army on local organic farms before applying. Applicants are also asked in the application form to demonstrate that they have thought about their future business, what they would grow and the markets they would hope to supply. They must also be available to attend the training sessions. FarmStart Woodbank prioritises residents of the Stockport area.

The programme fee is £500 (€560) a year which contributes to the costs of running the programme (training; rent of land, Co-ordinator wage, equipment use etc.) If participants want to expand after the first year, each additional ¼ acre costs an extra £50 (€56).

Kindling also requires a deposit of £100 (€112) per person, to cover instances of trainees leaving without paying bills (for bulk bought seeds materials), or additional work due to leaving the programme early (e.g. not clearing their section).

Land

The two FarmStart projects currently occupy 3.5 acres (1.4 ha) of land with 2 acres (0.8 ha) at Abbey Leys and 1.5 acres (0.6 ha) at Farmstart Woodbank. Abbey Leys Farm is owned by the Harrisons and the Kindling Trust rent 2 acres (0.8 ha) from them (£200 per acre, ie. about 550€ per hectare) and has a 5 year Farm Business Tenancy. Woodbank Park is council owned land, part of a recreational park and the Kindling Trust has a temporary agreement while the council develop long term arrangements.

Project management

The project was managed for the last two years by a full time co-ordinator who had trained as a grower on the Soil Association Future Grower apprenticeship scheme on a farm in Gloucestershire. Alex moved on to follow his dream of being a grower himself rather than training others to follow that dream, so FarmStart is currently run by an experienced grower working part time

and other experienced growers as mentors and trainers. The coordinator receives support from the Kindling Trust team including directors, development workers and finance and communications co-ordinators. Decisions are made through a series of regular meetings.

Sources of funding

The Kindling Trust charges a programme fee to contribute towards the costs of running the programme and generate income from the sale of produce grown at Woodbank FarmStart. The costs are higher than the income generated, so FarmStart is dependent on funding from charitable foundations. Over the last four years FarmStart has been funded by the A-Team Foundation for year two and The Prince's Countryside Fund for the last three years. Woodbank FarmStart also received support from Stockport council to cover some capital expenditure and currently to develop the community engagement element of the site. The Kindling Trust is currently seeking funding for FarmStart for future continuation of the programme.

Monitoring:

Surveys, feedback sheets and follow-up with participants after their involvement are used to monitor the longer term impact of FarmStart. The Kindling Trust is in the process of developing effective measures to record and report social impact, to share as a public resource that will inspire others to adopt similar programs by highlighting the benefits and the social returns of The Kindling Trusts model of social change.

The future aim and model is that, alongside programme fees and produce sales, Veg Box People and Manchester Veg People will generate sufficient income to support FarmStart. This may be possible in the next three years as these businesses are growing and the customers are hugely supportive of the aim to grow a new generation of sustainable growers.

Initial Results

In its first year the Woodbank project had issues with drainage on the land reducing yields, but challenges are to be expected in the first year of getting to know any site and dealing with challenges and working with a site is part of learning to be a grower.

One of the additional exciting benefits of establishing Woodbank FarmStart is that it is bringing new land into organic production. While it is only a relatively small area of land, it is a great part of the story to be able to tell to customers. So now buyers are both supporting new growers and supporting more land into ecological and wildlife friendly farming methods.

For aspiring farmers, FarmStart is a fantastic opportunity to trial farming, expand their skills and access land in a more

secure environment. "It's hard for me to put a value on FarmStart. It has provided an opportunity to access land that wouldn't have otherwise existed. I can say with certainty that I wouldn't be growing veg if FarmStart hadn't been set up, that's important because we desperately need more farmers and it means I'm able to spend my time doing something that I totally love." Corrina, FarmStarter 2015-16. ●

Further information

- <http://kindling.org.uk/farmstart>
- <https://www.soilassociation.org/farmers-growers/supporting-you/future-growers/>

Tamar Grow Local Farm Start UK

Supporting new local food producers in the Tamar Valley

Tom Carman The Real Farming Trust
Rachel Harries The Soil Association

Tamar Grow Local Farm Start is a Farm Start incubator project aimed at new growers wanting to access small parcels of land to kick-start their farm business. It is part of Tamar Grow Local's mission to promote and distribute local food, through the establishment of diverse local food initiatives and support to producers. This dense network of local initiatives is a key resource and long term strength for FarmStarters.

Description

Tamar Grow Local Farm Start is a Farm Start incubator project aimed to help small scale land entrepreneurs to get started in making a livelihood from food production. The project is managed by Tamar Grow Local – a Community Interest Company that distributes and promotes local food produce in the Tamar Valley. Tamar Grow Local provides the land, support and advice along the way and routes to market for fresh fruits and vegetables. The Farm Start project recruits aspiring growers, supports them to develop a business plan and helps them to manage the land, learn from one another and professionals with regular FarmStart support meetings throughout their tenancy at the site.

New growers have between 1-3 acres (0.4 to 1.2 hectare) to kick-start their fruit and vegetable business ideas. In 2016, Mill Lane Acres (their site) is now home to 7 small business tenants including a vineyard, forest garden, traditional market gardens, development orchard and a flower growing business.

Tamar Grow Local (TGL) started their FarmStart Project in 2015. The Tamar Valley is home to many people who want to make a livelihood from food production, and has a strong heritage of market gardening and horticulture, meaning that there is good growing infrastructure in place and good agricultural land, although it is underused. Tamar Grow Local started this project both to enable more local food production, but to also keep food producing assets, especially land, in use for agroecological farming.

Functioning

Tamar Grow Local Farm Start offers participants the following support services:

- 1-3 acre (0.4 to 1.2 hectare) parcels of land in the Tamar Valley
- Share of equipment including hand tools, bulk purchasing of agricultural contracting services, and a small van subject to appropriate licenses & training.
- Practical advice from growing mentors on how best to use your site.
- A polytunnel, and water harvesting equipment
- Business advice from the Tamar Grow Local Business Development Manager
- Access to wholesale markets to sell produce
- Access to retail markets to sell produce including farmers markets.
- Training or mentoring budget
- Access to Environmental Health Officer (EHO) approved test kitchen space (off-site)

Programme duration

The duration of the programme is tailored to the farming type and progress of the entrant's business. The vineyard for instance will be in place for at least five years whilst the crop is developing. The current forest garden will have a similar gestation period, whereas the quick learning potato crop producer is expected to 'graduate' sooner and to perhaps create a space for a new entrant that can learn from the experience of first and second year tenants. Typically though, entrants are expected to learn between 1 - 5 years.

As this is TGL's first Farm Start project, entrants are in their first years and none have 'graduated' to further farming careers. Tamar Grow Local does have a strategy though and is prepared to use its experience and legal structure to help Farm Starters to secure more land if they want to expand. Tamar Grow Local is exploring how they may be able to work with their Farm Starters in the long term. Tamar Grow Local's overall strategy is to promote and distribute local food, so there is strong benefit to retaining and developing these businesses beyond their incubation stage as they provide a source of food.

Participants

Participants have a very varied background with some younger people and some older people. There are no target groups and eligibility is broad: Tamar Grow Local looks for people living and working in the Tamar Valley including Plymouth, who would like to either start their own horticultural business or expand on an existing business idea. Participants have to produce a business plan and a management strategy to show how land will be used with TGL helping participants to develop these plans to help ensure the ideas

are robust and commercially viable.

The current tenants include a vineyard, forest garden and traditional market garden. Of these three, the growers tend to be semi-retired or underemployed and wanting to top up their living from further ventures as a transition into full time growing livelihoods.

Participants pay £500 (€560) annual tenancy fees to Tamar Grow Local. They also need to pay for any equipment, tools or working capital they require and have access to Tamar Grow Local's network to source this.

Participation in local networks

Entrants participate in a range of activities through their relationship with Tamar Grow Local. Tamar Grow Local is an umbrella organisation, which has established over 20 different local food initiatives in the Tamar Valley. These range from community orchards and allotments, field scale community growing, livestock co-operatives, through to Community Supported Agriculture initiatives, produce co-operatives, co-operative market stalls, food hubs, farmers markets, and training. Following initial project development, Tamar Grow Local supports projects and local producers by taking a role in marketing, distribution and adding value to their produce. These products and services include:

- Tamar Valley Food Hubs - A food hub model that distributes produce, currently supporting 40 local producers including community groups. The hub can provide better margins for producers through its zero-waste short supply-chain model.
- Tamar Valley Apple co-op - Tamar Grow Local buys apples from traditional and community orchards that would otherwise not have a market for their produce. The apples are currently juiced and bottled for local markets in 75cl bottles.
- Tamar Honey Co-operative - Tamar Grow Local provides a community honey extraction facility for local beekeepers and sells their honey under a shared label. These activities reduce the cost of beekeeping and make it more accessible as a hobby and source of income.
- Tamar Grow Local is the lead delivery partner in the Grow Share Cook project which provides families in need with cooking workshops and free vegetables fortnightly for 12 months. These vegetables are purchased from local producers and community groups wherever possible.

FarmStart producers may find themselves formally working with or marketing through partners in the network as well as contributing time to community based events and markets. Entrants are evaluated throughout their work to ensure their work is commercially viable and can make a living, and the plan is to help them to graduate on a conversational basis, once they feel ready.

Land

Tamar Grow Local leases the land (about 10 acres, i.e. 4 hectares) on a Farm Business Tenancy from a private landlord. They have then divided this into further smallholdings for use by the FarmStart incubators under rolling annual tenancy agreements. The land was previously used for farming, but not for the crops it is now producing. Tamar Grow Local requires tenants to have a land management plan and for this plan to consider and implement techniques to ensure the land can be managed in an ecological way. Most tenants have a desire to do this, having strong environmental principles.

Project management

The FarmStart project is managed centrally by Tamar Grow Local. TGL arranges monthly meetings with Farm Starters where agendas or learning topics are agreed in advance, and then discussed and explored in the sessions. Tamar Grow Local utilises its network of producers, experienced community members, farmers and professionals to support the farm starters as Farm Starters identify needs themselves - support needs vary from being enterprising (financial modelling for instance), technical (preparing produce for market) or strategic (accessing other routes to market).

The project is currently grant funded for three years from a range of funders including the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. This provides the staffing resources and budget for training and land access for the Farm Starters. Tamar Grow Local's organisational strategy is to grow a critical mass of producers across its networks that buy in to its membership, distribution and promotional services to provide enough income to cover Tamar Grow Local's core costs. This FarmStart project is part of that plan and in the long term TGL revenues are expected to subsidise the FarmStart work.

Initial results

The FarmStart is entering its second year and entrants have started to harvest, market and draw an income from their first crops. Of note is that some of this produce was consumed by marginalised people involved in Tamar Grow Local's Grow Share Cook project. This project provided a direct market of good local food to a wider demographic of people through Local Authority support. ●

Further information

- Tamar Grow Local: www.tamargrowlocal.org/Farm%20Start
- Tenants
 - > Tamar Valley Vines: www.tamarvalleyvines.com/home/#landing
 - > Naturally Vegan Plots: www.the-naturally-vegan-plot.co.uk
 - > Rabbit Acre: www.facebook.com/pg/rabbitacre/about/?tab=page_info

Learning from the experience of farm incubators in France

Farm incubators in France: Roles and functioning

Jean-Baptiste Cavalier RENETA

A tool to promote entry into farming and local development

The farming incubation period enables candidates, particularly newcomers, to practice farming progressively and in a relatively risk free way. It is one of the tools to foster generational renewal in a profession that has lost 200,000 workers between 2000 and 2010. It is an answer to the current challenges facing agriculture and local development: producing quality food in a preserved environment and creating jobs.

The farming incubation is aimed at anyone with an agricultural project who would like to experience his or her project in full size before getting started. Candidates are often newcomers to farming, many of them career changers. These prospective farmers need human and technical support, as they do not have prior farming experience. Their projects all seek to develop family forms of farming, relying on direct sales or short food supply chains, processing, organic farming, and community connections (CSAs).

The first experiences of farm incubators appeared in France in 2007. In 2012, there were 10 farm incubators in operation. Today, there are 45 in operation and 27 others in a project phase.

Some definitions: farming incubation period, incubator farm, incubation site

The farming incubation period is a stage in the process of progressively starting a farm business. It enables prospective farmers to develop their farm business autonomously in full scale, while providing a protected environment. The trial indeed takes place over a limited period of time, within a framework limiting risks and staggering development and risk-taking. At the end of the trial period, the candidates evaluate their project and themselves so as to decide whether to continue, adjust or abandon their project.

The farming incubation period is not part of vocational training, nor an initial discovery of the farming world. Candidates start a farming incubation period only after they have well defined their agricultural project. Through the farming incubation period, they may test:

- their motivation to farming : confrontation with reality, a life-size experience, etc.;
- their personal skills : ability to produce, sell, manage, organise, etc.;

- the technical and economic feasibility of the project : quantity, quality, cost, profitability, etc.;
- the adequacy between their project, themselves and the territory : project viability, life/ work balance, local embeddedness, etc.

The farming incubation is therefore a "tool" to enable a candidate to test his/her farming project, not a tool to test a future farmer. It allows prospective farmers to:

- develop personal skills, put them in practice and compare them with those of experienced people;
- experiment the technical and economic feasibility of their project and secure their entry into farming by limiting risk-taking thanks to progressive investments;
- enable progressive integration in the local community, thanks to the support of a local mentor;
- make progressive steps towards entry into farming or, in certain cases, to consider serenely an outcome different from entering farming
- develop their projects financially, technically and economically, with the support of all the stakeholders of the incubator farm.

This approach to farm incubators and the farming incubation period has several implications. First, the farming incubation consists in the implementation of a project on a provisional basis. All the conditions necessary for the experimentation are combined, for a limited time period. The farming incubation must also include a self-assessment procedure, with specific indicators. Regular self-evaluation should lead to the necessary adjustments. Furthermore, the farming incubation must provide several possible "exits": starting a farm business, becoming a farmworker, going back to their previous job, changing career, etc. Finally, the farming incubation must guarantee that there is room for error and that the situation is reversible.

The farm incubator ("espace-test agricole - ETA" in French) is a practical, coordinated organisation or system offering all the conditions necessary for the farming incubation. Its four main roles are: the incubator/fostering role, the nursery role, the mentoring role and the coordination role (see below). Each farm incubator is unique. Each developed in response to local needs and partners. Farm incubators involve diverse stakeholders: agricultural and rural development associations, people's education movements, business incubators, business nurseries, business co-operatives, regional agricultural authorities, regional natural parks, agricultural colleges and training programs.

Finally, the incubation site designates a physical place, equipped with means of production, which serves as a temporary or permanent support for the farming incubation. This place may be used only for farming incubations or may host other activities (e.g. a farm). A farm incubator may use one or several incubation sites.

¹²⁹ In France, access to the farming profession is regulated. Non-farmers can farm on small areas under a special status ("cotisant solidaire"): they pay social security contributions but do not benefit from agricultural health insurance or pension (they have to be covered by a separate social security system). They can sell to an intermediary (with an invoice) but, in some regions, are not allowed to sell directly to the public.

The farming incubation: how does it work?

Farm incubators are multi-actor systems, providing all the conditions necessary for the farming incubations. Their fundamental role is the provision of:

- A legal framework to enable each candidate to carry out their farm business in autonomy = incubator/ fostering role
- Production facilities (land, equipment, buildings...) = nursery role
- A multifaceted support and mentoring system, adapted to the needs of each candidate = mentoring role.

In addition, the governance and functioning of farm incubators ensure connections with local partners and the local community = animation-coordination role.

1- The incubator/ fostering role: providing a legal framework

In France, business incubators generally provide a "legal framework to support people initiating business projects, in real conditions of production, while preserving their social rights" (Ministry of Employment, 2000). It may involve offering physical space or material resources necessary to develop the business. Sometimes, it means providing support for accounting and business management, monitoring and final assessment of the activity, contacts with other business people and local stakeholders.

RENETA talks about the incubator role to describe the provision of a legal framework for the farming incubation, which includes hosting:

- the legal side of the business: signing a contract to provide a work status to the candidate and the business;
- the fiscal and financial side of the business: doing the tax and social paperwork, managing the financial flows of the business and the candidate's accountancy (collecting payments, paying expenses , etc.).

The organisation fulfilling the role of the incubator provides its legal business registration number (SIRET number in France) to the candidates so that they may use it for their business. This implies that it is qualified as a farm holding, in order to have the authorisation to produce and market agricultural products.

The legal status of the candidates vary according to the local contexts: agricultural social security contributors¹²⁹, trainees of vocational training, CAPE contract ... But the most secure and frequent status today is the CAPE contract, which aims at supporting business start-up's.

2- The nursery role: providing means of production

In France, business incubators are defined as "facilities for fostering, hosting, providing support and guidance to people developing business projects". They intervene before the establishment of a business. They aim to limit the obstacles linked to the start-up

phase and to promote experience-sharing between the emerging businesses. They offer a physical space (e.g. offices, workshops, meeting spaces) as well as shared equipment and services (e.g. secretariat) in order to reduce the costs. They also provide the support of professionals in various fields (legal, tax, banking...). They do not host the legal side of the business.

RENETA talks about the nursery role to describe the provision of the means of production:

- land - except where the candidate already has land and wishes to do the farming incubation on it;
- equipment - except small tools which the candidates usually own themselves;
- buildings: storage room, processing facilities, etc.;
- collective meeting rooms and offices.

3- The mentoring role

The aim is to provide support and guidance to the candidates throughout the farming incubation, according to their needs, the difficulties they encounter, and the stages of the incubation.

This role has "multiple" dimensions:

- technical support: agronomy, farming practices, etc. - provided by a technician from the local organic association, the Chamber of Agriculture or a mentor farmer
- Business support: accounting and management, customer management, investments, choice of marketing methods, etc - generally provided by the organisation fulfilling the incubator role
- human support: work planning, coherence work/ life project, etc. - here, the mentor farmer plays the key role
- discovering peasant lifestyle, integration into the social and professional environment
- mediation of the relationship between the candidates and their mentor, between the various candidates on a same testing ground, etc.

Fulfilling the mentoring role requires defining a framework and a "spirit" of the way in which the farm incubator will provide guidance and mentoring. It means defining and implementing a minimum set of tools and procedures ... while avoiding too much rigidity. The stakeholders of the farm incubator must define clear, specific, attainable and measurable objectives, while ensuring that there is room for error and that the process is reversible.

It is also important to define the role, missions and responsibilities of all those involved in guidance and mentoring. The latter must be professional and adequately trained. In some cases, the farm incubator may resort to external expertise.

4- The coordination role

This interdisciplinary role consists in managing the farm incubator as a whole. It includes all aspects of administrative and financial management: accounting, secretariat, fundraising, financing (e.g. advanced payment for crops, etc.). It also includes communication and external relations with financial and institutional partners.

A fundamental part of this role is to ensure the overall coordination of the farm incubator system, in particular to bring together and coordinate all the partners needed to support the candidates. Farm incubators are multi-stakeholder mechanisms. Many different people and organisations have their part on one or several aspects, either to provide support to the candidates and / or to ensure the functioning of the farm incubator. Good coordination between all of them is therefore necessary.

A national network of farm incubators: RENETA

Established in March 2012, the national network RENETA aims to promote farming incubations. Its main activities consist in:

- **Experience-sharing and capacity-building:** organisation of meetings and seminars, development of collaborative tools, training, publications, etc.;
- **Peer-to-peer learning and expertise:** support to emerging farm incubators, through peer-to-peer learning and other activities drawing from the wealth of experience in the network;
- **Research and social innovation:** making proposals to change the legal framework for entering agriculture and for creating local businesses, based on the principles of solidarity economy.

RENETA is now composed of 77 members, including 44 functioning incubator farms and 27 in project phase, as well as 6 associate members (national networks). The members of RENETA cooperate and mutualise their work, based on a Charter and common values: social and solidarity-based economy and people's education.

Results so far

In 2016, about 200 people were doing a farming incubation period. 70% of the candidates were under 40 and 60% were men. Between 2007 and 2016, 180 people completed a farming incubation. The number of candidates is growing rapidly, in parallel with the increase in the number of farm incubators. At the end of their farming incubation, 66% of the candidates started a farm (mostly in the area where they did their farming incubation); 10% became farmworkers; 15% chose to change their plan or return to their previous job. The remaining 9% have not yet defined their professional project.

Today, we can witness a strong appetite for farm incubators, in particular among local authorities. More and more of them become involved with farm incubators, for several reasons: the

desire to (re)vitalise local activities, to create jobs, or to provide public catering. They view farm incubators as relevant tools for agricultural and food policies, in particular as part of a new system set up by the latest Agricultural Law to promote multi-stakeholder "Local Food Plans". ●

Further Reading (in French):

- RENETA: www.reneta.fr
- Ministry of Agriculture, Centre d'études et de prospective, Les espaces test agricoles: expérimenter l'agriculture avant de s'installer, n°92, July 2016



Farm incubators for vegetable growing: how does it work?

Jean-Baptiste Cavalier RENETA

“The farming incubation is part of a step-by-step process to start a farming business. It defines a way for one or more people to develop a farming business and run it responsibly and autonomously, in real scale and conditions, for a limited period of time, within a framework that limits and staggers the exposure to risk. This allows prospective farmer(s) to assess their project and themselves, in order to decide whether to continue, adjust, or abandon the project.” (RENETA charter)

The farming incubation can apply to any type of agricultural activity: vegetable growing (i.e., diversified vegetable farming, sometimes called “market gardening”), herb farming, small animal farming (bees, snails, rabbits, pigs, poultry, etc.), sheep, goat, or cattle farming (for meat or milk, with or without processing), tree farming, wine growing, grain farming, etc. The only factors limiting the development of a given activity are:

- the available land: incubations in cattle farming, grain farming, or vegetable growing require different surface areas, and it is difficult to test tree farming or wine growing starting from bare land.
- the available equipment: specially equipped laboratories are required for food processing, and specific buildings are needed for livestock, etc.
- the level of investment needed to launch certain agricultural activities (e.g., to buy specific equipment, purchase livestock, plant trees or vine stock);
- guidance/support for prospective farmers: the relevant entities/resources need to be in proximity to the incubation site.

Historically, farm incubators first developed for vegetable growing, both because this was (and still is) the primary interest of newcomers looking to set up as farmers, and because vegetable growing requires less land and smaller investments, with relatively short crop cycles.

Today, all French farm incubators accommodate vegetable growing projects (with the exception of one specialising in sheep/goat herding). However, most are also open to other agricultural activities. This diversification generally happens gradually over time, as opportunities arise in the area (such as a farmer ready to transfer a farm with activities not previously offered at the incubator) and based on the demand from prospective farmers.

Most issues encountered by farm incubators apply to all types

¹³⁰ See Jean-Baptiste Cavalier, RENETA, *Farm incubators in France: roles and functioning*, 2017, in this publication.

of farming, but there are factors specific to certain farming activities. This paper will focus on farming incubations for vegetable growing.

Farm incubators, a wide range of configurations

Farm incubators vary widely in the manner in which they implement their four key functions¹³⁰:

- Incubator role: providing a legal framework for the farming incubation
- Nursery role: providing means of production
- Mentoring role: providing guidance and support
- Coordination role: managing the farm incubator and networking with local stakeholders

The way these roles are implemented depends, in particular, on the various partners involved.

There are as many different configurations as there are places that have set up farm incubators. This diversity can be seen in the following dimensions:

- the legal framework, i.e., with a formalised structure (association, business and employment/entrepreneurs cooperative [CAE], collective-interest cooperative company [SCIC], etc.) or not (partnership between multiple entities);
- how it operates: who assumes which function(s)? The farm incubator functions may be concentrated within a single entity or shared (more or less evenly) between different structures;
- how the incubation site is managed: as a single site or multiple sites (an “archipelago”), a site used by successive prospective farmers (and which will always be used as an incubation site) or a site on which the farmer intends to remain and operate after the incubation period

To illustrate the variety of possible systems, here are several examples of vegetable growing incubation sites:

1.1. Etamine, in Roanne

The Etamine association was created in 2016 at the initiative of two local authorities - Pays Roannais and Roannais Agglomération - in the aim of strengthening local vegetable production in order to meet the growing demand for high-quality, locally-grown produce among consumers within the agglomeration, as well as from the local authority itself for use in mass catering.

Roannais Agglomération purchased a farm and equipment with a view to promoting local vegetable growing. This incubator is currently accommodating two prospective vegetable growers on the incubation site at Les Millets farm, which is owned by Roannais Agglomération.

The association is made up of members from a variety of areas: local authorities (Pôle Territorial Roannais, Roannais Agglomération, municipality of Ouches), associations promoting

agricultural development (ADDEAR 42, ARDAB), agricultural learning institutions (EPLEFPA Chervé), consumers (Vivre Bio en Roannais ["Organic Living in Roannais"]).

The various functions are shared between these players:

- The incubator role is assumed by the Etamine association;
- The nursery role is assumed by Roannais Agglomération (the owner of the farm) and by the agricultural learning centre (EPLEFPA Chervé);
- The mentoring role is assumed by different players, depending on the type of guidance/support provided (technical / business / marketing / human, etc.): ADDEAR 42, ARDAB, Vivre Bio en Roannais, and mentor farmers;
- Pôle Territorial Roannais handles the overall coordination.

1.2. Terracoopa, in Montpellier

Terracoopa assumes all of the farm incubator roles, under a "business and employment cooperative" (called CAE) status, also relying on various partners (Terre Vivante, CIVAM Bio 34) to mentor and support prospective farmers.

The main incubation site accommodating the various prospective farmers (Domaine de Viviers), belongs to the agglomeration of Montpellier, which leases it to Terracoopa through a conventional rural lease. The site can accommodate up to eight prospective vegetable growers. This site was set up and equipped by the cooperative: polytunnels, tractors, drainage and irrigation system, etc.

Other prospective farmers are accommodated on "temporary" incubation sites throughout the county.

At the end of the incubation period (of a maximum duration of 3 years), once the new farmers' business has stabilised, they can join the CAE as an entrepreneur-employee under an open-ended employment contract. Working hours and compensation are fixed according to the projected sales and the business's cash position. The farmer can then become an associate by buying shares in the cooperative, which also involves taking part in its governance and in coordinating and mentoring new prospective farmers.

If the person does not want to stay within the cooperative, they can also leave the structure in order to start their own business. In this case, the person still starts out with everything they have learned and established during their time with Terracoopa.

1.3. Les Prés d'Amont, in Blois

This informal farm incubator (no legal status) for organic vegetable growers encompasses three entities: a nursery (Mature Entreprise), a secondary school specialising in horticulture (Lycée Public Horticole de Blois), and a group of organic growers (Val Bio Centre). Each of these entities assumes part of the farm incubator functions:

¹³¹ Read our case study on CIAP in this publication.

- Through an agreement, the horticulture school provides: 1.3 ha of farmland converted to organic agriculture, a hoop house for seedling production, a cold store, and an office. Farming equipment is available for use at a time-based fee. In addition, the school provides various forms of technical support and access to a directory of potential suppliers.
 - Val Bio Centre provides: technical support; connection to a network of growers; and a distribution network.
 - Mature Entreprise provides: human / administrative / legal / accounting support through individual mentoring sessions set up as needed; up to 200 hours of collective trainings which candidates can select from a catalogue of courses.
- A mutual aid system has been set up based on the principle of labour sharing: the prospective farmer can receive help from members of the network for tasks they are not able to complete alone. The work hours are counted, and the prospective farmer later "reimburses" the farmers who helped with work at their farms.

1.4. CIAP 44, in Loire Atlantique¹³¹

This collective-interest cooperative company (SCIC) offers various forms of support for new farmers:

- A permanent farm incubator: almost 3 ha on the premises of the agricultural secondary school in Saint Herblain, where three prospective vegetable growers can test organic vegetable production in real scale and conditions for a one-year incubation period;
 - entrepreneurship training through the "Creative Peasantry course": 200 hours of training and guidance and 1620 hours of work experience, divided between an established farm (with a mentor farmer) and the candidate's future farm;
 - Temporary payroll services for the farmer, under an umbrella company system: this tool operates similarly to a business and employment cooperative (CAE). The candidate can lay the groundwork for their business and begin their activity before being effectively set up on their farm site. CIAP provides legal, administrative, and commercial hosting of the business (agricultural production, processing, and marketing of farm products). As such, CIAP handles customer and supplier accountancy, in collaboration with the prospective farmer.
- For each of these forms of support, the prospective farmer c an request:
- guidance from a designated CIAP professional. This person becomes a familiar point of contact who knows the candidate, their administrative and financial situation, and their project and can offer personalised guidance based on the candidate's specific situation and the economic aspects of the project;
 - a mentor farmer who knows the trade, the region, partners in the

- field, and the risks and unknowns involved in setting up as a small farmer. This mentor farmer is the professional contact, already established in the local community and market;
- a local support group, established at the candidate's initiative, made up of local farmers, elected officials, engaged citizens, etc. This group forms a pool of resources that advises and supports the prospective farmer;
 - other prospective farmers, and partners of CIAP who offer experience, a collective dimension, additional training and information, etc.

1.5. Ilots Paysans, in Auvergne

Ilots Paysans is a collaborative project managed by the association CELAVAR Auvergne whose mission is to promote rural development and people's education in the Auvergne region. It is a dispersed farm incubator, encompassing a number of incubation sites scattered throughout the region. Each incubation site comprises land, agricultural equipment, and a local mentoring system, providing favourable conditions for the prospective farmer's incubation. Together, the different sites make up an "archipelago".

The Ilots Paysans farm incubator is party to multiple partnerships. At the regional level, it has partnerships with a number of players interested in promoting new farming projects: land use coordinators from municipalities and Regional Natural Parks, official entities informing prospective farmers (called Points Info Installation), local authorities, farmer associations, entrepreneurship support associations, agricultural learning institutions, etc. Each of these partners fills one or more roles depending on where the candidate is carrying out the farming incubation.

Particularities of farm incubators for vegetable growing

The large majority of farm incubators are, from the start, open to vegetable growing trials, for multiple reasons: being able to use relatively small surface areas, smaller investments, "short" crop cycles, and because of high demand from newcomers. In recent years, we have also seen a growing demand for the creation of vegetable growing farm incubators among local authorities.

A number of conditions are necessary for the candidate to be able to make a decision about the future of their project at the end of the incubation period.

First, the candidate needs to be able to implement the project "concretely" and in "real" scale and conditions, meaning that they have to assume all of the different aspects, from preparing for the season and creating a seeding/crop calendar, growing and harvesting produce throughout the entire season, marketing, and handling the administrative and financial aspects, etc.

For this to be possible, the candidate will not be operating in "real" conditions, but "close to real" conditions, with the possibility

of ramping up their activity over the course of the incubation period. The incubation period lasts two to three years (generally two years). The prospective farmer builds their skills over the course of this period, such that in the second or third year they are able to do more than in the first year.

Prospective vegetable growers generally start with 1 ha of land, including some surface area inside greenhouses. Some cultivate the entire area from the start, while others prefer to begin with a smaller plot. Some farm incubators give prospective farmers access to larger surfaces during the second or third year of their incubation period.

Second, the incubation period needs to allow the candidate to implement their project autonomously, in conditions as close as possible to what they will be on their future farm.

It is important to remember that the farming incubation is not "starting a farm", but rather preparation for starting a farm within a safe framework. Thus, the prospective farmer will be operating autonomously, but with the support and guidance of professionals, who validate the candidate at each major step in their project. Regular check-ins and follow-up allow any technical, practical, commercial difficulties to be dealt with and anticipated.

Some farm incubators give prospective farmers access to distribution channels (CSA, farm store, farm baskets, mass catering, etc.), allowing them to concentrate on production, while others leave them complete autonomy in selling their products.

Lastly, it is important for the prospective farmer to be able to test their activity, insofar as possible, in the area they will eventually be doing business in. The incubation allows them to create a professional network that will significantly facilitate the future farm. This also means that before setting up a farm incubator, it is essential to consider whether there are opportunities for new farmers in the area. In other words, the farm incubator is a tool that must correspond to a concrete need within the territory.

If these different conditions are met, the prospective farmer should be able to make a well-founded decision at the end of the incubation period about what they want to do: start a farm (in the area or elsewhere), partly or completely reorient their project, or abandon it.

Although a vegetable growing trial is technically easier and less costly to set up than an animal farming trial, certain complexities still need to be taken into account. Here is a non-exhaustive list of key points to keep in mind when developing a farming incubation for vegetable growing.

Validating specific skills, knowledge, and know-how is essential before a candidate begins a farming incubation, in particular to validate the candidate's ability to manage the production and marketing aspects of their project. When formalising the project during the application stage, these are

key points that will be verified by the farm incubator. Prior training and work experience in farming are often prerequisites, to ensure that candidates can fully benefit from the incubation period. Some farm incubators require candidates to have an adequate agriculture degree to set up as a farmer (e.g. having the French farming certificate called BPREA), but this is not always the case. Others prefer to focus on the candidate's practical experience and motivation.

A farming incubation is not necessarily judicious for every prospective farmer. It all depends on where the candidates are in their farming project. It is essential that the farming incubation be viewed not as an end in itself, but as a tool to help new farmers bring their project to fruition; it is one step in a broader process, the step that directly precedes starting a farm.

It is important to keep these points in mind when reviewing applications from candidates.

"Technical" support is also of particular importance during the incubation period, to allow prospective farmers to develop their skill set. Trainings dispensed by "technicians" may be useful (Chamber of Agriculture, organic agriculture associations (GAB), etc.), and working with mentor farmers will allow prospective farmers to acquire knowledge and know-how that cannot be learned in an academic setting.

In terms of mentoring and guidance, every farm incubator operates differently. Some farm incubators offer "mandatory" training courses on aspects such as managing a pool of equipment, accounting, etc., while others only offer custom trainings tailored to the needs of each prospective farmer. Some offer ten days a year of mentoring by an active farmer, while others do not offer farmer-to-farmer mentoring. Each farm incubator has to find its own formula, working out how to best meet the needs and expectations of the prospective farmers. This often means taking a case-by-case approach, finding the right balance between providing a safe and supportive framework for the prospective farmer, and allowing them their autonomy.

The equipment on site also needs to be carefully considered: a minimum of equipment is of course necessary, but it is not judicious to go to the opposite extreme of providing equipment at the incubation site that prospective farmers will never be able to procure on their own farms. The goal is to create conditions as close as possible to the farmer's future reality, while at the same time giving them the chance to discover tools that may be new to them. Again, in terms of equipment, it is a matter of striking the right balance.

The farm incubator generally provides the heavy equipment (tractors, polytunnels, food processing laboratory, etc.), and prospective farmers buy their own small equipment and inputs (seeds, fertilizer, etc.). The availability of heavy equipment is not,

however, "free" for prospective farmers, as they bear the cost through the various fees paid to the farm incubator. This, too, is a question of placing the prospective farmer in conditions as close to real as possible.

This is what makes "temporary" farm incubators – located on an active farmer's holding, or the prospective farmer's own holding – particularly strong: they are, by nature, truly realistic farming sites. It should be noted that when a prospective farmer is conducting a farming incubation on their own property, it is up to them to procure their own equipment.

Providing heavy equipment at permanent farm incubators is a significant advantage for prospective farmers, but also presents certain difficulties, such as:

- managing scheduling: more than one prospective farmer may need the same equipment at once, which can lead to conflicts that will have to be managed;
- managing maintenance: if repairs are needed, who makes sure they get done? And who pays for the repairs?
- insurance: any accidents that prospective farmers could cause while using the equipment need to be covered.

The scale of a project must also be given careful consideration. A prospective farmer cannot cultivate the same area during the first year or after two or three years. The incubation period serves as a time for building skills and gradually working up to the target in the most realistic possible conditions. It is better to start with a smaller surface than what is planned for the final project, to avoid being overextended from the get-go, especially since the prospective farmer is generally not devoting all of their time to their farming activity. They also need to set aside time for the various guidance and training they receive, and for the preparation of their future farm (finding land, for example), etc. Some farm incubators, such as Prés d'Amont in Blois, choose to impose that candidates start with a smaller surface than what they will need on their future farm.

The duration of the incubation period is another important factor. Naturally, for the incubation to be relevant, it has to cover at least one complete crop cycle (i.e., approximately one year). However, it is more judicious for an incubation period to last two years: the first year serves to make a number of adjustments, and the second year is used to test a more mature and better-honed project. A third year can also be considered, either because the project still needs adjustments, or to allow the prospective farmer more time to set up their farm (e.g., to find land, although ideally they should be looking for land from the start of the incubation).

Finally, how the farm products will be marketed is another parameter that should be established from the application phase. The incubation period is also intended to allow prospective farmers to try out different marketing approaches suited to their project:

¹³² Read our case study on Les Champs des Possibles in this publication.

open-air markets, farm boxes, CSA, farm store, wholesale markets, etc. Marketing their products can be far more time-consuming than prospective farmers imagine. It is important for candidates to have a concrete idea of what this entails. Some farm incubators offer access to distribution channels, whereas others leave marketing entirely up to the prospective farmers. Les Champs des Possibles¹³² in Ile-de-France allows prospective farmers to sell to a group of consumers through a CSA system. This means they need to be able to quickly supply produce for farm boxes, which places them under a certain amount of pressure but also offers the benefits of a contractual framework and advance cash. ●

Access to land after a farming incubation: experiences, difficulties, challenges

Jean-Baptiste Cavalier RNETA

¹³³ Read Jean-Baptiste Cavalier, RNETA, *Farm incubators in France: roles and functioning*, in this publication.

Access to farm land and buildings during a farming incubation period¹³³

An incubation site is a physical site, which is the basis for a farming incubation period. Usually, farm incubators have several incubation sites, which can be of two types:

Permanent incubation site:

It is a site dedicated to the farm incubator, where the candidates succeed one another and leave at the end of their farming incubation period. Generally, permanent incubation sites do not belong to the farm incubator. They belong to a municipality (e.g. Domaine de Viviers for Terracoopa), an agricultural college (e.g. Nathuré végétal) or a private land owner. The latter can be an individual owner or a collective one, such as Terre de liens (e.g. initial incubation site of Les Champs des possibles, Ver'tige). This type of incubation site constitutes a "springboard" for future farmers. At the end of their incubation period, candidates must find land to enter farming. It is recommended that they look for land throughout their incubation period, rather than at the end of it.

Temporary incubation site:

It is a place that is not intended to remain an incubation site in the long run. At the end of the farming incubation period, it can become a place where a candidate enters farming or return to its original function. There are several cases:

- a site belonging to a farmer who offers it for a farming incubation. The farmers can thus aim at providing an incubation site for an association, at ensuring their own farm succession or at giving a hand to prospective farmers, before taking back the land for their own use;
- a site belonging to a municipality, or to a collective private landowner such as Terre de Liens, whose objective is to help candidate(s) to enter farming on this specific site at the end of their farming incubation period;
- a site belonging to the candidates themselves, who will set up there at the end of their farming incubation period if their project is confirmed.

In some cases, the candidate will thus not have to look for land at the end of the incubation period.

On both permanent and temporary incubation sites, the owner of the site entrusts the land to the farm incubator, not to the candidate. It is important that the landowner specifically agrees for the site to be used for a farming incubation period. The modality can be a rural lease, a free loan (*commodat*) or other. The farm incubator then makes land available to the candidate, via a free-of-charge agreement (so as to avoid requalification as a rural lease, which is strictly regulated).

Permanent incubation sites have the advantage of being equipped by the farm incubator, which is generally not the case for temporary incubation sites. For the latter, the equipment and the buildings (polytunnels, storage sites, sheds, processing facilities, etc.) are made available either by the host farmers or purchased directly by the candidates (sometimes thanks to an initial investment made by the farm incubator).

Initially, farm incubators mostly resorted to permanent incubation sites. Then some of them began to develop farming incubations "in archipelago", i.e. several temporary incubation sites scattered over the territory, most often on existing farms. Today, most farm incubators combine these two types of sites, each with their advantages and disadvantages.

In all cases, the question of accessing land is a central issue. For permanent incubation sites, the issue is for the candidates to find permanent access to land at the end of the incubation period. For temporary incubation sites, the challenge is for the farm incubator to find new incubation sites for the future candidates.

Access to farm land and buildings after a farming incubation period

On finishing their farming incubation, the candidates may decide to fulfil their project and enter farming, but they may also decide to quit and move on to something else. In both cases, if it is a thought-through and informed decision, the farming incubation will have been a success. However, the decision to start a farm does not necessarily lead to an actual entry into farming. The main obstacle is access to land. Of the candidates who decided to enter farming, 85% found land in the area where they did their farming incubation period; 7% moved to another area; 8% were unable to start their farm for lack of access to land.

In France, access to land remains the main problem to enter farming. But the data available show that doing a farming incubation period makes it "less difficult" to find land, for two reasons:

- the incubation period allows the candidates to make themselves known locally and to grow a professional network (farmers, chambers of agriculture, associations *Terre de liens*). This will

enable them to hear about land opportunities and even to trigger them.

- the incubation period enables candidates to prove themselves. They indeed demonstrate their skills and their capacity to farm and to take care of the land, which can win the confidence of landowners.

Doing a farming incubation period can thus make access to land easier for prospective farmers, but this is only possible if access to land is addressed from the outset. It must be addressed:

– first by the farm incubator

A farm incubator has to be established with the support and involvement of local farmers, and in connection with existing mechanisms to support entry into farming. It would otherwise not succeed to fulfil its role of "facilitating access to land". Before establishing a farm incubator, it is also necessary to ensure that the territory needs new farmers and to identify the profiles needed.

– as well as by the candidate

It is important that the candidates start working on their land search from the very beginning of the incubation period. They must be able to characterise what they are looking for: area, type of soil, location (proximity to an urban area?), building, purchase or lease, the price or rent that they can afford, etc. They must also actively seek land opportunities, with the support of knowledgeable people. The main risk is that they focus on farming and do not give enough attention to the preparation of their entry into farming. If so, chances are that they will then find themselves without a solution when they finish their incubation period.

To ensure successful entry into farming after their incubation period, it is essential for candidates to work with alternative rural development associations such as ADEAR or CIVAM, with mentoring farmers, with advisers from the Chamber of Agriculture, or with local authorities. Local *Terre de liens* associations obviously have a central role to play in supporting land search: advice on the different ways of accessing land, support to actively search land, support to do the paperwork, putting them in touch with relevant partners (e.g. SAFER, municipalities).

Alsace is a small agricultural region with a particularly closed land market. Finding land there is very difficult. Many prospective farmers are blocked at the end of their vocational training because they do not manage to access land. Several local organisations have joined forces to establish a farm incubator to complement existing training schemes and address this recurring difficulty. Facilitated by *Terre de Liens* Alsace, the platform brings together a series of potential incubation sites and a group of interested candidates. From the outset, the platform opted for temporary incubation sites rather than permanent ones, so as not to postpone the problem

¹³⁴ See www.jeminstallepaysan.org/Ciap44 (in French) and presentation of the CIAP in this publication.

of access to land at the end of the incubation period. However, it studied the feasibility of establishing a permanent incubation site in market gardening as part of the Strasbourg agricultural college. This part of the project was finally abandoned but the feasibility study highlighted the importance of combining the establishment of such a permanent site with the launch of a monitoring work on land availabilities in market gardening in the peri-urban area of Strasbourg.

The case of farm succession

In France, farmers' retirements will peak in the coming years. The issue of farm succession is therefore more relevant than ever. Historically, most entries into farming took place through family succession, which has constantly decreased for several decades. Generational renewal will therefore have to rely on new entrants coming from outside the agricultural world.

Farm incubators are particularly adapted to these newcomers. They can act as "facilitators" for farm succession, facilitating the connection between transferors and new entrants. In some cases, the transferors anticipate their retirement well in advance and make part of their land available for a farming incubation period. This is an opportunity for them to reduce their activity by entrusting some of their products and markets to the candidates doing their farm incubation. It is also an opportunity for them to meet several new entrants and see them at work, which may enable them to identify a potential successor. In other cases, the farm incubator is the opportunity to support a candidate directly on the farm s/he will take over, in connection with the transferor. The farming incubation period then offers a framework to better know each other and collaborate, which can make farm succession easier.

Several farm incubators are developing experiments of farming incubation periods in a context of farm succession. Here are several examples, with CIAP in Pays de Loire region and the farm incubator Coups d'Pousses in the Gard department.

Facilitating farm succession, while organising community land acquisition on a cattle farm

In the Pays de Loire region, the farm incubator CIAP¹³⁴ and Terre de liens Pays de Loire worked hand in hand to support an organic breeder who was determined to transfer his farm, even though he had no identified successor. The work began with Odile, a first candidate for farm succession. She followed an ad hoc training provided by the CIAP - the "Creative Peasantry" training - which enabled her to start farming, while training and benefiting from the support of local farmers. At the same time, Odile, the transferor and Terre de liens began to raise money locally so that Terre de liens could buy the farm. After eight months, Odile decided to withdraw from the project. CIAP and Terre de liens then identified a

¹³⁵ Read Tanguy Martin, Terre de liens Pays de Loire, *When a farm incubator and a community land trust cooperate to organising farm succession and entry of a newcomer into farming*, in this publication

second candidate: Marc. Marc also followed the Creative Peasantry training and finalised the crowd funding. He formally took over the farm, purchased by Terre de liens, in 2016, the year planned by the transferor for retiring¹³⁵.

Organising a farming incubation period to facilitate farm succession on a market garden farm

David is a candidate with no family background in agriculture. A career changer, he decides to train in organic market gardening in Uzès. He does his internship at the farm of Yvan, a local market gardener. When his internship ends, David is advised by Yvan to contact Coups d'Pousses in order to concretely work towards his entry into farming. In 2014, David starts a farming incubation period on part of Yvan's farm. Yvan was well aware that the spirit of a farming incubation period implies that candidates are autonomous, including for making their own mistakes. He nevertheless transferred to David all his commercial outlets for the vegetables that David was starting to grow. David was thus autonomous on the technical and organizational aspects and Yvan became his mentor during the incubation period. After three years of incubation, David took over all of Yvan's commercial outlets, i.e. semi-wholesale sold in organic shops throughout the Gard department. Today, David leases Yvan's land and has been able to invest in equipment in order to mechanise and improve his farming business.

This experience points to several positive factors:

- The candidate benefits from comfortable conditions to develop his project, access commercial outlets, and plan his economic prospects;
- He receives daily technical advice and can exchange on the socio-professional context;
- The transferor can transfer his farm but also a global approach to agriculture (technical and environmental aspects, local partnerships, marketing, management, activism, etc.).

Transferring a farm to a farm incubator so as to establish a permanent incubation site

La Roustide is a 16-hectare farm in organic vegetable gardening. The couple of farmers, and two employees, used to produce vegetables for 250 boxes bought by AMAPs -i.e. community supported agriculture (CSA) groups - in four different towns: Nîmes, Istres, Martigues and Marseille. After 10 years of producing for these AMAP and engaging with committed consumers, the farmers tried to transfer their farm to a new entrant. After three years, the prospective buyers had not been able to concretely organise to take over the farm and the distribution channels. The transferors then decided to transfer their farm to the Coup d'Pousses farm incubator so as to enable future candidates to test their project in the specific

circumstances of a CSA vegetable garden. A twofold involvement of CSA members was key to make it possible: they made loans / prepayments to Coup d'Pousses to acquire the farm (the land still belongs to the former farmers); they also signed contracts through which they commit to buying the farm's produce, thereby ensuring the farm's economic viability. Today, the farm incubator thus offers an opportunity to candidates who wish to experiment a project in connection with CSA members, who become involved in their individual farm plans.

The various experiences of farm succession in connection with a farm incubator raise specific questions to which we do not yet have answers:

- What can be the role of farm incubators as an intermediary between a transferor and a prospective new entrant doing her/ his farming incubation period?
- Does this situation raise new questions or requires new ways of doing in terms of support provided to new entrants and transferors?
- How do we organise the temporary portage of farm land, buildings and equipment, from a legal and administrative point of view, but also from an economic point of view?
- What economic risk does the transferor/ host of the farming incubation period take?
- How can we anticipate early enough so as ensure that the transferor will have a solution if the candidate finally decides not to set-up on her/his farm?

The farm incubators, which are part of RENETA, launched a research-action work on the role of farm incubators in farm succession. A working group will meet to draw lessons from current experiences, in order to identify good practices and difficulties. This will make it possible to disseminate good practices and attention points within the network and to build tools to improve our practices. ●

France

Articulating farm incubation and lasting access to land: connections between “espaces test” and Terre de liens

Véronique Rioufol, Chloé Negrini and Thibaud Rochette Terre de Liens¹³⁶

¹³⁶ This note is based on a series of internal exchanges, within Terre de liens and with RENETA from 2014 to 2017.

¹³⁷ See: www.accesstoland.eu/Terre-de-liens-

¹³⁸ Terre de liens, Recto/verso des chiffres internes, n°3, 2016 (unpublished document)

Terre de liens and the movement of farm incubators, gathered in the RENETA network, were both established in France about 15 years ago. They offer complementary approaches to facilitate entry into farming, maintain peasant farming and local food systems, through local, multi-stakeholder dynamics. Over the years, they have developed a range of practical collaborations.

Farm incubators and Terre de liens: common vision, common project

In France, farm incubators are called “espaces-test agricoles” (ETA). They emerged in the years 2000, as a way to enable unemployed people or people seeking a career change to start-up a farming business. The main aims of an ETA are to:

- foster entry into farming, particularly of newcomers
- secure the entry path into farming, by supporting and advising the new farmers
- promote forms of farming which are anchored in the local community.

The emergence of ETA is directly linked with the rise of newcomers, who usually don't have access to land, lack practical experience or skills, and local network –with which ETA can help.

ETA are also connected with an understanding of entry into farming as a progressive process, rather than one-time event. They are there to enable new farmers to experiment a farming project and to do it life size. These may be an additional step after vocational training, or after a career change, or after a period of farming on somebody else's farm. It may also be the initial years of farming on one's own farm.

Terre de liens was established in the same years, to preserve farmland and facilitate access to land for organic and peasant farmers, particularly newcomers¹³⁷. Every year, Terre de liens advises and supports 1300 farmers and future farmers seeking to enter farming and/ or to access land.¹³⁸

Very early on, commonalities and shared questions have emerged between the two organisations. For Terre de liens, ETAs are a natural partner and ally, as:

- Many of the prospective farmers advised by Terre de liens are newcomers, lacking practical experience and community connections, which are both developed through a farming incubation period. Farmers finishing their experiment on a farm incubator are good candidates for farming on a farm which Terre de liens will buy, or for which TDL is advising a local authority.
- There is a need to experiment various ways of accessing land – besides Terre de liens and other community land trusts, ETAs are a way for newcomers to identify land opportunities and access land – by getting to know local landowners (other farmers, local residents, municipalities, etc.), by showing that they are capable to run a farming business and can thus be trusted with land, by building a consumer-base and connections with local stakeholders who can help them find land.

Conversely, ETAs are interested to collaborate with Terre de liens, as:

- TDL can help them to find land for the farm incubator, either by directly acquiring and managing land which is put at the disposal of a permanent incubation site on a TDL farm; or by identifying possible sites for an ETA, through our local contacts, and land expertise.
- Farmers finishing their experiment on an farm incubator often need to find land to get established. TDL can advise and support them, by providing information on available land, being a go-between with possible public or private landowners, or directly acquiring land for them.

Concrete collaborations

Hosting farm incubators on TDL land

Three of the farms owned by TDL host an ETA: Les champs des possibles, on Toussacq farm; Coup d'Pousses on Barjac farm; and Le Gerموir, Nord-Pas de Calais. In the latter case, the ETA is the only activity of the farm. In the 2 first cases, the incubator farm was established after TDL bought the farm.

Incubating a project on a farm acquired by TDL

In some cases, the prospective farmers experiment their project on the farm where they will get established. Such on-site incubation has taken place on two Terre de liens farm: on Gallinagues farm, the farm incubator Graines de Paysans was run for almost 10 years to train prospective farmers while finding successors for the farm. In Auvergne and in Pays de Loire, a local farm incubator – respectively Ilots Paysans and CIAP – and Terre de liens have joined forces to enable candidates to experiment their project on their future farm,

¹³⁹ Read Tanguy Martin, Terre de liens Pays de Loire, *When a farm incubator and a community land trust cooperate to organising farm succession and entry of a newcomer into farming*, in this publication

in connection with the transferor. The incubator farm supports the candidate for experimenting their farming plans, while Terre de liens bought the farm¹³⁹.

Helping in the set up and management of a farm incubator

Many local branches of TDL are involved in the setting up and management of farm incubators in their region. Some conduct a feasibility study to help them find land to establish the farm incubator. Some also participate in the board of directors of local farm incubators and/ or in running their daily activities.

Advising incubated farmers during and after their incubation

Many local branches also organise information or training sessions to inform incubated farmers of the legal and technical possibilities to access land, of the specific features and constraints of the local land markets, etc. In some cases, they also provide one-on-one advice to help them find land at the end of their incubation period.

Sharing experiences and advocacy

Both ETAs and Terre de liens are social innovations, which are trying to change the existing system to foster agroecological transition and generational renewal. Sharing experiences and lessons learnt is important to improve our own analyses and practices, as well as to share them through the French Rural Network. There is also an overall, political alliance to promote “progressive entry into farming”, the role of newcomers, and the need to support agroecological farming. To forge these links, Terre de liens is a member of RENETA and Terre de Liens and RENETA have partnered in several experience-sharing and advocacy projects supported by the Ministry of Agriculture .

Collaborations between farm incubators and Terre de liens have developed organically on the ground. Progress is needed to collaborate more systematically and efficiently in the different stages of entry, prior, during and after farm incubation. Increased collaboration will also enable us to better know the profiles and needs of newcomers and have them better recognised by agricultural institutions and policies. New routes for collaboration are also developing, as ETAs are increasingly seeking to ensure that incubated farmers can get established on their incubation sites or nearby, and are therefore trying to locate and manage a range of experimenting sites, which TDL can help do. ●

Further information

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