

## FRANCE

# Entry of skilled / younger farmers

### Location

Coussac Bonneval

### Programming period

2014 – 2020

### Priority

P2 – Competitiveness

### Measure

M6 – Farm & business  
development

### Funding (EUR)

Total budget 563 000  
RDP 224 000  
Other 339 000

### Project duration

2015 – 2017

### Project promoter

GAEC La Tournerie

### Contact

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### Website

n/a

A group of young agronomists combined RDP support with innovative financial solutions like crowdfunding to develop a self-sufficient farm growing local, quality organic products.

## Summary

A group of 11 young agronomists decided to combine RDP support along with innovative financial solutions like crowdfunding in order to develop a self-sufficient farm growing local, quality organic products. The group set up 4 hectares dedicated to organic market gardening (including 4 500 m<sup>2</sup> of greenhouses), dairy cows, goats, pigs, an artisan cheese dairy and 20 hectares of organic cereals.



The conversion of the land to organic farming took two years. Masonry and carpentry work in the existing building was necessary for the creation of housing spaces for the animals, a brewery and a cheese dairy. This stage of the project was completed during the winter of 2015-2016.

## Results

The farm is running at full capacity offering a variety of products including fruit, vegetables, cheese (70 000 l/year of processed milk), pork, bread and even organic beer (100 hl/year). The group opened a 'community café' where they sell their own beer and also launched a direct selling spot twice a week.

The 18 hectares of cereals ensure food self-sufficiency for the farm occupants

There is no more food waste: vegetable and cheese waste is used to feed animals and animal manure is reused as a fertilizer for growing vegetables.

17 jobs were created during 2015-2017.

## Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ The young group bypassed the main obstacle to farm business start ups by avoiding, in an original way, the trap of incurring too much debt: the property was acquired through crowdfunding via an estate company. This company, as the owner of the land, charges the collective an annual rent for its use.
- ❑ The collective experiments with organizational and communication tools, and even creates new ones to meet their needs. Weekly meetings begin with a "mood tour", to take the pulse of the collective before starting the week, and "philosophical meetings" address substantive issues without the obligations of decision-making. Without aiming for consensus, these times of formal exchanges bring out new questions and nourish individual reflections.

### Context

In January 2012, a group of 11 young students from the Higher Institute of Agriculture in Lille (ISA) expressed their willingness 'to do something together'. Some were interested in market gardening or breeding, others were interested in processed products such as bread, cheese or beer. At the end of 2013, two members of the group settled in La Ribouille, a hamlet in Saint-Germain-les-Belles, in the south of Haute-Vienne (Limousin, Nouvelle Aquitaine). They began to convert a farmhouse and the idea of establishing a "base camp" for the entire group was slowly formulated. Soon, the adjoining land transformed into a kitchen garden. A duck pond was created as well as a henhouse and a workshop. Before long, all 11 agronomists were living onsite; some of them in caravans. The old bread oven was restored, an outbuilding was turned into a microbrewery and the cellar was transformed into a cheese store. La Ribouille evolved from a base camp to an experimental site. Although the production volumes were modest at this stage, the heart of the project was there: the collective.

Besides this young group, another major stakeholder in the project was the organisation Terres de Liens. It was established in 2003 out of the convergence of several movements linking community education (in French: *éducation populaire*), organic and biodynamic agriculture, ethical finance, solidarity economy and rural development. The aim of 'Terres de Liens' is to enable citizens to act locally. The movement developed new tools to limit the disappearance of farmland and facilitate access to agricultural land for sector newcomers. These tools are available to everyone in the 21 French regions through a community of practice (in French: *réseau associatif*), a foundation and an estate company.

### Objectives

The overall objective of the collective was to develop a self-sufficient farm growing local, quality organic products.

*"The sellers of La Tournerie farm played a decisive role in the start up of our enterprise. Their willingness to sell all of the farm (instead of breaking it up), and their confidence in such an atypical project, gave us the time to complete all the necessary setup steps and to negotiate with Terre de Liens regarding the acquisition of the farm."*

Gaec La Tournerie members



### Activities

The process of setting up our enterprise started in early 2014. The 11 young farmers received the prescribed training from the Chamber of Agriculture, complemented by farm visits. The group then set about outlining the various future activities of the project and preparing grant applications to submit to organizations such as 'Terres de Liens', the chamber of agriculture, government bodies, EAFRD managing authorities, banks, etc. The collaborative ethos of the small group proved effective and the project was fully developed in a few months.

The group created a legal entity and was able to convince the Terres de Liens estate company to support them in acquiring the land in May 2015 (for EUR 269 500). In June 2015, the sales' agreement was signed and just three months later, the local rural development programming committee approved a financial commitment under the 'Young farmers setup' (in French: *Dotation Jeune Agriculteur – DJA*) that allocated EUR 22 400 to each member of the group. Other grants have been successfully obtained, under M13 (Payments to areas facing natural or other specific constraints - ANC), M11 (Organic farming), M10 (Agro-Environment-Climate > protection of endangered breeds). That same summer, the farm collective was officially approved as a "Groupement Agricole d'Exploitation en Commun" (GAEC).

This joint farmers' setup includes a combination of activities: 4 hectares dedicated to organic market gardening including 4 500 m<sup>2</sup> of greenhouses, 15 dairy cows (black and white from Brittany), 70 goats (Poitevin), an artisanal cheese dairy and 20 hectares of organic cereals that provide raw material to produce bread, beer and to feed the farm's pigs. The farm's conversion to organic took two years and the development of the buildings was done during the winter 2015-2016, where masonry and carpentry works were necessary for the creation of the meat processing workshops, a brewery and a cheese dairy. One member of the local community, an architect-carpenter-trainer, was employed part-time by the group during this period.

### Main Results

2 years on from its 2015 launch, the farm is running at full capacity. It offers a variety of products: fruit, vegetables, cheeses (70 000 l/year of processed milk), pork, bread and even organic beer (100 hl/year).

This self-managed farm has eliminated food waste by using leftovers to feed the animals. The 18 hectares of cereals ensure food self-sufficiency for all occupants, and all animal manure is reused as a fertilizer for growing vegetables.

The young group opened a 'community café' (in French: café associatif) where they sell their own beer. They also launched a direct selling spot twice a week.

EU funding has contributed to the farm's success and helped it to create 17 jobs during 2015-2017.

### Key lessons

The young group bypassed the main obstacle to farm business start ups by avoiding, in an original way, the trap of incurring too much debt: the property was acquired through crowdfunding via an estate company (Terre de Liens). This company, as the owner of the land, charges the collective an annual rent of EUR 7 000 for its use.

When it comes to managing organisational issues like the assignment of tasks, shared spaces, pooling of revenues, etc. the collective experiments with different approaches, and even creates new ones to meet their needs. Weekly meetings begin with a "mood tour", to take the pulse of the collective before starting the week, and "philosophical meetings" address substantive issues without the obligations of decision-making. Without aiming for consensus, these times of formal exchange bring out new questions and nourish individual reflection. The pooling of revenues, for example, has been the subject of much debate.

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#### Additional sources of information

[https://europa.eu/investeu/projects/small-farm-big-ideas\\_en](https://europa.eu/investeu/projects/small-farm-big-ideas_en)

[www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=29&v=Pr52\\_7-7Hwk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=29&v=Pr52_7-7Hwk)