



Fair trade and collective approach to serve the agroecological transition: the ACE farm group example (Agroecology and Fair Trade)

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Introduction :

- Agriculture in the Mediterranean is particularly vulnerable to climate change. (1) Agroecology provides solutions through implementation of plant cover and getting trees back in the fields. (2) However, those practices are poorly documented and agroecological transition is a long-time process.
- By 2025, L'Occitane is committed to get six supply chains certified according to fair trade standards, implying guarantees but also obligations:
 - Producers must get organized in a collective and democratic way;
 - Part of the price paid is dedicated to finance collective projects.
- 11 producers thus decided to create a fair trade and agroecological group, with the support of L'Occitane. The collective organization aims to facilitate implementation of small-scale agroecological experimentations.

What roles did the collective organization and fair trade approach play in getting the farmers involved into agroecological transition and how does this transition materialize?

Materials & Methods :

Commitment of L'Occitane to buy Fair Trade certified raw materials from its iconic partners in Provence and Corsica (Almond, Cade, Immortelle, Lavender, Verbena, Rose)

Phase 1 : Impulse

- Feasibility study regarding the transition of L'Occitane's supply chains to fair trade, accompanied by external structure
- Creation of pluridisciplinary internal taskforce on fair trade
- Sensitization field tour and workshop with 11 farmers on agroecology to probe their interest

Decision to create a non-profit collective organization linking fair trade to agroecology

Phase 2 : Emergence

- Study of collective structures possibilities
- Accompaniment of collective structuration: creation of independent juridic entity, design of governance rules and financing set up
- Beginning of work on Regenerative Agriculture with simple acts:
 - Encouraging farmers to observe their soil;
 - Distributing seeds to farmers to cover their soil.

First general assembly of the created organization

Phase 3 : Formal structure

- Initiation of L'Occitane's transition plan towards fair trade and farmers' transition towards Agroecology
- Gathering of first field results and formalization of work methodologies on the field (trials conception and monitoring methodologies)

Results & Discussion :

About collective structure's creation :

- Creation of an independent juridic entity, with the status of a non-profit organization named "Agroécologie et Commerce Equitable, Agriculture Régénératrice en Méditerranée" (ACE) in July 2021.
- Design of association's "raison d'être" :
"Produce sustainably and valorize agricultural productions with pride"
Through 3 axis : Agroecology, Fair Trade and Open Source

About technical agroecological project :

Cover crops :

- Design of two experimental levels and monitoring methodologies on soil quality, cover crop and crop yield. Complexity has been faced to find the good balance between monitoring relevance and time required
- First results : **60 ha of cover crop have been implanted in 11 experiments in 5 farms producing an average of 3,3 tons of dried biomass per hectare**
- Identification of species adapted to Mediterranean conditions
- Demonstration of incapacity to manage cover crops with conventional farming tools
- Next working axis : seeds sovereignty and adapted tools obtention

List of chosen technical monitoring KPIs

Indicators	Protocols used
Soil michorizes abundance	Beaker test
Soil aggregate stability	Slake test
Soil structure	Beaker test
Worms' abundance	Beaker test
Soil water infiltration	Beerkan test
Cover crop yield	Biomass weighing

Agroforestry & hedges :

- **1250 trees have been planted in 4 farms** (2 ha in agroforestry, the rest in hedges representing 800 linear meters)
- Decision to stop temporarily the support on that topic to concentrate on cover crops because farmers were less to be motivated

Intercropping in lavender and monitoring :



About fair trade :

- Common certification Fair For Life chosen
- First production costs studies were led, raising questions : lack of reference price on small sectors (ex : Verbena); heterogeneity in results; encouragement of top-quality or environmentally-friendly practices versus economic performance

Conclusions :

- The project led to the creation of a functional non-profit organization, provided with democratic governance functioning, substantial budget and roadmap to experiment and deploy agroecology.
- **The collective of farmers has taken fair trade certification benefits and constraints on board to use them as a lever in getting involved into agroecological transition**, implementing plant cover and agroforestry trials, as their first step on agroecological transition pathway.
- The project enabled highlighted that human, technical and financial accompaniment are key conditions of success for launching a group dynamic on regenerative agriculture topics. This dynamic needs to be rapidly transformed to get autonomized, so that the organization can open to other buyers.

References:

- (1) MedECC 2020 Résumé à l'intention des décideurs. Dans : Changement climatique et environnemental dans le bassin méditerranéen – Situation actuelle et risques pour le futur. Premier rapport d'évaluation sur la Méditerranée [Cramer W, Guiot J, Marini K (eds.)] Union pour la Méditerranée, Plan Bleu, UNEP/MAP, Marseille, France, 35pp
- (2) IPCC, 2019: Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems

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