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Research

Agri-Food Ferments II - UMR Territoires / France

**Agroecology Scientific Day 2024**

Workshop 4, Session 3a

**Title:**

**Cooperative agricultural projects: from the local conditions of emergence to the means of transforming the local agri-food system**

**Abstract:**

At a time when the literature describes multiple changes in the agricultural sector, affecting both workforce profiles and farm characteristics (Purseigle and Hervieu 2023), a number of new cooperative agricultural projects are emerging with the aim of meeting the challenges of renewing and sustaining the workforce, preserving the environment and biodiversity, promoting new consumer practices, transforming public policies and mobilising citizens around agricultural and food issues. And yet, although these projects are mobilised around a set of common challenges, the ways in which they are implemented vary widely. Described in the literature as 'innovative', these projects correspond to ways of practising agriculture that are 'under construction', leading them to experiment, adopting a wide variety of legal arrangements, economic models, funding solutions and work organisation (Cretin, Laurens, et Scheromm 2023, 7). Often resulting from the combined action of associations and citizens, institutions and public authorities, or even private players, these projects have been described by some authors as part of a new agri-food geography (Renting and Wiskerke, 2010; Wiskerke, 2009) that brings together market players, civil society and local governments.

Based on this observation, the Ferments research project, which brings together researchers, employees and volunteers from the Terre de Liens association network, has obtained funding from the French National Research Agency (ANR) for "Science with and for Society" (SAPS), with the aim of studying the characteristics, emergence methods and development conditions of these cooperative agricultural projects, which are still difficult to grasp for the time being by the players who want to support them. More specifically, the research aims to clarify the conditions under which these agricultural projects can assert themselves more strongly in their territories, emerging from the position of marginal 'alternatives', and have a greater impact on agri-food systems (De Schutter 2017).

To answer this question, between 2023 and 2024, nine agricultural projects were explored. Most of them were explored through "learning visits". Combining interviews, site visits, document collection and photography, the 'learning visits' provided opportunities for cross-learning between researchers and stakeholders. In addition, three pilot sites were chosen for in-depth studies, which enabled us to collect, record and evaluate

to reconstruct in detail, in dialogue with the players involved in these projects, the events, controversies and key sequences in their development.

In this paper, we will present the initial results of the research by sketching out the initial contours of these projects through their agricultural activities, the values they share and the common issues they are trying to address. In addition, we will propose an interpretation of the diversity of activities, legal arrangements, economic models, financing solutions and work organisation adopted by these agricultural projects, and we will show how this diversity is conditioned by the opportunities and constraints specific to the territories hosting the projects and their integration into a plurality of social and territorial networks.

## Bibliographic references

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