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EXPLORING THE RATIONALES OF FARMERS' ENGAGEMENT IN AGRICULTURAL COLLECTIVES CONFRONTED WITH THE PROBLEM OF GENERATIONAL RENEWAL: A CASE STUDY OF TWO COLLECTIVES IN THE AURA REGION, FRANCE

Key-words: Generational renewal, governance and organization of collectives, relationship to work, personal trajectories, organization of work, commitments to agricultural collectives

Abstract: The future of agricultural collectives has direct consequences on the economy and life of rural territories. However, evolutions of the relationship to work of farmers, the socio-economic context and the digital transition are disrupting the functioning of agricultural collectives. They are struggling to attract young people or to make different generations of farmers work together. This study explores and discusses the reasons behind farmers' commitment in agricultural collectives, challenged by the issue of generational renewal. The focus here is on two agricultural collectives, a CUMA¹ and a GEDA². A total of 19 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted, covering five themes i) the organization of work on the farm ii) the farmer's relationship to work iii) his personal trajectory iv) his commitments within and outside the collective and v) the functioning of the collective studied. The first level of analysis, provides a general portrait of the functioning of each collective and explore their interactions with commitment. The second level, highlights the diversity of farmers' profiles and their interactions with engagement. The study shows that active engagement is above all a question of priority and motivation of members rather than a question of generation. Indeed, those who take on responsibilities are generally those who consider the collective as part of their priorities and as an extension of their work, or as a sine qua non condition for participating in a collective that enables them to benefit from essential services. However, this assumption of responsibility is assessed by farmers according to their desired professional/private life balance. In cases where private life is as important as professional life, the engagement is manifested when farmers tend to have a flexible work organization and/or are comfortable with the idea of postponing their farming activities. Besides, flexibility in work organization, mainly related to delegation, and the composition of the work unit facilitates active engagement. But the modalities of commitment are also influenced by the relations with the external social environment. Furthermore, farmers who are actively engaged tend to choose responsibilities in such a way as to meet certain expectations regarding the meaning of work and/or relationships, and the contribution of skills. Finally, the features of engagement seem to be mostly inherited from the parents. As a result, this research raises a number of findings useful to facilitate the support of intergenerational mesh and the renewal of members taking on responsibilities in agricultural collectives.

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¹ Cooperative for the Use of Agricultural Equipment

² Group of Agricultural Study and Development