

HANDOUT

FARM SUCCESSION FOR A SUSTAINABLE RURAL TRANSITION

INNOVATION
IN ACTION
SERIES

Retiring farmer and successor © Albert Pons

Xarxa per a la
Conservació de la
Natura



CONTEXT

The Catalan Network for Nature Conservation (XCN) fosters nature conservation initiatives amongst civil society. These occur on a variety of contexts including farmland. Fostering farm transmissions with an agroecological perspective is a complementary strategy to contribute to nature conservation and rural regeneration. XCN supports the few local organisations that work on that line. This action is focused on "la Vall del Corb" (VdC), a rural area facing demographic decline, abandonment or intensification of farming activities, a lack of new entrants, and little farm diversification. Local actors are getting organised to revert these tendencies and revitalise VdC through a long-term project named "Territori de Vincles".

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

The "Territori de Vincles" project aims to preserve VdC's local landscape and natural values, enhance agroecology, foster a circular economy, and strengthen rural services. In its starting phase, it is crucial for the project to improve existing knowledge so as to calibrate future strategies and areas of work. The action research carried out by XCN and the local Aresta Cooperative (partner in "Territori de Vincles") aimed to explore agricultural characteristics and land structures in VdC, as well as other aspects affecting farm succession. While enabling farm transfers to a new generation of ecologically-minded farmers is indeed considered a possible pathway to foster a local sustainable transition, this requires assessing the needs and expectations of local retiring farmers and new entrants.

"Innovation in Action". In 2020-21, six RURALIZATION partners conducted eight-month-long participatory action research projects to explore new solutions to leverage farmland in favour of agroecological transition, generational renewal, and rural regeneration. The results of their actions are presented in this series.

INNOVATIVE

- ✓ Make the work on farm succession a central aspect of regeneration and sustainable transition
- ✓ Highlight information that is not easily accessible or visible, e.g. information on the profile of retiring farmers.
- ✓ Support local authorities in implementing innovative practices by providing them with crucial preliminary information.

IMPACTFUL

- ✓ Generating key information on emotional aspects of farm succession and increasing awareness towards generational renewal challenges.
- ✓ Improving the relationship between "Territori de Vincles" partners and key stakeholders and increasing their recognition and legitimacy.
- ✓ Bringing stakeholders' voices to the forefront by identifying retiring farmers and new entrants' perceptions and proposals

OBJECTIVE

Improve knowledge on the diverse aspects which can support or hamper farm succession and a rural transition in Vall del Corb

ACTION PLAN

Task 1: Improve the knowledge on the farming sector within the area

- Gather relevant pre-existing public data on the local farming sector. Identify key data missing and ask for it to relevant stakeholders. Analyse the overall data sets and draw main conclusions.

Task 2: Improve knowledge on the amount, state and expectations of possible new entrants

- Identify possible new entrants into farming in VdC and conduct a survey to assess their needs and expectations regarding the process of entering into farming.

Task 3: Improve the knowledge on the amount, state and expectations of retiring farmers

- Identify retiring farmers within the area, define data to be obtained and conduct interviews to assess their needs and expectations regarding the process of retiring and transferring their farm.

Task 4: Strengthen the collaboration and/or common understanding amongst stakeholders

- Organise sessions to debate with the stakeholders involved in the "Territori de Vincles" project, and identify policy proposals that may satisfy local actors' needs regarding the fostering of an agroecological transition.

RESULTS

Different **formal and informal channels** were used to establish contact with retiring farmers and **overcome some negative responses** (rejection, disinterest, conformism etc.). Interviews were conducted with a varied sample of **8 retiring-farmers**. **The table on the right shows main conclusions** regarding the difficulties to farm succession mentioned by respondents. Beyond these, retiring farmers elaborated on policy concerns, mainly related to a poor design and highly bureaucratic procedures.

As for **proposals**, some broad ideas were mentioned, such as the remuneration for non-productive tasks, an employment exchange programme, hunting activities, the re-orientation of the pig farms by encouraging and facilitating extensive grazing models, etc.

To survey new entrants, an online form was created and disseminated and ultimately answered by **35 individuals**. Although the information gathered was rather eclectic, we could outline that:

- many of the respondents have little experience or training
- many are willing to implement agroecological practices
- respondents showed interest in multiple possible farming sectors.

Respondents also indicated some fears related to taking over a farm, e.g. that they couldn't economically afford it or that the transferor could exert too much power in the decision-making processes.

The knowledge generated served to **fuel discussions** among the "Territori de Vincles" partners and ultimately will be useful to **engage effectively with a larger circle** of stakeholders. This contributes to **federating local actors**, facilitates the process of **drawing conclusions** from the action research, and **orientates** future project activities.

PERCEPTIONS OF FARMING

- Transferors experience **disenchantment towards the farming profession** and do not want to burden their descendants with taking over the farm.
- **Some farmers mention health issues related to their activities** as a potential deterrent for successors.

PERCEPTIONS OF NEW ENTRANTS

- Farmers have the perception that there is a **lack of interested new entrants**.
- They also doubt more generally the **capacity, motivation, and viability** of new entrants' projects.
- Most interviewees wanted **successors with specific skills or characteristics**, such as having an adapted social background (being from the area, knowing the area).

MATERIAL DIFFICULTIES

- Some farmers might have **specific economic expectations after retirement**, notably to retain some CAP direct payments.
- Older farmers pointed to the **lack of economic viability of their farms, or other material difficulties for succession** (too elevated capital value, issues preventing building renovation, etc.).

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND PLANNING

- **None of the respondents had a clear successors and there was a lack of planning** in this regard.
- **One of the farmers was unwilling to transfer the farm outside of the family.**

EXPECTED ROLE AFTER FARM TRANSFER

- Interviewed farmers **expect to keep a role in the farm**, either staying involved, or transferring knowledge to the successor (except for the two animal raisers interviewed who consider they have sacrificed enough time and wish to cease involvement completely upon retiring)

TIPS FOR PRACTICE!

BUILDING LEGITIMACY

- **Building first-hand knowledge on little-known issues** such as emotional and social aspects of farm successions contributes to making field expertise recognised and legitimate.
- **Embedding XCN's research in work done by a coalition of local actors** and creating links with other stakeholders (e.g. local authorities) is key to facilitating larger recognition and support.

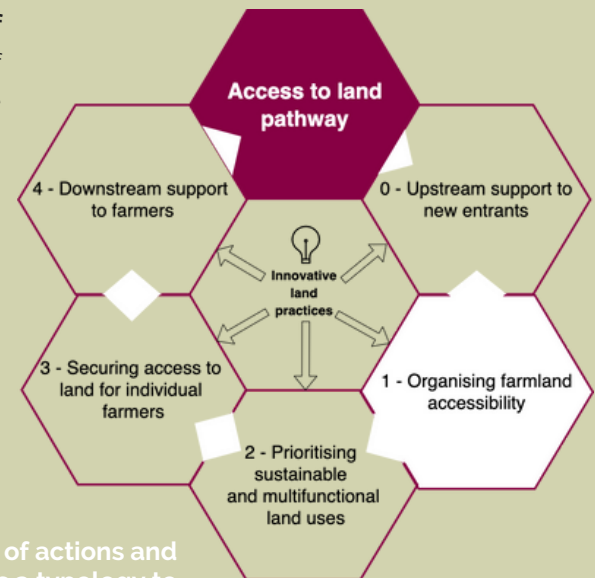
OBSTACLES & LEVERS

- **Retiring farmers can be difficult to reach.** This action showed that **it is best to use a variety of channels** to identify and establish contact with them (e.g. local cooperatives, farmers groups, etc.)
- **Using broad public dissemination channels** (e.g. social media campaigns) helped increase visibility on generational renewal issues, which is not a very mainstream or mediatic topic.



AN ADAPTED RESPONSE TO LOCAL LAND CHALLENGES

The action tackles the question of the **accessibility of farmland**. There has been an improvement in terms of knowledge on land availability, as well as on the sociocultural factors that interfere with accessing such land. In addition, this information is now better organised and will be more accessible in the future. Some farm transfers have been anticipated as a result of the action and local stakeholders might have more power to channel these towards rural regeneration. Furthermore, upstream **support to new entrants** (pre-land access) has also been addressed. Possible new entrants within the area have been identified and their needs and expectations have been assessed. This will be useful in the future when connecting retiring farmers and possible successors, and to prevent land abandonment and intensification beyond this action.



What is the "Access to land pathway"? Innovations use a wide range of actions and strategies to provide effective access to land. The pathway provides a typology to categorise innovative practices' different modes of action.

WHO WE ARE

XARXA PER A LA CONSERVACIÓ DE LA NATURA

XCN is a second-level organisation that fosters nature conservation initiatives amongst civil society, by leading actions related to knowledge transfer, funding, advising and policy. XCN's members are usually local land stewardship organisations that work together with landowners in order to preserve the natural values and ecological processes of their estates. **Learn more at: www.xcn.cat**

ACCESS TO LAND NETWORK

The Access to land network brings together grassroots organisations from across Europe to share experiences and promote the significance of access to land for agroecological transition and generational renewal. Established in 2012, it functions as an informal network of about 15 organisations.

Learn more at: www.accesstoland.eu



CONTACT

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