

T5.2 Case study report (Code FR6A)

## **Farm collectives: a lever for an agricultural and rural transition**

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## Acronyms & Abbreviations

<b>ADEAR</b>	Associations for the Development of Agricultural and Rural Employment
<b>ATAG</b>	Tarn association for the development of group agriculture
<b>CAP</b>	Common agricultural policy
<b>CAPE</b>	Support contract for business setting-up (Contrat d'appui au projet d'entreprise)
<b>CdP</b>	Champs des Possibles
<b>CSA</b>	Community-supported agriculture
<b>CEFI</b>	Farm training and set-up employment contract (Contrat emploi formation installation)
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GAEC</b>	Collective farm grouping (Groupement agricole d'exploitation en commun)
<b>HCF</b>	Hors cadre familial
<b>InPACT</b>	Initiatives for a citizen and territorial agriculture (Initiatives pour une agriculture citoyenne et territoriale)
<b>SAFER</b>	Land Development and Rural Establishment Company (Société d'aménagement foncier et d'établissement rural)
<b>SCOP</b>	Cooperative and participative company (Société coopérative et participative)
<b>SCIC</b>	Cooperative society of collective interest (Société coopérative d'intérêt collectif)
<b>TDL</b>	Terre de Liens
<b>UAA</b>	Utilised agricultural area

## Introduction

Since the 20th century, French agriculture has undergone major changes. These have affected practices, which have become more mechanised and intensified; land distribution, with fewer and larger farms; and demographics, with an ageing population and a reduction in the number of agricultural workers. Although still dominant, the family farm model is evolving with the development of salaried employment (Cahuzac and Détang-Dessendre 2011) and fewer farm transfers within families.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, France and Europe have made the renewal of generations in agriculture a key priority. Between 2007 and 2020, the European Union (EU) allocated over 9 billion euros of aid to young farmers, without significantly impacting ageing trends in the agricultural sector. According to the European Court of Auditors, this aid followed “a poorly defined intervention logic” and “should be better targeted to foster effective generational renewal” (ECA 2017). The stakes are therefore high to better define and understand the practices which promote such renewal, in order to support them more effectively.

Our study tests the hypothesis that farm collectives can be a lever for generational renewal in agriculture. Moreover, it looks at the way these collectives may or may not promote the regeneration of rural territories, for example through more social connections between farmers and rural inhabitants, innovations to make farming more accessible, and care for rural environments and landscapes. Although our investigation is a modest contribution to the answers to these vast questions, it allowed us to question and compare the trajectories and impacts of three collective farms, through conducting more than twenty semi-structured interviews with farmers and advisory organisations, as well as key informants around the farms (elected officials, neighbours, volunteers).

This work first allows an analysis of the context and trajectories of emergence of farm collectives. Then, it questions the practices implemented and synergies developed around these farms and, more broadly, their territorial impact. Finally, the study explores how the institutional environment affects the emergence of these farms, and develops several policy options for supporting farm collectives.

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<sup>1</sup> One-third of new farmers in 2018 set up their business outside of the family farm (MAA 2021).

## Defining farm collectives

Before proceeding to the analysis, we must briefly clarify our definition of farm or agricultural collectives. The literature indeed offers multiple interpretations, for instance:

- Collectives of producers pooling equipment or services: these are often cooperatives, or technical groups (Van Dam et al. 2017, Le Brun et al. 2019, Chevalier & Dellier 2020).
- Farms that bring together several producers but enable each to organise production autonomously. Vanwelde and Dumont (2021) refer to this juxtaposition of individual economic projects on the same site as “shared farms” and study the collaborations generated by such associations.
- Farms where farmers have a common project for agricultural production and partially or totally mutualise investment, labour and, in some cases, marketing and remuneration (Hollard 2011, LeJaille 2017, Lataste et al. 2016)

Our study falls under this third definition of farm collectives. Our criteria for selection were the following: farms bringing together at least two associates with no family ties, via one or more operating farm organisation, which pool their means of production (capital, labour) as well as sometimes their means of processing and marketing the production. These criteria are borrowed from French Associations for the Development of Agricultural and Rural Employment (ADEAR), which are precursors in supporting work on the issue of farm collectives in the French context (Hollard 2011, Le Jaille 2017, AGRI'COLL 2021). Consequently, our analysis focuses on agricultural production collectives. We nevertheless acknowledge that other types of non-production collectives surround these farms and play a role in their functioning—for example, citizen or consumer groups.

Study sites were chosen using our networks to first gather a list of farms corresponding to these criteria. We then selected three farms from this list that had been in existence for at least five years, in order to facilitate the observation of their territorial impact, with a rather high number of associates (at least four), and mobilising a diversity of legal models as well as innovative agricultural and association practices. Our study may therefore not reflect the characteristics of the majority of farm collectives in France.

## D5.2 30 CASE STUDIES ON RURAL NEW COMERS, NEW ENTRANTS TO FARMING AND SUCCESSORS

The three farms that were selected are the Champ Boule collective farm grouping (*Groupement agricole d'exploitation en commun* or GAEC in French), the Belêtre cooperative and participative company (*Société coopérative de production* or SCOP), and the Toussacq farm, managed by a cooperative society of collective interest (*Société coopérative d'intérêt collectif* or SCIC). Around these sites, a snowball sampling method was used to select interviewees. We began by interviewing farmers and close cooperators, then asked them to designate relevant people with whom to conduct additional interviews. In total, we interviewed 13 men and 10 women; including three interviews with two people at a time.

## Farm Contexts

This investigation spans rural contexts alternating between mixed farming and arable crop areas. Seine-et-Marne, where Toussacq is located, is the largest agricultural department of the Île-de-France region, comprising 336,000 hectares (ha) of utilised agricultural area (UAA). 85% of the farms grow arable crops and 50% of the cereal production is used for export (Seine-et-Marne 2017). Seine-et-Marne farms are rather large, averaging 146 ha, with an increasing proportion of non-family employees (Agreste 2011). The rate of land take for urbanisation reached almost 500 ha per year in this department between 2001 and 2010 (CDPENAF 2020). Despite a slowdown in recent years, pressures on land remain high.

Some 300 kilometres away, the Belêtre farm collective is located in the Indre-et-Loire department, in the Centre-Val de Loire region. Although part of a highly productive area for arable crops, which occupy 60% of the regional UAA, Indre-et-Loire hosts a more diversified agriculture than neighbouring departments with more specialised crops (wine and fruit crops) and a higher proportion of small and medium-sized farms (Agreste 2017). Farms are on average 70 ha, compared with over 90 ha and 100 ha in the neighbouring Loire-et-Cher and Indre departments (Agreste 2020). However, land remains a coveted asset, with a price increase of about 33% of prices between 2013 and 2019 (from €3720 per hectare in 2013 to €4970 in 2020) (SAFER 2020).

Finally, much further south, the Champ Boule farm is located in the Ariège department (Occitanie region). The Ariège landscape is a contrast of plains and mountains. Agriculture covers only 27% of the department's surface area, i.e. a UAA of 132,110 ha. Yet Ariège hosts a number of farms equivalent to that of Seine-et-Marne: 2,660 farms with an average size of nearly 50 ha (i.e. about 1/3 of the size of farms in Seine-et-Marne). 61% of the UAA consists of grassland, and the majority of farms raises



Figure 1. Localisation of investigated farms

grazing livestock. Agricultural land prices have been relatively stable in Ariège since 2012, although there is a difference between the plains, where prices are increasing, and the hillside and Pyrenean areas, where they are decreasing (SAFER Occitanie 2019).

	Toussacq	Belêtré	Champ Boule
<b>Localisation</b> - Region - Department - Municipality	Île-de-France Seine-et-Marne  Villenauxe-la-Petite	Centre-Val de Loire Indre-et-Loire  Dolus-le-Sec	Occitanie Ariège  Barjac
<b>Geographical characteristics</b> - Surface area - Maximum altitude - Climate - Protected areas	- <b>Surface area</b> <sup>a</sup> 20,81 km <sup>2</sup> - <b>Altitude</b> <sup>a</sup> 138 m - <b>Climate</b> temperate Atlantic  One type II protected area et one Natura 2000 site (27,643 ha) <sup>a</sup>	- <b>Surface area</b> <sup>a</sup> 27,27 km <sup>2</sup> - <b>Altitude</b> <sup>a</sup> 127 m - <b>Climate</b> modified temperate oceanic  Three type I and II protected areas and one Natura 2000 site (13,733 ha) <sup>a</sup>	- <b>Surface area</b> <sup>a</sup> 2,78 km <sup>2</sup> - <b>Altitude</b> <sup>a</sup> 603 m - <b>Climate</b> predominantly oceanic (mixed mountain)  One type II protected area, Pyrénées d'Ariège natural park <sup>a</sup>
<b>Demography and employment</b> - Number of inhabitants, density - Share of secondary residences - Proportion of working people - Unemployment rates - Share of workers employed outside of the municipality	 419 inhab., 20 inhab./km <sup>2</sup> (declining) <sup>a</sup> - <b>secondary residence</b> 9% <sup>a</sup> - <b>share of workers:</b> 75,9% <sup>a</sup> - <b>unemployment rate:</b> 8,6% <sup>a</sup> - <b>share of workers working outside of the municipality:</b> 82,8% <sup>a</sup>	 671 inhab., 25 inhab./km <sup>2</sup> (stagnating) <sup>a</sup> - <b>secondary residence</b> 8% <sup>a</sup> - <b>share of workers:</b> 81,5% <sup>a</sup> - <b>unemployment rate:</b> 7,7% <sup>a</sup> - <b>share of workers working outside of the municipality:</b> 79,9% <sup>a</sup>	 42 inhab. - 15 inhab./km <sup>2</sup> (increasing) - <b>secondary residence</b> 37% <sup>a</sup> - <b>share of workers:</b> 62,5% <sup>a</sup> - <b>unemployment rate:</b> 4,2% <sup>a</sup> - <b>share of workers working outside of the municipality:</b> 50% <sup>a</sup>
<b>Characteristics of farms</b> - department UAA - average size of farms - share of surfaces cultivated organically - number of farms - type of cultures - land prices	<b>UAA:</b> 336,000 ha <sup>b</sup>  - <b>farm size:</b> 146 ha <sup>b</sup> - <b>share of surfaces cultivated organically:</b> 4,1% <sup>b</sup> - <b>number of farms in 2000:</b> 3242, in 2010: 2780 <sup>b</sup> - <b>main cultures:</b> cereals, oilseed crops, sugar beets - <b>price per hectare in 2020:</b> €7090 <sup>b</sup>	<b>UAA:</b> 350,967 ha <sup>b</sup>  - <b>farm size:</b> 70 ha <sup>b</sup> - <b>share of surfaces cultivated organically:</b> 5,1% <sup>b</sup> - <b>number of farms in 2000:</b> 6775, in 2010: 4881 <sup>b</sup> - <b>main cultures:</b> cereals, oilseed crops - <b>price per hectare in 2020:</b> €4970 <sup>b</sup>	<b>UAA:</b> 132,110 ha <sup>b</sup>  - <b>farm size:</b> 49,6 ha <sup>b</sup> - <b>share of surfaces cultivated organically:</b> 23% <sup>b</sup> - <b>number of farms in 2000:</b> 3060, in 2010: 2660 <sup>b</sup> - <b>main cultures:</b> grazing livestock, cereals, oilseed/protein crops - <b>price per hectare in 2020:</b> €5440 <sup>b</sup> (€3620 in sub-Pyrenees region)
<b>Emploi agricole</b> - Share of salaried jobs provided by agriculture - Share of non-salaried jobs provided by agriculture	<b>Share of jobs provided by the agricultural sector (2019)</b> <sup>b</sup> - salaried jobs 0,43% - non-salaried jobs 5,4%	<b>Share of jobs provided by the agricultural sector (2019)</b> <sup>b</sup> - salaried jobs 1,28% - non-salaried jobs 13,04%	<b>Share of jobs provided by the agricultural sector (2019)</b> <sup>b</sup> - salaried jobs 0,96% - non-salaried jobs 22,52%

<sup>a</sup> at the scale of the municipality

<sup>b</sup> at the scale of the department

**Table 1. Comparing the three farm contexts**

Sources: INSEE 2019, INSEE 2020a.b.c., SAFER 2020, AGRESTE 2020a

Table 1 provides a comparative overview of the geographical, demographic, social and agricultural characteristics of the municipalities and departments in which the farms are located. Our survey allows for a more qualitative approach to the field reality, from which common characteristics emerge between the different territories.

### Bedroom communities and secondary homes: a mixed social context

The three municipalities are relatively small. Barjac (Champ Boule farm) is the smallest, with about 40 year-round inhabitants. With a high rate of second homes (Table 1), its population grows during the summer months. Yet summer residents are not very involved in the village life and, according to the testimonies collected, the ageing population is rather isolated. In both Dolus-le-Sec (Belêtre farm) and Villenauxe-la-Petite (Toussacq) the population is slightly larger. However, a large proportion of inhabitants commute to nearby towns and cities, as shown by the high proportion of residents working away from their home area (Table 1). Village life is therefore also reduced: the social fabric has deteriorated, shops have disappeared, few meeting places remain in the village centres, and the car and supermarket cultures seem predominant (even though practices are changing with the development of local community-supported agriculture [CSA] schemes). *“One of my observations is also that there is a disconnect between the people here and agricultural activities. We are surrounded by fields, by crops, but most of the inhabitants, including the children, have no idea what grows, who works in these fields! (...) most of the production is not used to feed the population, at least not directly.”* (Toussacq, FR6A/Int. 7). Nevertheless, being located in the area of influence of larger cities can also prove to be an advantage, particularly with regard to marketing: the Belêtre collective sells some of its bread in Tours while the CSA clients of Toussacq market gardeners are located in Paris-adjacent urban towns (Montreuil and Pontault-Combault). In addition, despite difficult social environments, some local dynamics exist: Lasserre, the hamlet neighbouring Barjac, hosts many newcomers and numerous pioneering new entrants settled in Ariège, the school in Dolus-le-Sec has nearly a hundred pupils and constitutes a hub of encounters between children and parents, and a support group composed of local inhabitants is being structured around the Toussacq farm.

## Low farming demographics, but strong agriculture influence on natural, socio-economic and political landscapes

In the three areas studied, agriculture represents a relatively small percentage of jobs (between 0.4% and 1% of salaried jobs, see Table 1). However, its economic weight remains significant: in Seine-et-Marne, agriculture brings around € 600 million in annual turnover and € 163 million in Ariège (Seine-et-Marne 2017, Midi-Pyrénées Chamber of Agriculture 2014). Agriculture is also omnipresent in natural landscapes: it maintains rural and mountainous spaces around Barjac, while in Villenauxe-la-Petite and Dolus-le-Sec, agricultural territories occupy more than 90% of the land surface (Corinne Land Cover 2018). Finally, farmers are strongly represented in local politics. In Dolus-le-Sec two members of the Belêtre collective are on the town council and a majority of the council is involved in the farm's CSA scheme. In Barjac and Villenauxe-la-Petite, the mayors are both retired conventional farmers. Such predominance of agriculture in the social, economic and political context could *a priori* constitute an asset for the establishment of new entrants. However, this is not always the case, as some pronounced divides exist in these contexts between old and new farmers. A former Seine-et-Marne elected official, close to the Toussacq farm collective, explains: *“local elected officials are conservative, as I said, and not so forward-looking. (...) in addition, the conservative elected representatives are often conventional farmers, very, very close to the Chamber of Agriculture, so they don't necessarily have this organic vision”* (Toussacq, FR6A/Int. 1). In Barjac, the collective is quite openly in conflict with the mayor. Even though there is a predominance of conventional and traditional farming in the study areas, we must mention that they coexist with well-established militant agricultural organisations and networks, e.g. presence of the local ADEAR and InPACT networks<sup>1</sup> in Ariège and Indre-et-Loire, or Champs des Possibles and the Abiosol network<sup>2</sup> in Île-de-France. These support networks for peasant organic agriculture have helped the farm collectives emerge.

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<sup>1</sup> The "Initiatives for a citizen and territorial agriculture" (InPACT) network brings together structures promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development at the national and department levels (local InPACT structures may not have the same membership as the national network).

<sup>2</sup> The Abiosol network brings together three organisations: the Champs des Possibles (CdP), Terre de Liens Île-de-France and the Île-de-France CSA network, with the aim of pooling these three organisations' resources, tools and skills to support candidates for setting up in organic farming.

To conclude, in the three areas studied, the economic, social and agricultural landscape is mixed. On one hand, the collectives have to deal with occasionally difficult social dynamics and draw on their own resources to bring about local changes. *“If we take the Lochois area, there is nothing that has made it easy for them, not at all. It would be very different today, eh, because they are an example, so we had no example at all, we had no reference point, they went looking for examples elsewhere in France”* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 14). On the other hand, we can also postulate that such declining contexts can offer advantages: less competition over marketing channels, willingness to welcome new populations, etc. In any case, we can hardly draw conclusions from our surveys on what contexts that are favourable or unfavourable to the emergence of agricultural collectives. When questioned on this issue, farmers themselves emphasised that the choice of a location to establish had been primarily a matter of opportunity, the presence of a farm to take over and of benevolent farm transferors seemed, at least in the cases studied, more crucial prerequisites to the emergence of collectives than the wider context.<sup>1</sup> This wider context, as we will see in the next section, does however influence the trajectories of emergence of collective farms and the shape they take.

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<sup>1</sup> Even in regions such as Ariège, where land prices are relatively low, farmers report a phenomenon of “land retention” by older farmers to continue receiving aid from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In these regions as well, being able to enter agriculture depends on the willingness of the sellers to pass on the land.

## Emergence trajectories of collective farms

### From the idea to the farm set up

In two of the cases studied (Belêtre and Champ Boule), the idea of setting up a farm collective was born through exchanges within groups of friends during university and their first professional experiences. A farmer from Champ Boule explains: *“The GAEC works because it is a group of friends, clearly. Then there's also the professional side, I like to work with people who work well. But basically, it's that we get along well too”* (Champ Boule, FR6A/Int. 18). Initial exchanges among friends enabled confronting different visions and building a shared idea of the farm collective-to-be. In Belêtre, the group of friends visited farms and met professional farmers to refine the criteria for a collective that would meet their aspirations: *“For three years we went to visit collective farms all over France. We spent 2, 3 or 4 days there. We asked people to welcome us, to explain how they worked, their history and everything. In exchange, we took part in the work so that it was a give and take. And that really helped us build our perspective on what setting up as a collective could be”* (Belêtre, FR6A/ Int. 11).

Friends belonging to the initial groups of Belêtre and Champ Boule, for the most part, established on farms, some collectively and some individually. It was often through their professional encounters and experiences that they identified the opportunity of a farm being transferred. Therefore, the initial collective imagination was overtaken by the field reality: as the groups changed, certain activities were transformed or left aside. *“At the beginning there were many more people and it was a much more heterogeneous project including housing, culture, people who perhaps wanted to have other jobs than farming and to be in this collective, and everything. And then it turned out that, in fact, the people who really took action, and then also, in fact, they made strong decisions! [...] 'Cause in fact they said to themselves: ‘well, that's nice, but actually here, we're ready. We've got to make a move, we've got to get in, to get a jog, to settle... We're not here to make your dreams come true for you”* (Champ Boule, FRA6A / Int. 16). Also, in both cases, the timeframe of establishment on the farm was not the same for the whole collective. In Belêtre, one person was initially

ready to establish and found an opportunity. As time went by, another person from the initial group of friends and two additional associates were added. Finally, the son of the farm transferor completed the group. At Champ Boule, two friends established themselves simultaneously on the farm being transferred. The spouse of one of them soon joined the collective as an associate; then two other members were added to the collective.

If in Belêtre and Champ Boule the desire for a collective preceded the entry in agriculture, in Toussacq, the idea of the collective was born gradually. At the beginning, the farm's owner, in connection with the île-de-France CSA network, formed the project of hosting a farm incubator in Toussacq. *“Ever since I was an activist in the CDJA<sup>1</sup>, when I was 32 years old, I think, I have always fought to find ways to get young people in agriculture, because it seemed obvious that, as the generations aged in agriculture, we were going to... there were fewer and fewer young people interested in the profession—the sons of farmers, many of them left. And for me it was part of my motivation to be able to facilitate the entry of new young people in agriculture”* (Toussacq, FR6A/Int. 2). Gradually, the Champs des Possibles (CdP)—a cooperative acting as a business incubator—took over the entire farm lease. In doing so, the CdP was faced with the need to make the production sustainable and profitable to generate a return on its investment on the farm. The cooperative decided to encourage long-term installation of formerly incubated farmers on the farm, by granting them the status of entrepreneurs salaried by the CdP. At the same time, the CdP continues to offer future farmers the opportunity to come and test farm activity on real scale in Toussacq. For this case, therefore, the collective is not necessarily a choice made by the farmers from the outset. Nevertheless the experience of testing an activity on a collective farm sometimes convinces trainees to join the association: *“What really convinced me was the people. In fact, I found it great to be permanently with other farmers, to have this living space, this kitchen where everyone meets, where we discuss, where we... well, I found that great, I didn't expect that, we were really looking at establishing on our own farm”* (Toussacq, FR6A/Int. 10). Thus, in Toussacq the desire to enter farming precedes the idea of a collective. Consequently, the trajectory of emergence of a group dynamic was longer and more variable on this farm.

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<sup>1</sup> Young farmers union

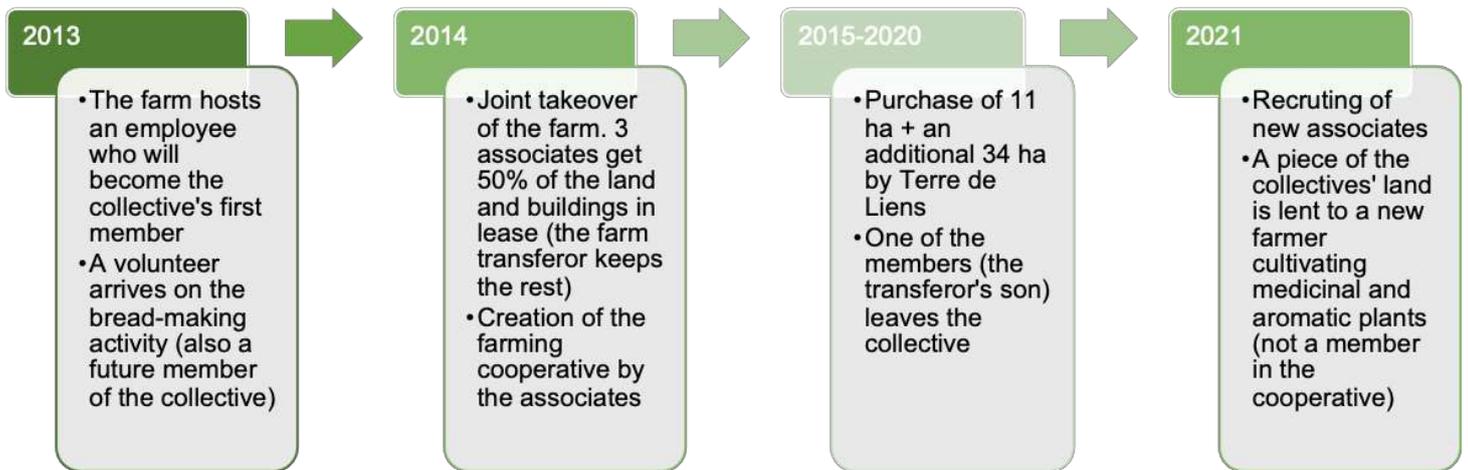


Figure 2. Chronology of the farm set up in Belêtre

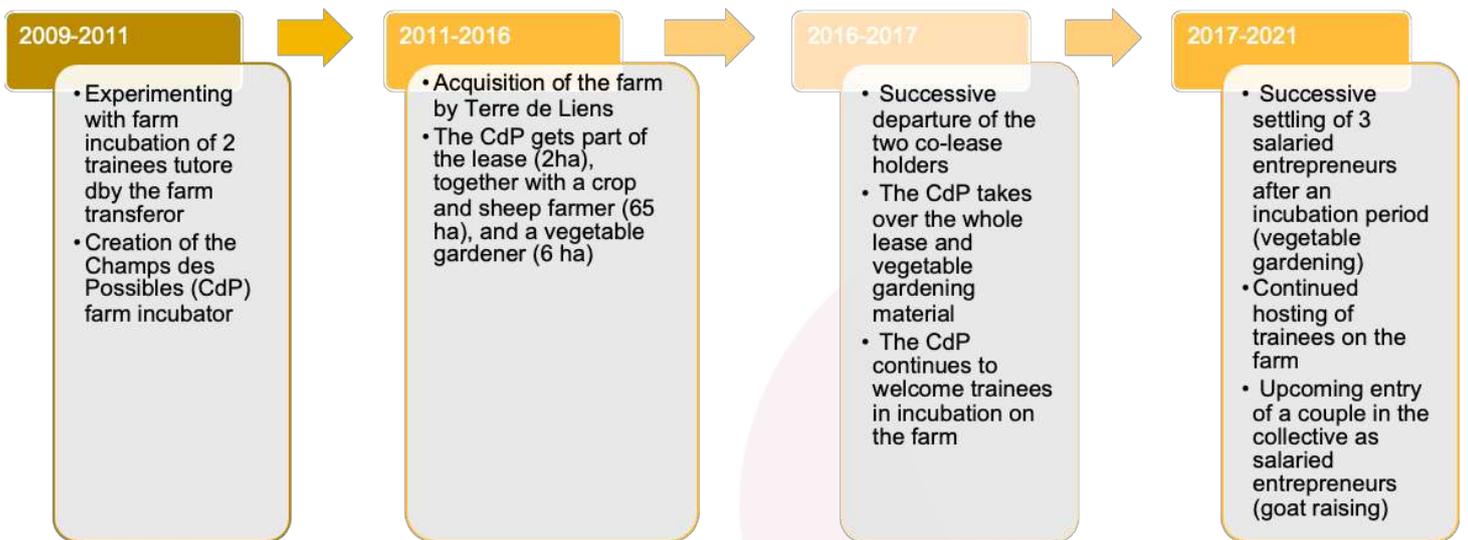


Figure 3. Chronology of the farm set up in Toussacq

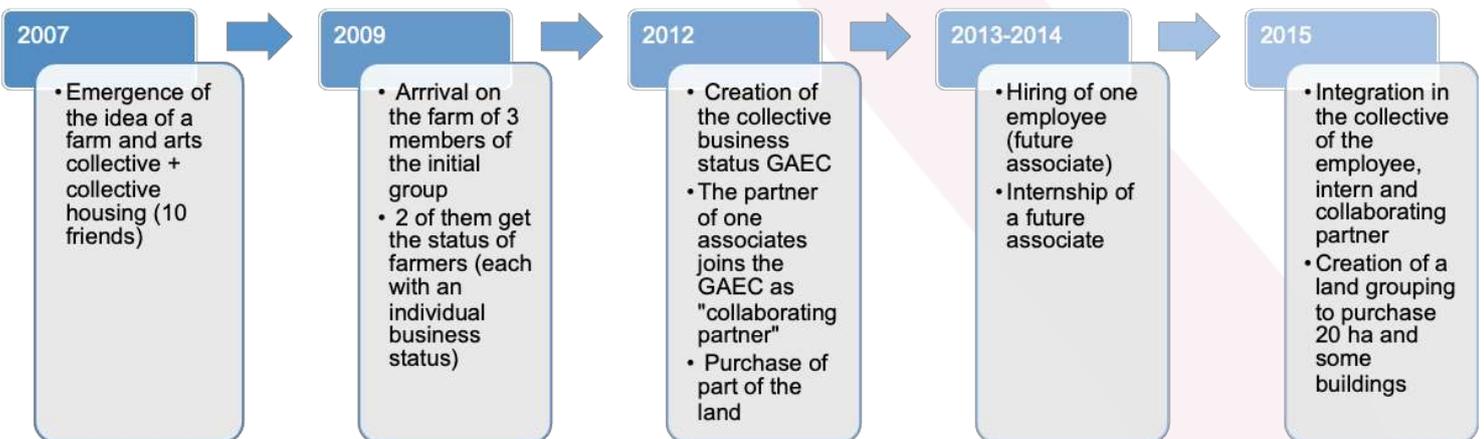


Figure 4. Chronology of the farm set up in Champ Boule

## Levers for collective installation

	Belêtre	Touss.	Cham.B.
Mobilisation of the local agricultural and territorial network	✓	✓	✓
Farm transferor as drivers of the establishment of a collective	✓	✓	✓
High socio-professional profiles for the members of the collective	✓	✓	✓
Existence of an external cooperative assuming responsibility for the lease and equipment		✓	
Counselling on human aspects and/or counselling on setting up in a collective	✓	✓	✓
Organic and peasant agricultural model pre-existing on the farm taken over by the collective	✓	✓	✓
Presence of extra-agricultural activities: promotes the link to the territory and the reputation of the farm	✓		✓
Sharing of responsibilities, mental workload, work	✓	✓	✓
Sharing of financial investment between associates	✓	✓	✓
Existence of a meeting place/convivial space on the farm	✓	✓	
Generational unity of the group and similar family situations (young children)	✓		✓

**Table 2. Comparison of enabling factors to establish as a farm collective**

In two of the cases, Belêtre and Champ Boule, the idea of the collective emerged during the future members' post-secondary education. This education—often in the fields of agriculture, biology or the environment—permits the acquisition of necessary skills and knowledge, experimentation, meeting multiple actors and the creation of the friendships and intellectual stimulation essential to building a multi-faceted collective (mixing social, cultural, environmental, agricultural aspects). To structure the collective, these groups have also called on external support, in particular to manage the human aspects of collective organisation (getting counselling from the *Tarn association for the development of group*

*agriculture* [ATAG] for Champ Boule or by the *Autrement Dit* training centre for Belêtre). In the case of Toussacq, some members also come from higher education backgrounds, but the establishment of the collective is made possible by the existence of the CdP external cooperative, which helps to bring together aspiring farmers and addresses material and economic aspects related to entering agriculture. A mix of personal skills and knowledge and external support, therefore, seems to facilitate this non-traditional agricultural installation. Thus, the future associates themselves create the main lever for their entry into farming. Furthermore, one of the fundamental factors for the emergence of these collectives was the support from the farm transferors. In the three cases studied, the farm's previous owners had already worked on the emergence of a new local agricultural model. In defending organic and peasant agriculture,<sup>1</sup> they had created fertile ground for the establishment of a new generation. The pioneering approach of these organic farmers, at a minimum, allowed local actors to observe new ways of doing things and, at best, to accept and subscribe to this new model. The land had already been converted to organic farming, the agricultural practices had already been tried and tested, and the clientele had already become loyal to it. This created, in part, favourable conditions for the new farmers: *"When we set up here, we suffered a little from isolation [...]. We were marginalised. The fact that we were organic at the time, the fact that we came from elsewhere... Whereas now there is a group, there is really a whole network"* (Champ Boule FR6A /Int. 19). Above all, by transferring their farms outside of their families, these pioneers have agreed to make way for a model that goes beyond simply changing farming practices to bring about social change in agriculture. Although they did not practise collective farming themselves, the transferors decided to trust these new entrants, who are vectors of innovation both in the way they practise agriculture and in how they embody the farming profession.

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<sup>1</sup> For a definition of "peasant agriculture", see the principles developed by the Federation of associations for the development of agricultural and rural employment: <https://www.agriculturepaysanne.org/Les-10-principes-politiques-de-l-Agriculture-paysanne>

## The obstacles to setting up a farm collective

	Belètre	Touss.	Cham.B.
Reluctance of the municipality against the collective			✓
Initial reluctance of some neighbouring farmers	✓		✓
The incubator status leads to many people entering and leaving the farm while testing farm activity and hinders the emergence of a “collective spirit”		✓	
Use of non-agricultural legal status: lack of recognition of institutions and/or impossibility to mobilise young farmer grants and other agricultural aids	✓	✓	
Unattractive immediate environment (social, environmental)	✓	✓	✓
Difficulty in finding housing in the immediate area		✓	✓
Management of the group requires time and/or support	✓	✓	

**Table 3. Comparison of hindering factors to establish as a farm collective**

The main obstacle to setting up in the rural areas studied is linked to the contexts described above. The development of organic farming is not always well perceived, and this is compounded by a new socio-economic model in which, on the same total land area, farming provides a living for up to five or six people instead of a single farming household (see figures 5 to 7). One farmer explains: *“because it is painful for farmers that their children do not take over [the family farm]. (...) So they will say: farming is no longer possible. So what we do, in fact, is not farming. So either you hear 'we're all receive the RSA<sup>1</sup> [minimum living allocation]', or 'we have money on the side, we came in with plenty of money'. Basically, we don't live on farming! And what's more, there are five of us on 40 hectares! Whereas everyone else has 150 ha on their own. So it's not possible, for them, it's not possible!”* (FR6A/ Int. 19).

<sup>1</sup> Revenu de solidarité active (or active solidarity revenue)

Collective farms generate relatively contrasting opinions among local actors. Their establishment is often met with scepticism, particularly from traditional farmers and institutions: refusal by the Barjac mayor to rent land and a residence to the Champ Boule collective, local judgment of the members of Belêtre as “oddballs”: *“let's say that at the beginning, it was a laughingstock. It was not going to hold up, they were originals, it wasn't serious, and then they were only on 19 hectares at the start with four associates”* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 15). For each of the three examples studied, we note a shift in these negative perceptions as the collective becomes integrated into the territory and “proves itself”. In Belêtre, a more positive view of the collective now seems to have taken hold in the local community. In Barjac and Villenauxe-la-Petite, a contrast persists between supporters and opponents. This divide is especially pronounced regarding Champ Boule, where there is a clear line between those in favour and those against the collective.<sup>1</sup> *“We figured out that it is every man for himself. We would have liked it to be a bit more cooperative [...]. Like, the supermarket is 10km away, so they don't need us. They actually don't care that we're there. On the other hand, they do care about the flies, the noise in the morning. That, they care about.”* (Champ Boule, FR6A/Int. 19). In Toussacq, the context is less divided, and the members of the collective are instead confronted with indifference and confusion: *“What I hear is that, um, the members of the farm are considered a bit as oddballs (...) the people in the plain, they judge the practices, no, they judge the Toussacquois in the sense that (...) they don't always have the codes of the rural world, the local world, and sometimes they make mistakes or they don't respect the unspoken rules of 'that's the way it's done'”* (Toussacq, FR6A/Int. 4).

Another obstacle inherent to the context is the difficulty in finding local housing and attractive places for new families, especially as most collective members are newcomers to the rural territories studied. Thus, the environment as a whole—the receptivity the local population, ease of finding housing, dynamism of the territory, openness to new agricultural practices—is a factor that influences farm collectives' form and activities.

Other obstacles to setting up collectives appear in our investigation, particularly concerning the human aspects of farming as a group. It takes time to establish common values and ways of working adapted to all. Daily organisation is necessary, and collectives must earmark time

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<sup>1</sup> A neighbouring farmer and an elected official refused to be interviewed.

for communication and decision-making. In the case of Toussacq, the status of the farm as a “business incubator”, where the lease, employment and investments are managed by the CdP cooperative, can create friction between the cooperative’s salaried team working outside the farm and the cooperative-employed farmers’ collective. For example, the selection of candidates for an incubation and test period hosted in Toussacq is carried out by the CdP cooperative council the members of the farm collective have no opportunity to offer input. It is also the cooperative as a whole that bears the risks linked to the hosting of trainees or apprentices, the hiring of employees and any public or children’s visit on the farm. This can create tensions regarding farmers’ latitude to manage their work places according to their desires. *“What about the farmers’ family? In any peasant way of life, there is a desire for the family to be involved. I remember that Amélie, with her little boy who was two or three years old, who would come with the goats or whatever, it’s true that he [the cooperative manager] said: yes, well, it’s problematic, because if there’s an accident, who’s responsible? Well yes, but at the same time, it was in her logic, the goat breeding, her child was part of it!”* (Toussacq FR6A/Int. 8). To provide a recent example: in 2020, to support a farmer undertaking test period in the bakery workshop, the CdP signed CSA contracts for bread sales and hired an apprentice.<sup>1</sup> When the farmer suddenly left, the cooperative had to find alternative ways of honouring these contracts. The existence of an external structure thus creates a complexity specific to the Toussacq farm, which must be managed over time: meetings and mediation between local and external teams are organised, and new operating methods forged, as obstacles arise. This experience is rich in lessons, and could support the spread of the model as territorial and citizen cooperatives in agriculture develop in France.

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<sup>1</sup> The recruitment of an apprentice for a two-year period was expressly requested by the incubated baker to reinforce the workforce available on the workshop.

## The farms today and their agricultural activities

### Legal models

This study allows the comparison of three different legal models dictating the organisation of agricultural collectives.

- **The Champ Boule GAEC**

The collective farm grouping or GAEC is without a doubt the most classic association structure in agriculture. It is a form of non-trading partnership designed to allow the joint exercise of an agricultural activity. A partner leaving the GAEC must obtain the approval of others to transfer his or her shares, which can be ensure group cohesion when associates enter or leave the partnership.

- **The Belêtre SCOP**

A cooperative and participative company or SCOP is a legal trading status, in contrast to the non-trading nature of the GAEC. The SCOP status guarantees the involvement of employees in the cooperative, as they equally share decision-making, risks and profits. Workers also hold the majority of the shares in the cooperative's capital (at least 51%) and 65% of the voting rights.

- **The Champs des Possible SCIC (Toussacq)**

The cooperative society of collective interest (SCIC) is also a legal trading status. The capital is held by members of the SCIC, which is governed by panels that, within the company, aim to join all actors concerned by the project (SCOP Coop 2021). There are at least three types of panels in an SCIC: beneficiaries, employees and another category chosen by the cooperative itself. In the case of the CdP, members belong to seven different panels: employees, counsellors, local authorities and public institutions, salaried entrepreneurs, citizens, farms and related structures, and technical and economic partners. The farmers in the CdP have two possible statuses: as incubated entrepreneurs associated with the cooperative via a "support contract for business setting-up" (*contrat d'appui au projet d'entreprise* [CAPE]) during the test period; or, often after a trial period, as salaried farm

entrepreneurs autonomous in the management of their agricultural activity (no tutoring or counselling via the cooperative, unlike for incubated entrepreneurs).

The type of operating structure chosen has many implications for the collectives in various areas: how the investment is managed, how entries and exits from the collective are organised, how land can be owned and transferred, etc. A detailed description of these legal aspects is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, it should be noted that there is a major difference between non-trading agricultural companies (GAEC) and trading companies (SCOP and SCIC). In a GAEC, members have the status of farmers and can benefit from the same economic and fiscal aid and advantages as other types of farms. Under the SCOP and SCIC schemes, on the other hand, members' status as employees prohibits them from accessing aid dedicated to agriculture, including the young farmer grant. Moreover, members may not "recoup" investments in the production tool financed by their work, since there is no capital gain on shares held in the company. Investments for equipment and other aspects of the farm is financed by the profits of the cooperative, which retains ownership of the tool to ensure its durability. These legal forms are not widely used in agriculture, but there is increasing discussion about their adaptation to the sector, as they have many benefits (Confédération Paysanne 2020). Among the relevant advantages are facilitating farm entry by limiting debts and granting producers the status of salaried employees. The latter implies that producers pay social security contributions but, in exchange, benefit from better social protections than other farmers, such as unemployment rights and higher retirement pensions, etc. This arrangement is necessary to compensate for the fact that farmers will not be able to sell the farm and material to finance their retirement; on the other hand, it is a highly promising change in a context marked by the overcapitalisation and increasingly difficult transfer of farms. In 1988, the average farm cost €250,000. Nowadays, it is around €376,000 (excluding inflation) (APCA 2015). Thus, in thirty years, the capital required for an average farm has increased by over 50%. While the average capital required to set up a farm is increasing, the gap between money invested and income generated is widening: to generate €1 of income, French farms required €7 of capital in 1993; this same figure is €10 in 2013 (APCA 2015).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> APCA study based on 2013 data from a sample of 7,300 professional farms, all sizes and orientations combined.

	Toussacq	Belêtre	Champ Boule
<b>Legal model</b> 	Cooperative company of Collective Interest (SCIC)	Workers' cooperative (SCOP)	Collective farm grouping (GAEC)
<b>Surface</b> 	73 ha	64 ha	42.5 ha + 20 ha mountain pasture (summer)
<b>Farmers</b> 	3 salaried farm entrepreneurs (2 more to join), 2 incubated farmers, 1 salaried farmworker (5 men, 2 women)	4 SCOP members (1 to 2 future associates to join), 1 farmer hosted on the land (3 men, 4 women – if a mixed gender recruitment is confirmed)	5 members of the GAEC (4 men, 1 woman)
<b>Productions</b> 	Market gardening; cereals; poultry and goat raising (upcoming); sheep raising	Market gardening; cereals; aromatic and medicinal plants (by a farmer hosted on the cooperative's land)	Market gardening; sheep, cattle and pig raising
<b>On-farm processing</b>	Bread making; goat cheese (upcoming) ; canning and lacto-fermentation (upcoming)	Flour milling; bread making	Cheese and milk products (yogurt, etc.)
<b>Labels</b> 	AB (organic label)	AB, Nature & Progrès (organic and additional environmental responsibility label)	AB (organic label)
<b>Agricultural buildings</b> 	- 2 warehouses (1 made of bricks, housing storerooms) - 1 polyvalent building (meeting room, kitchen, store, bakery, cheese-making lab, canning and processing lab)	- 1 warehouse - mixed farm houses and buildings (CSA workshop, bakery, office...) - stable	- 1 warehouse (with the cheese-making lab inside) - sheep houses - stable
<b>Marketing</b> 	CSA, farm store, markets	CSA, organic stores, producer stores, school cafeteria (for bread)	Farm boxes, markets, organic stores

Table 4. "ID Card" of the three farms

## Diversified farms with high added value productions

The three farms host diversified production, with mixed farming and livestock for Champ Boule and Toussacq, and market gardening and cereal crops for Belêtre.<sup>1</sup> Collective installation requires work on the economic model of the farms, which, as illustrated by the diagrams of the farms before and after transfer (figures 5 to 7), go from providing a living for one or two people to sustaining four to six active people. Although high-value-added farm models are not integral to collectives, maximising economic efficiency becomes even more important when the production on a given area must support satisfactory incomes for all involved.

The collectives' strategies to add production value include:

- **The choice of proximity marketing channels:** selling through CSAs, producers' shops, local organic shops, or in markets limits the number of intermediaries, reduces transport and distribution costs, and allows prices to be set more freely.
- **Adding value through on-farm processing:** the production of dairy products, bread and preserves on the farms requires an initial investment in equipment and buildings, but allows for a better use of the raw materials and, in some cases, even for the use of unsold produce (canned vegetables).
- **Mutualisation strategies around work:** the three farms have implemented systems of on-call duties (deliveries or weekend work, for example) and mutualisation to share the load and improve work efficiency.

In addition, the collectives studied also favoured low-entry-cost models by renting rather than acquiring land (or gradually acquiring land in the case of Champ Boule), exchanging or pooling equipment with neighbours, and have mobilised public aid (social and solidarity economy aid for Toussacq and Belêtre, agricultural aid for Champ Boule). These choices free the collectives from heavy and long-term bank loans: *“For me, something that seems very, very important is that from the outset, this collective wanted to free itself from bankers, and in particular from contracting loans. So that obviously goes against what we hear, what we see, and what we practice in general”* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 15). The farms' economic success is exemplified by members' earnings, equivalent to a minimum wage or more in all three

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<sup>1</sup> Belêtre also hosts an aromatic and medicinal plant business, managed by a person who is not part of the cooperative but to whom the associates are lending land.

cases. In the case of Champ Boule and Belêtre, there is a strong desire to tailor production, not only to reach a satisfactory income but also to maintain a reasonable work schedule. For example, in Belêtre, the farmers decided not to increase the number of vegetable baskets sold in the CSA; within Champ Boule, the number of associates increased from three to five people to reduce individual working hours.<sup>1</sup>

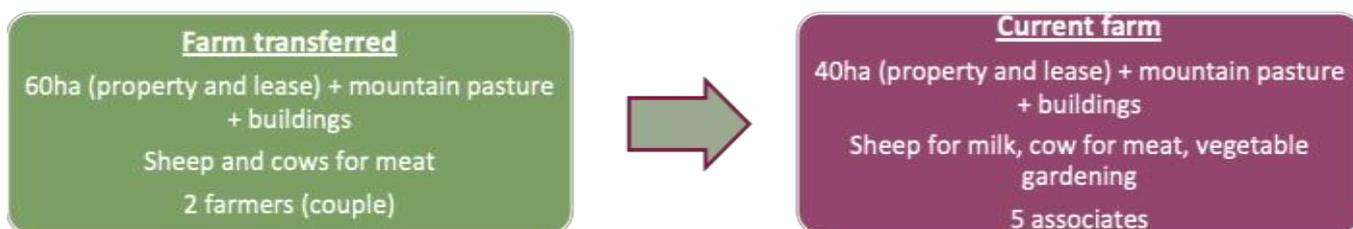


Figure 5. Champ Boule before and after farm transfer



Figure 6. Toussacq before and after farm transfer

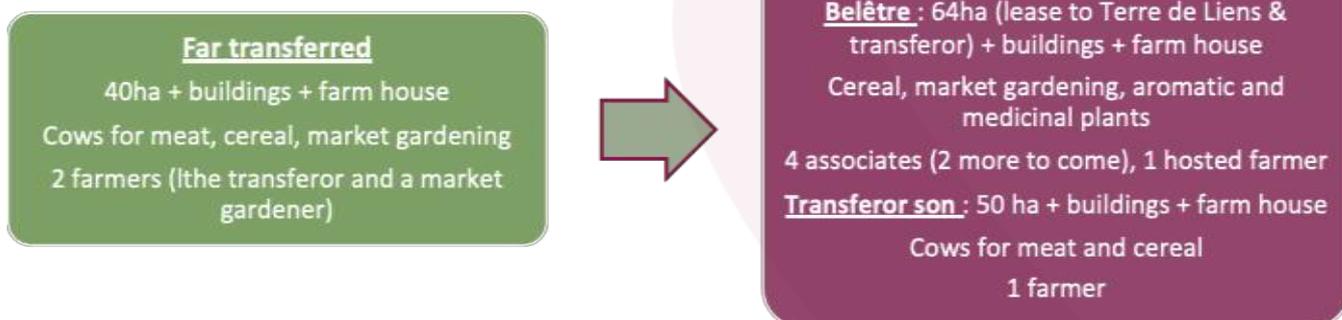


Figure 7. Belêtre before and after farm transfer

<sup>1</sup> The associates' level of remuneration remained the same after the addition of these new members, as the farm achieved a reduction in losses and a managed to better value the production.

## From production assets to labour: diverse degrees of mutualisation on collective farms

As we have seen, mutualisation and solidarity issues are central to collective schemes in agriculture. We can nonetheless deepen the description of how collectives mutualise, which they do in different areas and to various degrees.

With regard to production assets, in the three cases studied, ownership of the land is mutualised through collective purchase mechanisms used for all or part of the land. Champ Boule created an agricultural land group (or *Groupement foncier agricole* [GFA])<sup>1</sup>, while Toussacq and Belêtre are renting all or part of their land from the Terre de Liens (TDL) solidarity land company.<sup>2</sup> Other production assets such as equipment and buildings are also largely shared, but management of these varies from farm to farm. At Belêtre and Champ Boule, the members have decision-making power on investments and bear costs jointly. In Toussacq, mutualisation is organised by the CdP cooperative, which holds all the production assets (land lease, buildings, equipment) and re-invoices farmers to divide the costs. Thus, in this second case, mutualisation is more “formalised” through the involvement of an external structure: it implies, for example, regulations regarding the use of common areas and materials, accounting for the distribution of costs between farmers and decision-making processes involving the cooperative’s council for certain costly investments.

Farms also adopt various strategies to mutualise the work itself. At Champ Boule, the collective emphasises the versatility of all associates. Each one must be able to take turns conducting all the workshops, except for more specialised tasks such as cheese-making. The members of the collective have common schedules and the work on the farm can be adapted to the rhythms production dictates: for example, a reduction in market gardening activities during the lambing period (Chambre d'agriculture Occitanie 2019), during which only one associate at a time takes care of market sales. In Belêtre, the model is somewhat similar: an on-call schedule is established for certain activities for which the farmers take

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<sup>1</sup> A GFA is a civil company specific to agriculture. It was created in the 1970s to encourage the transfer of family farms by favouring the transfer of shares in a company rather than assets. This legal form has evolved considerably and can also be used in mutual land holding arrangements.

<sup>2</sup> TDL is a French organisation created in 2003 to favour the establishment of a new generation of peasants. One of the tools developed by TDL is collecting citizen investment to purchase land through a private company limited by shares (Ltd), called “La Foncière”. Land held by La Foncière is then rented to farmers with sustainable agricultural and agri-rural projects via long-term leases.

turns (delivery, distribution of the CSA, etc.). The associates divide up other tasks that benefit the group, such as administration or liaising with retailers. Associates regularly compare their “job description” sheets listing their tasks and trade away those they no longer wish to perform. Beyond these more general duties, however, job division is relatively specialised, as each member is dedicated to a specific activity and associates’ schedules can be different: *“We work about forty hours a week, with very, very different rhythms from one to the other”* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int.12). In these two farms, the mutualisation of work is coupled with pooled incomes from farm activities. In Toussacq, each person is responsible for his or her own activity and the mutualisation of work is more circumstantial, involving occasional help to one another. Some specific activities are mutualised: the three market gardeners jointly plant potatoes or and some of the collective members, but not all, take turns running the farm shop. Remuneration is also individual, as each producer essentially maintains their own marketing channels (except for those who market jointly at the farm shop).

In addition to these central aspects concerning work and production assets, the mutualisation that takes shape within the collectives can cover a wide range of areas: mutualisation of knowledge and know-how, of human and technical support, of supporter networks, of housing, etc. (Vanwelde & Dumont 2021). The analysis of the three farms tends to show that the degree of collaboration chosen is a compromise between individual freedom and collective efficiency. Indeed, in Belêtre and Champ Boule, mutualisation implies renunciation of personal liberty. Some projects and experimentations are clearly restricted in order to favour the overall balance of the farm: *“As an individual, I think that there are many things in our collective that can make one feel a little deprived of freedom (...) you can't decide too much on your own to do a thing. And at the same time, that's what makes us so efficient today, I think. Because in fact the things that are perhaps not profitable, not efficient, have been pushed to the back burner as we have put hourly efficiency and work comfort at the top of the list. Free time, remuneration. We said, in fact, that these are the things that take precedence over everything. And sometimes it can be upsetting, but, at the same time, when you stop in the evening and you don't need to continue working because it's all done, it's really cool. In fact, there's nothing... There's always a flip side to the coin”* (Champ Boule FRA6/ Int. 16). In Toussacq, the members of the collective explain that they do not feel ready to make such concessions and want to keep their freedom in the workshops:

*"It's a very pragmatic approach to the collective and I like it a lot. It's much more secure and solid over time. Because if we put everything together, and it doesn't work (...) The important thing is not to succeed at all costs in cultivating together, or doing this together just because the collective, in its definition, in people's imagination, means you have to work in this way! We don't care what people say. What we want is for us to get there and to feel good with it, you know."* (Toussacq, FRA6/ Int. 3). This individual freedom, however, translates into working significantly longer hours than on the other farms studied.

In conclusion, it seems that there is no ideal formula for mutualising. Rather, it is a matter of agreeing as a group on the model best suited to each person's aspirations: *"I'm not sure that we can actually impose the collective on people. I mean, rather, I'm sure we can't. But on the other hand, we can propose things on a variable scale according to what each person wants to experience. Because us, we want to share everything, but we can see that there are lots of people who see it and say 'eh, no', you know. So I have the impression that we have to remain open about the degree of mutualisation"* (Belêtre FRA6/ Int. 12).

### Innovative aspects related to setting up as a collective

A number of innovative aspects are linked to farming as a collective. Innovation is rarely a linear or solitary process; the exchange of ideas between peers is sometimes central to its emergence, as is the mobilisation of wider networks (Murtagh et al. 2020). In the case of collectives, group functioning favours innovation: *"The fact that there are several of us, that we are very different, that we each have our own way of seeing things, well, we don't stay with something fixed and unchanging, you know. Sometimes when you're on your own, you do something that doesn't suit you but... you don't see how to get out of it. It's certain that working with others is nourishing. It makes you move forward, it makes you innovate, it gets you out of certain patterns"* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 12). Among the innovative aspects of the farms, we can distinguish:

- **Legal and statutory innovation:** two farms (Toussacq and Belêtre) have 'hijacked' legal trading statutes for agricultural use. As we have seen, the choice of these legal forms is motivated in part by the improvement of social working conditions in agriculture. On the other hand, these choices are associated with innovative and committed reflections on issues of heritage and transmission. The associates of Belêtre this clearly justify the choice of

the workers cooperative (SCOP) model as a means of promoting farm transfer and sustainability of the production asset: *“With €50, you become an associate, salaried, co-manager, and you have the same income as us... So, if we really want to renew the generations in agriculture, then that's what we need. You have to ask people for €50. So, those who arrive, for them, the SCOP is not bullshit! Economically, it's great! And all those who will come afterwards! Because the production asset is there, there's no need to buy it, and... there are reserves in the company, there's self-financing capacity, even if the asset has to be improved, it always has to be improved a bit. So economically, it's very relevant for those who arrive.”* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 11).

- **Organisational innovation:** the collectives introduce organisational methods that strongly distinguish them from family farms. This may involve innovation in the organisation of farm workshops (Pluvinage 2011), often designed to produce synergies between different activities (e.g. work on the farm 'circularity' of farm work: reuse of waste, processing of unsold produce, etc.). However, the most innovative aspect is undoubtedly the conscious choice of a governance model, arising from the need for group of individuals without family ties to work together. On the farms studied, this involved setting up specific meeting methods, creating work management tools (planning, recording of hours, etc.), developing decision-making procedures, prioritising (explicitly or implicitly) the group's desires, setting up counselling sessions, and so on. Several interviewees noted that the time devoted to group organisation and human aspects on these farms is incomparable to that in traditional agricultural operations: *“To reflect on how we did, how we could have done better, and how we are going to do it, rather than doing, nah, it's not at all part of the farming culture to take, I don't know, it's 10%, no like 20% [of their time on this] they told me (... ) it's unheard of for people to do so much upstream training, to take such good care of each other, to take care of making assessments”* (Belêtre FR6A/Int. 14).

- **Innovations in the relationship to the farming profession:** closely linked to the question of 'doing things together' and of the governance models is the question of the farming profession 'vision' the collectives uphold. The choices of operating methods and priorities are linked to a value system which is sometimes strongly asserted, for instance through the adoption of a common charter (Belêtre and Champ Boule). We can distinguish the following major areas of innovation with regard to the relationship to the farming profession:

**1) Relationship to working time:** in Belêtre and Champ Boule in particular, we observe the implementation of time monitoring tools and deliberate efforts to reduce working time (defined schedules, 35- to 40-hour weeks, five annual weeks of holidays): *“I more or less work 4.5 days a week and one weekend out of three over the year. That's 35 hours, a good 35 hours, because after that, there are always little things that come up. And we try to have six weeks of holidays, but we don't really manage to do that. And there are people who have already taken three or four months here and there.”* (Champ Boule, FR6A/Int 18.) Additionally, both farms decided, at some point, to count associates' time devoted to external commitments as working hours, whether it constitutes voluntary work for agricultural and rural organisations or for organisations outside agriculture (culture, education, etc.).

**2) Relationship to assets and property:** refusal of individual ownership, investments held by a cooperative (no building of assets with notions of future resale), attention paid to the transferability of the farm... *“I'm not from the farming world, so I don't have... like many new entrants in the agricultural world, actually, we don't have this generational spirit, with the mindset, perhaps, of ‘the land, the land, the wealth of goods, the thingy’ (...) it's a pressure, eh, to be an owner, to have your own tools. And then, in the end, it's a bit of a morbid capitalisation because you hope to get a fortune at the end of your life, I don't know, a fortune which, for me, is completely utopian because the material, after 20 years, is worth nothing. There's not much that's worth anything. And to go through the Champs des Possibles, it means capitalising on... Well, I'd rather capitalise on an asset that will be useful to the next generation than capitalise on myself, which, in my opinion, is a bad calculation, eh!”* (Toussacq, FR6A/Int 5.)

**3) Vision and embodiment of the profession:** considering agriculture as a vocation and also as a profession that can be entered and exited more easily, providing oneself with social protection, placing specific values at the centre of the profession (self-management, links to the territory and to citizens, etc.), promoting models of agriculture that serve society and the environment, etc. The collectives' members emphasise that developing associates' versatility and looking after animals or land together fundamentally change their practice of farming, a profession still often viewed through perspectives of heritage (“my cows”, “my vegetables”). One could study the

hypothesis that this paradigm shift also requires a transition from emotional attachment to production assets toward attachment to the values underlying production (human values, bonding, sharing, etc.).

Some of the aspects observed in these farms—such as placing values of horizontality, self-management or sociocracy at the centre of production—are not new if we consider the functioning of workers' cooperatives more generally. However, the fact that these values are applied to the agricultural profession, in collectives with productive ambitions, is innovative. Stakeholders we interviewed consider extending these innovations to family farming a valuable idea. Family farming indeed remains a majority-controlled arena which, without reflection on its modes of operation, can reproduce relationships of domination and exploitation which the necessary evolution of agricultural structures that promote generational renewal.

## Actors, synergies and networking

In the first part of this study, we deepened the analysis of the trajectories and activity of the farms. We are now interested in the collectives' interactions with external actors and wider networks. The maps of actors produced for the three farms (Figures 8 to 10) distinguish several categories of interactions: with supporting organisations (agricultural and rural development organisations, legal or economic counselling entities) and political organisations (unions), with landowners and land holding structures and with territorial actors (citizen interactions and relations with farmers or regarding aspects related to production).

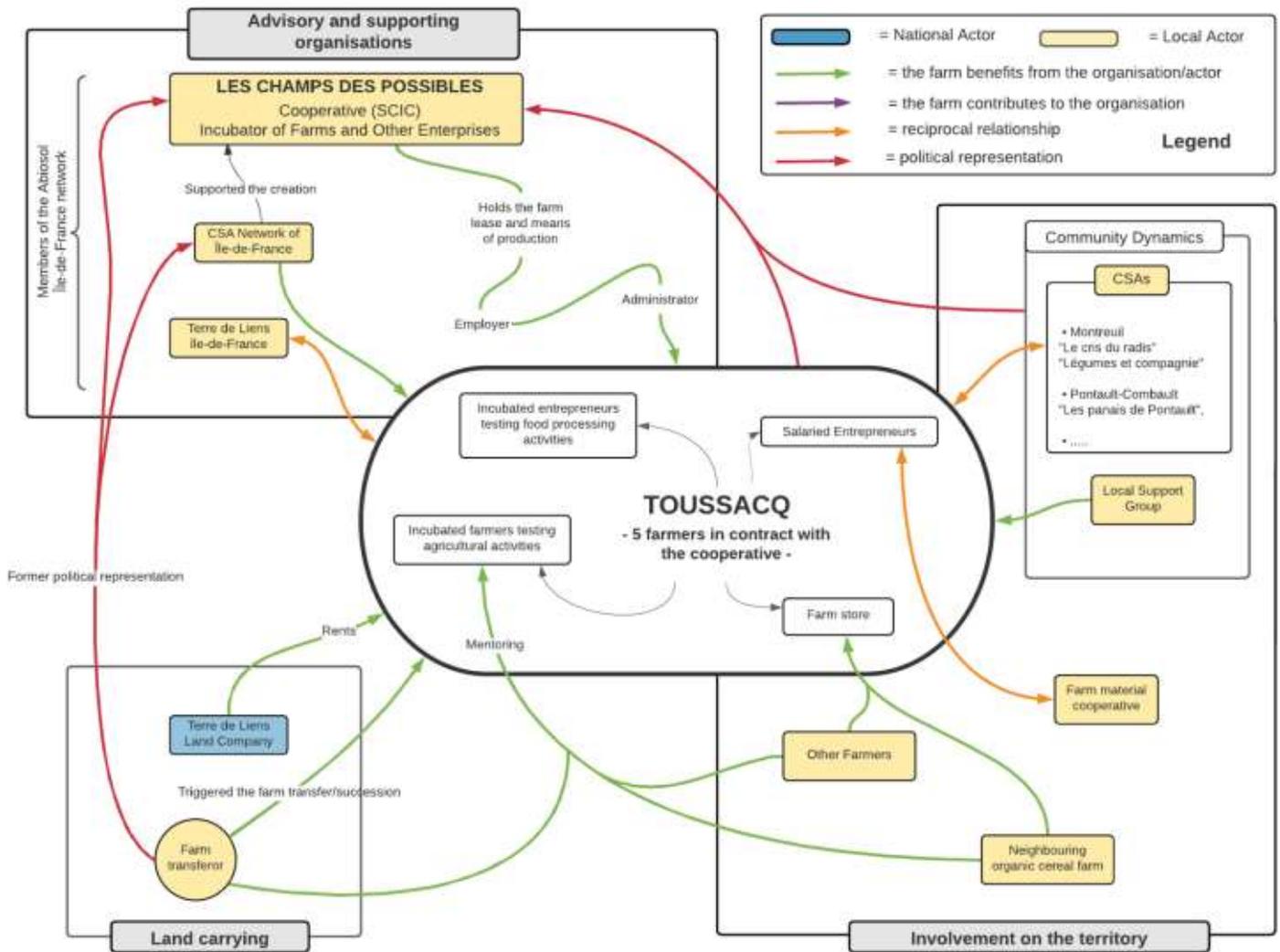


Figure 8 . Cartography of actors around the Toussacq farm

D5.2 30 CASE STUDIES ON RURAL NEW COMERS, NEW ENTRANTS TO FARMING AND SUCCESSORS

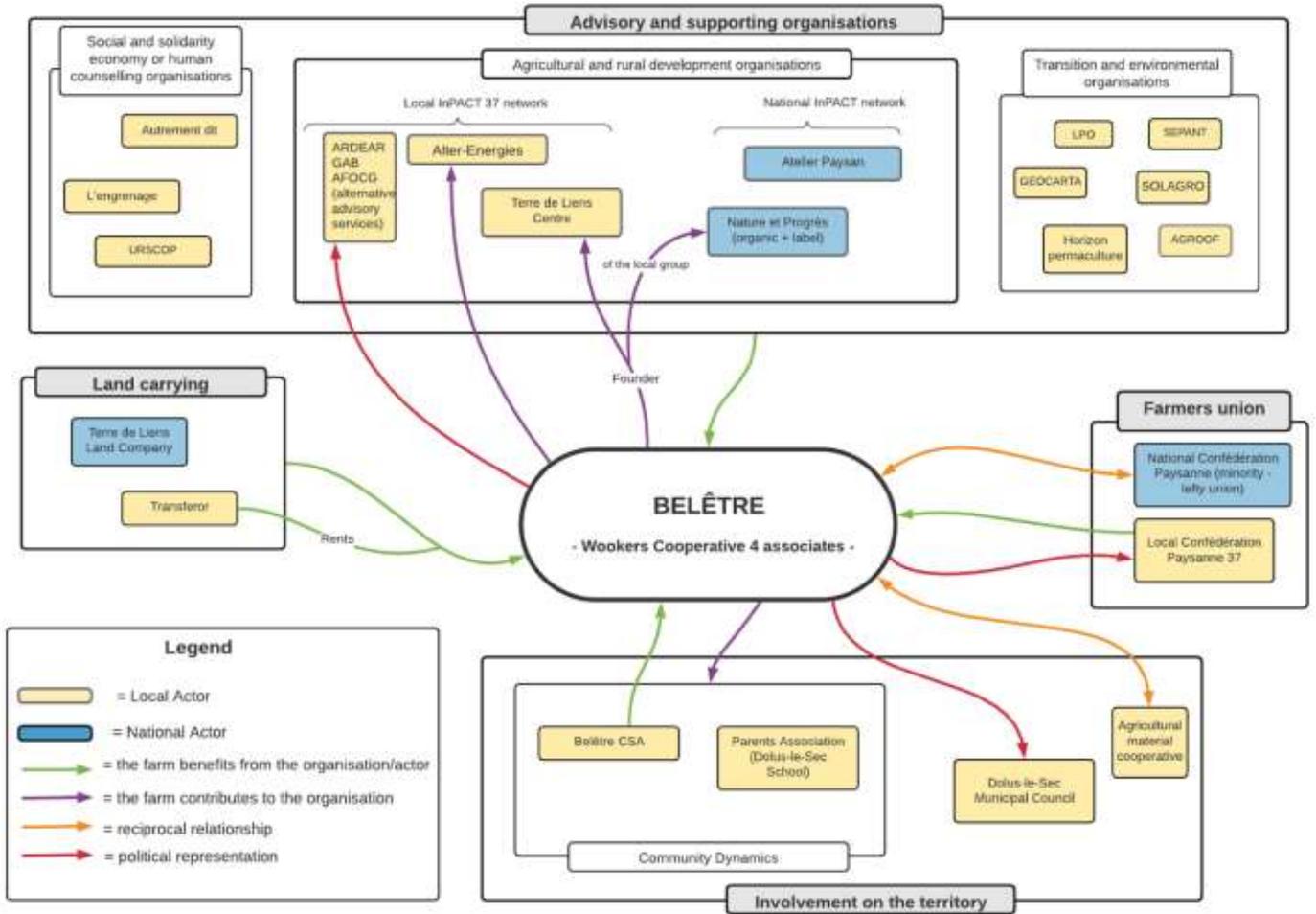


Figure 9. Cartography of actors around the Belêtre farm

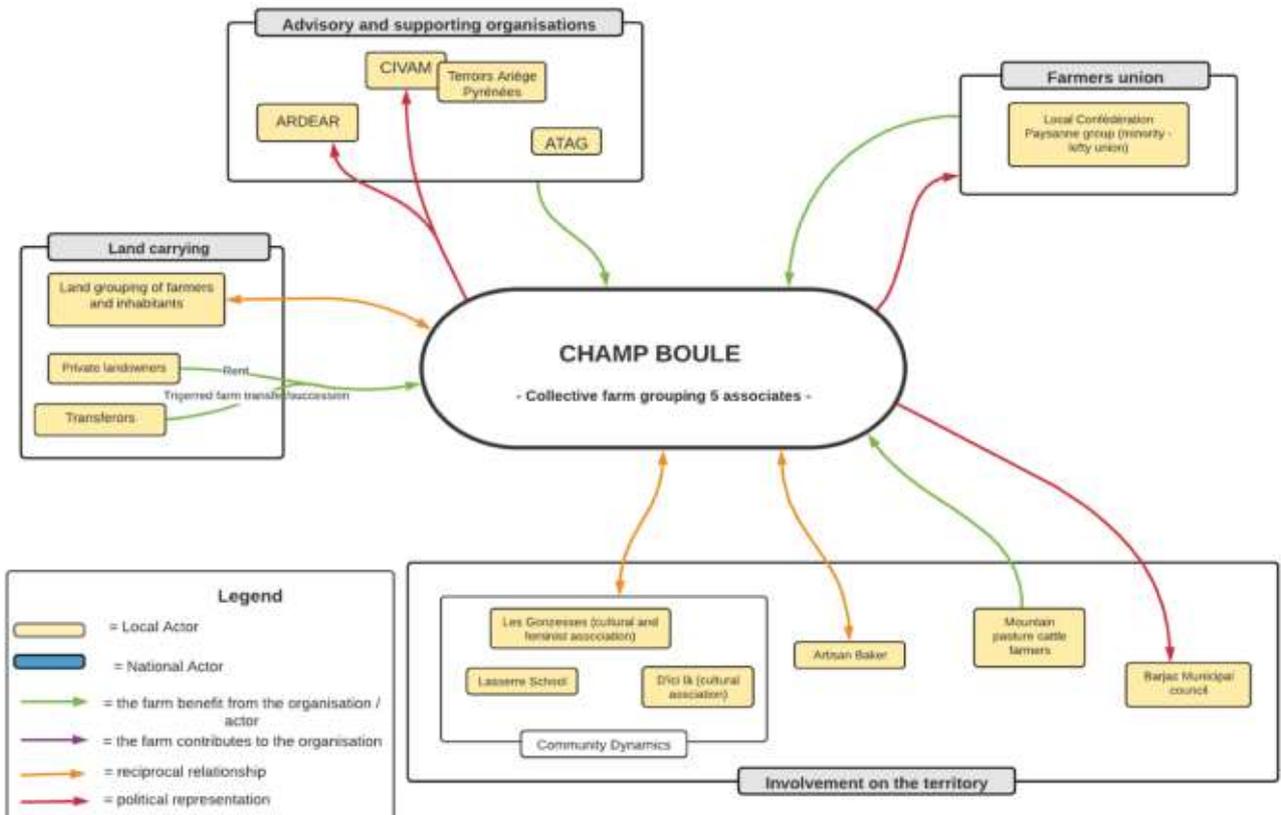


Figure 10. Cartography of actors around the Champ Boule farm

## Local citizen dynamics and non-agricultural activities

On the three farms studied, numerous interactions with citizens exist and nourish a reciprocal exchange. On one hand, the farms contribute to the territory 1) by the investment of the collective's members in local organisations, 2) by welcoming visitors on the farm and fostering social links, and 3) by and contributing to changing practices and mentalities around agriculture and food. On the other hand, citizens invest in the farms in the following ways: 1) participation in marketing, 2) support to farm development, 3) "political" and moral support, or support to the collective's local integration.

The members of Belêtre have outlined as a strong priority forging links with the territory. Some associates or their spouses are involved in the municipal council and local school Parents association. The farm has become such a dynamic place that it inspires the creation of other meeting venues in the area: *"There is the idea of creating a space for social life in Dolus. But we told ourselves that, strategically, it shouldn't come from here. Because the point is to create other places for socialising in Dolus, beyond Belêtre. Plus it's not in the town, and we don't reach everyone. So, we told ourselves, well no, if there's a social space, it's better that... it can be people from here but it's better to try and make it a dynamic that comes from elsewhere"* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int.12). Moreover, these exchanges lead to a change in food practices: *"At the beginning, very few people from Dolus were in the CSA. And today there are... I don't know, I don't have a count, but... It's maybe at least a quarter, maybe a third. (...) when spots for new CSA members become available, we bring people in not according to their order of arrival on the waiting list, but according to their geographical proximity to the farm, in order to relocate as much as possible and to continue forging links like this"* (Belêtre FR6A/ Int. 11). CSA members and the farm associates hold majority voices in the Dolus-le-Sec municipal council and fight hand-in-hand for local changes—e.g. offering bread from the farm and homemade vinaigrette at the school cafeteria. In addition, the CSA members become involved on the farm in various ways: helping with vegetables picking, preparing and distributing the boxes, participating in a "cultural commission" to organise events, etc.

At Champ Boule, the collective is also involved in the local social life. They participate in cultural associations, organise festive events (markets, concerts, shared meals), organise the sale of vegetable boxes on the farm... In return, the farm benefits from an increased

clientele and local support *"around Lasserre, Barjac, Tourtouse, Fabasse, roughly a 10 km radius, we make €500 to €600 of vegetables every week, it's quite... commercially, it's not nothing. And then, humanly speaking, it's people who are almost all acquaintances or friends. Well, in a nutshell, it's very rich"* (Champ Boule - FR6A/Int. 16). These synergies do not, however, exempt farms from local conflicts, as briefly mentioned above. In Champ Boule this manifests particularly with the mayor and some elected officials, with whom the collective disagrees about representation on the municipal council and certain projects (e.g. creation of an 80-space parking lot for a commune of 40 inhabitants).

As far as Toussacq is concerned, relationships with the immediate surroundings are less developed. This farm has the specificity of maintaining strong links with more distant citizen communities, notably CSA communities located in the urban areas of Montreuil and Pontault-Combault (80-100km from the farm). CSA members organise participatory work on the farm, convivial moments, and support the producers when necessary. Toussacq is also a hosting place for training sessions or seminars organised through the Abiosol Île-de-France network. Locally, we can observe the development of clientele for the farm shop and more and more young people from the local area are hosted on the farm for training courses or apprenticeships. Finally, a local participative group was created involving CdP incubated entrepreneurs from the cooperative's branch for tertiary sector, who are planning to further develop farm visits and events in Toussacq (educational activities, cultural events, etc.).

## Integration in agricultural and rural development networks

Beyond citizen dynamics, another important dimension of synergies around collective farms concerns agricultural and rural networks. This study comments on three important aspects: relations with neighbouring farmers (often linked to the exchange of services and equipment), knowledge exchanges on the farms, and alliances or interactions with agricultural and rural development structures.

In all the cases studied, the collectives interact effectively with neighbouring farms. For example, Belêtre and Toussacq are involved in local cooperatives mutualising agricultural equipment. The Belêtre associates have also approached several neighbours to exchange or rent equipment and hire services. This enabled them to forge links with the local agricultural

community. Exchanges with neighboring farms also concern processing and marketing. For instance, the cereals from Toussacq are transformed into flour at the Chaillois farm located 21 km away. The sales areas at Toussacq and Champ Boule feature goods from neighbouring producers and craftspeople (honey, flour, bread, etc.). Finally, Champ Boule associates have supported the installation of a neighbouring snail farmer by giving him access to a building and land. Once again, however, antagonisms may exist. For example, the Belêtre associates were in conflict with a local cereal farmer who sprayed pesticides on fields bordering their farm. Champ Boule is now at odds with the snail farmer who is retiring and wants to sell his farm to the highest bidder, instead of favouring a new entrant.

Concerning the exchange of knowledge, this can be organised with established farmers. For example, in Toussacq, technical tutoring of the incubated farmers is provided by other, more experienced farmers. It seems however that knowledge exchange is mainly performed with communities of new entrants and specialised organisations. The three collectives are involved in training a new generation of farmers by taking on apprentices, wwoofers, and trainees. Belêtre also takes part in training courses to share its experience (e.g. “The SCOP status” or “Setting up as a collective” training) and develops numerous synergies with researchers and study organisations. For instance, mapping the farm's soils with GéoCarta, elaborating an agroforestry development plan with an intern from Agroopf, working with Horizon Permaculture and Solagro on the farm's climatic and environmental impact, elaborating low-tech agricultural machinery prototypes with Atelier Paysan, etc. The farms are therefore a resource for the development of new knowledge and know-how.

Finally, all farms are supported by advisory organisations, generally from pro-agroecology and pro-peasant networks—i.e. different from traditional advisory networks formed by agricultural chambers and majority farmer unions—which provide them with technical and human counselling. Belêtre and Champ Boule associates also assume representation functions within these networks, e.g. acting as administrators of InPACT network organisation or within the Confédération Paysanne farmers union.<sup>1</sup> Through this, the members of the collectives contribute to agri-rural projects and advocacy for the development of a peasant and ecological agriculture. Belêtre has the particularity of

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<sup>1</sup> The Confédération Paysanne is a lefty and pro-peasant farmers union, which has protested against the dominant position held by the two majority unions (Young Farmers and National federation of farmers unions)

maintaining relations with national networks (the national Confédération paysanne and InPACT network), which attests to the farm's strong political ambition and desire to facilitate the duplication of their experience.

The synergies we described, whether with the local or the agricultural community, take time to build and are based on a conscious effort by the collectives to open up. Such synergies can of course crystallise in a similar fashion around regular farms. Nevertheless, the collective is a definite lever to free up time for such activities and multiply the impact.

## Impact of collective farms

The description of agricultural and non-agricultural activities now allows us to begin analysing the farms' impact. We focus on two aspects at the heart of the RURALIZATION project: generational renewal and rural regeneration.

### Impact on the renewal of rural and agricultural generations

RURALIZATION is concerned with how to renew agricultural generations but also, more generally, how to revitalise rural demography. Demographic decline is at the heart of many rural issues: the departure of young people reduces the labour force, cultural and gender mixings, and the availability of local skills to innovate and solve rural problems (Bock 2016, Murtagh *et al.* 2020a). Moreover, as a knock-on effect, as rural populations reduce in relation to the rest of society, the political 'weight' of the rural also decreases—it represents an increasingly small share of the electorate—and it becomes more difficult to mobilise on specific rural issues. Farm collectives carry more demographic weight than individual farms: establishment of families, housemates, children, non-farming members, creation of activities and jobs... The Champ Boule five families, for instance, represent a non-negligible proportion of inhabitants in a municipality of 40 annual residents. Moreover, in the three cases, the collectives have inspired others to set up around them—friends, former trainees, incubated farmers who find an opportunity to settle in the vicinity, etc. In the case of Belêtre and Champ Boule the farm dynamic has not only encouraged the establishment of new people, but has also favoured the return or maintenance of children of the transferors in the area: *“and in the meantime, we have a son who, in spite of everything, has remained living in the village, thanks to them! That's actually what he told us, eh, if it hadn't been for the young people, he wouldn't have stayed. So our son stayed, but he did so to have a forestry business”* (Champ Boule, FR6A/Int. 18).

Beyond demographics, farming as collective is a lever for generational renewal for it answers problematics specific to new entrants without agricultural backgrounds. It often fits in with a vision of the farming profession that corresponds to the aspirations of new

entrants: better work-life balance, easier entry and exit from farming, control over the value chain from production to marketing, among other aspects (EIP Agri 2016, Rioufol and Diaz 2018). In addition, collectives make it possible not to face alone obstacles related to starting a farm. Pooling together resources to gain access to land and performing start-up investment, acquiring knowledge, facing administrative constraints, etc. The sharing of risks and responsibilities, as well as the sharing of the mental burden, removes some of the fears of new entrants: *“I think, in terms of confidence, I was clearly... I never imagined setting up alone”* (Champ Boule, FR6A/Int. 16). The human component is essential for understanding the motivations of the collectives. One of the farmers explains: *“Because at the very beginning, we were housemates with some associates. We are all the same age, we all have children of the same age, so the children are very close too. That helps too. We have the same life patterns, a bit”* (Champ Boule, FR6A/Int. 18). The sharing of conviviality, friendships and festive moments are thus strong motivations compared with a farming profession perceived as solitary: *“The idea is in this collective, I get back to it, is precisely that. It's not to be alone. A better quality of life - Oh yes! – Improved work-life balance - Ah well, literally. And, I must admit to you, I don't see how you can find this balance on your own”* (Toussacq, FR6A/Int. 5).

Lastly, observing the collectives' land strategies also provides clues to further promote generational renewal in agriculture. Faced with an increase in farm prices and difficulties in taking over farms, the collectives were structured around land opportunities and start-up models considered “lighter”: *“at that time, what we... what brought us together was what we called a ‘light’ setting up. Zero investment, everything rented. There was a bakery, there was a whole... tools to work with, a tractor available, fodder, a greenhouse and everything... Customers. So we said ‘we’ll start with five people’”* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 11). The farm transfer success often rested on an effort to reorganise the land. In Toussacq, the transferor together with the TDL Île-de-France facilitator canvassed the area to convince lessors to sell the land to TDL. Champ Boule and Belêtre negotiated with the transferors and other landowners to gradually increase the land base of their farms. This work of aggregating land enabled creating a viable asset; in line with the aspirations of the collective. A certain threshold of hectares was often necessary to diversify and add associates (but, conversely, a farm “too big” required the recruitment of new associates). In the case of Belêtre, this land

consolidation strategy extends beyond the farm set up to enable other farm installations. The collective is now indeed experimenting with making plots available to a new farmer cultivating medicinal and aromatic plants. It is thinking to take this logic further through partnering with land organisations to establish new entrants around the farm; drawing up a common charter to ensure new land users contribute to a local and sustainable approach. This fuels a long-term vision to revitalise and increase the resilience of territories in the face of an uncertain future: *“our slightly longer-term vision is to change the landscape around us, to change the village life, to recreate a network (...) What we're talking about at the moment is that if there's land still available around here, I think we should apply for it, so that we can get a hold of it and not let it go to waste, and then look for either new associates or for candidates who would come and settle there and to whom we would hand over the land. So it's a strategy where you need land, but you also need habitats. You have to work the land until there are candidates, then you need candidates... And then you have to think about a collective organisation for managing the land, managing the equipment, etc., etc.”* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 11).

In contrast to these positive effects on generational renewal, we must mention the negative aspects of the farm collective model, which can make it less attractive. The following difficulties emerge from the interviews: limitation of individual freedoms, difficulty in being constantly surrounded by people, in finding one's place or legitimacy to assert one's needs, in devoting the necessary time to meetings, etc. Above all, the human factor, so central to the motivation to set up as a group, is also the most complicated to manage over time. Conflict management and the entry and exit of associates are subjects that require a certain resilience from the members: *“To build something, you need at least a stable base. Well, the idea of this farm is to train people. But before training people, we need to stabilise the workshops, so that those who have to train people are able to do so in the first place (...) It's going to take time, but... yes, [exits from the farm,] it has an impact. It's not that we give up, but it's like a punch you get, you say to yourself 'ah shit, pff, let's do it again'”*. (Toussacq, FR6A/Int. 5). Moreover, when questioning the collectives on men-women relations, it seemed to us that this model did not, at least for the farms studied, resolve gender issues in agriculture. The collectives unconsciously reproduced patterns that assign additional roles to women: acting as liaison agents when conflicts arise within the group, reaffirming the

importance of shared maintenance of the premises, etc. Moreover, women were still in minority in the political representation functions assumed outside the farm (but were more present in cultural or school parents' associations) and were generally given less responsibility for handling agricultural equipment (but more for handling the processing of farm products). Although these issues did not seem to have been much discussed within the farms, they are related to relationships of domination that the collectives claim to be sensitive and attentive to. It should be noted, for a more nuanced position, that a Champ Boule associate founded the feminist cultural association "Les Gonzesses"<sup>1</sup> and that this farm regularly hosts a market of women artisans as well as events (shows, conferences) dealing with the theme of gender.

## Impacts on rural regeneration

The RURALIZATION project develops the concept of "rural regeneration" to refer to transition processes that go beyond a simple reversal of rural decline. These involve a more positive reinvention of rural spaces. To trigger rural regeneration, RURALIZATION has identified the importance of 1) capitalising on local approaches and resources 2) while leveraging external opportunities, ideas, and resources for innovation, and 3) adopting integrated approaches connecting social, economic, and cultural dimensions (Murtagh *et al.* 2020a; Murtagh *et al.* 2020b).

With regard to local resources, our investigation shows that collective farms contribute significantly to the renewal and creation of tangible local resources—maintenance of landscapes and the environment, regeneration of natural resources (e.g. planting of trees, hedges in Belêtre), creation of jobs and local wealth. They also generate intangible resources: community socialisation around the farms (social capital), volunteers and trainees' skill-building (human capital), development of alliances and political mobilisation with citizens and agricultural organisations (political capital). Many of the CSA and farm volunteers interviewed attest to the process that made them directly and sensorially aware of the necessity of local agriculture: *"At the beginning, I was really just a CSA member, happy to have this box of fresh vegetables, which is really close to my home because I live in the*

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<sup>1</sup> "The chicks"

*municipality. So, there you go. All these wonderful people I met, with whom I got on well. There was also this cultural approach where they programmed events. I run a show hall myself, and sometimes we trade gigs with each other. It was a really nice encounter. And then to be able to help in the field, picking potatoes, picking green beans, etc. So, it's a whole thing volunteering there. It's really a community of interesting, friendly people, and then these quality vegetables, bread, etc. Now we also managed to have bread from Belêtre at the school cafeteria once a week. I've been insisting on this for four years, being on the municipal council. And now we've finally been able to make it happen and it's great."* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 13). The contribution of these collective farms to local resilience was particularly demonstrated by the local enthusiasm for farm products during the COVID crisis. Moreover, the farms' multi-activity is a lever for economic diversification and revitalisation in contexts of decline, shop closures, and disappearance of value chains.

Beyond local changes, the collectives give thought on how to scale up and expand their impact. They do so in particular by leveraging synergies with external networks. *"Bringing biodiversity issues at the landscape scale: ecological corridors, wetlands, hedges, permanent grasslands, how do we think about that? On our small 64 ha, it's good, but it's not really enough. So how can we think about this with other farms? This is another topic I mentioned to the Confédération Paysanne facilitator, perhaps there will be a training course on this, on the resilience of our farms in the face of the crises that await us. Resilience on at the farm level, the territory level"* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 11). We also note that communication efforts around these farms are particularly important: press articles, videos, scientific studies, etc. Such exposure requires the availability of farm members and is clearly part of their commitment: *"It's one of the farms that is often mentioned. There are other collective farms like that, which we use for communication, to show examples of collective projects and value added created in relatively limited spaces with people who live well and find a balance between their personal and professional lives. (...) It's something they've already been identified several times to talk about... Télé Buissonnière, Télé Alternative<sup>1</sup>... I think they're often referred to because they're very involved in the network, in the agricultural community. So, they are known."* (Champ Boule, FR6A/Int. 17). Thus, the collectives use their personal experience as a lever for a rural transition and for advocacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Documentary and independent film-making media.

## Policy and institutional support

### Counselling and training

In order to rise to the challenge of generational renewal in agriculture, training and counselling is needed for all farm candidates, particularly in the “pre-establishment” or “project emergence” period. However, since 2018, the French VIVEA training fund<sup>1</sup> no longer finances the training of aspiring farmers; focusing only on those already in business. This is an important limitation for both beneficiaries and counselling structures, at a time where renewal rates continue to decrease and despite the fact that the profession continues to attract younger people: *“We feel that there is a movement of people undergoing professional reconversion who say ‘my job has no meaning, I live in the city, I’m out of touch with the land...’ And who are reorienting themselves. So, these people need to be welcomed, supported and trained”* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 11). It is also important that training courses leave room for fieldwork and practical experience, whereas current curriculums generally allow only for short periods of training. Practice-based training cycles encourage direct knowledge transfer and enable adjusting ones’ agricultural project to real-life conditions. Structures such as the CdP incubator—which allow testing one’s farm project at real scale while receiving tutoring—should therefore be supported.

Farm collectives exemplify a different way of farming: diversification, change of practices, integration of non-agricultural activities, coordination with a shared living space, etc. This often involves restructuring the farm to adapt to the project. Help with costing and sizing of new activities can then be found lacking, even more so when collectives develop cultures that are at odds with local or conventional production (Fimat *et al.* 2019). *“I have the impression that a small tool, a small link is missing in the counselling system, in the InPACT networks in the broadest sense, which is to go as far as dimensioning and assisting with setting up the workshops. You see there we have set up the tunnels, we have installed the machines. Well, we have a large network, we know people, we find people. But I put myself in the shoes of someone who arrives from Paris and says to themselves ‘I want to do this’ and*

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<sup>1</sup> VIVEA is a mutual fund set up by the agricultural profession for the training of farm entrepreneurs (it does not cater to salaried agricultural workers). More information: [www.vivea.fr](http://www.vivea.fr)

*who doesn't know anyone... Well, it's a mountain! When you've never done that, and you weren't born there..."* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 11).

When farm collectives merge with life and housing projects, difficulties may arise between residents and farmers, particularly when both groups don't entirely overlap. It is a challenge for advisory organisations to integrate this variable into counselling. There is also no dedicated financing—apart from certain training courses—for advisory bodies to provide long-term and tailor-made support to farm collectives. *"We really need to put emphasis on human counselling, relational support. It should be free and there should be public institutions that do just that. There is a bit done by the [agriculture] chambers, but they're service providers and, um... for a farmer, even for anyone, paying for human counselling is often difficult. It seems... you see, paying for technical support is normal, paying for human support is a bit impalpable: 'ohlala, putting money into blah blah'."* (Toussacq, FR6A/Int. 4).

For the sustainability and viability of collectives, it is necessary to finance and multiply advisory schemes (human, legal, technical) but also to give the farms the possibility to free up time for this support. Regarding a specific advisory process on agricultural practices, a Belêtre associate explains *"In fact, we also had to devote these 14 days, which in the end turned into 16, 17, 18, I don't know how many there were, we can't count. We said to ourselves, well, if we want to be available for that, we have to have people replacing us to work in the garden, or in the bakery or in delivery. So, we cut our salaries by 20% for 6 months to create a budget to hire people to replace us. So that's it. That's why, I say, we spend time on it, but also money"* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 11). Finally, we must highlight that this work is necessary at several stages in the life of the collectives and must therefore be considered in the long term or at least reinforced at specific times, for example when people join or leave the group *"we were supported by ATAG... well, they were accompanied by ATAG before I arrived. We were accompanied again when I moved in. And again when Théo moved in"* (Champ Boule, FR6A/Int. 16). To guarantee the legitimacy of public support, collectives could for instance be asked to prove a minimum agricultural turnover in order to obtain financial aid.

Finally, local authorities have an important role to play, whether for the preservation and identification of agricultural land or to improve housing accessibility for farmers, which can be a major obstacle. They can also provide financial support to workers' cooperatives.

Belêtre farmers view this as a sustainable of public investment, as aid stays in the capital of the cooperative and will continue to support generational renewal over the long term: *“For the municipalities, the public authorities who put money in, it is public money that is used very efficiently. For us, for every €1 we put into the capital of the SCOP, the Centre Region authority also put in €1. With a ceiling of €15,000. So we put in €3000, and the Region gave us €3000. We were obliged to put it into the SCOP, yet that doesn't mean the shares belong to us (...) it remains in the company. Most of the time, the Young Farmers Grants are wired to bank accounts. When you leave, you leave with your grant. I mean, it doesn't make sense. (...) that way the public aid is privatised at that point, falling into a farmer's pocket. And the community puts money back in, and for each generation we put money back in. So there again, economically, for the public authorities, it's very relevant”* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 11).

## Contracts et legal statutes

Gradual farm set-up and association schemes are particularly well suited to the creation of agricultural collectives. All three farms studied used some contracts to progressively test and incorporate new members: the Creative Farmer course for Belêtre, the farm training and set-up employment contract (*contrat emploi formation installation* or CEFI) in Champ boule, and the support contract for business setting-up (CAPE) in Toussacq. It is important that these schemes be recognised by the institutions and give access to social rights and compensations. One CAPE contract holder with the CdP attests: *“At the unemployment agency, I was no longer asked to prove that I had taken any steps, or that I was looking for work and so on, because I was on contract. But I could still get aid”* (Toussacq, FR6A/Int. 7). The possibility to use such schemes to test production and farm association, however, depends on prior existence of a farm structure able to realise the testing contract. Further support mechanisms could be developed to enable groups of new entrants to test functioning as a collective outside of existing structures.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, all the cited schemes are specific to certain regions and partly financed by regional authorities. They could be widely duplicated and better supported to facilitate the development of farm collectives.

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<sup>1</sup> In France, the GAEC & SOCIÉTÉ organisation developed the “GAEC trial scheme” and more generally the “right to test farm association” principle (Coly 2020, GAEC & SOCIÉTÉ undated)

Two of the collectives identified in this study use a trading cooperative status (SCOP or SCIC status). As previously explained, this choice is motivated by a different relationship with capital and a different vision of the farming profession. While these cooperative companies enable easier transfer of production assets and better social protections, they also present major obstacles: *“There is effectively a sacrificed generation. The one who, at a given moment, not only gives up on the Young Farmers Grant, but is also going to build a production asset. And at the end of the year, we will have invested about €200,000 in our farm. Without any bank loans, because we paid ourselves very little in the first few years and we still pay ourselves little. We pay ourselves a minimum wage for 35 hours, but we work more than 35 hours. So, we also do voluntary work. And it's because we don't get paid for all our hours, or don't pay them well, that we leave a lot of money in the company”* (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 11). These new statutes shake up the farming world. They could help trigger a wider change, if institutions recognise their potential for generational renewal and modify the law to boost their development. The Confédération Paysanne (2019, 2020) and other supporters of these schemes mention in particular the need to:

- create a SCOP status similar to non-trading legal statutes that are most commonly practised by farmers, notably the GAEC;
- ensure that SCOP associates and salaried agricultural entrepreneurs can access the Young Farmers Grant;
- open economic or tax aid available to GAECs and other agricultural enterprises to cooperatives;
- recognise the status of salaried associate, allowing for instance associates to pay into the VIVEA agricultural training fund;
- support the creation of cooperatives in order to avoid “a sacrificed generation” (e.g. support the purchase of the initial asset or allocate pension rights in return for the non-valued capital for those who exit the cooperative);
- increase the ceilings for public support to cooperatives: *“at some point public authorities have to put money in: the CAP SCOP is an example of regional scheme [to support cooperatives]. Now the ceiling [for regional aid to SCOPs] is no longer €15,000 but €50,000, for example, in the Centre Region. And we could imagine that it could be*

*much higher, and that it could be a national scheme, to avoid this sacrificed generation" (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 11).*

The GAEC status also remains relevant. The possibility of integrating non-agricultural activities into the enterprise could make it more up-to-date. Choosing between the diversity of possible legal statutes for a collective set up (association, GAEC, SCOP, SCIC, etc.) may also require counselling or at least juridical advice. Training on legal statutes could therefore be developed.

## Land access

With regard to land, 'buffer' systems are needed, whether to enable temporary land storage or longer-term collective land ownership. Organised in conjunction with SAFER land agencies<sup>1</sup> and local authorities, temporary land storage allows lengthening the transition between retirement of previous owners and set up of new farmers. During this transition, land is temporarily held by the SAFER, who buys it and then retrocedes it to new entrants after they had more time to finalise their project, get financing, create legal statutes, etc. This system exists in some regions but could be duplicated for a national coverage. Once again, local authorities can play an important role by financing the SAFER fees for temporary storage, organising the storage themselves, or setting criteria to prioritise storage for new entrants or farm collectives.<sup>2</sup> *"If we want to change scale, we need to be able to tell local authorities 'it's your role to store land, and look, it works, some have done it'. We've already organised material mutualisation, employees, land storage and so on. So, the idea is to start the strategy, to initiate the thing on pilot territories, and then I think the upscale will only happen with the local authorities, or in any case larger structures" (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 11).* To avoid farm concentration or land abandonment, land storage or collective acquisition is needed even in when there are no pre-identified candidates to take up the plots acquired. After purchase, coordination with advisory organisations or farm incubators is necessary to find trained new entrants to take over these lands. *"We know that farm candidates who*

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<sup>1</sup> SAFER stands for *Société d'aménagement foncier et rural* (Land Use and Rural Settlement Corporation), they are French land agencies who are notified of land sales and have special missions to regulate and intervene on land markets.

<sup>2</sup> In Ille-et-Vilaine, the department authority finances land storage schemes specifically for new entrants with innovative agri-rural projects. (Loveluck *et al.* 2021).

*have incubated on Toussacq, which is a farm that we are familiar with, well we know that they have the skills (...) For us, it's really nice to have a space like that in the Île-de-France Region. When we have farm acquisition projects, if we have candidates who come from Toussacq, well, that's really reassuring" (Toussacq, FR6A/Int. 6).*

## Documenting and raising awareness

Today, the majority of new entrants still imagines establishing on individual farms. They usually dream of acquiring smaller plots requiring little investment or mechanisation. Yet farms expected to be transferred in the near future will rather be large and costly. Collectives can be better suited and must be encouraged to take over these larger holdings. Thus, finding ways to incentivise new entrants to consider collective set ups and helping groups of people find each other and get structured is essential. While advisory organisations play an essential role, it is also about developing a narrative and appetite for farming as a group: *"in my view, the energy must be put into telling the stories, into building the imaginaries we propose to new entrants so that they have images of what it is to be in a collective, what it brings, why some people prefer to be in a farm collective. That, in fact, is not an institutional task, it is a journalistic, awareness-raising and communication task" (Toussacq, FR6A/Int. 4).*

Thus, beyond technical and legislative proposals, institutional support for farm collectives must integrate i) work to document innovative experiences and ii) efforts to raise awareness and provide information to different target audiences. The documenting work must emphasise the diversity of farm collectives, in particular how they adopt heterogeneous degrees of mutualisation to suit their members. This implies a better definition of what is meant by "farm collective", in order to move away from a 60s vision of collectives as hippie communities. This documenting work should facilitate sharing experiences and tools (charter, time bank, collective management tools etc.).

Concerning target audiences, the collection of these stories and feedbacks should, in particular, make it possible to raise awareness of:

- New entrants, to re-enchant the image of the farming profession and raise awareness about the diversity of models of collectives;

- Farm transferors, to address issues of farm transferability and restructuring and share testimonies of successful takeovers to ward off possible fears: "*the only thing I remember being afraid of is telling myself: 'They mustn't fight.'* (...) *You can always tell yourself: 'How will it hold? If it doesn't hold, what's going to happen to it [the farm]?'*" (Champ Boule FR6A/Int. 19)
- Elected representatives and citizens, to better value the contribution of farm collectives to rural regeneration and incentivise a better welcoming of these in rural territories "*When there are people from the village who say 'yeah, well, at the CSA, these are people...' I say 'well wait, go and see them, they're people who work, they're not... (laughs)'. No, but it's true, there are also preconceptions like that... You have to teach people (...) Go and see! Go and meet them! They do open doors!*" (Belêtre, FR6A/Int. 13)
- Agricultural institutions and advisory bodies, to increase support to collectives in their practices.

## Conclusion

Collective farms are a promising practice for the regeneration of agriculture and rural areas. Although this conclusion depends in part on the meaning put behind the concept of regeneration—a reflection which RURALIZATION continues to enrich through its studies and concertation with stakeholders—it is nevertheless clear from our investigation that collectives:

- generate demographic and generational renewal dynamics in territories in decline;
- produce value, diversify the economy, and create local jobs while taking care of the land, the landscape, and the natural resources
- improve food supply options and food practices, creating local value chains.

Beyond their economic and nurturing function, these farms become spaces of life and territorial dialogue with citizens. They thus contribute to increasing social, human and political capital in the rural communities around them and beyond. The lessons learned from the collectives' field experiences nourish wider communication and advocacy efforts. The collective intelligence emerging from group farms is a key lever for innovation, which offers great prospects for further scaling up and effectiveness of these models.

Through the literature and our interactions with researchers and other collectives, it seems that much of our analysis could be applied to other collective farms. However, these conclusions should not be generalised at this time. More investigations could be conducted to strengthen our findings on the contribution of farm collectives to rural development. A research perspective would also consist in exploring issues related to the scaling up of collective projects. These can be broken down into two parts: 1) how can collective set ups be reproduced and made more popular? Can collectives themselves expand (by taking on more partners, more land) while remaining faithful to their initial values and project?

In conclusion, we would like to emphasise that our survey has crossed paths with many farmers, support structures, researchers and projects developing work on the issue of farm collectives. We were surprised by the abundance of work in progress, exchanged ideas with many passionate people, and hope that this report will find its place in the growing body of

research on agricultural collectives, the expansion of which seems crucial to encourage more vocations and support for farm collectives.

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## Annex 1. The list of interviews

Code	Role	Date	Place
FR6A/Int.1	Former elected official / Cooperative member	21.01.2021	Villenauxe-la-Petite
FR6A/Int.2	Farm transferor	21.01.2021	Villenauxe-la-Petite
FR6A/Int.3	Farmer	21.01.2021	Villenauxe-la-Petite
FR6A/Int.4	Supporting organisation representative	22.01.2021	Villenauxe-la-Petite
FR6A/Int.5	Farmer	21.01.2021	Villenauxe-la-Petite
FR6A/Int.6	Supporting organisation representative	22.01.2021	Villenauxe-la-Petite
FR6A/Int.7	Cooperative member	27.01.2021	Phone
FR6A/Int.8	CSA and Cooperative members	08.02.2021	Phone
FR6A/Int.9	Supporting organisation representative	22.03.2021	Phone
FR6A/Int.10	Future farmer	25.03.2021	Phone
FR6A/Int.11	Farmer	03.02.2021	Dolus-le-Sec
FR6A/Int.12	Farmer	03.02.2021	Dolus-le-Sec
FR6A/Int.13	CSA member and elected official	03.02.2021	Dolus-le-Sec
FR6A/Int.14	Supporting organisation representative	03.02.2021	Phone
FR6A/Int.15	Supporting organisation representative	23.02.2021	Phone
FR6A/Int.16	Farmer	16.02.2021	Barjac
FR6A/Int.17	Farmer spouse / local community representative	16.02.2021	Barjac
FR6A/Int.18	Farmer	16.02.2021	Barjac
FR6A/Int.19	Farm transferors	16.02.2021	Barjac
FR6A/Int.20	Local community representative	16.02.2021	Barjac

Table 5. Interviews