

LEARNING BY DOING AND SHARING, A WAY TO IMPROVE AGROFORESTRY KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND EXCHANGE AMONG PRACTITIONERS

The example of the Agr'eau programme, an initiative designed for and by farmers in France



THE WHAT AND WHY

Purely academic approaches do not allow a full learning of agroecology principles

Knowledge transfer is one of the key axes for the development of innovative practices such as agroforestry. Agronomy, ecology, tree management, etc. are already particularly complex fields of expertise when undertaken separately, so composite subjects such as agroecology or agroforestry require an even deeper understanding of interdependent varying factors and interactions between components at the system level. Theoretical approaches cannot provide the whole set of skills needed; it can lead to forgetting crucial points for sustainable agroforestry

development at plot, farm, and landscape scale. Knowledge creation and exchange therefore must be implemented in a context-specific approach and be farmer-centered. One such example is the methodology used within the Agr'eau regional development programmes and implemented at a water catchment level in France. The aim of this initiative is encourage collaborative development of optimal farming practices, taking a landscape approach to soil, water, and resource management.



Field trip to Jérémy Auzeral's farm, farmer in Lot-et-Garonne, France, 2018

Credits: Association Française d'Agroforesterie



Students in Agricultural sciences visiting Michel Nedellec's farm, Gers, France, 2018

Credits: Association Française d'Agroforesterie

HOW IS THE CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

Mixed trainings and on-farm events to optimize sharing and emergence of ideas

From the beginning, the Agr'eau programmes were designed to build a community of practitioners and experts, and foster exchanges between the different stakeholders evolving in and around the agricultural sector (farmers, foresters, natural resource managers, decision makers, scientists, teachers, etc.). Since the launching of the first pilot programme in 2013 (established in the Southwestern Adour-Garonne water catchment), more than 1,000 events were organized, gathering 30,000 people in total. In the same time, nearly 700 farmers and advisors were trained

with a mixed methodology of digital learning, lectures, field trips and technical days. The main focus of the Agr'eau programmes is on training the practitioners (lifelong learning), but partnerships with agricultural colleges are also an important objective. Resources are regularly published online as newsletters and in the press through technical magazines. Lastly, open days at innovative farms from the Agr'eau network are a good opportunity to reach an ever wider audience and encourage a reconnection between producers and consumers.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 727872.

Keywords: Learning; teaching; pedagogy; training; knowledge

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HIGHLIGHTS

Agroforestry practices are being (re)invented in the field every day, based on local observations and sharing of site-specific experiences among practitioners. The Agr'eau programmes, implemented at a catchment scale in the four corners of France, are aiming to foster this "learning by doing" process allowing for collaborative grassroots development of improved farming practices, while taking a landscape approach to soil, water, and resource management. Farmers, advisors, natural resource managers, researchers, teachers, and even the agri-food sector are now involved in this continuous improvement process encouraging a faster and more appropriate sustainable farming transition at regional level.



Technical day at Pierre Pujos' farm, Gers, France, 2018
Credits: Association Française d'Agroforesterie

FURTHER INFORMATION

Canet, A., Salvo, E., Schreiber, K., Beziat, R., Sirven, B. and Balaguer, F. 2016. Agr'eau: a farmer-centered grassroots effort to develop resource-efficient, eco-friendly, climate-smart agriculture across the Adour-Garonne Catchment Basin (South-West France). IN: Proceedings of the 3rd European Agroforestry Conference – Montpellier, 23-25 May 2016 (corresponding author: fabien.balaguer@agroforesterie.fr)

Balaguer, F. 2017. Agr'eau: developing a resource-efficient, ecofriendly climate-smart agriculture across the Adour-Garonne basin (South-West France). French Agroforestry Association; power point presentation for the Agroforestry 2017 Conference – Cranfield University, 22 June 2017.

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ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

From Fork to Fork - Towards market integration for agroforestry and agroecology

In the past two years, Agr'eau has started to build on its network of farmers and stakeholders to involve the rest of the value chain (cooperatives, industries, wholesalers, collective catering companies, etc.) in the agroforestry/agroecological transition.

There has long been felt a need to create an entity that could play the role of a platform able to integrate vertically the major players of these new production/processing/distribution chains, and to reach out horizontally to a wide range of consumers. This is the main mission of the movement Pour une Agriculture du Vivant (PADV), created in 2018 to gather private companies in direct relation with national farmers associations and assisted by local organisations and advisory offices specialising in agroecology/agroforestry development. PADV is laying the foundations in France for an integrated and ambitious agroecological production-distribution approach on a large scale, from corporations in the private sector and high-level political commitment, to engagement from farmers.

As PADV provides services to food companies by helping them create sustainable distribution chains and identifying producers that fit specified agroecology and agroforestry standards, the additional value is being reinvested in applied research and assistance to farmers for implementing permanent soil cover, low soil disturbance, low phytosanitary interventions and tree reintroduction in landscapes. By bringing the subject to the wider audience (consumers), this project is a major opportunity to involve every citizen in agroforestry development and to reach beyond practitioners or specialised researchers.

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4 JULY 2019