

The challenge of providing access to land for sustainable agriculture

“Access to Land: Markets, Policies and Initiatives” is an article published on 13 March 2023 in the Sustainability journal and written by Willem K. Korthals Altes. The interest of this article lies in the fact that it explains the causal link between the market, current European public policies and the difficulty of gaining access to agricultural land for new farmers, while highlighting innovative initiatives to respond to this problem.

La Fabrique Ecologique has identified three salient points in this article:

#1 In recent decades, agricultural innovation has focused on the mechanisation of practices, crop specialisation, and production on an increasingly massive scale. In the face of the current crises relating to climate change and biodiversity, health issues and economic uncertainties, alternatives to the established model are emerging, notably in European public policies (e.g. the European Green Deal or the "Farm to Fork" Strategy). While these public policies encourage the advent of new generations of farmers, they do not guarantee that they will have access to agricultural land.

#2 Tensions in the agricultural land market act as a barrier to farm ownership. Large landowners rent out all or part of their land to tenant farmers. Since rents are very high and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidies are primarily granted to those large landowners, it is difficult for newcomers to get on the property ladder. The increase in the size of agricultural properties intensifies the pressure on land availability. The same applies to urban sprawl and the use of land for ecological compensation projects (such as water management schemes or the establishment of new hydroelectric power plants). Thus, the new generation of farmers, more sensitive to environmentally friendly farming practices, is finding it difficult to establish their own farms.

#3 Citing an article by Loveluck *et al.* (2021), the author highlights 64 innovative initiatives to enable

new generations of farmers to access land and to develop more environmentally friendly practices. These initiatives form a “roadmap for accessing land”, in which LFE has identified five key elements: (1) the need to provide support to people wishing to become professional farmers before they are able to gain access to land; (2) ensure that arable land remains available for agricultural use; (3) the monitoring of innovative initiatives developed by organisations promoting sustainable land management practices; (4) facilitate the procedures for making land available for rental to newcomers; (5) provide support to those new farmers who already own land.

Perspectives for France

In France, the 2014 Law on the Future of Agriculture promotes agro-ecology by proposing the creation of farmers' collectives and its teaching in schools. A range of subsidies is made available to young farmers to encourage the transition towards more sustainable practices. Despite these initiatives, greater efforts need to be made. The organisation *Terre de Liens* (“Links through the Land”), which is referred to in the article mentioned, has become one of the main forces in this process of providing access to land, thanks to its efforts to establish a network of solidarity and mutual assistance between farmers. Its actions also focus on citizen mobilisation and specific proposals for changes in agricultural practices.

The opinion of Pauline Bureau, the Vice-Chair of LFE

If the CAP cannot be changed, initiatives that facilitate access to land for farmers using more sustainable practices should be supported. This is a prerequisite for the ecological transition of the agricultural sector.