

Micro-farms and territory: a new model of small agroecological farms in France

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Dominant agricultural model is questioned: soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, dependence on chemical inputs, income crisis and generational renewal blocked. Agroecological transitions are urgent and call for reconsidering the contributions of diverse agricultural models. This study focuses more specifically on small farms and the discreet yet significant innovations of micro-farms in France. Its central aim is to determine whether micro-farms constitute an alternative by offering multiple territorial solutions to complex challenges.

Our geographical, agronomic and socio-anthropological approach opens up a new research field on individual, agricultural and territorial pathways for change. Conducted over ten years and involving 99 farms in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region, it seeks to identify the characteristic features of this model: practices (archetypal model), aspirations (desired future model) and reference framework (normative model for action).

The study first reviews existing research that contributes to characterise micro-farms, then develops an original methodological approach based on a participatory survey. This survey was implemented within the MicroAgri action-research programme (2017–2020) in Gironde, bringing together researchers, agricultural stakeholders, farmers and local authorities. Farmers were invited to define their identity through a structured set of questions, followed by qualitative interviews to deepen understanding of the social diversity of the group. This collaborative method revealed a much greater heterogeneity than initially expected.

These very small farms, often diversified and committed to agroecology, attract new profiles of farmers. They combine life projects, ecological engagement and territorial embeddedness. Such structures are more accessible to those wishing to establish themselves on a human scale, with better control over costs, labour intensity and the use of inputs. They also help to rebalance the place of women in agriculture.

Behind the term “micro-farm” lies a highly heterogeneous set of situations: from 1,000 square meters of market gardening for a single worker to 70 hectares for four people in mixed crop–livestock systems. Some farms are specialised, while others combine livestock, processing, agroforestry or educational activities. Their legal, economic and human diversity reflects strong adaptation to local contexts: land availability, social networks, markets, territorial culture or economic opportunities. Micro-farms thus appear as deeply rooted territorial constructions. They play an essential social role: creating connections, welcoming citizens, transmitting knowledge and stimulating short supply chains. They are as much places of social experimentation as of agronomic innovation. Ecologically, they develop advanced agroecological practices: reduced tillage, intercropping, autonomy in inputs and energy, frugality, and attention to ecological dynamics.

In conclusion, the study shows that micro-farms outline an agricultural and food model proportionate to a more harmonious balance in human life. This model is expressed in three forms: an archetypal model that gives concrete shape to desires for a change of life; a desired-future model that spreads to initiate a shift towards a peasant agroecological development model; and a normative model for action that experiments to co-construct projects for agricultural and food relocalisation. Supporting any one of these three forms of the micro-farm model means encouraging a network of experiments (farm-places, narrative-places, project-places) that are essential to social, ecological and economic transformations.

Reference : Toublant Damien, *Micro-fermes et territoire : émergence d'un modèle de petites fermes agroécologiques et paysannes en France*, thèse de doctorat en géographie, Université Bordeaux Montaigne, 2024. Français, <https://theses.hal.science/tel-04902795>