

Civic initiatives on Access to Land for Local, Sustainable Farmers in Western Europe

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Abstract

Land access is a growing issue in many parts of Europe, and a key obstacle to the development of local, sustainable agriculture. Albeit national differences, some trends prevail throughout Europe: diminution of agricultural land, land concentration, price increase, disconnection between agricultural land use value and its price, insufficient renewal of farmers' generations and difficulties in farm transfers, etc. Yet, farm transfer is largely disregarded and the land question is often ignored.

In this context, a number of civic initiatives have recently developed in Europe to provide easier land access to local, sustainable farmers, connected to their community. Based on insiders' knowledge of these organisations, this paper explores the specific needs addressed by these civic initiatives on land access – with a focus on two of them: Regionalwert AG, Germany and Terre de liens, France. It explores some of their benefits and challenges (e.g. facilitating the establishment of farmers, ensuring good land stewardship, fostering community connections), drawing from these two experiences as well as a range of similar innovations.

1. Introduction

In Europe, there are growing social demands in terms of sustainable practices, local quality food and direct contact between farmers and consumers, environmental protection, and vibrant rural areas¹. The development of local, sustainable agriculture is however hampered, amongst other factors, by farmers' increasing difficulty to secure agricultural land under good conditions in the long run. While there are a number of policy measures at EU level, and sometimes at national level, to facilitate farm succession and support establishment, these seems to be insufficient or partially inadequate: they do not manage to ensure adequate renewal of generations², they encourage (rather than limit) land concentration and the decrease in farms number³, they have lim-

¹ Citizens' expectations were strongly expressed in the public debate and Eurobarometer organised in spring 2010 by the European Commission, to prepare its Communication on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy See http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/debate/report/executive-summary_en.pdf and http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_336_sum_en.pdf.

² The second tier of the CAP includes measures to support the establishment of young farmers and retirement of old ones. For the 2007-13 period, the objective set by member States is to support the setting up of about 184,000 young farmers (including 43,000 for France only (Source: European Network for Rural Development, Output Indicators: measure 112, http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/rural-development-policy/programme-implementation/monitoring/output-indicators/en/output-indicators_home.cfm and State of Play of CAP measure 'Setting up of Young Farmers' in the EU, September 2010, http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=52A08D1B-ADF1-678F-EAF9-D225543D6452). In France, there are 30,000 retirements per year, and about 13,000 actual establishments (Source: Mutualité sociale agricole).

³ See EC Eurostat and FAO Stat.

ited results in terms of reshaping agriculture towards genuine environmental protection (EEA, 2010a and 2010b ; Broussard and Trouvé, 2010), and they often ignore or fail to address the needs of local/ small-scale/ peasant/ organic farmer.

In this context, a number of civic initiatives have developed in Western Europe over the past decade to address the difficulties of local, sustainable farmers in getting or maintaining their access to land. These initiatives can be analysed as part of what has been termed a 'civic agriculture' (de Lind, 2002; Lyson, 2004). They rest on closer relationships between farmers and consumers/ community members, and may involve a broader range of stakeholders (community developers, local authorities, farmers' organizations, etc.). They seek to reinforce agriculture's contributions to "public goods" (environmental protection, adaptation to climate change, landscape preservation, vitality of rural communities and economies).

These initiatives do not seek to address land access issues in general. Rather, they focus on what we would define as 'local, ecological, value added agriculture'⁴. Indeed, their concern is threefold: maintaining local food production and marketing, promoting good land stewardship and environmental protection, and fostering the development of organic/ ecological agriculture, as well as, in some cases, ensuring that agricultural land is preserved in the face of urban and infrastructural sprawl.

This paper seeks to explore the needs addressed by these civic movements on access to land. It will first examine land access issues for local, sustainable farmers, in Western Europe. It will then describe several of these initiatives and their main features, particularly drawing from the examples of Regionalwert AG and Terre de liens. Finally, it will explore the benefits and limits of such civic initiatives, as well as consider possible policy implications.

2. Methodology

Both authors belong to organisations – Terre de liens and Regionalwert AG – which are part of these initiatives. Since September 2010, together with few other European organisations, we started a project aimed at documenting existing civic initiatives on access to land, and connecting them⁵. We thus mapped tens of European local or national initiatives and organisations, and realised a series of seven case studies. The latter are based on personal interviews with members and stakeholders of the organisations, study visits and internal documents.

As a result of this work, we have regular exchanges with about ten organisations involved on land access issues⁶, as well as more occasional exchanges with another seven initiatives. We have therefore had formal and informal exchanges about the workings, functioning and results of these initiatives as well access to internal documents (presentations, statutes, feasibility study...).

⁴ These initiatives are not geared towards one single group or type of agriculture. They however all deal with forms of agriculture characterised by 1/ the use of sustainable production techniques (e.g. organic agriculture and other practices with (almost) no chemicals and limited use of non-renewable resources); 2/ openness onto local environment (local supplies or marketing, relationships with consumers and communities, role in landscape preservation, etc.); and 3/ engaging in value added activities (direct marketing or short-supply chains, processing, geographical indications, organic production, agro-tourism...)

⁵ See Access to land for Community-Connected Farming: project and partners presentation, available at: www.terredeliens.org (from June 2012).

⁶ These include: Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farms, Soil Association Land Trust and Biodynamic Land Trust from the UK; AIAB, Campi aperti and Terre future from Italy; Land-in-Zicht and Terre en vue in Belgium; Aktion Kulturland in Germany; Xarxa de custodia del territori and Rurbans in Spain.

Information contained in this paper is therefore based on the authors' direct experience of their organisations, research on similar organisations, and exchanges with partner organisations' members and stakeholders.

3. Land Access Issues for Local, Sustainable Farmers

Our organisations have observed difficulties in terms of land access for both new entrants and already established local, sustainable farmers. Some of the factors causing these difficulties are transversal to the whole agricultural sector; others are specific to local, sustainable farmers.

> Changing patterns in farm transfers

The farming population in the EU is aging rapidly: in 2007, 55% of farm holders were above 55 year old and 33% over 65 year old; at the same time, only 6% were under 35⁷. A whole generation of farmers is reaching retirement age and, like for the general European population, this calls for a massive transfer of jobs, skills and means of production to a new generation. This inter-generational transfer is complicated by the size of the phenomenon – more than half of farm holders will retire within few years – as well as by the fact that, less farm transfers take place within the (extended) family and that many aging farmers do not have a successor. Data is not available for the whole of the EU, but the case of France and Germany shed some light on the issue. In France, in 2007, in 58% of farm holdings, (one of) the holder(s) was above 50 year old. Out of these, only 28% knew who would be their successor (Ministère de l'Agriculture, 2008). In Germany, in 2010, nearly 70% of the 185,305 farms with a manager aged 45 or older faced unclear or lacking succession. Of those farms with lacking or unclear succession, circa 21% had a manager aged 60 or older (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2011a).

One of the consequences is that many farms are bought for enlargement by already established farmers. Combined with the overall decline of the utilised agricultural area, it means that a smaller number of farmers are farming larger farms⁸. Another consequence is that some farmland is left abandoned, as inheritors do not farm it, and do not wish or get organised to rent it. Finally, changing patterns in farm transfers go hand in hand with the development of a new category of new entrants getting established outside of family transfers.

This situation often calls for more pro-active policies to facilitate farm transfers, such as: CAP and national payments and mechanisms (e.g. access to credit) for young farmers, payment and support mechanisms for transferors, and market transparency.

> Increased pressure on land availability:

Urban sprawl and the construction of infrastructures exert a strong pressure on agricultural land. About 85% of land uptake for artificial uses indeed comes from agricultural land (EEA, 2010b). Together with land abandonment, it has resulted in a dramatic decline of the utilised agricultural area in Europe. Between 1961 and 2008, EU 15 has lost 22% of its UAA⁹. Although the trend

⁷ Source: Eurostat, key variables by age of holder, size of farm (UAA) and LFS Status (ef_ov_kvage), 2007, available at: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/agriculture/data/database>. These figures may have to be mitigated, as it appears that in some countries, in many farms, the work has already been transferred to the next generation but for business or tenancy reasons the older farmer remains presented as the main farmer.

⁸ Source: Eurostat, Key variables by size of farm (UAA), economic size of farm (ESU) and LFA status (ef_ov_kvaaesu), see: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/agriculture/data/database>

⁹ Source: FAO Stat, Agricultural Area, available at: <http://faostat.fao.org/site/377/default.aspx#ancor>

slowed down over the past decade, the development of artificial soils and decline of agricultural land remain long-term trends in EU-15 (EEA, 2010b).

> High land prices:

Almost all EU countries have experienced a (sometimes dramatic) rise in both sale and rent land prices¹⁰. In most of Western Europe, agricultural land sales prices have reached very high levels. In Andalusia, Northern Italy, or Belgium Flanders, prices of €20,000 to €30,000 per hectare are common¹¹. For an average EU-15 farm of 45 ha, it means paying 900,000 to 1.35 million Euros.

Such high land prices are increasingly disconnected from agricultural use value, and mostly result from a combination of external causes: competition with non-agricultural uses of the land (e.g. residences, tourism, infrastructures); impact of CAP subsidies on sale and rent prices¹²; and, land acquisition as a safe financial investment. Land prices are thus becoming out of reach for farmers, and often make it impossible to reach break-even point from a mere agricultural activity.

High land prices have consequences for young farmers, particularly those who set up outside of family transfers, or who have to buy off part of the inheritance from relatives. Young farmers indeed have to make many simultaneous investments and adding the financial burden of the land may make setting up an activity unsustainable. High land prices may also be an issue for established farmers who borrowed money to buy their land, and thereafter bear a long-term financial burden to repay the loan. Finally high prices are a problem for established farmers who wish to extend their acreage or who are offered to buy, at an inflated price, the land that they rent.

From our experience, lack of available land and high land prices constitute a particular obstacle to local, sustainable farmers, all the more so for new entrant ones, who usually do not have the same financial capacities, nor credentials to get bank loans or match existing criteria for financial support. Access to finance for farm set-up is an important issue e.g. in Germany, where banks refrain from giving loans for start-ups in the agricultural sector. Existing criteria for what is deemed 'viable' or 'profitable' agriculture by the banks and agricultural policies (acreage, quantitative output, regular increase in capital and inputs, etc.) indeed tend towards specialised, capital-intensive forms of agriculture. So do existing professional and social networks, and the organisation of the agro-food industry.

> Lack of tenure security

In certain cases, tenant farmers adjust to changes in their tenure conditions (higher rent, non-renewal of the lease...) by farming another land or moving to another region. This is less of an option for local, sustainable farmers, whose project and economic viability rests on working with a given environment and a given community. A local, organic farmer, for instance, invests in the long run to improve the quality of the soils and biodiversity, and to develop the farm's ecosystem as a coherent whole. Losing even one part of the land therefore has important consequences. Similarly, because a large part of their project, and often their marketing, is based on community connections, these farmers are particularly affected if they have to move to a different location.

¹⁰ The evolution of sales price indices for agricultural land between 1992 and 2006 has thus been +50% in the Netherlands, +100% in the UK, and +150% in Ireland (CEPS, 2008).

¹¹ Source: CEPS, 2008 and SCAFR-Terres d'Europe

¹² A recent study commissioned by the European Commission on 11 member states concluded that direct payments –both coupled and decoupled– have an upward impact on land prices. This impact varies from country to country, and diversely affects sales and rents prices. Everywhere though CAP payments have contributed to increase prices as well as the capital value of agricultural landowners (CEPS, 2008).

> Discrepancy between input and gain in the agricultural sector

In few other economic sectors the discrepancy between investment and gain is as high as in the agricultural sector. The situation is even worse for farmers managing their farms sustainably. Unless communicated and marketed in a special (and time consuming) way, social and ecologic services appear only on the cost side of the accountancy.

4. Emerging Civic initiatives on Access to land in Western Europe

In various parts of Western Europe, citizens- and/ or farmers-led initiatives have given shape to various mechanisms to support access to land for local, sustainable farmers. For a large part, this movement is fairly recent, and is part of the broader development of community-connected agriculture and alternative food networks. This section will propose an overview of these initiatives, describe in more details two of them - Regionalwert AG and Terre de liens – and highlight their starting conditions.

4.1 A diversity of recent initiatives

Our initial mapping and contacts have enabled us to identify civic initiatives on access to land mostly in England, Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, and Italy. Most of these experiences are fairly recent (less than ten year old); some just started couple of years ago or are still in emerging. Broadly, they can be divided in two groups: experiences centred on a specific farm; and, national and regional initiatives focused on land access for specific types of agriculture.

> Experiences centred on a specific farm

In many Western European countries, there are some collective forms of land ownership. These allow the farmer(s) to resort to family, friends, consumers and supporters money to set up or expand their activity. Some are farmer-led, others community-led initiatives. Farm-centred initiatives often take the form of a cooperative owning the land, with the farmer becoming a tenant farmer. Shareholders can usually leave at any time, and redeem their share. In a number of cases, this is viewed as a transition period to alleviate the financial burden of the farmer, and the farmer thereafter buys back all the shares to become landowner. In many cases, it is seen as a permanent scheme, to alleviate the farmer in the long run and to consolidate connections between the farmer and the community. Some of these initiatives, such as Fordhall Farm in the UK, managed to gather large community support and raise considerable amount of money (£800,000 from 8000 shareholders)¹³. Some, such as few German biodynamic community farms, have lasted for 40 years or more (Dottenfelderhof, Buschberghof).

> National and Regional initiatives focused on land access for specific types of agriculture

A second strand of initiatives is a series of civic organisations developed specifically with the aim of preserving agricultural land, developing environmentally sustainable agriculture and facilitating land access for farmers. Some are associations, other cooperatives, shareholder companies or land trusts. They focus on specific types of agriculture – e.g. organic or biodynamic agriculture, peasant farming, regional agriculture – such as the Soil Association Land Trust or the Biodynamic Land Trust in the UK¹⁴. Most are multi-stakeholder and bring together farmers or farmers' organisations, consumers, rural development groups, ethical banks, environmental associations, sometimes companies from the organic food chain, etc.

¹³ See www.fordhallfarm.com. A detailed case study is available on the Stroud Common Wealth website, in the Community Farm land trusts section <http://www.stroudcommonwealth.org.uk/>.

¹⁴ On the Soil Association, see: <http://www.soilassociation.org/Whatwedo/LandTrust/> On the Biodynamic Land Trust, see: <http://www.biodynamiclandtrust.org.uk>

4.2 Focus on Regionalwert AG and Terre de liens

In recent years, new organisational forms – different from land trusts - have emerged to pursue the goal of facilitating land access for local, sustainable farmers and gathering support from consumers and citizens. Exemplary in that respect is the rapid development of Regionalwert AG (RWAG) a shareholder corporation, based near Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany (Volz, 2011). Regionalwert AG collects money from local citizens interested to support the development of local organic food production and marketing. Money is invested in organic farmland and farm businesses, as well as food processors and distributors. RWAG owns eight hectares of land and has shares in 220 ha of land. In order to maintain the sustainable use of land, the land bought is then leased - not sold - to farmers, who have to manage their business according to RWAG sustainability criteria. Besides providing access to land, Regionalwert AG provides investment money to set up or enlarge business activities.

Another illustration is Terre de liens a civil society organisation created in 2003 to address the difficulties faced by organic and peasant farmers in securing agricultural land (Rioufol and Wartena, 2011). Terre de liens accompanies farmers who wish to set up collective landownership structures, and raises awareness about land access. Since 2007, Terre de liens directly acquires farmland, which it holds in perpetuity for the sake of current and future generations. The land is let to farmers who undertake to farm organically or biodynamically or who are peasant farmers committed to respecting the environment (under legally-binding environmental leases). To acquire farmland, Terre de liens has created two financial tools:

- * the *Foncière*, a civic investment company which collects investments and has gathered €22 millions from about 6500 (mostly individual) shareholders ; and
- * the *Fonds*, an Endowment Trust which collects donations in cash or kind.

Through the *Foncière* and the Fund, Terre de liens now owns, or is in close to acquiring, 120 farm estates, amounting to 2500 hectares, where 200 farmers are working. This has been made possible by the support of 1800 members, 9000 shareholders, tens of groups of local inhabitants and consumers, and local authorities.

4.3 Starting Arrangements

There are important differences between existing civic initiatives and how they emerged. The distinction made above between farm-centred and regional/ national initiatives is still relevant here. In many cases, farm-centred initiatives are farmer-driven and were born out of farmers' desire to consolidate the farm's financial stability by building closer ties with consumers and/ or local inhabitants. It may go hand in hand with the desire to improve the farm's integration in the local territory and its contribution to environmental protection, landscape preservation or others. ; These instances may be analysed as part of the adaptive strategies and mechanisms developed by peasant farmers to adjust to a changing and overall unfavourable environment, while maintaining and enlarging their autonomy (van der Ploeg, 2008).

Regional or national initiatives often result from the cooperation of a range of stakeholders and organisations seeking to extend or complement their action in favour of local, sustainable agriculture by a specific intervention on land access. These often include an organisation with financial expertise (ethical bank or cooperative), enabling them to develop the necessary mechanisms and monitoring of a public issue of shares. They also often need specific legal and technical expertise (e.g. property administration, establishing contracts, agronomy). Once the regional or national initiative exists, the decision to support a specific farm stems from a combination of opportunity

(available land) and a farmer's and/ or community's project. Sometimes, local authorities, ethical banks or organic food distributors play a decisive role. Thus, Terre de liens bought a 120-hectare farm in Barjac, in Southern France, at the request of the municipality. It is now supporting conversion of the farm to organic production, as well as a bottom-up project of local sustainable development involving the establishment of several farmers and their families and the development of short supply chains to supply municipal catering services, local markets and organic shops.

Where money is raised from the public, there seems to be a variety of reasons for people to invest in land access initiatives. New forms of connections between farmers and consumers / communities is often decisive. In the case of Terre de liens, the success of the first public issue of shares largely stemmed from the strong mobilisation of the Biocoop, the major French network of organic shops, and AMAP¹⁵ networks whose consumers proved committed to supporting the establishment of organic farmers in their area. Other people may not be consumers but have direct connections with the farmers (family, friends, neighbours) or be local inhabitants interested in preserving local food production. Others still are motivated by general concerns, such as the promotion of organic food, environmental protection, or solidarity investment. For such initiatives, bringing down the distance between the food sector and the consumers/ citizens bears not only societal benefits but indeed personal benefits¹⁶.

5. Benefits and challenges

More research is needed to establish and analyse the benefits and limits of these civic initiatives on land access. As noted above, they are recent, sometimes very recent (less than two years) and only Regionalwert AG has so far developed an extensive annual evaluation procedure (Volz, 2011). It is also difficult to assess their specific contribution, as they are often part of broader dynamics supporting local sustainable agriculture, closer consumers-farmers connections, or awareness about food and agricultural issues. We hereby attempt to highlight a number of benefits and challenges, based on internal analyses and stakeholders feedback and mostly centred on public adhesion to these initiatives. It is however too early to assess the long term impact of these initiatives, in particular with regard to the farmers and farming conditions.

5.1 Benefits

The first benefit of these initiatives is to facilitate the establishment or continuation of local, sustainable farmers. By providing access to a piece of lands and buildings, they guarantee non competitive access to land for these forms of agriculture. They also take the burden of investment in lands and buildings off the shoulders of the farmers. This makes it easier for them to approach banks for a smaller loan, and is often a needed condition for young farmers to be able to set up their activity. In some cases, low rent or favourable loan conditions are cross-subsidised by other activities of the trust or company (e.g. Regionalwert AG). Besides land access, civic initiatives often also provide young farmers with broader technical expertise and support.

Another benefit of these initiatives, intrinsic to their goals, is that they preserve land in agricultural use in the long run, thereby countering urban sprawl and land abandonment (Stroud Common

¹⁵ AMAP are Associations for the preservation of peasants' farming (*Associations pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne*), set up between organic farmers and consumers to create lasting and strong connections. Consumers pre-pay a number of 'baskets' or boxes (usually one per week for the duration of the semester/ year), making it possible for the farmer to invest and have financial security and visibility. Every week, the farmer(s) deliver the products to the consumers, either on the farm or in town. In Fall 2010, there were over 1500 AMAP, gathering 70 000 families and over 1000 farmers

¹⁶ These topics are now addressed virtually as in the online game "Seeders" (www.weareseeders.de).

Wealth, 2007). They also often gear land use in favour of food production and local food chains as well as environmental protection, which fulfil broader social needs. This is exemplified in the experience of Regionalwert AG, which supports the entire local organic food chain and emphasises shareholders' contribution to the betterment of their local territory, with regard to social, environmental and economic dimensions.

Another benefit of these initiatives is that many also create strong connections between the farmers and their local communities. This is particularly the case for initiatives centred on a farm, wherein money is raised mostly from consumers and local inhabitants. This has many advantages as it breaks the farmers' isolation and provides a pool of customers and supporters. Most farms which benefited from citizen support for land access engage with their community: most market their products directly to consumers (e.g. through farm shops or local markets), provide a range of social and cultural activities (barn dances, workshops, festivals, etc.) and/ or fulfil broader social goals (e.g. conservation of rare and traditional species, training of apprentices).

Finally, a key dimension of these initiatives is to invent new forms of ownership and management of the land, which tend to remove land from the commodity market and promote land as a common good. In many cases, the land is entrusted to the farmer under conditions that s/he takes good care of the land, maintains it in agricultural use and protects the environment. In these instances, the farmer is seen as part of a generational chain of farmers who reconcile food production and good land stewardship, in order to pass on the land – preserved, if not improved – to future generations. One step further, some of these initiatives re-invent the distribution of added value between work, capital and ground-rent. Some try to keep farmers' rents at the lowest price, so as to support farmer's activities and income. Some – such as the Foncière Terre de liens or Regionalwert AG – have also decided not to pay dividends to owners of the capital (land). The rationale is that shareholders, by investing in these companies, are seeking broader 'entitlements' than financial ones: environment protection, good local food, development of organic agriculture, etc.

5.2 Limits and challenges

While civic initiatives clearly have many benefits for farmers, consumers and wider social needs, they are also faced with a series of challenges and limits. Here again, further studies and analyses have to be conducted. We are here only starting to highlight some issues.

A first question is that of the durability of these initiatives, particularly those at farm level. While they usually provide stronger connections between farmers and consumers/ citizens, they are also more dependent on specific farmers and group of citizens. In cooperative forms of land ownership, the financial viability of the cooperative may be endangered by the withdrawal of major shareholder(s). In France, Terre de liens was born out of the limitations of these forms of collective ownership: by creating a national tool (la Foncière), it provided the capacity to raise money on a national scale, and to always reserve 25% of its capital to allow for the exit of shareholders. Besides the financial durability, there is also a challenge to maintain in the long run a vibrant group of committed citizens.

A second issue lies in property administration. With civic initiatives becoming owners of land and building, they effectively have to ensure the maintenance and enhancement of their property, in a way congruent with the needs of the farmers and their broader social goals (e.g. environmental protection). This is both a major technical and financial issue. Technical, because property administration requires specific skills (renovation works, insurance...) and time. Financial, because

property administration – mostly the management of buildings – is costly and can rarely be covered by the rents. It therefore requires to raise additional money from citizen, to use part of the capital (or capital interests) or to invent new forms of arrangement with the tenant farmers.

A third issue is the relationship between the landowner (such as Land Trust or cooperative) and the farmers. There are often initial criteria to select a project or farmer (e.g. farming organically, marketing for the local community, protecting the environment). How to further organise the relationship so that the farmers keep their autonomy and get support, but also meet the expectations or objectives of the community or institution facilitating their access to land? Should the latter get involved in farm management or frame the farmers' choices and practices? There are different models and responses to these questions, and many farmers are wary of the risk of interference.

A fourth issue concerns the ability of civic initiatives to monitor and communicate on land stewardship and other benefits of these forms of agriculture. A number of farms are part of official stewardship schemes (e.g. UK organic entry or higher level stewardship). Beyond these schemes, how to assess the environmental needs of the land and possible action routes? And how to make the benefits of good land stewardship and other social and economic benefits more widely known? Regionalwert AG is one of the few organisations to have developed a specific methodology: once a year, it publishes a sustainability report presenting 64 indicators that cover the social, economic and environmental performance of all its businesses. They include the businesses' impact on biodiversity and natural resources, their employment structure (gender equality, level of training, etc.), the quality of work places, or their level of local engagement.

A last question highlighted here regards the capacity of civic initiatives to effectively intervene on the land market. In many regions, land is rarely sold on the market; it is mostly passed on from one generation of farmer to another, within family transfers of land ownership, inherited tenancies or continued tenancy by non-farming landowners. This situation is likely to change, with the coming to retirement age of a whole generation of farmers and the lack of successors. Besides, it is very difficult for civic initiatives to buy land at market price, in a context of very high and rising land prices. This may hamper the development of these types of initiatives in countries where land prices are very high, such as Belgium or Italy. In this regard, the formidable development of Terre de liens has to be understood in the very specific French context of a highly regulated land market (including sale and rent price regulations, strong structure policies, role of the SAFER).

6. Conclusion

Civic initiatives facilitating access to land for local, sustainable farmers are developing in Western Europe. They bring an answer to the difficulties faced by some farmers in gaining or maintaining their access to land. They may also have wider social and environmental benefits. Clearly, they are however not THE solution: they will always be limited to marginal numbers of farms and farmers, and, far from being a one size fits all solution, they will only be relevant in specific contexts and conditions. They nevertheless show that other approaches are possible and needed. They also give an indication that these approaches may receive considerable citizen support, and call the attention of public (local and national) authorities.

To reach scale effect, one route probably is to consolidate the role of municipalities in protecting agricultural land (in particular preserving land from urban sprawl and developments) and facilitating land access for local, sustainable farmers, through various means: providing access to communal land, financial support, administrative support to find land and get established, customers

(municipal catering for schools, care homes, etc.). Another, longer term, route lies in the reorientation of European and national agricultural and rural policies, so as to preserve agricultural use of the land, support local, sustainable agriculture, and regulate land markets.

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