



## Conference Announcement and Call for Papers

### New Forms of Agriculture: Ordinary practices, public debate and social critique

*November 20-21, 2013*

*Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA)  
Département Sciences pour l'Action et le Développement  
Dijon, France*

At least since the 1990s, an array of new social movements (Via Campesina, the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil, various campaigns for food sovereignty and food justice) and public initiatives (national targets for the reduction of pesticide use, subsidies for multi-functional agriculture) have increasingly called into question agriculture's environmental and social impacts. This conference seeks to open a space for discussion with regard to the subversive dimension of these debates, studying the "new forms of agriculture" (sustainable, organic, agroecological, fair trade, etc.) they propose with specific attention to those forms' ethical and political aspects. How do new agricultural models and practices contribute to the construction of new forms of social critique? How are the social and political aspects of such movements either foregrounded or bracketed within public and academic discussions?

Our guiding premise is that agriculture represents a significant site for the refashioning of contemporary social critique. Debates over competing agricultural models and practices touch on issues relating both to the common good (from public health to environmental protection) and to individual fulfillment (from the pursuit of satisfying work to the consumption of healthful and appetizing food). The overarching goal of the conference is to examine, from a range of sociological, ethnographic, and historical perspectives, the different ways in which the practices and objectives of these new forms of agriculture are politicized and/or depoliticized. To what extent do new forms of agriculture rely on idealized representations of agricultural work and rural life? To what extent are they subject to "conventionalization" or the dilution of their goals in the name of more widespread adoption?

Papers and sessions for the conference may address one of the three following themes (alternatives to these themes are also welcome):

#### **1. Agriculture as a public issue**

In a context of frequent food-related public health crises, increasingly urgent conflicts over natural resource use and global unrest in the face of mounting commodity prices, the management of agricultural issues is no longer left exclusively in the hands of the agricultural sector. Our first theme relates to the diverse means by which agricultural activities emerge, develop and are addressed (or not addressed) as matters for public debate. Papers may, for example:

- describe some of the new actors (environmental groups, public health professionals, urban and regional planners, advocates for minority rights) participating in public

discussions as to what constitutes “good farming,” how they have come to the table, what they contribute, new coalitions being formed, etc.;

- question the ways in which farmers, agriculture and rural life are represented in public policy, by the media, and/or within academic analyses;
- analyze the manner in which specific claims, terms and injunctions with respect to agriculture emerge, circulate, or take hold (e.g., “food miles,” “eat local,” “environmentally friendly farming”); what is at stake in such debates; how questions are defined; and whose answers are considered authoritative;
- consider how new agricultural models and practices gain a place on the public agenda and are subsequently embraced or rejected by public officials (how are new practices identified? what channels must such initiatives pass through? what kinds of financial assistance are made available?).

## **2. Agriculture as a key site for new forms of debate and resistance**

From the prominence occupied by peasant identities within contemporary social movements (Via Campesina, the Confédération Paysanne) to the manner in which new and existing activist groups have taken up agricultural issues (animal welfare, GMOs, etc.), agriculture has become a central front in the development of new forms of citizen and activist engagement. The second possible theme for the conference will focus on the nature of these links to agriculture (whether dominant or marginal, highlighted or kept in the background) within contemporary social movements. Papers may, for example:

- present empirical studies of unions or activist organizations working on agricultural and rural issues, analyzing their ideological grounding, leadership, strategies, history, collaborations with other groups, etc.;
- study the emergence of alternative production and consumption networks (organic cooperatives, local food councils and food hubs, food justice and food access campaigns for disadvantaged areas, etc.);
- offer an ethnographic description of the more informal networks that exist with respect to these or related issues, including “care farming” (agricultural/horticultural therapy programs), assistance for farmers in difficulty, agricultural workfare programs, etc. Here the interest may lie in examining how forms of “ordinary” resistance and/or political engagement develop outside established or existing networks.

## **3. The construction of new forms of agriculture**

The third theme relates to the manner in which agricultural practices are modified or transformed as a result of shifts in public opinion, activist campaigns or other calls for new forms of agriculture. The goal here is not so much to argue in favor of this or that more sustainable or equitable agricultural model, but to examine in detail the new possibilities and/or constraints such new forms of agriculture create for farmers and other food system actors. Contributions may, for example:

- analyze the tensions resulting from the emergence of new demands made on farmers and farming and the consequences such tensions hold for agriculture as a profession and as a way of life;
- trace the manner in which new norms and standards (e.g., for animal welfare, for public health, for environmental impacts) are diffused and adopted, and what their intended and unintended consequences may be;

- describe new and expanding forms of urban agriculture, often considered marginal to “real” or professional farming (allotment gardens, workfare projects, guerilla gardens, rooftop gardens), examining for example who spearheads such projects, how or to what extent they become institutionalized, what arguments they employ, and what new perspectives they offer;
- focus on the transmission of professional knowledge, asking how transmission models within alternative agriculture movements may differ from the diffusionist model traditionally associated with agricultural modernization. What is the relationship between expert knowledge and local knowledge within such movements, for example? How are new forms of training and education conceived and organized?

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Contributions are welcome from all social science, humanities, and related disciplines, focusing on examples from any geographic region and from any historical or contemporary period. The conference committee will favor proposals grounded in empirical research. Conference sessions will be held in French and/or English as determined by the needs of the participants (the possibility of providing translated versions of PowerPoint presentations will be appreciated).

Paper proposals of up to 1,000 words (in French or in English) are requested by **March 30**. Proposals should include a title, a detailed abstract summarizing the paper’s argument, methodology and empirical basis, and a brief bibliography, as well as the name, affiliation and contact details for the author or authors. Submissions and any questions should be addressed to Laura Sayre (postdoctoral researcher, INRA-SAD, UMR Cesaer) at [laura.sayre@dijon.inra.fr](mailto:laura.sayre@dijon.inra.fr).

Committee decisions will be communicated to authors by early June. For accepted proposals, draft texts of 5000-6000 words will be requested by September 30 in order to facilitate the work of panel discussants and to expedite the preparation of an edited volume and/or special journal issue following the conference.

*Conference committee:* Florent BIDAUD (Centre d’Etudes et de Prospective, Ministère de l’Agriculture), Stéphane BELLON (INRA-SAD Avignon), Jacqueline CANDAU (IRSTEA Bordeaux), Yuna CHIFFOLEAU (INRA-SAD Montpellier), Claude COMPAGNONE (AgroSup Dijon), Philippe CORCUFF (IEP Lyon), François DEDIEU (INRA SAD Champs-sur-Marne), Eric DOIDY (INRA-SAD Dijon), Lucie DUPRE (INRA-SAE2 Ivry), Philippe FLEURY (ISARA Lyon), Anahita GRISONI (EHESS-ENS Lyon), Julie GUTHMAN (University of California, Santa Cruz), Florence HELLEC (INRA-SAD Mirecourt), Roger LE GUEN (ESA Angers), Jean-Marc MEYNARD (INRA-SAD Grignon), Jérôme MICHALON (Université Saint-Etienne), Dominique PATUREL (INRA-SAD Montpellier), Nancy PELUSO (University of California, Berkeley), Justine PRIBETICH (AgroSup Dijon), François PURSEIGLE (ENSA Toulouse), Laura SAYRE (INRA-SAD Dijon), Pierre STASSART (Université de Liège Arlon), Michelle WANDER (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign)

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