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Comparison of swine farming styles in Brittany and Midi-Pyrenees

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Abstract: We examine some sociological factors that determine the adaptive margin of swine farms in two regions in France, by using a comparative farming styles analysis. Côtes d'Armor in French Brittany is known as a concentration area for swine production. Midi Pyrenees is taken as an example of swine farming in regression. In both regions a survey was carried out, with semi-structured interviews, a more structured questionnaire and field debates with farmers of various cooperatives. Five different styles of farming were identified in Brittany, in reference to three key dimensions. The study in Midi Pyrenees showed a specific single style of plural activity in the department Lot. Three styles of farming were distinguished in Aveyron and Tarn, which were not entirely similar to the situation in Côtes d'Armor. The debates with the farmers reflected different perspectives for swine farmers and cooperatives in the two regions.

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

Introduction

Styles of farming are patterns of coherence in farming practices related to contrasting farmers' logic (Van der Ploeg, 2003; Commandeur, 2006). The concept is used for the evaluation of sociological factors of swine farming between French Brittany (Côtes D'armor) and Midi Pyrenees (Lot, Aveyron and Tarn). Brittany is known as a concentration area for swine production. In Midi Pyrenees during the last decade two out of three swine farm exploitations have vanished and the remaining farms face serious difficulties. In France farmers' cooperatives are strongly organizing the production, ensuring the insertion in the food supply chain. They negotiate with slaughter houses and processing factories. They also supply technical advice to their members and doing so, they express their policy vision on how to produce. We assume that swine farmers are more susceptible to visions expressed by their cooperative in Midi Pyrenees than in Brittany, and that they feel more dependent on the local strategy of their cooperative. The aim of the article is to explore the relevance of the factor 'policy orientation of the cooperatives' for explaining the diversity and adaptive margin of farmers' logic both in Midi Pyrenees and in Brittany.

Materials and Methods

In both cases a survey was carried out, starting with semi-structured interviews, which explored the scope of diversity in swine farmers' logic. Based on these interviews, a more structured questionnaire was developed and used in a survey with a larger number of farmers (Commandeur *et al.*, 2008a, 2008b). Analysis of the farmers' responses contributed to the identification of three descriptive dimensions for analysis: passions for farming, ambitions for revenues and appreciation of swine farming practices and products. The results were presented for discussion within the farmers' cooperatives.

Results

Based on these key dimensions, five different styles of farming were identified in Côtes d'Armor, and were assigned with metaphors referring to their guiding logic: (i) intensity entrepreneur, (ii) scale entrepreneur, (iii) craftsman, (iv) inheritor, and (v) stockman. The cooperatives encompass biased subpopulations of the regional distribution of farming styles: *intensity entrepreneurs* dominated the cooperative Léon Tréguier (LT). Elpor, a small cooperative without extension service, was biased with a relatively large proportion of *stockmen*. Cooperl, the largest cooperative that provides all kinds of services to the farmers, was relatively biased with *inheritors*.

The study in Midi Pyrenees shows in fact a single style of plural activity specific for the department Lot and related to the departmental cooperative Qualiporc. Three styles of farming were distinguished among the farmers in the departments Aveyron and Tarn. All three were found within the cooperative Alliance Porc Sud (APS). The metaphors, used for the styles of farming found in Aveyron and Tarn were not entirely similar to those of three styles in Côtes d'Armor. 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.

Discussion and Conclusion

Both styles of *entrepreneur* in Brittany were characterized by the focus on efficiency in investments and labor. The decision for investments or (external) labor inputs depended on the expected margins for profits, related to the farm scale and the ruling uncertainty about income perspectives. In Midi Pyrenees farms tend to be smaller and the perspectives are more uncertain, because of the higher production costs. Neither of the two styles of *entrepreneur* in Brittany was actually identified in Midi Pyrenees (although a few farms in the survey were atypically identified as having such a style as a dominant logic). Next, in the case of Midi Pyrenees, we preferred the metaphor "artisan" instead of "craftsman" in Brittany. This style we encountered to a limited extent in Midi Pyrenees: although some farmers were very focused on productivity levels, is still related to modest hyperprolificacy and reduced system adaptations in comparison with Brittany. In reverse, system adaptation in the technical performances in Midi Pyrenees often involved a (re-) orientation on off-standard products (with designated labels). The style *plural active Lot* had no equivalent in Brittany. Swine production in Lot is an essential element of maintaining sufficient family income on farms that combine several activities and cannot specialize in any production in which the family is involved. So, swine production is integrated to other activities giving flexibility and contributing to a multifunctional unit. In the cases of intensity entrepreneur related to LT in Brittany and plural active Lot related to Qualiporc in Midi Pyrenees there is a near complete overlap of farming style, cooperative and location, although both concentrate on opposite strategies and perspectives. The styles stockman and inheritor were identified both in Brittany and in Midi Pyrenees related to all involved cooperatives. These farming styles focus specifically on low input production, and on family labor and succession for farming successively. Cooperl in Brittany is in a comparable situation to APS in Midi Pyrenees to the extent that they try to provide a wide variety of services. They differ however in the satisfaction of the styles of farming with the cooperative. In Brittany the *craftsmen* are satisfied with the technical support they receive, but the *inheritors* want more support to creating family farm perspectives. In Midi Pyrenees the *inheritors* are satisfied with the completeness of services, whereas the *artisans* are dissatisfied with the support for the development of product diversification. In both regions there are not just different styles of farming; when assessing the options for future strategies of the cooperatives, the farmers relate to their styles as well as to regional opportunities. In Brittany the future strategies were predominantly focused on the markets for standard products. Midi Pyrenees revealed historical and ongoing controversies leading to indecisiveness or delay.

In Côtes d'Armor, and in Lot, Aveyron and Tarn, Midi Pyrenees, similar dimensions were identified for the evaluation of farming styles. However the styles of farming in the two regions were not entirely similar, related to the opposite perspectives: relatively stable in Brittany and in regression in Midi Pyrenees. All styles of farming showed however specific accents in their relations to the farmers' cooperatives. The study shows the divergence in the creation of adaptive margin towards perspective in swine farming.

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