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## Statement on policies (session 4)

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► **To cite this version:**

Claire Lamine. Statement on policies (session 4). U.S. Agroecology Summit 2023, University of Vermont, May 2023, Kansas City (US), United States. hal-04200393

**HAL Id: hal-04200393**

**<https://hal.inrae.fr/hal-04200393>**

Submitted on 8 Sep 2023

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# U.S. Agroecology Summit 2023

## Session 4: Harnessing Resources, Redirecting Policy and Addressing Structural Barriers to Advance Agroecology Research in the USA

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Statement in support of Session 4: *Harnessing Resources, Redirecting Policy and Addressing Structural Barriers to Advance Agroecology Research in the USA*

*A note to readers: in this short statement, I have attempted to draw on my diverse experiences with agroecological research and policies especially in France and Brazil, hoping to provide some transversal insights echoing the 4 key questions of the panel.*

- **Devoted policies are necessary for advancing agroecology and supporting a larger commitment of research communities.**

Both France and Brazil have set up agroecological policies around 10 years ago, that allowed some significant progress by supporting collective farmers' innovations and changes in practices, reorienting the agricultural teaching system (even if this is full of inertia), structuring new markets and outlets especially through public programs and regulations linked to public food procurement, and encouraging transdisciplinary agroecological research. In Brazil agroecological groups (*nucleos*) in universities, supported by national funds, developed a range of local partnerships with farmers and civil society organisations. In both countries, these policies were imperfect and could seem weak in front of industrial agriculture, and also led to processes of cooptation of agroecology by an overly technocratic agroecology in France or could not resist to the larger post-2016 policy dismantling in Brazil; however, they also led to the creation and reinforcement of lasting alliances across the academic, farming and civil society arenas (Lamine 2020, Niederle et al., 2022).

- **The analysis of agroecological policies and the experimentation of new forms of collective reflexivity lead to recognize agroecological transitions as open-ended processes.**

As coordinator of an Agroecology program within my INRAE department (2016-2020), I have contributed to a collective exploration of research priorities across disciplines and based on this, gathered diverse research experiences informing this open ended nature of agroecological transitions. Our work has revealed the importance of open-ended, participatory, iterative and process-focused transitions in agroecology, rather than determinist (with predefined steps and pathways) and top-down approaches that often characterize mainstream development, explored with many other colleagues and partners through a collective writing process and a [collective book](#). Coordinating a research project in partnership with the French Ministry of Agriculture around one of the government's first agroecological program (aimed at fostering collective farmers dynamics by funding local farmers groups), confirmed this idea that public schemes should favour this open-endedness and allow farmers and their partners to set up their own experiments and knowledge exchange and building processes. This indicates the need for investments in participatory approaches to research, learning and policy.

- **Embedded, ongoing transdisciplinary research is needed for supporting territorial approaches to food systems sustainability**

Along with local civil society /farmers networks and local authorities, I have set up an action research project, [L'Assiette et le Territoire](#) in my own region, Ardèche, around a plenary group of around 25 local actors and researchers. This allowed to build a shared interpretation of the territorial food system's trajectory and the main challenges (social inclusion, recognition of the diversity of visions etc.), to write a manifesto, to co-define research questions (around new farmers, food democracy, and other issues). This action research process led to establish a lasting autonomous local food council, involving a diversity of local actors, whose main aims is to act as an arena of exchange across initiatives and across local policies (set up within the french policy framework of '[Territorial Food Projects](#)') as well as to play a watchdog role in relation to the key issues of food justice and food democracy.

- **Agroecological research support/programs should favour co-led research**

At a larger scale, I have set up with a range of partners from the academic world, but also from farmers and civil society networks as well as local authorities, a European network, [ATTER](#), whose key principles is to work on a shared portfolio of agroecological transitions territorial case studies across 5 countries (France, Italy, the UK, USA and Brazil) and foster cross fertilization processes. This was possible because European research programs allow and favour such co-led projects which

appear as a powerful way to support transdisciplinary knowledge co-creation and mobilization as well as co-learning across agroecologists around the world, including from the global south.

## References

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