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Agriculture and the rights of citizenship

Serge Bonnefoy

The relationships between the city and agriculture are as old as the concept of city itself: the primitive accumulative city, the cereal market city, the city marked by agricultural supremacy and union unrest, the city that gives its name to local controlled origin products, the city as an agricultural shopwindow.

These relationships affect agriculture both in proximity to the city and in the larger scenario of the Regions and, indeed, have a bearing on agriculture in general. But it is in proximity of the city that agricultural practices, known as periurban agriculture, are most directly affected by urban development, by the evolution of the dichotomy agriculture-society, city-countryside, urban-rural and, lastly, city-nature.

The periurban agricultural policies that have emerged over the years have followed a tortuous path, contrasting with the classic paths of the great public policies. In France, the issue is a complex one because it depends on one hand on the urban planning sector (the Ministère de l'Équipement, town planning agencies) and on the other on the government sector for agriculture (the Ministère de l'Agriculture and professional farming organizations), each of which frequently passes on the buck of responsibility for periurban agriculture to another sector. The State has intervened only on a few occasions, while on others it has attributed this responsibility exclusively to the territorial authorities. Although the periurban agriculture issue first raised its head in the region of the Ile-de-France, at the beginning of the 1980s, it was in the Rhône-Alpes region that territorial periurban policies first made

their appearance.

These originated thanks to a convergence of interests, an alliance among rural planning experts, town planners concerned with the territorial balance, active researchers in the field, the leaders of the professional farming categories and the political authorities responsible for rural agglomerates. The innovation was facilitated by the good relationships that developed among the State, the Region and the Department.

In the '90s, the 'Grenoble variant' triumphed, to the great advantage of the intermunicipal areas and of local governance. At the end of this decade the State reappeared on the scene, heralding 7 infield agro-urban projects.

The creation of Terres en Villes in June 2000 and the new involvement of the State placed a symbolic end to half a century of the dilatory formula, 'on the agenda', that had characterized the periurban agriculture issue. The territorial dimension of this policy is nowadays more widely recognized and it is to be hoped that it will be incorporated into territorial planning in general.

For a long period, the leaders of the profession believed that the peri-urban farmer would 'keep going' by selling land for building. Nursery gardeners inside the green belt have long been considered a world apart, and the denomination periurban agriculture was looked down on by country cereal farmers and qualified breeders, as if use of the term would demean the farming profession and acknowledge defeat of the rural by the urban world. Nowadays, the periurban situation is a microcosm of all the main contradictions of French agricultural policies, and has obliged farming professionals to question the meaning of their job. Nevertheless, in the last fifty years periurban

agriculture has won full rights of citizenship, becoming an important focus of public policies nationwide and taking its place in local urban and agricultural history.

Agricultural and nature fairs organized by social groups and local institutions have resulted in this type of agriculture being attributed countless strategic objectives, often of a contradictory nature: territorial balance, attraction, quality of life, economy and employment, quality of urban products on offer, landscape and biodiversity, asset and identity, social integration, protective barrier against natural hazards.

Since the first urban Regional agricultural program, drawn up in Lyon in 1979, the processes and formalization of local agricultural policies, known as periurban, have gradually been improved.

The process generally occurs as follows: - a triggering event or facilitating institution causes the intermunicipal area or the body representing the interests of the entire farming profession in France, i.e. the Chamber of Agriculture, to set up a partnership in favour of periurban agriculture.

- a preliminary diagnosis is made, adopting a different approach, which facilitates the procedures and the definition of common goals for the partnership;

- the common goals are then formalized in a document signed by the partners; this document is generally called a charte agricole, (agricultural charter), a protocole cadre (cadre protocol) or a projet agri-urbain (agri-urban project), promulgated in a pluriennial action program. These goals are echoed in the main political documents of the urban Region: Projets d'agglomération (Agglomeration projects), Schémas de cohérence territoriale (Territorial

coherence schemes); - finally, an agreement is signed between the intermunicipal area and the Chamber of Agriculture or, more rarely, an association granting equal status to the different actors is formed, defining the methods for implementing the action program.

The content of territorial periurban agricultural policies

An analysis of the actions taken in the territories adhering to the Terres en Villes project, reported in the databank that collects the experiences of the network, reveals that the themes taken into account by the agglomeration policies are fairly homogeneous:

- actions in favour of the protection of farm estate and programmed value enhancement of farm and forest land and nature oases;
- actions in favour of the agro-environment and biodiversity;
- actions in favour of the sustainability of farmers and foresters activities and of agricultural settlements;
- actions in favour of farm and forest economies and especially value enhancement of local produce in the urban consumer pool;
- actions enhancing the value of agricultural and rural estate in urban communities and fostering good relations among farmers and city-dwellers.

The land estate issue is central to periurban agricultural policies and is constantly raised by the farming profession, that calls both for clearer and more sustainable rules and for a better apportionment of land use to balance large urbanization projects, for instance.

The first type of action aims above all to ensure that farm and, in some territories, forest land are attributed a greater importance in urban

planning, and to increase the level of protection of non built-up land. The second type aims to achieve correct management of the effects of urbanization on farmers and farm estate. This largely involves new expropriation, creating land estate reserves that will then enable exchanges and the recreation of commercial farming estate and vital agricultural spaces. In order to guarantee the protection of agricultural spaces, it is not enough to convince the urban authorities and other actors of the need to protect periurban agriculture. This protection must also be meaningful to the citizens and respond to social needs going beyond those of simple agricultural production. The inevitable corporate professional spirit needs to be overcome so as to promote programmed, multifunctional management of farm, forest and uncultivated land. This is why periurban agricultural policies intervene at three different levels:

- at the level of the farm (Aubagne, Grenoble, Rennes), or more rarely forest (Grenoble), encouraging agri-environmental or sylvan-environmental, as well as multifunctional undertakings. The aim is mostly to adapt the European and national norms to the local territorial priorities: the centralization of French governmental policy makes this attempt to achieve coherence somewhat difficult;
- at the micro-territorial level, in areas of less than 1,000 hectares, in agreement with the other actors, to establish the goals of the management project and the priority actions to be taken. This project proposal is ratified thanks to the Law for the Development of rural territories, that sanctions the creation of intervention perimeters within which

natural and agricultural periurban spaces are fostered;

- at the level of the urban agglomeration or Region, to define the governance of the farm, forest and uncultivated spaces. The second fundamental tenet of periurban agricultural policies after the protection of agricultural spaces is global agricultural development. The actions furthering this purpose vary from one metropolis to another according to the different types of dominant agriculture: the main aim is to create a network of vital commercial farms characterized by a high degree of sustainability. The creation of local trademarks guaranteeing the quality of the product and introducing a coherent marketing and promotions policy corresponds to an overall policy of short circuits. The actions in favour of farmer-citizen relationships set up by the actors of the Terres en Villes agglomerations cover all the areas. The principal aim is to increase the citizens' knowledge and understanding of farming and the forest, and of the farmer's identity. These actions are much in demand by farmers as they appear to be a means of eliminating the isolation of periurban agricultural professionals and combating stereotypes. The europeanization of the urban issue, of periurban agriculture and the governance of open periurban spaces is already underway, as demonstrated by the PIC Urban, Interregional projects III B that define the governance of periurban farm, forest and uncultivated lands, and by the deliberations of the European Social Economics Committee of July 2004 on periurban agriculture, as well as by the creation of the network of peri-urban regions: PURPLE. One of the most important developments of the

upcoming years should be the implementation of a management policy of open spaces, complementary to, but distinct from the periurban agricultural policies. It will then become apparent whether periurban agricultural policy can 'fit in' with the policies for non built-up land; this conviction is strengthened by the behaviour of the urban visitor in search of the regenerating effects of 'nature'. Agriculture would thus be reduced to the status of a tool, like many others, serving to enhance the city asset. But adopting this view would mean neglecting all the other open challenges of periurban agriculture and the restraints of public management. A management of open spaces that does not succeed in creating wealth seems to us bound to fail in view of the European strategy defined in Lisbon and Göteborg. But the reasons behind this are largely social: in recent years, themes such as the greenhouse effect and the notions of the sustainable city, energy, public health as well as social integration and identity, not to mention the harmful effects of urban sprawl, have come ever closer to the forefront. The most recent focus is on the effects of classic farm produce in countering the growing problem of pediatric obesity. The social and economic challenges raised by periurban agriculture are too great to allow us to evade the issue and its myriad implications.