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# EIP-AGRI Focus Group

## New entrants into farming: lessons to foster innovation and entrepreneurship

MINIPAPER: The role of local authorities fostering new entrants into farming – 01 12 2015

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## Introduction

Local authorities are the closer level of government that citizens have. The general structure can differ from one country to another, but it is considered that a local authority is the organization that is officially responsible for all the public services and facilities in a particular area.

The main aim of this mini-paper is to make a general overview about the paper that local authorities can play supporting a new generation of farmers. New entrants are characterized to contribute strongly to the construction of an emerging local food system in Europe. This is one of the main reasons because this paper explores some of the problems and solutions that local authorities find to foster the implementation of new farm business.

This mini-paper will not study in details the institutional roles, the regulatory constraints or the financial problems for local authorities willing to help new entrants. The work done, it is an exploratory assessment of the current reality in some European areas.

## Taking stock of the state of the art

When talking about the role of local authorities fostering new entrants into farming, what is striking is the diversity of institutional roles and of involvement in the subject that local authorities can accomplish. Multiple ranges of actions have been identified in order to help a new generation of farmers setting up into farming. Nevertheless, there are some constraints that block local authorities to be more active giving stronger support to new entrants.

The first one, it is that most of the farming competencies are not responsible for local authorities and they do not feel that they can do something profitable for farmers. They have relegated this role to the department of agriculture at the national level. It has to be considered that local authorities can raise agricultural development programs or other actions to foster new entrants.

The second one, it is related with the typology of local authority. Most of them are small and do not have enough capacity to work with farm and food issues. Bigger municipalities could present diversified actions to support a new generation of farmers, but it depends on the willing of the local government. For example, in France, there are many experiences of local authorities that have developed specific programs to help new entrants. The development of farm incubators is one of the tools they can use. They can provide land, they can give subsidies, etc. They can also facilitate the commercialization by the development of local markets, or buying the production of the farmers for the canteens (schools, hospitals, etc).

A third constraint is that some of the local authorities tend to be too traditional. Usually local authorities practice less active governance, they continue with traditional practices and are not open to new ideas since they are not aware of them or are not open to them since they bring additional work and create new issues.

A fourth element to take into account it is that local authorities and new entrants are not always linked; they do not know and not understand each other. New entrants do not always feel or know that local authorities can help them: they need to be aware that the first step towards "localization" is their top priority task. New entrants have to scan the local community and local authority; afterwards they need to find a way to position them in the locality. Related to that, local governments often perceive new entrants as a burden ("they will fail", "this is more unemployment or social issues to deal with") and do not perceive them as an opportunity (job creation, providing new services to the population, social diversity, etc).

## Supporting local farmers for local markets

One of the commune ideas related to local authorities and new entrants it is that they have to dedicate its efforts to support local farmers for local markets. One of the key assets of local authorities is they have direct contact with local actors. The problem is that sometimes new entrants are not visualized as key actors in the local level. In that direction, it has to be taken into account that in the last years there has been an exponential increment of local and organic food. This new trend makes local authorities to be more aware with new activities like local markets, recreational gardens or healthy food campaigns.

There are two fields where local authorities should strongly work on to create a supportive environment for new entrants: (1) **Production-Place**: create strong relationships between local food producers (including land tracking and land tenure monitoring) via stronger attachment to local consumption (various events) by fostering traditions and supporting innovations; (2) **Process-Place**: involve relevant stakeholders on local level to develop local-regional food supply chains (processing plants, involve public institutions and private small, medium and big size consumers, etc.), here with underlining the common benefits of sustainable food landscape.

A new perspective to this issue has to be related with an "active involvement for common benefits": local authorities and new entrants should work for win-win situations. To be able to connect with local authorities new entrants need to make themselves visible: willing to participate, be focused on bonding, linking and bridging and to contribute something for community common benefit. At the same time, local authorities can implement a huge variety of small actions that require little funding and skills but greatly help new entrants: welcoming them, putting them in contact with other businesses, informing new entrants about useful infrastructures and services (housing, transports, schools, job search...), recommending them to other institutions, etc. Local authorities should not think how to get economic resources to new entrants; they should think how to facilitate the new initiatives. Sometime get the best solutions does not depend on money just depend on will.

Finally, it has to be taken into account that new entrants are usually small in figures in one locality, their voice on local/regional level is quite modest. Stronger cooperation among new entrants is needed (formal or virtual community, or internal woofing - bonding) for information transfer and to get more "visible and strong" (linking, bridging) in broader community. Local communities with "all-inclusive" strategy are interesting tourist destination.

In France, local authorities are more and more involved in the development of agriculture, for various reasons, and it depends on the "type of local authority". For example, rural small cities and rural departments/regions try to facilitate the installation of new entrants on their territories because they want to strengthen the life of their territory: when new people come in the territory to live, it strengthens the economic development; it allows the villages to organize services (schools, hospitals, shops, mail services...). In the other side, bigger cities want new entrants because they need local food production in order to answer to the consumers' demands. It is also interesting the experiences on some natural parks supporting new entrants in order to have farmers that will take care of the environment.

## Collecting relevant examples and good practices

Most of the municipalities are not implementing actions to support a new generation of farmers. But there are some interesting experiences around Europe that can inspire some local politicians to invest time and money in help new entrants into farming. The next points summarize some of the examples. Most of them are from France, because are based on the knowledge of the authors.

- Related to **access to land**:
  - Near Roanne (France), a farmer retired and sold his farm. The municipality decided to buy this farm. They wanted to develop the production of vegetables on the territory (most of the farmers produce wine and cattle). They finally decided to create a farm incubator, in order to support future farmers on their project. This future farmers start to produce on this farm, testing their project during 2 or 3 years. During this period, they look for land for their installation.
  - In Montpellier, the local authorities decided to buy various parcels around the city, in order to create a “green belt” dedicated to agriculture. They now rent this land to organic farmers, with low rental costs.
  - In southern Ardèche, the “Site de proximité” gathered examples of municipalities that implemented solutions for newcomers to access land (2011) : <http://vivre-monts-ardeche.fr/La-mobilisation-du-foncier.html>
  - A newcomer had met with a technician from the Parc Naturel Régional du Pilat about the setting up of his services as a musher. She needed a place to settle the business. Sometime later, the technician heard of a property on sale and rang the newcomer to inform him. This proactive information helped start the business.
  - In the Diois (Prealps), a mayor was concerned by the slowing down of activities in his village and showed great will to welcome newcomers and help them settle down. Access to land was a major issue. After searching for public funding and failing, he motivated local inhabitants to gather money and invest in agricultural land. With the help of Terre de Liens, they acquired enough land to install two families who started agricultural production as well as touristic and cultural activities.
  - On the mountainous plateau in Ardèche, a small village was consistently losing population, and there was only one farmer left. The mayor and another official from the village council worked for several years with the chamber of agriculture to change the situation. In particular, they analyzed the distribution of ownership and use of the agricultural land, and went to the many owners, one by one (they often lived far away and had to be contacted via mail), to advocate for the installation of a new farmer and ask them if they would agree to rent their agricultural land to a newcomer if he was supported by the village council. Many of them agreed. When the young couple arrived to start a farm, they had a consistent stretch of land to use as well as good relationships with the many owners, through the village council.

- In 2010 and 2011, Relier and Ardear edited guides about what local officials can do to help business creators access land and housing in rural regions, respectively in Auvergne and the Alps :

<http://www.reseau-relier.org/IMG/pdf/finalguideweb.pdf>

[http://www.alpes-sud-isere.fr/IMG/pdf/2010\\_recueil\\_experience\\_ardear\\_29p.pdf](http://www.alpes-sud-isere.fr/IMG/pdf/2010_recueil_experience_ardear_29p.pdf)

- Related to **access markets**:

- In France, various cities decided to buy local production for their canteens. One of the first experiences is the city of Lorient. The main problem is to find enough production, which needs to work with groups of producers. For that, they need to build this in cooperation with farmers' networks.
- A municipality in the Alps encouraging a new activity by lending a building for the processing of apple juice from local varieties and buying the juice for every local meeting and fest. A municipality in the Baronnies provençales chose to have lunch at the new "auberge" after every council meeting. Both examples show that it is not necessarily costly in terms of public money, rather it's a choice of how it is spent.

- Related to **local policies**:

- Wealthier local governments – particularly periurban ones – can create specific policies. For example the Pays Voironnais (in the outskirts of Grenoble Metropole) has had a specific subsidy for new farmers. Alternatively, local governments can make sure that *existing* policies in the area are phrased in a way that does not exclude newcomers, and exert a political influence to ensure newcomers are taken into account and recognized as a positive force for the territory.
- To facilitate the installation on the territory: région Auvergne. For example, one small village in Auvergne welcomed a newcomer by doing some works to arrange a parking space in front of his business, they had a celebration for his arrival and offered him a local cow (which was relevant to his activity..).
- Auvergne is a rural region, with low population levels. In order to attract new comers, and revitalize their territory, they have developed a program of "entrepreneurship residency". The idea is to give to new comers good conditions to create their activity on the territory. For that, they take in charge the costs of transport, food and hébergement. And the new comers are accompanied in the creation of their activity by professionals of the region. This program is dedicated to all kind of activity, of which agriculture. Small actions that matter a lot: inform about schooling for kids, jobs for partner, throw a welcoming party, introduce to other farmers and businesses, and the local population, help find housing, etc.

### Identifying needs from practice and proposing directions for further research

The analyses of the different examples around Europe bring some open questions and proposals for further research. Four different areas of interest have been identified: 1) there is a lack of information around Europe about what local authorities are doing for a new generation of farmers; 2) very little have been explored about

the positive impact to setup new entrants at the local level; 3) it is necessary to study new forms of governance between local authorities and new entrants and 4) the preparation of a toolkit for local authorities in order to help new entrants to setup.

The first need we have identified it is to have a better knowledge about what are the different local authorities doing to foster a new generation of farmers (real actions that are taking place nowadays in Europe). If we do not have a clear idea about the reality nowadays, it is difficult to inform the different levels of administration in order to improve the support to new entrants.

There is also a lack of knowledge about the role and competences of the local authorities in each country. Are they the same in different countries and regions? Are they different in function of the type of local authority? What are the different levels or types of local authorities?

The second need it is related to the analysis about what new entrants can bring with them for the territories, at an economic level, but also at a social level. Supporting new entrants in their project is supporting the creation of employment. It could be interesting to study the indirect consequences of their installation: how much money it saves? How much money it creates? If we want local authorities to be involved, we have to show them that it is also their own interest. Use alternative wealth indicators that go beyond GDP to measure the contribution of new entrants to the well-being of the area (example: provide a medical or personal service locally, which was unavailable before or had to be sought far away).

It could be interesting to help local authorities to integrate the reflection on new entrants into farming, into a more global agricultural and economic policy. For example, when a city like Grenoble, in France, wants to study the possibility to develop a farm incubator on lands they have acquired, the question is "what is their agricultural development policy", because installing new entrants is only possible and interesting if there are lands for them to go after the incubator, if there are markets where selling the production, if there are infrastructures to transform the production, etc.

In that sense, some of the main research lines should go to identify and test the benefits of local production and local consumption models: how new entrants are collaborating to some of the main challenges (climate change, healthy food, sustainable environment, labor in rural areas, etc). An integrated "new entrant training facility" supported and followed directly by a university could help. See "New Entry – Sustainable Farming Project": <http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/>

The third element we have identified it is the necessity to study new systems of governance between local authorities and new entrants. Although the models of market already exist, new models of relation between new entrants and the rest of society are needed (tourism, local gastronomy, hostelry, end consumptions, HORECA, etc.). It is totally necessary to study the different actions that a local authority could offer to support new entrants: to facilitate a free space at the local market in order to sale local product; to make informative and training actions in order to revalue the local product; to support restaurants to introduce local and organic products in the menus; to connect old farmers with new farmers in order to the transfer knowledge, to exchange seeds, to recuperate local varieties, etc.

At the same time, it is necessary to create an image of the "all-inclusive-community": new entrants into farming might be just one of the social groups which could contribute to rural revitalization; therefore a local authority should organize "local pool meetings" with all new comers involved, resulting in a short operative document with designed objectives and defined tasks.

The last need identify in relation to how local authorities can help new entrants, it is the preparation of a toolkit for local authorities: how to attract, retain and support new entrants into farming? It could include recommendations to newcomers to the appropriate institutions (business creation associations, banks, other

local authorities, farmers' associations, etc). Local governments also have a “power of invitation”: if they want a subject discussed or an initiative highlighted they can call a meeting and the institutions invited will generally come and put the subject on their agenda. In this way, even the smallest local governments can make a difference to newcomers' visibility, credibility and acknowledgement.

### Suggesting potential practical Operational Groups

- “Farm incubators”
- “A toolkit for local authorities in order to foster a new generation of farmers”
- “Benefits for the community when setting up new farmers”
- “Local actions for local farmers”
- “New Entrant Community or Network”. There are some experiences like “Neo-Agri” ([www.neo-agri.org](http://www.neo-agri.org)) or “La Revuelta al Campo” ([www.larevueltalcampo.wordpress.com](http://www.larevueltalcampo.wordpress.com)).

### Ways to disseminate experience and practical knowledge

- To practice exchange between different experiences in the same country and between different countries. Into European funds the programmes the Interreg family would be the more adequate.
- The outcomes of all the mini-papers should be on agenda of rural networks and national rural parliaments; later on it can be a part of RPD 2020.
- To include the main findings into the lectures of professors taking part of the Focus Groups and to and organize some New Entrant researches in the different Universities.
- To organized an international Seminar related to the main findings worked on the Focus Group.

### Conclusion

We see that there is content for further research in the field of the positive interactions between local authorities and newcomers. However it is clear that there is already a lot being tested and achieved in the field that needs showcasing through the appropriate channels to reach officials, officers and new entrants.

One key element to mention it is that some of the solutions to foster a new generation of new entrants have to do with money, others with key actor attitudes and others just need plenty of both. In some cases it is not so much the amount of money invested or the skills, but rather the beliefs held both by the officials and the newcomers that determine the outcome of their collaboration: obviously, win-win situations arise when both sides start with the idea that they can benefit from one another rather than perceive one another as a burden or an impediment.

Everything that can emphasize the positive impact of newcomers in their settling area is therefore important to underline and to convey to local authorities. Most of the solutions highlighted in this mini-paper cost no money or very little money, and require little specific skills. Yet their impact on the success or failure of new entrants seems paramount. Therefore we suggest that a solution-oriented attitude, added to positive beliefs about newcomers into farming could make a great difference in most rural areas of Europe.

In the other side, we are also aware that some solutions need a lot of money to be implemented. For example,

access to land can cost a lot to a municipality if it decides to buy it. And it is maybe the only way to preserve land from speculation. There are some actions that really need a local authority's decision to invest in a way that can be helpful for a new generation of entrants into farming.

Just to conclude, it is important to take into account that the new emerging complex systems need a strong resilience actor approach. Resilience should be developed either by new entrants or also by support (local, but also regional and national) institutions - regarding financing scheme, land management, legislation on farm entrepreneurship, etc. It is needed new attitudes and visions to overcome new entrant's barriers. It is a political and also a social duty to help new entrants to enter into farming.