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Agroecology in French Polynesia: little support for development, but
consumers want it

Summary

For the period 2018-2022, the four Pacific Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) - New Caledonia, Pitcairn, Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia - are benefiting from the Pacific Regional Project of Territories for the Sustainable Management of Ecosystems (PROTEGE). This project supports the OCTs' public policies on agriculture and forestry, and a call for applications has been launched for a network of agroecology demonstration farms in the Pacific. The aim of such a project is to encourage the agro-ecological transition towards sustainable agriculture, particularly organic, adapted to climate change and respectful of biodiversity. One of the main aims is to set up a regional network of demonstration farms for innovative practices in line with the principles of agro-ecology, drawing on the know-how and knowledge of farmers¹. In terms of agroecology, following the COVID-19 crisis, the Federation of Associations for the Preservation of the Environment (FAPE - Te Ora Naho) in Polynesia set up a programme entitled "Mon fa'a'apu durable" (BOULEAU, 2020).

With this in mind, in September 2020, Moorea's *Food and Cook lab* ran a free training course for people wishing to create their own fa'a'apu, the Polynesian vegetable garden. The course, entitled "My sustainable fa'a'apu", introduces participants to the various principles of agroecology, including composting, mulching, water management and biodynamic agriculture. The overall aim of the course is to promote farming that respects nature and strives for food self-sufficiency. Initially, the course was designed to support professional farmers in their transition to permaculture and agro-ecology, but following strong demand, it has also been offered to the general public. What's more, in French Polynesia, as a result of concerns and demands for traceability, consumers are turning more towards small-scale agricultural production units, which are also contributing to the agro-ecological and bio-economic transition.

¹ Presentation of the Oceanian Regional Project of Territories for the Sustainable Management of Ecosystems (PROTEGE) from the website *The services of the State and the Territory of Wallis and Futuna*, "Network of demonstration farms for the sustainable management of ecosystems".

"l'agroécologie dans le Pacifique 2020-2022_Programme PROTEGE", online 28 July 2020, [URL: https://www.wallis-et-futuna.gouv.fr/layout/set/print/Publications/Appels-a-projets/Reseau-de-fermes-de-demonstration-de-l-agroecologie-dans-le-Pacifique-2020-2022_Programme-PROTEGE], accessed 5 August 2020.

Agroecology, while receiving less support from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), enables farmers to produce as much as conventional agriculture, which is based on the use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. Agroecology is a convergence of agronomy and ecology: it seeks to remain productive while relying on the natural functions of ecosystems. What's more, agro-ecological farmers have a business model that is economically viable (GREMILLET, FOSSE, 2020). Agroecology therefore appears to be a solution in the face of climate change, all the more so in Polynesian territories experiencing water stress, such as the Tuamotus. However, it is still under-funded and insufficiently supported by the public authorities.

Over the course of the 2019-2020 academic year, a group of student gardeners with no training in the subject have been shaping an uncultivated area to grow plants needed for consumption. To optimise the plot's space and production capacity, the students have even developed an awareness of permaculture. The garden was divided in two using an agro-ecological approach.

In conclusion, agroecology appears to be a solution to climate change, all the more so in the Polynesian territories, which are experiencing major water stress. However, it is still under-funded and insufficiently supported by the public authorities. Through this agricultural model, Polynesian farmers are providing services of common interest, in the interests of consumer health. The COVID-19 pandemic has raised questions about the fragility of our food sovereignty and the role of biodiversity as a bulwark against possible pandemics and zoonoses. This should, however, encourage the public authorities to support agro-ecology, while providing subsidies to farmers who integrate environmental and biodiversity issues into their farming methods, and then gradually stop subsidising industrial livestock farming and intensive agriculture, characterised by high-yielding crops per hectare.

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