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Knowledge and experiences sharing on an experimental farm station: New roles and postures

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► **To cite this version:**

Juliette Anglade. Knowledge and experiences sharing on an experimental farm station: New roles and postures. First Agroecology Europe Forum, Institut Supérieur d'Agriculture et d'Agroalimentaire Rhône-Alpes (ISARA Lyon). Lyon, FRA., Oct 2017, Lyon, France. 125 p. hal-02734178

HAL Id: hal-02734178

<https://hal.inrae.fr/hal-02734178>

Submitted on 2 Jun 2020

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First Agroecology Europe Forum

Abstract template

Title

A social experiment on an experimental farm station : exchanging and sharing knowledge and experiences to support the agro-ecological transition toward more autonomous farming systems

Take home message (one sentence)

Experimental farm station may become privileged places to support agroecological transition by opening their doors to create a space for a concrete and sensible dialogue, and foster a greater articulation and circulation of multiple forms of knowledge.

Description (e.g. main outcome of your work, method if relevant, etc.- Max 1 page)

The agroecological transition is embedded in the lexical field of worlds of the unavoidable, the imperative, the future, but few places are dedicated to give it a flesh and concrete existence, a « tried-and-true » guarantee. The INRA experimental farm station of Mirecourt (Vosges, eastern France) is trying to do so by opening the doors to a large audience of their autonomous mixed-crop dairy system experiment, entirely certified on its 240 ha in organic farming since 2004. For 10 years, between 700 and 800 visitors (students in technical and higher education, farmers, and AKIS actors) coming mainly from the Eastern part of France but also from other regions of France and Belgium, were received each year, corresponding to about 20-25 days/yr. It is less conventional farm visits or information days about research trials, and more days of exchanges and share of multiple forms of knowledge, know-how and experiences, to support a transition toward more autonomous farming systems.

Since 2016, the knowledge exchange days are the subject of a social experiment aiming to depict, by the INRA practitioners themselves, a pragmatic research, a science in the making, living, uneven, humble to reconstitute complexities, variabilities and uncertainties inherent to autonomous agricultural systems that do not without but do with the environment.

The device has allowed to try many modes for knowledge-sharing, varying situations to reflect environmental and work conditions (fields, nearby animals, the parlour ...) and facilitating dialogue and debate with different discussion partners bearers of specific knowledge, and professional and ethical standards. Participants describe action routines or exceptional experiences, track records, experimental results, visions, or whether change in

attitudes, by the means of different media that speak for themselves: storytelling, photos, facts and figures, graphs, markers, indicators from everyday life ... Focus are, more often on the process than on the results that are site-specific, and on the “doing” as many as the “thinking”. Intellectual, social, technical and material pathways are made visible and reveal unresolved issues, difficulties, mistakes and unexpected levers, seen as potentially useful resources for practitioners looking for more autonomy.

In the pedagogy field, the issue involved here is to foster the inter-comprehension, to build a collective negotiation on the coherence of the scientific and pragmatic choices and of the meanings of results to contribute to an active appropriation and an informed criticism on urgent societal issues. In this regard, experiential learning and socio-cognitive conflicts are encouraged by maximising times for peer exchanges in small groups and learning in context, with a particular attention given to observation, and more broadly to a sensitive environment.

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