

Learning new skills by French farmers. Evolution and unevenness of the beliefs

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Abstract

The evolution to which farming is assigned by the whole society requires acquisition of new skills. This paper focuses on the evolution of the beliefs which authorizes and accompanies the process of learning new individual skills by farmers. A preliminary study had been carried out with 28 Auvergne farmers. This paper focuses on the consequent longitudinal study of two cases carried out with two neighbouring farmers whose farming systems are very similar (industrial crops). One of them has acquired the new skills necessary to convert to organic farming, whereas the other one (which is a control farm) has not such an experience. With a management approach, we suggest that the different nature of their beliefs concerning their occupations explains, in the long run, the differences in their acquisition of new skills, and we proceed in three stages.

Björkman (1989) shows that the occurrence of important changes in the environment (reported to the manager through direct contacts) and the drop in the results are the factors which produce a radical change in the managers belief systems. We find these two factors with the farmer who acquires new skills, and not with the control farm. Moreover, the evolution of beliefs and skills we highlight is underpinned by studies lead on several mentors. Daft and Weick's approach (1984) brings explanations on the nature of the beliefs. Thus, they oppose the manager who believes that the right answer is hidden in the environment - and who passively accepts available information (which is the case of our control farmer) - to the manager who, considering that "nothing is written", exerts himself to influence the environment (e.g our farmer who has acquired new skills). In the last analysis, following Brunsson (2000), we maintain that all the belief systems are not equally efficient as regards the learning process. The clear, detailed and logical systems which integrate several dimensions of the business allow better and quicker learning. Following our investigations, we add that these systems are concerned with public interest, what would be the key to their efficiency.

In the light of Management Sciences, we want to describe and analyse a number of learning processes of new individual skills through personal paths among the farmers. Skills are not to be taken here neither as individual qualities nor as knowledge. Skills have to do with action (Minvielle, 1998), so that it is only by paying attention to what people do that we can trace such skills. The process of learning new knowledge depends on and finds expression in the evolution of beliefs. We want to understand what makes these beliefs change. The nature of beliefs (Boudon, 1999) - and more particularly normative beliefs- may be approached in two different ways. The first theory has it that beliefs are governed by irrational causes – hence the phenomena of inculcation (e.g Durkheim and Marx), affective (e.g Freud and Pareto) or naturalistic processes to account for their creation. But beliefs may also result from

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particular reasons that the agent has to understand, thus adopting comprehensive processes (Weber's stance). Now that such choices have been made, we shall go deeper into the causality chain.

A preliminary survey among 28 Auvergne farmers (Macombe, 2003) had shown the vital role of the belief systems in the acquisition of new skills. But only long period case studies (Yin, 1998) could allow to study the process. Therefore, we have carried out two-and-a-half-year-long longitudinal studies with two farmers. The main data, which was complemented by actual visits of the farm and by exploitation of documents, consists in interviews that were tape-recorded and typewritten. The analyses were all corrected – when necessary- or authenticated by the farmer. Several questions were examined, but we are interested here in the farmer's account of the story of his farm. We noticed that the farmer learnt new skills as he thought he was able to do new things in his job. Such learning was confirmed by our recording of his activities. We tried to trace his normative beliefs (as we had a detection tool, see document 1). Then, we paid attention to the way these beliefs evolved as well as to the explanation given by the farmer to account for their evolution. But the study was not carried out with the aim of testing Björkman's theory; the farmers themselves mentioned the variables which were indispensable to the analysis as they told their story.

The action takes place in Limagne, an area of industrial crops (corn, wheat, sugar beets...) in the centre of France. Today, in 2003, the foreseeable evolutions of the CAP and the opening of European farming towards the Eastern part of Europe allow us to predict important changes. It should be known that the two farmers live in the same village, handle local traditional productions, and are both renowned for their technical and economic results, regularly ranking among the best of the Département. The main part of both households' income come from the farm. Moreover, the two farmers have the same main production system (major part of the turnover) as when they set their farms up. But at present (February 2003) the one "Gérard" (who has been set up for 20 years) has acquired the necessary skills to turn to organic farming, the other one "André" (set up for 30 years) has not acquired any specific skill allowing him to anticipate the changes that are beginning to take shape.

In the light of our presentation of these cases, it is clear that the farmers have lived (during 20 and 30 years) in the "same" professional environment, but that they have not experienced it in the "same" way. We therefore adopt an interpretative approach according to which "*Interpretations of event or data is not determined by stimuli, but are rather the results of organisation members fitting the stimuli to their own beliefs and values.*" (Björkman, 1989). We assume that the beliefs of these two farmers regarding the professional environment are not identical because they interpret it with differences beliefs about their occupation. The purpose of this research is therefore to understand why Gérard has acquired new skills and why André has not done so, and we look for the answer in the nature and the evolutions of their beliefs on their job.

In order to throw a light on the process, we shall mention first of all the synthesis carried through by Ingmar Björkman (Björkman, 1989) on the factors affecting the radical changes in the organisational belief systems, then the theory of Daft and Weick (Daft and Weick, 1984), before suggesting a third analysis, that converges on a number of works of Nils Brunsson (Brunsson, 2000) on the nature of the belief systems of organisations. Although these researches are concerned with the organisations themselves, these authors actually endeavour to analyse the beliefs of the managers : "*strategic-level managers formulate the organization's interpretation*" (Daft, Weick, 1984). We apply them to farmers, i.e managers of very small businesses. It must be clear that the decisions that are made in these very small farms are the result of a collective and interactive process – some of these decisions can be joint choices. They may seem to reflect the choice of one single individual – the interviewee – but this is a wrong impression.

Direct contacts and drop of the results influence the beliefs of managers

Ingmar Björkman was interested in the evolution of these beliefs, only in the case of sudden changes threatening the organisations (that is the case of our farmers). This author highlights two factors which can be applied to the farms: the occurrence of important changes in the environment and the drop in results.

He specifies that “the important changes in the environment” strongly affect the beliefs of the managers, provided that they emerge through direct personal contacts: the manager lets himself be influenced and convinced by mediators who tell him about their vision of the evolutions in progress.

During the preliminary survey, we had highlighted this effect among the farmers who had acquired new skills (which the cases A, B and C illustrate). Table 1 summarizes, for these three persons, the changes of the beliefs, the acquired skills and the direct contact (testified by the farmer) which convinced him.

Table 1: Modification of the beliefs, acquired skills, and convincing direct contacts

	Modifications of the beliefs	Acquired skills (in the family)	Direct contact	Extracts from the interview
	A has become aware that this local breed, up to now neglected, is worth being saved. It deserves to generate a range of new products.	- to negotiate with the stock breeders - to make cheeses - to organize a joint sharing of the selling income.	The technician in charge of the preservation of the hardy breeds has convinced the farmer of the interest of it.	<i>So – Mr Laurent A... ’s visit..., do you know him ? You’ve been told of it. Because... It is true that generally speaking a technician has not a very good image. Then him, on top of that, he has had a passion for that since ’77, he has never left, he has never... he clings, he does, he is welded to the topic [the preservation of endangered breeds]. It is true, he has brought a lot ()</i>
	B has become aware of the potential valorisation of the bulbs (garlic, shallot, onions) by direct selling.	- to transform the bulbs into soup, conserve, sauces - to sell on the countryside markets.	A retired woman farmer has encouraged B and has taught him the first recipes.	<i>And it is true that afterwards by discussing with her... it is true that she is rather a good cook, she told me :”listen, you could try and make jams, things...all that stuff”. Then I said “ya” she had plenty of recipes that she... that she gave me ()</i>
	C ’s membership of an association made him realise that he wanted to work on organically-ground produce.	- to work in organic farming - to sell organic farm produce (no organized chain).	The couple C has joined an organic farm producers’ association which influences them a lot.	<i>the fact that we grow organic food, accounts for change and then besides, we belong to ... an association of organic farm [producers], association “bio63”, therefore, we are still working together, we have a lot of meetings and... I mean , we learn a lot, I mean. Therefore we are obliged if...by being a member of an association, of this association, we are obliged to do... to think alternatively, you see.”</i>

We can find the trace of this direct contact with Gérard, whereas no such thing can be brought out in André’s story.

“It went hand in hand with an action of the farmer’s union... it made a synergy. That’s to say that the ideas we read were reviving something within our minds, they were speaking to us, it was going in both directions. And this is perhaps through them that we became aware that what we were doing had eventually to be done differently.” (Gérard, February 2003)

Moreover, for A, B, and C and Gérard, the simple “contacts” were not enough, for a “learning by doing” has been testified: the farmer and his mentor have been “doing together” (document 2)

Then, Ingmar Björkman mentions the drop in results. Such a phenomenon happened for Gérard, not for André. The two farmers have always shown excellent technical results. But the economic results have not always been exemplary ones for Gérard. Established in 1984, he got into debt a lot in order to buy his family-in-law’s land. The 1985 CAP seesaw movement, and the prolonged drop in prices, threatened his system of industrial crops (80 ha usable agricultural area). As soon as the promulgation of the “Farm Bankrupt Act”, he therefore instituted a procedure. The excellence of his technical results allowed him

to be pronounced right and to restructure his debt. Since then, the economic results have been as good as expected. On the other hand, André, a relentless worker, has always got good economic results and never felt threatened by a drop in his results. It seems indeed that the financial troubles of Gérard, at that time, have been the mainspring of an active search for solutions (at the first row of which the proactive bankruptcy) as Björkman predicts it.

The Björkman criteria (direct contacts and drop in results) are well adapted to explain the evolution of the beliefs of the manager Gérard, and to favour the acquisition of new skills. Mundane recommendations could be drawn from them, such as : the subject should be in contact with someone able to convince him, he should “do with him” in order to learn, and he should feel threatened by the drop in results of the business, so that the beliefs of a farmer can change and get the learning under way. However pertinent these recommendations may be, they do not exhaust the topic. The works of Daft and Weick allow us to refine the prospect by questioning the nature of the beliefs themselves.

Enactment and conditioned view

Daft and Weick consider the organisations as a system of interpretation of the environment and distinguish several possible modes of interpretation. The “enactment” mode refers to an organisation which experiments, tests, builds its environment and learns by doing. For the mode “conditioned views”, the interpretation is made by traditional ways and the detection of the information is passive ; the manager applies the formula and works on formal data (Daft and Weick, 1984). The document 3 shows that these two type-ideal respectively describe the exploitation of the proactive Gérard for the first one, and that of André’s, still applying the same formula, for the second one.

Daft and Weick characterize the organisational beliefs which underlie these models. We apply their analysis to the manager’s beliefs. The two dimensions accepted by the authors are the beliefs in the characteristics of the environment and the “intrusivity” of the organisation in its environment;

The environment is understood as being more or less easy to analyse. If he thinks it is fit for analysis, the manager (it is the case of André) plays the game of interpretation by believing that the “winner” will be the one who will find the “right” answer, supposed to be hidden somewhere. He thinks that the external environment is “solid”, down-to-earth and that the events and the process are unavoidable and measurable. On the contrary, if the manager believes that the environment is not to be analysed, (it is the case of Gérard) he will fudge it as unpredictable and he will not look for “the” right answer in it.

The intrusivity of the organisation is the other dimension. The manager’s standpoint ranges from the passive acceptance of the information given by the environment (filtrated by the traditions and the unconscious imitation which is the case with André) up to experimenting various ideas in order to influence and to shape the environment (it is the case of Gérard, who constantly seeks to create the event rather to undergo it);

A certain number of circumstances confirm the manager in the idea that the environment is non-analysable (if it can be interpreted in several ways, if it is difficult to penetrate or to change it). Besides, a hostile environment generates «increased search because of new problems», whereas a friendly environment confirms him in his passiveness. Therefore, less mundane recommendations could be drawn from Daft and Weick’s analysis. In order to make the learning of new skills easier among farmers, an unpredictable and hostile environment should be provided for them! The cocooning of the cooperatives and the associations towards their members should be avoided and the unpredictable side of the agricultural policies should be let to hang heavily over their heads. The survivors would definitely be endowed of new skills. The idea is not altogether valid ; indeed there is a point when the threat of unpredictability prevents any action. There is another less cursory way of making learning easier.

A number of beliefs systems allow to learn better and quicker

Nils Brunsson points out that all the beliefs systems are not equivalent in the face of radical changes (Brunsson 2000). Some of them own qualities that are of immediate interest for our topic. They have the ability to capture very early the “strategic drift”, that is to say the gaps between the strategy of the organisation and what should be done, considering the evolutions of the environment. They also know how to acquire the necessary skills – and so quicker than the other organisations – in order to correct this drift. Moreover, this phenomenon works the other way round: the organisations which capture and correct easily the drift thus reinforce their beliefs! But these are not any systems of beliefs. They are clear and narrow systems, integrating several analyses of the way the organisation works, complex and logical.

Provided he owns a system of belief of this type, the manager easily makes the necessary learning. But how compatible is the existence of this system of steady belief with the evolution of the beliefs necessary for the learning? One should actually reason by considering on the one hand a “hard core” steady within the beliefs of the manager (a hard core of possibly clear, narrow, integrator and logical beliefs) and on the other hand, the secondary, variable beliefs which proceed from the confrontation of this hard core with down-to-earth situations (to a particular competitive situation, or production management problem...). This hard core recalls the major values of the business, allowing them to last (Collins, Porras, 1998) or the invariant values of the Henokians¹ (Mignon, 2000) which will assure durability. Nils Brunsson’s conclusions can be reformulated in the light of these two categories of belief. Nils Brunsson would write that a manager whose beliefs conceal a steady “hard core” having the required qualities will make his secondary beliefs change very quickly if needed, and that the success of this correction will reinforce the hard core’s beliefs.

The contrasting cases of Gérard and André are evidence of the different possibilities of learning induced by different beliefs’ systems on their job. As we have already seen, André runs his business and makes his decisions by applying a well-proven recipe (document 2) whereas Gérard bases himself, in his long term decisions, on an ideology of his job which makes up a hard core of clear, narrow, integrator and logical beliefs. The rebuilding of the ideologies of the farmers on the whole of their career allowed us to compare the two systems of beliefs.

André sets himself the target - which will remain steady during 30 years- of “making money on the very short term”. His recipe to reach it is steady: he must work hard by doing numerous hours’ work, in the frameworks of contracts which secure a payment and the selling of large quantities, he must not hesitate to change the outlet and prove himself to be an opportunist.

Gérard’s targets, on the other hand, are going to evolve. When he set himself up, he wanted to fulfil himself by becoming the Limagne farmer who would best control production techniques. Twenty years later, his ambition is to be the most environment friendly farmer. His system of beliefs has changed in its outward signs (farming practices), but he remains steady about the taking into account of a collective interest : “*All the problems must be examined according to the public interest and this must be done at several levels*”. In the eighties, public interest was pertaining to the export calling of France, to be supported through a strong productivity in cereals. Today the new collective interest is to be concerned by the environment, and particularly by wildlife.

The application of a recipe does not give the opportunity of inventing new rules, of infringing them, whereas the framework of Gérard’s beliefs permanently incites him to show himself as “intrusive”. We

¹ The Henokians are the members of an association of businesses which have existed for more than two hundred years and which achieve a continuity of capital and management (majority held by the descendants of the incorporator and management assumed by one of them);

believe that the important thing is for Gérard to organize his beliefs according to public interest. We have already met this phenomenon with the same consequences, in the preliminary survey. Mr A thinks that the Ferrand breed should be saved in the interest of the group of concerned breeders, but mostly in the interest of the citizens as a whole, for whom this breed makes up a cultural heritage. Mr and Mrs B are convinced that Auvergne garlic can be better preserved than other varieties of garlic, a thing which benefits the consumers. Mr and Mrs C think that the organic farming produce taste better and are more healthy than the others.

André's system is not efficient enough for learning new skills. On the other hand, Gérard's system of beliefs does not only allow him, but also encourages him, to find out new skills. The managers of the farms should actually be helped to develop this type of system of belief in their jobs. In a more general way, the very propagation of the systems of beliefs taking into account public interest should be made easier. These systems are contagious, as we saw with the three farmers A, B and C (document 1). The public power can give an impetus through teachers and trainers. In the teaching or training fields, as Mc Gregor had highlighted it (Mac Gregor 1979 ; Bernoux 1993), the learners remember better the systems of beliefs of the trainers than the contents of the training session. Consequently, in order to transmit to them a clear, narrow, integrator and logical system, which takes into account collective interests, the teachers should convey beliefs of this type. On this basis (this hard core) each one will adapt his own beliefs to the circumstances (cloud of secondary beliefs).

Conclusion

The main weaknesses of our approach to beliefs and skills are the result of our restrictive apprehension of them. Indeed, skills are only seen through the farmer's assertion of his new capacities whereas we focus only on occupational ethics as far as beliefs are concerned. Thus, sociotechnical elements (Dubar, 1992) which participate in the development of skills are not mentioned. The skills of systems combining individuals, groups, language and objects (Girin, Journe, 2001) are not envisaged. But this should not lead us to consider that the acquisition of skills is an individual matter when dealing with the agricultural sector. This would be a wrong literal reading of the first two theories. The weaknesses are also linked with the method of case studies. Indeed, such a method prevents us from generalising the results we have come to. We could show that all the underlying hypotheses –that is also that of the “hard core” (Lakatos, 1995) - can be extended (Albert, 2000). We didn't develop the idea in our essay. Still, the main interest of this approach is to highlight the importance of the evolution of beliefs in the agricultural sector. Such an evolution will in turn lead to the improvement in the skills demanded by the whole of the society. We have also tried here to think about some ways of contributing to this evolution.

Björkman's review has highlighted the probable evolution factors of the beliefs among the farmers: direct contacts, learning with a convinced mentor, and threats on the farm results. Daft and Weick's model characterizes two opposite ideal-types of organisation as far as the environment interpretation is concerned, and consequently puts the question of the nature of the beliefs. In resonance with Brunsson's approach, for whom all the beliefs' systems are not equally efficient as regards the learning of new skills, the cases we have exposed show the differences between the beliefs' systems which integrate the reference to a collective interest and those which do not care. We believe that it is an important research track for those who want to understand the “predispositions” to the learning of new skills. Better chances of acquiring new skills and of meeting intentionally with new opportunities of learning would be given to the farmers by spreading these altruistic systems of belief. They would thus contribute to enrich the many dimensions of the farming activity in practice.

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Document 1: A tool for the detection of normative (ethical) beliefs on occupation

The specific tool that has been used to analyse various discourses of justification is indebted to Boltanski and Thévenot's (Boltanski, Thévenot, 1991) "grammar of justice". We take the word "ethics" as meaning the implementation of a conception of justice to an individual in a specific situation. In other words, justice is concerned with universal "common goods", whereas ethics has to do with a local common good. The "grammar of justice" is divided into six axioms, which are six proposals about the state of the world. Each proposal has been translated into the terms that suited the situation of research. Thus, we have been able to predict which ways of reasoning – and which phrases – would account for each particular axiom. The thought processes contradicting each axiom have also been anticipated. There only remained to look for the thought processes that confirmed or contradicted the six axioms in the various accounts. When an account about one and the same local common good possessed the characteristic proposals of all six axioms, it was said to be "ethical". It was called to be "sceptical" in all other cases.

Document 2: Reported speech of the farmers A, B, C and Gérard, showing that there has been "learning by doing"

By getting in touch with the breeders who still owned this breed, in order to set up the programme of breed preservation with the technician, Mr A has learnt to manage a group and to negotiate with it. *"It's true, he brought a lot because... but however, he works alone, you see, he is a lot in the field. Then we began to set up a programme, from what remained; At that time."*

Mrs B has learnt by doing the transformations of the produce and selling on the markets with her mentor : *"The garlic soup, it is because we have taken over from a person who was retiring...M.C...., a bloke from Montaigut and they had already settled it, this garlic soup and... we have taken over their recipe, and that is only afterwards by discussing with her... it is true she is quite a good cook, she said to me : "tell me, you could try to make jams, things...all that stuff". Then, I said "Ya" she had plenty of recipes that she had...she had given to me, and we settled it together, she helped us for a while."*

Mr C has seen changes in his representations while he was regularly meeting a group of organic farmers : *" First I must say that we were not the kind of people who...who were putting large quantities of...of inputs [forbidden in organic farming] so the change was not made [difficult to do] and then, I must say, we arrived to organic... almost naturally. And then, we have the... what would I say, the mentality which is changing at the same time as we work organic, I mean, our mentality...undergo a total change, even the way we see things...we are forced to...the fact that we work organic, makes us change... And that's the way we entered the organic chain of farming and that afterwards, all was done in a natural way, even our way of considering things which are done, I mean, it is nearly the job itself which made us... see things in a different way, I mean, do you understand what I mean ? I mean that it's not...we didn't overnight, we didn't get up and say : "OK, well, we're turning organic", it didn't happen this way, we are not... we have not arrived, like the purists who came before us, we are not among the first ones to be organic, those who arrived, those that have always... everything, done everything in organic, we came to it gradually, I mean, yes, the state of mind changes afterwards, yes, that's for sure."*

Gérard explains his learning "on the job".

Q : "What had to be done in order to control, in order to be technical, in order to work properly? What sort of efforts did you have to make to get there?"

Gérard: "(silence) As far as I'm concerned, I had to learn... I had several teachers for that purpose; I was taught by the former worker who was there. Each year, it's new. And then there has been the CETA technician, the one I knew very well and who helped me a lot indeed, and there is also a technical research there."

Document 3: Intrusivity of Gérard and application of a recipe by André

Gérard is directly at the origin of 6 legal structures in 11 years : "GFA", a farm real estate company, under French law (Groupement Foncier Agricole) with his family in 1985, GEDA, an Agricultural Development Group (Groupement d'Etude et de Développement Agricole) in 1986, a cooperative and a trading company ("Société Anonyme") to market small bulbs in 1989, marketing cooperative of cereals in 1992 and EARL business company in 1996.

Within 30 years of activity, André created an EARL business company with his wife.

G rard has tried 13 different activities in 16 years, in addition to his basic pattern.

Andr  has tried two new activities in 30 years (see just below).

G rard's intrusivity is such that he feels able, in case of need, to establish his four children on the farm! *"That is to say if my children – we have four children –if they all want to stay on the farm – I do tell them "it's feasible"...they'll have to adapt, they'll have to change the productions, they'll have to calculate and to plan all that, but theoretically, that's to say if they want it and if they feel like it, it's feasible, they have always been told so."*

Andr  applies a well-tried recipe, which rules the general basic cropping pattern.

This cropping pattern has always been composed at its full, of crops under contract (seed corn and sugar beets). Which induces agronomic abnormalities, like the absence of rotation and the excess of weeds in the corn. In order to fight these weeds without paying, Andr  and his wife apply the same recipe: they weed 25 ha by hand each year !

Over a total of 35 ha at its maximum, they have had up to 21 ha of grain corn, and their sugar beet quota represents the guarantee of 3,5 ha. A number of parcels have brought grain corn for more than 30 years, bringing about heavy weeding problems.

"As a matter of fact, we have always had problems of cropping pattern, ourselves, since we had so little land and so many crops which require, like sugar beet, 5 years [before being cultivated on the same parcel] as the corn ; we have put corn, corn, corn for more than 30 years, on the same lands, we have no cropping pattern. Having no cropping pattern, the big problem is weeding. But otherwise, there is no worry because we always bring what the crop takes off [as nutriments] but the trouble, it is true, is weeding with... it is weeding of our corn of course... It is all made with hands afterwards. So we have... during a long time, because the specific weeding products are very expensive, during a long time, still now we don't do, we do very little, we put half a dose, "Mikado" or things like that, we weed by hand. We weed before raising and all that is after raising, we always saved post-raising weeding by making manual weeding. Therefore, we use hand weeding of 25 ha each year... made by two persons. I can tell you that we have quite a few 17-hour days' work!"

They also apply this recipe to new crops. This was the case in 1985 with bulbs on the one hand, and greenhouse crops on the other hand, when they had to find an additional income to finance their children's studies.

*"My children study therefore, they cost a lot so then, we take, we decide to work alone²...Because our children ask for more and I don't want them to become farmers because it's a real grind! and then...and then I want them to do what they feel like, I don't want them not to have the opportunity to choose what they want to do. Therefore, they choose to study and then we are here to pay, and that's all. I don't want them to help us... They do what they want and, well, they will come back if they want, but...So, I can tell you that from '85 till '95 it has been the real grind, because at the beginning, they were in Clermont () because when you earn 5 000 F and that you need 3 000 F for the children... so, it's there, it is the need for money which persuaded us, let's say, to convert towards other crops (silence); We have never done many crops : 1,5 ha of market gardening, if you want, that isn't market garden, but these **crops that were bringing us not far from 100 000 F still, at that time, but then... [we were doing] everything ourselves, without hiring workers."***

The setting up of the bulbs illustrates the quantity of work they had to subject themselves to, but it also illustrates the permanent antagonistic and opportunist research of both the guarantee and the best selling price.

Between 1985 and 1995, the couple decided to settle 1,5 ha of bulbs (onion, garlic, shallot) instead of wheat.

In 1985 and in 1986: the onions are sold under contract to wholesaler B., who also buys the shallots but without a secured price. The garlics are sold at the wholesale market.

In 1987: The onions are sold under contract to B., but the shallots are sold at the wholesale market. The farmers get crossed with B., so that in 1988 and up to 1995, all the production of the bulbs is sold at the wholesale market to R. The latter requires special preparations to sell the produce at a better price, he even demands it, lest he should not take them.

² That is to say that Andr  and his wife stop working in a community with their brothers-in-law and cousins (i.e.100 ha of crops linked to these various farms) for whom the couple were running the 57 ha of grain corn, castrated by up to 110 workers.

The onions must be peeled. B's wife will peel 7 to 10 tons by hand every year (for 3 to 4 F / Kg)

The stem-onions to be plaited should be picked up by hand (for 2,80 F / Kg)

The garlies must be plaited for the Christmas period (for 15 F / Kg). The plaiting lasts 15 days (from 6 a.m. till 1 a.m. with 2 persons)

“I had more profit with R., so I quitted B.”

“On the other hand, we made a lot of money there () That was what paid the kids' studies. We didn't do that for anything but our kids' studies.”

The recipe was also applied in 1995, with the obtention of a wide surface of 600 m² in greenhouses and of production contracts of seeds (vegetable market crops). These contracts are still in force in 2002 with seeds of courgette and salad.

“We asked Limagrain for greenhouses. Then, of contracts, glasshouses-contracts. Then, so, I went to see a gentleman at Limagrain, as he knew I was working [well] ...because it's a little like the Michelin family there, I had a technician, in the field, who knew that I was working [well] so he must have told him : “yes, yes, they are able to run greenhouses, there is no worry at all” so we were entitled to have 600 m² of greenhouses. So, these are... These are seed contracts, well, contracts with Tézier, Vilmorin, Clause and we do grain seeds and as we needed money,, we have been steered towards tomatoes, there were three of us, working on hybrid tomatoes.”