

**Pierre Le Gall**

[plegall@isara.fr](mailto:plegall@isara.fr)

Isara Lyon-Avignon, Rural Studies Laboratory

**Claire Delfosse**

[clairedelfosse@orange.fr](mailto:clairedelfosse@orange.fr)

Lyon 2 University, Rural Studies Laboratory

## **Agroecology Scientific Day 2024**

### **Workshop n°4, Session n°1**

#### **Title :**

**An agro-ecological transition at risk? The case of PDO products in Bresse.**

#### **Summary:**

In 2009, one of France's oldest designations of origin, Bresse poultry, proposed new production conditions that were particularly ambitious in terms of their environmental components<sup>1</sup>. For example, the specifications now require 25 metres of linear hedgerow per hectare. In 2014<sup>2</sup>, two products historically associated with Bresse (Bérard and Marchenay, 2007; Delfosse, 2014, 2011), Bresse butter and Bresse cream<sup>3</sup>, were awarded their PDO, with cows fed on grass and pasture. In terms of herd management (free-range for poultry, pasture for cattle), modes of governance (via the ODG), and the existence of a polyculture-poly-breeding model, agricultural production in the Bresse region meets various agroecological principles (economic, social and environmental) according to the criteria laid down by the FAO and other experts (FAO, 2018; Mottet et al., 2020).

Despite this buoyant momentum at the start of the 2010s, this agro-ecological transition, which bears little or no name, remains under pressure at a time when its environmental, social and economic foundations are crumbling. For example, the requirement for poultry to graze is now subjecting the animals to more predation, even if this is reinforced by the presence of hedges, while the increasingly frequent summer heat waves are leading to changes in poultry behaviour and stress (nervous cocks). Although poultry farms seem to be relatively unaffected by drought, unlike cattle farms, the question of animal welfare remains, in terms of its ability to coexist with environmental issues<sup>4</sup>. Predation is a factor affecting the economy of poultry farms (up to 20% loss in some cases). But the dynamics of the region are just as much affected by issues linked to the industry and more socio-economic issues. The gradual closure of farms (through conversion or closure) is threatening the balance between mixed farming and poly-breeding, but above all it is threatening the only breeding and genetic selection centre for the Bresse chicken and turkey industry, at Bechanne<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Decree no. 2009-1601 dated 18 December 2009 on the registered designation of origin "Volaille de Bresse" or "Poulet de Bresse", "Poularde de Bresse", "Chapon de Bresse".

<sup>2</sup> Bulletin officiel du Ministère de l'agriculture, de l'agroalimentaire et de la forêt n°27-2014

<sup>3</sup> Whey, mixed with cereals such as maize, is traditionally fed to poultry.

<sup>4</sup> The practice of spruce harvesting is currently the subject of much debate, between animal welfare considerations, the need to protect the environment and the need to protect the animals. historical practices and zootechnical interest.

<sup>5</sup> Below 600,000 chicks sold annually, the structure's profitability is not guaranteed.

What's more, a reorganisation of intermediaries and downstream players (diversification of the only local poultry producer, emergence of national groups such as LDC), as well as a reduction in the number of intermediaries, is weakening the interdependence between Bresse breeders and poultry producers. The same applies to Bresse butters and creams, which are no longer the flagship products of the companies (such as La Bressane), and are at best sometimes used as loss-leader products. Upstream, they are struggling to pay for milk and are suffering from a significant drop in their assets. Lastly, in the poultry sector, the Covid crisis has revealed the industry's heavy dependence on the catering trade and gastronomy for outlets, while current inflation is undermining sales of a top-of-the-range product. These cyclical crises do not, however, mask the profound structural crisis affecting Bresse poultry, which is consumed less and less locally, and is not well suited to new forms of domestic consumption. Faced with these challenges in the agricultural sector (to which we should add the competition for access to biomass through methanisation) and in society as a whole (decline in local consumption, changes in home catering), the role of local and regional authorities is crucial. Food transition policies (relocalisation of food production, in particular through PATs) and energy transition policies are leaving out these products, which have strong local roots. Long absent, or compartmentalised by administrative divisions<sup>6</sup>, territorial action is now seen through an economic prism, particularly in favour of the survival of industrial (processing) or breeding facilities (Béchanne breeding centre). At present, environmental fundamentals are being replaced by economic issues relating to the sustainability of the sector and its assets.

Based on surveys carried out as part of the ANR *Gingko*<sup>7</sup> research programme in 2024, this paper looks at the fragility of agricultural models that are strongly influenced by agroecology. What is more, we show how difficult it is to combine environmental, social and economic sustainability, and how difficult it is to perpetuate this triptych over time. We will also look at how the reshaping of food practices, and indeed our food systems, is impacting on the agro-ecological transition. Finally, we will look at how local and regional authorities, which have been particularly encouraged to take up 'ordinary' or non PDO products as a result of the relocalisation of food being placed on the public agenda<sup>8</sup>, are now trying to reinvest in these historic products. This work is part of a wider debate on the place of the territory in the agro-ecological transition (Gliessman, 2016; Wezel et al., 2016), but within an innovative framework, since it involves PDO products that have been little questioned until now.

#### References :

- Bérard, L., Marchenay, P., 2007. Produits de terroir: comprendre et agir. CNRS, Bourg-en-Bresse.  
Delfosse, C., 2014. Le métier de crémier-fromager : de 1850 à nos jours, Mer du Nord. ed. Rinxent.  
Delfosse, C., 2011. La patrimonialisation des produits dits de terroir. quand " le rural " rencontre  
What is "urban"? Anthropology of food.

---

<sup>6</sup> The Beurre and Crème de Bresse PDO areas, as well as the Bresse poultry and turkey PDO areas, are divided between the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Bourgogne-Franche-Comté regions.

<sup>7</sup> GINGKO. Geographical Indications as a common heritage of knowledge. Re-evaluation of current models of regulation and collective action in the context of agro-ecological transitions.

<sup>8</sup> Via Territorial Food Projects (PAT)

FAO, 2018. The 10 elements of agroecology: guiding the transition to sustainable food and agriculture systems.

sustainable agriculture.

Gliessman, S., 2016. Transforming food systems with agroecology. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* 40, 187-189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2015.1130765>

Mottet, A., Bicksler, A., Lucantoni, D., De Rosa, F., Scherf, B., Scopel, E., López-Ridauro, S., Gemmil-Herren, B., Bezner Kerr, R., Sourisseau, J.-M., Petersen, P., Chotte, J.-L., Loconto, A., Tiftonell, P., 2020. Assessing Transitions to Sustainable Agricultural and Food Systems: A Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation (TAPE). *Front. Sustain. Food Syst.* 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2020.579154>

Wezel, A., Brives, H., Casagrande, M., Clément, C., Dufour, A., Vandenbroucke, P., 2016. Agroecology territories: places for sustainable agricultural and food systems and biodiversity conservation. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* 40, 132-144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2015.1115799>