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Farming styles and cooperatives disputes of swine farmers under economic pressure in southern France

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Abstract: In Southern France, the regression of swine farms and swine is ongoing. It involves reorientation of socio-professional networks, especially the farmers' cooperatives. For understanding the various ways of maintaining swine production under the regressive circumstances, we focus on the farmers' initiatives and motivations for cooperative action.

This article is build upon an inquiry of the diversity in swine farming strategies and styles in a production basin in regression: the departments Lot, Aveyron and Tarn in Midi Pyrenees, Southern France. We studied the motivations for the modes of farm management and the search for support from cooperatives, including the ambitions for product diversification. The survey consisted of 30 semi-structured interviews, followed by 90 structured questionnaires. The diversity in farming styles is explained by local opportunities and contrasts in socio-professional integration in farmers' cooperatives.

Keywords: swine farming, farming systems, farm management, farmers' cooperatives

Introduction

During the last decade, two out of three swine farm exploitations in Midi Pyrenees (Southern France) have vanished and the remaining farms face serious difficulties. More than 70% of the swine production in the region is localized in Lot, Aveyron and Tarn. Swine farming in this part of Midi Pyrenees is exemplary for a swine farming region in decline. In the south-west of France a zone is recognized for the certification of a Protected Geographical Identification (PGI) for *Bayonne ham*, processed in the valley district of the Andour. About 95% of the swine farmers in Midi Pyrenees (98% of the slaughter hogs) are associated with the production of Bayonne ham (2005, personal communication Midiporc). At sub regional level a zone for certification is proposed for the production of a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) for *Lacaune ham* (**Figure 1**).

Different styles of farming are identified in every branch of farming, even within more or less homogeneous regions (Van der Ploeg, 2003). Commandeur (2003) showed that this is even true for intensive swine farming in the Netherlands. In a recent study in French Brittany, five styles of farming were identified (Commandeur *et al.*, 2008). In French Brittany however, swine farming is still sustaining; despite the difficulties of low prices, various logics for reducing production costs are still in progress. Our interest in Midi Pyrenees is to study diversity in farming styles in a region of regression and analyze whether and how diversity in the farmers' logic manifests. The prime hypothesis of this study is that the diversity in *styles of swine farming* in Midi Pyrenees is different from French Brittany, related to the more limited options for reducing production costs

In the previous study in French Brittany we recognized that the majority of the swine farmers do not contribute directly to the formation of the production basin. The farmers' cooperatives serve as intermediates (Commandeur *et al.*, 2008). In fact, in France, farmers' cooperatives are organizing strongly the production; ensuring firmly the insertion in the food supply chain. The cooperatives negotiate with slaughter houses and processing factories. They supply technical advice to their members, and in doing so, they express their policy vision on how to produce.

In French Brittany the socio-professional network among swine farmers is also tighter than in Midi Pyrenees, because local swine farmers' density in Brittany is much higher. We presume that swine farmers in Midi Pyrenees may be more susceptible to visions expressed by their cooperative, and that they feel more dependent on the strategy of their cooperative. The second hypothesis of this article is the presumption that in Midi Pyrenees, the policy orientation of the cooperatives and the attitude of the (often non-swine-farming) neighbors are relevant factors, influencing the individual swine farmers'

logic. In other words, we presume a dynamic interaction between the meso-sociological level of cooperative organizations and the micro sociological level of neighborhood integration.

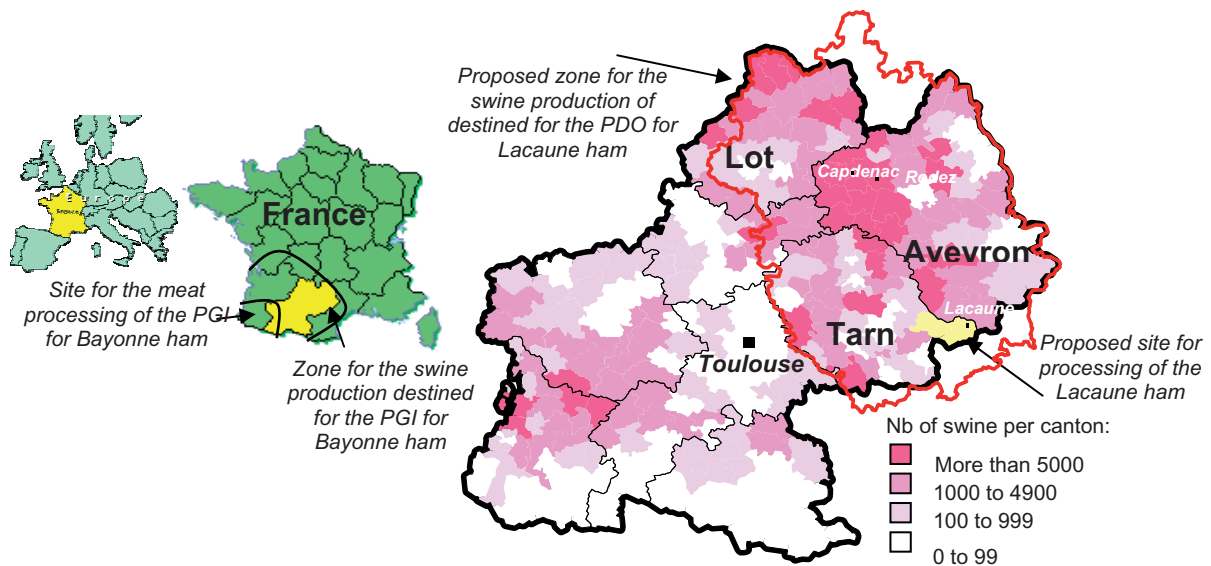


Figure 1. Number of swine per canton in the departments of the region Midi Pyrenees (Source: RGA 2000) – with indications of the main slaughter houses related to the farmers' cooperatives (Rodez – APS; Capdenac – RE; Auch- Fipso) and the geographical constellations of the production and processing zones for the production of PGI Bayonne ham and PDO Lacaune ham (in Midi Pyrenees / France / Europe).

The two hypotheses led to two research objectives. The first objective is the diversity in *styles of swine farming* in Midi Pyrenees: the manifestation of diversity in swine farmers' logic and farming practices and the integration of swine farmers in socio-professional networks in the major production basin of Midi Pyrenees region in France; the departments Aveyron, Tarn and Lot. We describe the conduct and analysis of the logic of the swine farmers' perceptions: where do they stand in the *space of information* of their business and how do they try and find opportunities for creating a future perspective?

The second objective is to examine to what extent cooperatives form a relevant explanation for different spaces of information for farmers. How do farmers get influenced by the way in which cooperatives deal with market and socio-professional environment? How do they approach opportunities for collective action? And in what way do they expect to benefit? We combine therefore the notion of diversity in styles of farming (according to Van der Ploeg and Commandeur) and the dynamics of collective action (according to Olson, 1971) of farmers' cooperatives. The integration of these two aspects contains important theoretical challenges.

In this study we abstract and integrate the notion of *style* from the individual to the mental level, by concentrating on the extraction of logics in the perceptions and reasoning of the farmers. The findings of the study were put into debate with two groups of farmers of different farmers' cooperatives. In the discussion of this article, we concentrate on the interactions between the farmers' logic and the specific local opportunities and constraints, in account of the orientations of the farmers' cooperatives, both about geographical conditions and about socio-professional integration.

A conceptual framework

A *production basin* is a different concept from the geographical notion of a zone or region. A production basin refers to a functional setting in terms of an economic activity, which is spatially characterized by the flow of specific economic goods and related finances. The setting of a basin is incorporated in a global scheme that fits with the majority of the implicated actors. The scheme is founded on a strategic view in which human and cultural factors play a prevailing role (Rainelli, 2003).

A *space of information* is even a more comprehensive concept than a production basin, because it includes the interaction with all carriers of information, without the restriction to flow of specific economic goods and related finances. Within the same production basin with more or less homogeneous technical structures and infrastructures, scientists have found diversity in patterns of farmers' logic and farming practices that cannot be reduced to variations in factorial prices, production

intensity or production scale. This indicates that other features than economic flows are involved in structuring patterns of farming practices, implicating the expression of diversity and representing a kind of heterogeneity within a production basin (Bolhuis and Van Der Ploeg, 1985).

A *space of information* refers to the notion that every individual is surrounded by information, that may (or may not) appeal to his perceptions. Every individual organizes this information by approaching it with his own rationality. A space of information is therefore not an objectively definable collection of all information available in relation to a particular subject, because the act of relating information to the subject is a rationalization in itself. With respect to the stylization of logics, the mode of rationalization characterizes the space of information. These include socio professional relations between peers, who share (or disagree) about notions and normative rules on how swine farming practices should be performed; as well as the relation with their locally active critics who express and sometimes impose normative visions on the farmers (Darré *et al.*, 1985).

Collective action can act as molding factor for constraints. We use collective action in the form of farmers' cooperative activities as an input in our research and not as a research object. We discuss how the operation modes of the cooperatives influence the rationalization of farmers' logic and the farmer's visions on the future of their activities. We do not analyze or discuss how cooperative leaders implement their strategies in their organization or even motivate their members. In other words, we have not studied the cooperatives as such; nor their organization and their social constitution.

The structure of collective and cooperative action

In Midi Pyrenees more than 85 per cent of the swine farmers participate in farmers' cooperative. Thus they benefit from collective merchandise flows of supply (feedstuff) and sales (slaughter hogs), as well as technical and veterinary assistance. Since the 1980s the farmers' cooperatives have been frequently restructured by consecutive processes of reorganizations, fusions and sometimes divisions. The farmers' cooperative Qualiporc operates now almost exclusively in Lot, whereas various cooperatives operate in Aveyron and Tarn (and other departments): Rouergue Elevage (RE) and Alliance Porc Sud (APS) being the most important; followed by Porci-d'Oc, and Fipso.

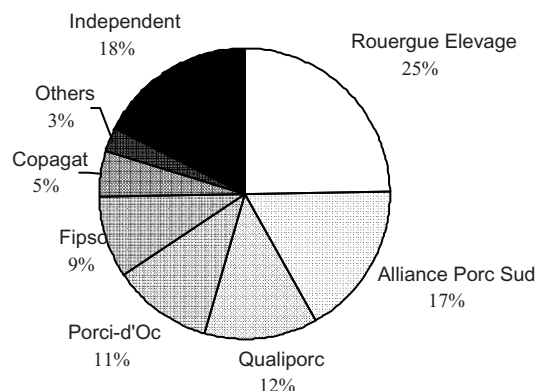


Figure 2. Division of members over the various farmers' cooperatives in the departments Lot, Aveyron and Tarn (Source: Midiporc, 2005)

An overcapacity of slaughter houses in Midi Pyrenees has developed since the 1980^s when RE and APS did not come to an agreement about a shared slaughterhouse in Aveyron and two slaughter houses were built. The overcapacity is filled with the 'import' of slaughter hogs from other regions in France (mainly Bretagne and Aquitaine). A public assumption that the overcapacity is filled with swine from intensive farms in the north of Spain is not supported by figures: the import of pork from Spain is at the level of pork cuts, and not of slaughter animals. However the competition on the sales market with Spanish products is fierce (2005, Interprofession Midiporc, personal communication). The initiative for the syndicate to develop Lacaune ham was taken by a group of ten farmers in Lot, Aveyron and Tarn, although it is associated with the farmers' cooperative Porci-d'Oc. APS and Porci-d'Oc discussed profoundly about the option of a cooperatives fusion, but in the end (in 2005) they decided against it.

In Lot cooperatives reconstruction led to one dominant farmers' cooperative, which adheres about 90 per cent of the swine farmers: Qualiporc. Qualiporc has taken the initiative to support the production for pork products with a *Label Rouge* quality certificate.

Materials and methods

Field surveys and sampling

Data collection for the survey took place in 2004 and 2005 in the departments Lot, Aveyron and Tarn in Midi Pyrenees. Six initial interviews were held with experts and extensionists in the regional swine sector. The experts provided an overview of the diversity of swine farming practices in the region. Based on the expert views and on insights and questions from previous interview work, semi structured interviews were arranged with 30 swine farmers of several farmers' cooperatives, who were selected by their representation of the regional diversity of situations and farming practices.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed in order to identify similar modalities in the farmers' responses to the questions. Based on this exercise a structured questionnaire was composed containing questions and sets of propositions for responses (modalities). In all 109 questions and 620 modalities were developed. The structured questionnaire was first run in 2004 with 60 farm visits among a group of swine farmers from the area. In 2005, a slightly adapted questionnaire was run, using farm visits and telephone questioning. This questionnaire was presented in to 30 farmers of various farmers' cooperatives in Aveyron and Tarn and 60 farmers who belonged to one of two specific farmers' cooperatives, Qualiporc in Lot and APS in Aveyron and Tarn (see also **Figure 2**).

Analytical methods

The semi-structured interviews led to the identification of the topics and preoccupations which the farmers emphasized in their expressions. The most important preoccupation in Midi Pyrenees was the price level of pork, which was often discussed in terms of a *price crisis*, due to the relatively higher production costs in comparison to French Brittany. The crisis had led to reduced perspective for swine farming in general in the region and problems for farm succession. In the discourse the production goals were discussed both in terms of quantitative production indicators, as well as qualitative features (product certificates). In terms of socio-professional environment it was noted that in Midi Pyrenees the swine farmers were often isolated from their peers. Drawing on previously obtained results in French Brittany and the Netherlands (Commandeur *et al.* 2008, Commandeur 2006), the interviews led to the specification of a set of five dimensions as frame of reference for the evaluation of contrasts in the various aspects of the interview discourses. The dimensions were distinguished in two describing and three explanatory dimensions (**Table 1**). The principal factor components of the five dimensions were analyzed in a correlation matrix. The relevant issues of the components were summarized.

The results of the semi-structured interviews and the questionnaires were both analyzed. Every modality was coded as a variable and inserted separately in a matrix, using a data reduction Principal Component Factor Analysis (PCFA), using SPSS. The variables were related to one of five dimensions (see also **Table 1**), which were each analyzed in separate trails. Next the 'individual factor scores' of the farmers were subsequently used in a hierarchical cluster analysis for each of the five dimensions. The cluster analysis resulted in the identification of four *styles of farming*.

The styles of farming were discussed in two meetings farmers of with the two farmers' cooperatives that contributed most to the study in terms of interviewed members: APS in Aveyron / Tarn and Qualiporc in Lot. At both discussions, there were about 12 member farmers present to participate.

Results

Sociological dimensions

Table 1 represents the sociological dimensions that identified the related subjects, about which:

- the farmers spontaneously and voluntarily expressed themselves without prompting and that were related to their farm and occupation;

- the farmers provided a clear point of view by responding to the questions with factual and direct responses;
- marked differences were discerned concerning the basic point of view of the farmers.

The questions in Table 1 display the issues of the discourses of the farmers about which their opinions contrast. Their distribution into the five dimensions facilitates the comprehension of the points of view in terms of linear contrasts.

Table 1. Overview of the identified dimensions and summary of the relevant issues

Dimension types	
<i>Describing</i>	<i>Summary of the relevant issues</i>
Herd and associated technology and the technical application	What do the animals represent for you? What type of genetic material? How do you keep track of performances (indicators)? What is your system for group management and hyper prolificacy? What worries you at your farm operation?
Organization and efficiency of labor and investments	Are your buildings well organized? Which task(s) do you prefer / like the least? Is there a (good) division of labor tasks / work organization? What are the skills of a good swine farmer / farm worker? What are the advantages of your profession? Appreciation of time off? What type of adaptations would you like to make at your enterprise?
<i>Explanatory</i>	<i>Summary of the relevant issues</i>
Ambition of revenues and expectation of prospects	What are your main reasons for choosing this profession? What are your long term objectives as farm operator? Are your revenues enough for you? What is your view on the prospects of swine farming (on the farm / in this area)? What advice would you give to your successor (your child or not)?
Relations with the food chain and the socio-professional environment	What are your sources of information and how do they serve you? Which farmers' cooperative do you belong to, why, and what do you expect of them? What professional and non-professional relations do you have outside your farm and what do these relations consist of? What type of discussions do you have? Do you search for more autonomy or for further integration in market chains?
Appreciation of farming practices and products	Are landscape and environmental management important issues for you? Should local characteristics be made evident in pork products (PGI, PDO, etc) What are the characteristics of swine farmers in this area and are they appreciated? What image does the public have of pork? Do you share that view?

Styles of swine farming in Lot, Aveyron and Tarn

On each farm either of the farming styles was dominantly present in farming. In Lot, a local dominant style was found. Table 2 represents portraits of the identified styles.

Features of the styles of swine farming

In all styles of farming the swine section was embedded in plural activity of various sorts. We encountered up to five different activities on one farm, although specialized swine farms occurred in all three departments. Aside swine farming we encountered in Lot mainly beef production – including various breeds for specialty products, and sheep farming. In Tarn and Aveyron we encountered also cereal production (mainly in Ségala), dairy production, and even horse breeding for milk production. In Aveyron several swine farmers were engaged in maternity collectives for piglet production.

The differentiation in styles of farming is both explained by structural features like location (department) and cooperative, and by the identified sociological dimensions. The structural features give a stronger determination to the styles of farming than the sociological dimensions. Therefore no further differentiation was detected among the five interviewed swine farmers in Lot who are all members of Qualiporc cooperative. The swine farmers in Aveyron and Tarn were divided by three guiding styles of farming, which were given metaphors: artisan, inheritor and stockman. The determination was linked to the type of other activities on the farm (specialized, cereal production, beef production or plural active) and to the farmers' cooperative.

The style *plural active Lot* is characterized by a combination of factors: the plural activity, and a specific farm management organization for the reduction of labor requirement that reflects the influence of the farmers' cooperative (Qualiporc) and the departmental agricultural board. The management system is 'classical' in reference to the technical extension application since the 1970^s in

the sense that the piglets are weaned after four weeks, so the sows are kept in seven groups. Hyperprolificacy is managed by balancing the farrows among the sows. All feedstuff is purchased commercially and usually mixed on the farm in line with the extension of the departmental board, for reasons of costs effectiveness. The farmers appreciate their cooperative for the service and commercialization of the hogs. In Lot a genetic swine brand is preferred that fits with a slaughtering a bit heavier than the standard type. The farmers' cooperative firmly promotes the production of these heavier hogs among their members for *Label Rouge* pork. This quality certificate addresses the public desire for combining less disputed production methods and the positive image of meat taste, caused by prolonged maturation of the animals. *Label Rouge* does not address any features of geographical determination, which is convenient for the swine producers in Lot, because departmental feedstuff production is not an option on the poor soils and departmental pork transformation is difficult to organize for lack of private slaughter houses.

Table 2. Features of the identified styles of swine farming, related to the identified dimensions

Style of farming Dimension	Plural active Lot	Artisan	Inheritor	Stockman
Herd and associated technology and the technical application	Aside dairy cows Farrower – finisher or finisher and beef “Classical” system Balancing farrows Commercial feeding mixed at farm Indicator: costs	Multiplier or breeding collective Passion for swine Specialized Practices adoption Technical indicators Improve performance	Poor effective attachment to the animals; “classical” production system Balancing farrows Various indicators	Cereal farmer Beef farmer Breeding collective Rustic animals (non hyper prolific) Indicator: costs
Organization and efficiency of labor and investments	Partner sometimes off farm job Prefers reproduction Organized for time off, but wants more	Perfectionist Organized for time off, but take little Likes the profession Coop employers	Organization functional Dislikes stable cleaning	Organization functional, but could be better Likes animals and annual planning
Ambition of revenues and expectation of prospects	50% or 50-75% of revenues from swine Crises is structural; prospects uncertain	50% or 90-95% of revenues from swine Quality of life Development for succession	50% of revenues from swine Liberty / own boss Continue farming Pessimism	50% of revenues from swine; revenues insufficient Liberty / own boss Valorize cereals
Relations with the food chain and the socio-professional environment	Influence coop: Feed mix at farm Genetic type swine Appreciates coop for services and commercialization	Frustrated by govern politics Criticizes coop Discusses global prices, labels, environment Socially implicated	Appreciates coop for services and commercialization Discusses in coop: global prices, labels, etc. Social appreciation of swine farmers poor	Appreciates coop Relatively isolated Good relations with neighbors
Appreciation of farming practices and products	Poor attachment to region / too many labels Differentiat: no value for farmer Pork image: fat Promotion not valid	Differentiation of products / labels Price margin farmer – consumer too high Own promotion important	Proud to be small in Ségala / Midi P Differentiation of products / labels Consumer under media pressure	Proud to be in Midi P / South-west Fr Differentiation: no value for farmer Supermarkets serve to sell our products

In Aveyron and Tarn there are various cooperatives actives. However, the styles of farming that were found were not limited to the influence of a specific cooperative. In reference to the sociological dimensions, the metaphors are reflecting the dominant farmers' logics and the dominant dimension:

The *artisan* is passionate about improving the technical management of the sows and to maximize the production. Most of his attention is given to reproduction, sow herd management and growth of finishing hogs. However, the focus is not restricted to quantitative data. In anticipation to the expected geographical labels, the artisan searches also for qualitative improvement to meet the criteria (an animal with more weight and more fat, and fed with specific products). In this search the artisan criticizes his farmers' cooperative for not generating enough added values for (geographical) quality features.

The *inheritor* is focused on one main perspective: maintaining a rural life and occupation in agriculture. Farm labor is nearly completely drawn from the family labor pool. Proud on the local heritage the inheritor anticipates also to the expected geographical labels, but he supports the farmers' cooperative to generate the market line.

The *stockman* is, above all, fond of his animals and passionate about remaining a swine farmer, even if he works at a lower productivity level. The essential is joy of living with animals (swine) on a farm;

and although part of the joy stems from the fact that the animals are productive, it is not the productivity level that offers the satisfaction. This way of life with the animals has certain introversion and requires a low burden of investments. Farm investments are kept as low as possible by putting together “least-cost” solutions. In Midi Pyrenees, this strategy is associated with the cereal production farms in Aveyron and Tarn. In this “least-cost” strategy, the option for regional production and geographical labels is rejected. Such a decision would require specific ambitions and a management focus for specific results, involving planned investments, as well as an extravert openness and external efforts to create and construct specific local marketing structures. The reduced motivation for investments may be related to the fact that the style *stockman* is associated with poor perspectives for (family) succession. This implicates low pressure on maintaining feasible farm perspectives.

The biggest discrepancy between the plural active swine farmers in Lot and the farming styles in Aveyron and Tarn is that the farmers in Lot do not see the production of swine for a geographical label as an option. Under the local conditions, it is impossible to meet the criteria for any geographical label, and the option is no part of the local discourse about swine farm development. The local discussions are about reducing costs, autonomy and social isolation, and the development of non-geographical labels (like *Label Rouge* – see above).

The style *plural active Lot* was not exclusively found in Lot, but also in Aveyron and two incidental cases in Tarn. This coincides with the geographical constellation of the three departments: Aveyron is closer to Lot than Tarn. Next, not all farmers in Lot were identified by the style *plural active*, but also by *inheritor* and two incidental cases of *stockman*. This coincides with the fact that *inheritor* is the most common style of farming in Lot's neighboring department Aveyron. In the comparison between Aveyron and Tarn the relatively elevated number of *artisan* in Aveyron is remarkable, whereas in Tarn the number of *stockman* is relatively elevated. The elevated number of *artisan* in Aveyron calls for associations with the fact that Aveyron has a tradition of several authentic products, labeled for designated origin, like *Roquefort cheese* (from sheep milk) and *Aveyron veal*. The elevated number of *stockman* in Tarn calls for associations with the small average size of the swine section on the farms.

Field debates

When the results were presented for debates in the cooperatives, the farmers' recognized the styles and recognized themselves in different styles. When discussing the future strategies of the cooperatives, the farmers related to their styles and the differences in regional opportunities and regional habits. Although both in Lot and in Aveyron and Tarn the farmers had serious concerns about the perspectives, they approached the issues from different angles, related to their information space.

Discussion

The first hypothesis of this study was that diversity in *styles of swine farming* in Midi Pyrenees may be reduced to a single style. The study shows in fact a single style of plural activity specific for Lot. In the department Lot, the overall dominant style of farming is metaphorically called *plural active Lot*. Swine production in Lot is an essential element of maintaining sufficient family income on farms. These farms are combining several activities and cannot specialize in any production they are involved. So, swine production is integrated to other activities giving flexibility and contributing to multifunctional unit.

The disequilibrium in manifestation of styles of farming in the production basin in northern Midi Pyrenees directs towards the issue of the ontogenesis of styles of farming. Originally, styles of farming were identified with reference to locally shared endogenous knowledge about how farming practices should be performed (Hofstee, 1946). The vast input of externally developed and universal scientific knowledge in farming in the late 20th century did not reduce the diversity in styles to a single universal style, but led to a diversification of styles, newly based on technology and labor, investments and markets (Van der Ploeg and Long, 1994). In our survey area, the input of external knowledge led to a new, locally shared style in Lot, and a diversity of styles based on technology and labor and investments in Aveyron and Tarn.

Note that styles of farming are identified in relation to each other, based on the contrasts in the farmers' perceptions and activities, and estimated by an analysis of local professional relations among swine farmers, in a specific universe of styles. There are no 'objective features' from which styles of farming are identified; they are always subjected to the contrast that they form with other styles identified in the same badge. However, as a frame of reference for these styles there are

identifications of dimensions and modes of perceptions that appeal to a general sense of logic, which justifies the use of similar metaphors for identifying the styles of farming in different regions and unrelated surveys.

The divergence in this case between the logic in Lot on the one hand and in Aveyron and Tarn on the other, seems related to the question of *specialization*. As a consequence, the orientation of farmers on production intensity versus plural activity is related to the integration in merchandize flows. It seems paradox that the focus on further intensification is found in the departments of Aveyron and Tarn where merchandize flows are more intraregional orientated, whereas in Lot, where the merchandize flows are super departmental orientated.

With the intraregional divergence of specialization the information space diverged as well. The local diversification of factorial prices, production intensity or production scale cannot be taken as either cause or result of the farmers' orientation. They can only be taken as an iterative, self inflicting process, in which both historical factors and contrasting situations created the logics. Each situation generates its own knowledge development and contributes to increasing divergence of logics.

From the analysis of farming styles it looks as if environmental issues do not play a significant role in the region in the discussion about individual and collective strategies. That image is not entirely correct. In general the issue is not as hot as in the intensive regions, like in Brittany, where extensive measures are required for adaptation to government rules. In Midi Pyrenees the government regulations are much easier met, and the pork board Midiporc has an extension program to provide technical assistance to farmers with their farm measures. The hardship in the area stems from incidental interactions with (often non-swine-farming) neighbors, which may lead to social stress and lack of opportunities for farm developments. However, these incidents are not linked to any specific style of farming and there is no collective organization for the defense of the subjected farmers. Therefore these aspects have played a minor role in this presentation of the study.

For explaining the merchandize flows of pork it should be noted that the market for fresh pork has developed only relatively recent, i.e. since about the 1960^s. From traditions everywhere, pork used to be a product for conservation after transformation measures involving dry cure, smoking or cooking. The fresh pork market has expanded dramatically by the demand for convenience food, distributed by supermarkets, and appealing to the hasty urban life. There are neither authentic traditions nor consumers' pressures towards diversification of fresh pork. The whole issue of product diversification in pork is still concentrated on the conserved product (mainly ham and sausages). And these products are primarily associated with specific districts and stations for transformation and commercialization. And it is only in relation to these products that there is an interest for the origin of the meat in terms of farm location and farm management practices. *Label Rouge* is an initiative to make a distinction on the fresh market with a claim on citizens' desires for farm management practices (comparable to the initiative of *organic label*, although with a different set of rules and norms). It does not demand the consumers to associate the product with authenticity, geography or any distinct characteristic, but to dissociate it from intensive and industrial production methods; the alliance between producers and consumers is the projection of the sense of dissociation from the industrial image.

The second hypothesis of our study was to examine the role of collective action in orientations of farmers. Our field study shows a great diversity in local debates on what to do for the future of farming. In Aveyron and Tarn, farmers' cooperatives seek more power in negotiating for slaughter hog prices in the competition with the Spanish offer. And, as far as they seek for increase in revenues through geographical labels, they do so within the logic of the style of *artisan*; that is, through intensive production based on intraregional features and options, like Ségala cereals for as feedstuff basis and the production of an older and heavier slaughter hog than standard (about 130 kg versus 100 to 110 kg) for slaughtering at Lacaune. These options are intertwined with farmers' cooperatives policies.

The problem of power over slaughter hog prices on the standard market is a hot issue at Alliance Porc sud (APS). The discussion is related to their past of a powerful cooperative with a strategy to equal French Brittany in production methods and with the current overcapacity for slaughter hogs. At both sides, the farmers' cooperatives that have potential interest for creating alliances (Rouergue Elevage (RE) and Porci-d'Oc) are turning away from the policy of following French Brittany as their example. The relation with RE has is still tense and they are also promoted the development of a regionally oriented production in the 'Greater South'. At the other side, the search for PGI / PDO denomination at Lacaune is a driving force in Porci-d'Oc.

Nevertheless, the three styles of farming identified in this study (artisan, inheritor and stockman) are found in both farmers' cooperatives, which are taken as examples in the region. The study shows the

difficulty to separate these styles from the satisfaction of the farmers' logic with the policy of their farmers' cooperative. All farmers' cooperatives should increasingly take into account the ongoing diversification among the farming styles of their members.

In all these dynamics, the question of protection of geographical name to enhance the commercialization process is at the center of the analysis. As a main example, the criteria for the expected PGI / PDO *Lacaune ham*, although still potential, influence already the farmers' logic substantially. The influence was reflected in the farming styles, as well as in the specific contrast on the dimension *ambition of revenues and the expectation of prospects (iii)*. The perspective of the PGI / PDO appeared essential for the style *artisan* and for the logic of all farmers that anticipated farm succession. The perspective appeared important for the style *inheritor* and for the logic of all farmers that intended to continue farming at the present farm location. It appeared rejected by the style *stockman* for its lack of logic in their context of perceptions, and by all farmers without prospect for farm succession.

Since the option of a fusion between the cooperatives APS and Porci-d'Oc is put to a hold in 2006, the restitution debate with APS members was biased consequently. Although the APS members discussed about the desire for development of geographically nominated labels, the specific option for a PGI / PDO *Lacaune ham* was not an explicit point of discussion. Paradoxically, at the same time the members of the debate defended the political strategy of their cooperative for further specialization similar to French Brittany; that is further intensification and cost reduction of the production for continuing the competition with the offer for standard slaughter hogs from the intensive production regions in France. It seems therefore that the boards of the cooperatives APS and Porci-d'Oc may be imprisoned by the discussion. The future of the farmers' cooperatives in Aveyron and Tarn from now on seem very dependent on the next moves of their boards to (re-)unite their members with considerate respect to their diversity in farming styles.

In Lot, most farmers are plural active in animal farming. Traditionally, the animals were herbivores. Swine were introduced as a supplementary source of income without requirement of land, although sometimes kept in open air meadow field systems. The reconstruction of farmers' cooperatives has ended in a 'one for all' situation; the cooperative Qualiporc. The debate about the study results in this cooperative was very lively and the outcome of a *plural active Lot* style of farming was widely acknowledged. All (but one) farmers present recognized themselves in this style of farming although most of them added a secondary tendency to one of the styles found in Aveyron and Tarn (*artisan*, *inheritor* or *stockman*). The exception was a farmer who thought himself an entrepreneur and atypical for swine farming in the region.

The board of Qualiporc is eager to lead its members towards added value in the form of *Label Rouge*. This policy is an obvious choice for an area where physical geographical features are hard to attach to product specification. There is no typical source for feedstuff and for slaughtering the hogs the farmers are dependent on the standard slaughter houses. Added value before slaughtering can only be created in 'environmental and animal friendly' production systems. These systems coincide with reduction of production intensity and the allied image.

The strategy for *Label Rouge* quality was widely supported by the members present at the debate, without any opposition, although some of them doubted whether the outcome would really encompass new perspectives. This was particularly noted when the debate focused on the future perspectives of the farmers for their situation in 10 to 15 years: the discussion dropped still. The paradox between the eagerness to develop quality labeling and the perspective it would create was stunning. It seemed as if lost in lack of alternatives, and therefore the only hope.

Whether or not *Label Rouge* is the only hope for Lot is hard to determine. In view of the fast regression of swine farming in the department, it seems so. And at least there were no serious investigations going on to look for alternatives. For example: renewing the support for open air meadow systems was not proposed as an option, presumably because of the implications for labor requirements; the work is hard and unpleasant under in seasonal weather conditions. Besides there are no conceptual examples available on how to merchandize such features. The combination of *Label Rouge* (or any other label) with specific meat image reflecting the specific regional 'Lot culture' was not proposed, presumably for the lack of local feedstuff production and the lack of power of the cooperatives over the process after slaughtering. Nevertheless it may be postulated that for the creation of future perspective of swine farming in Lot a diversification in styles of farming within the concept of plural activity and focused on additional small scale opportunities may be required for the creation of perspectives.

Conclusions

The scientific impact of this study is concentrated on the connection between farming style and interaction with farmers' cooperatives. The issue came forward because the styles of farming in the production basin could not be analyzed and interpreted in accordance with a single concept of farming styles approaches. The societal impact of this study is the awareness of the interaction between farmers' logic and farmers' cooperatives policies.

On the issue of the two hypotheses, we conclude that the first hypothesis is partly confirmed. We have put forward the aspects of specialization and merchandize flows as explanatory factors for the appearance of a single style of swine farming in Lot. The question, whether the regression of regional swine production is contributing as well, is still open for further research.

The way that farmers produce and organize their production is connected to the organization of merchandize flows. They are at the core of the local debate, which is different from giving advice to the producers. The styles of farming are contributing to the debate and, at the same time, they are influenced by the dynamic of the debate.

We have shown that although a production basin is a unit in technical and economic terms, it is not so in sociological terms. The sociological 'unit' that we found was identified as space of information. This space appeared segmented by the influence of the cooperatives and the local debates.

From our work in farming styles approach, we showed that farming styles are a relevant factor to explain local dynamics of farming and the motivation of farmers to involve in collective actions, and including a way of reflecting about questions of cooperative organization and the organization of industrial chains and networks.

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