LOCAL DIALOGUE ON FARMLAND PRESERVATION: A FRENCH EXPERIMENT.

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Abstract Body: Development plans at the local level often proclaim farmland preservation as a key challenge. But a gap between these stated objectives and an in-depth diagnosis on farmland is commonly observed. In France, local committees have been established in 2012 to increase the awareness of elected officials on urban sprawl and to improve their planning strategy concerning farmland. These committees are composed of representatives of the State administration, farmer unions and environmental associations. They organize meetings with elected officials (mayors) in charge of development plans and write a committee’s opinion on plans in progress. Our inquiry is based on materials (meeting minutes, opinions delivered) collected among 10 commissions concerning about 200 municipalities in different French regions and on interviews conducted with committee members. We try to identify the main discussion topics raised during the debates with mayors: did municipalities explore various scenarios for the location of developable zones? What are the perspectives for maintaining farming activities on the long term? How to manage building rights in agricultural zones? We proposed a typology of these local debates in regard of the characteristics of municipalities concerned (location in metropolitan areas, demographic trend, social composition). The inquiry also offers a survey of the effectiveness of the procedure, underlining that the committees succeeded in improving the diagnosis on farmland activity but had a limited effect to reduce the dimension of large developable zones.