

Worldwide Agricultural and rural diversity facing the challenge of corporate agriculture.

J P. Jessenne*(1) Vincent Chatellier (2), François Collart-Dutilleul (1), Dao The Anh*1,3)(Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Vietnam), Marie-Claude Maurel (1), Pr. François Purseigle (1), Jean-Marie Séronie (1)

(1) Académie d'Agriculture de France : 18 Rue de Bellechasse, 75007 Paris - France

(2) Inrae, Umr Smart, 35042 Rennes Cedex - France

(3) Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Vietnam

*Corresponding author : jean-pierre.jessenne@wanadoo.fr

Keywords : agricultural diversity, corporate agriculture, small farms, rights of the peasants, competitiveness

Agricultural and rural diversity was a long-standing fact throughout the world. Recent transformations seem to be tending towards a uniformity of the countryside and farming systems. The diversity of landscapes and productions used to reflect the qualities of the geology and the climate while the diversity of farmers used to reflect very different land regimes (Marie-Claude Maurel). The issue to be addressed in our public session is: can changes in farm structures upset these data?

Six contributors in an Academy session on 2 February 2022 show, on the one hand the complexity of the developments observed throughout the world and on the other hand the tension between the expansion of corporate agriculture and the international ideals defended by the UN.

There are great differences from one country to another. For example, in south-eastern Asia, small farming is preserved in Vietnam when more and more land is monopolized by big firms in Cambodia (Dao The Anh). But in each country the evolution is often complicated. The French case presented by François Purseigle is significant. A research, based on empirical work and a critical analysis of statistical data, shows that the decline in the French agricultural population and the dilution of professional statuses within it are not accompanied by a homogenisation of farm structures. Paradoxically, while the number of French farm managers decreases (1 million in 1988, 390 000 in 2020), farms have never been so diverse. While once-dominant medium-sized farms are experiencing unprecedented fragility, small farms are being maintained and created, often based on multi-activity and a diversity of income sources (energy production, guesthouses, public landscape maintenance works...). Their activities are increasingly based on strategies of association, outsourcing or integration of employees. On the other hand, can be seen the emergence of large agricultural enterprises with the appearance of firms. Some of these firms are financial in nature, carried by multinational companies, investment funds, etc.; most of agricultural firms in Europe act by delegating farm labour tasks to subcontractors and service providers. This explains that permanent employees become the majority (50% in 2021) of the labour force. This evolution is accompanied by a slow changing in the agricultural regional diversity; its economic efficiency is challenged by international competition; at last, it confronts us with a question: what is a “farm”, an “agricultural *exploitation*” nowadays? (V. Chatellier; JM. Seronie).

Keeping peasant populations on their land was the subject of The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants adopted by the UN General Assembly on 17 December 2018. It aims to maintain the diversity of farms and protect the small independent family farm from corporate agriculture. However, François Collart-Dutilleul shows that other institutions are interfering; paying little attention to the peasants, they put other challenges such as climate change, the preservation of biodiversity, food security ensured by the opening up of markets, etc.,. This raises a major question for us: is it not time to tackle these globalised issues together so that we stop treating problems separately, which makes it even more difficult to find solutions?