

# Collective farm shops and AMAP (French CSA) in southwest France. Commitment and delegation on the part of producers and consumers.

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**Summary:** local relations between producers and consumers are examined through the prism of two types of collective system: *Associations pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne* (AMAP, french CSA, Community-Supported Agriculture) and Collective Farm Shops (CFS). We refer to a study of the Midi-Pyrénées region carried out in 2007. We make a particular study of what motivates consumers and producers alike. Having demonstrated the significant increase in the numbers of regional collectives schemes, we highlight a range of existing tensions in the way that these collectives and networks of collectives (CSA) operate. The combined CSA/CFS approach allows a better vision of the skills deficits encountered amongst producers who are required to play a number of different roles, and provides a definition of routine, the most natural agricultural situation encountered in a CSA-style partnership.

## Introduction

With the increase in AMAP (*Associations pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne*, French CSA) schemes, direct sales practices have again come to the fore in France. The 2007 study<sup>1</sup> into AMAP and CFS in the Midi-Pyrénées gathered data from producers and consumers. Having been personally involved with this study, notably in the provision of the AMAP data, I propose in this paper to set out its main outlines, examining them in the light of insights derived from recent research into the sociology of consumption. I also call upon personal experience as manager of a technical meat-processing unit at a regional agricultural college in the aftermath of the mad cow crisis. As part of my job I was required to assist livestock farmers in projects for meat-processing and the sale of meat parcels. More recently, I spent 6 months as a participant in an AMAP scheme in the Tarn *département*. The aim of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding of local food networks as examined from the viewpoints of stakeholders' social motivations, skills and difficulties. The approach adopted concentrates on sociological, economic and geographical considerations.

The two systems were selected as a way of examining the vast field of direct sales (direct producer-consumer handover) and short chains (no more than one intermediary). AMAP schemes are of special interest because of their exponential growth in the Midi-Pyrénées region since 2003. Recent literature has presented these two collective systems together: CSA and CFS (Holloway *et al*, 2007; Delfosse and Bernard, 2007). An AMAP, like a CSA, is a partnership wherein consumers group together around a local producer. Based on a contracted commitment covering a sustainable period of time, the producer undertakes to provide consumers with a weekly “basket” or “box”, comprising mainly vegetables. Consumers accept the idea of payment in advance and of participating in the sale of the producer's crop (Lamine,

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<sup>1</sup> POUZENC Michael. *et al*, April 2008, *Les relations de proximité agriculteurs-consommateurs : Points de vente collectifs et AMAP en Midi-Pyrénées* (Local Consumer-Producer Relationships, CFS and CSA in the Midi- Pyrénées) , UMR Dynamiques Rurales, Toulouse

2008). This in turn leads to a mutual commitment between the consumers in a group and the producer, with the consequent strengthening of relationships.

Collective Farm Shops (CFS) are sales outlets run by producers who have taken the decision to sell their produce jointly. The shop is staffed by producers themselves and/or by their staff. The CFS therefore represents a combination of direct sale and short chain.

We start by introducing stakeholders from the Midi-Pyrénées region. We present the results of the regional survey and underline the importance of the role that product quality can play for stakeholders. We outline three local situations that we consider to be relevant in promoting CFS- and AMAP-type projects. We then take a look at the motivations, skills and learning curves experienced by stakeholders. A large spread of skills is often evident on both sides (consumer and producer). We seek to contextualise changes in the producer role and in their choices and orientations evident in these alternative food systems, by attempting to transpose consumer sociology results into the professional sphere. We make the hypothesis that there are trade-offs in the choices made by producers, equivalent to those observed in consumers as part of the purchasing act (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2006).

## **1 Collective Practices in direct marketing: the case of Midi-Pyrénées**

We study the particular case of a French region, Midi-Pyrénées, covering eight departments over 45,000 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of 2.8 million people. It is a rural area with one central urban pole, Toulouse, 800,000 people. Midi-Pyrénées ranks as the first French region in number of farms (about 54,000<sup>2</sup>). Meat and milk industries represent more than 56 % of the total agricultural business<sup>3</sup>. This region thus suffered more than any others from the BSE crisis in France between 1996 and 2000. Food crises at national level fed consumers demand for healthier and safer food. The weight of the consumers became greater, first through consumption groups in both agricultural and food sectors, then through the dynamism of direct marketing networks which escape the trust crisis in long supply chains.

### **1.1 Methodology and objectives of the study**

Understanding the evolutions of market exchange systems, and more specifically the interconnection in trading<sup>4</sup> between consumers and agricultural producers, can bring a light on the current transformations within rural and urban territories. As Lamine (2005) argued, we want to follow here a symmetrical way to study interactions between actors of the food chains and consumers. The study on which this article is based on, centred on collective systems of exchange (AMAP and CFS), anchored in proximity relationships. In the vast corpus of "alternative agro-food networks" (AAFN, Goodman, 2003) and short food supply chains (SFSC), the limitation on only two objects of study raises nevertheless many questions. Further to a series of preparatory interviews, which some of them were made for a university work on Midi-Pyrénées AMAP<sup>5</sup> (French CSA), the research group<sup>6</sup> raised a few hypothesis before conducting in depth, semi-directive interviews. These hypothesis concern four points: militant

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<sup>2</sup> source : French agricultural statistics : Agreste, 2006, estimations of 2004

<sup>3</sup> source : Conseil régional Midi-Pyrénées, website [www.midipyrenees.fr/](http://www.midipyrenees.fr/) consulted in april 2008

<sup>4</sup> DUBUISSON-QUELLIER Sophie De la routine à la délibération, Les arbitrages des consommateurs en situation d'achat, revue-reseaux, n° 135, 136 p-253

<sup>5</sup> Girou Stéphane, (2006), L'engagement collectif des consommateurs en AMAP

<sup>6</sup> Nine social and human scientist of three toulousian schools or university : Toulouse University, Institut National Polytechnique de Toulouse-Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Agronomie de Toulouse and Ecole Nationale de Formation Agronomique

speech, novelties, "terroir"-territory issues and limits of those networks. We shall detail the answer to these hypothesis in part 2.1. Inventories of collectives in AMAP and CFS of the region were led at the same time. We present now their main lines.

## 1.2 AMAP and CFS: some figures

### a AMAP

Claire Lamine (2008) underlines the exponential development of AMAP in France after the first experience in 2001 in Aubagne (region Provence Alps-Côte-d'Azur (French Riviera), PACA) with Denise and Daniel Vuillon, the precursors market gardeners. She estimates the number of affiliated AMAP between 500 and 700 in France at the end of 2007. Midi-Pyrénées appears as one of the most dynamic regions for the creation of AMAP. The study counts 101 AMAPs (members or not of the regional network Alliance Midi-Pyrénées) in 2007, following the first creation in 2003. We can estimate at about 50 % the collectives having been created between 2006 and 2007. Comparatively, the region PACA, which is the cradle of the AMAP movement, counts 120 AMAP in 2007 (Lamine, 2008) for 4.8 million inhabitants. Alliance Midi-Pyrénées, the regional network based in Toulouse and lead by volunteers is mostly the origin of this dynamism.

On 101 listed AMAP, we were able to obtain information on observation by telephone or interviews with 23 collectives. We had 27 in depth interviews in 9 production farms, and with 12 collectives. We attended 17 distribution meetings. Despite our effort to contact and meet with Alliance Midi-Pyrénées, they did not wish to collaborate with us on this subject.

AMAPs are found in every department of the region, three quarters of them being in cities, mainly in Toulouse neighbourhood. With the same conclusions as several authors had before, such as Adam (2006), Mundler (2006) or Rigo (2007), our interviews allow us to describe the consumer member (called "amapien") : he or she belongs to a family of 2 to 4 persons, is a middle class city-dweller with a rather high cultural capital. Producers engaged in AMAP live for two third outside the urban and suburban zones. On average, the market gardener is 38-year old and settled on a farm surface of seven hectares. Half of farms is organically certified and three quarters of producers sell their products on local markets. Within the nine AMAP producers met during 2007 study, four have a non agricultural curriculum before entering agriculture (plumber, computer scientist, truck driver, ...).

We have to explain about the local market before going any further. There are approximately 8,000 such markets in France in 6,000 townships<sup>7</sup> and 188 of them in Toulouse department Haute-Garonne alone. Generally once a week those local markets welcome stallholders selling food or other products. They are different from farmers markets which are usually found near touristic areas during summer. The local markets are either the main or the complementary source of income and social link for the development of AMAP and CFS. One of the issues for local markets is the distance between production places and dropping points (Other French regions such as Ile-de-France and PACA (Lamine, 2008) face similar problem). Toulouse urban pole is responsible for it: 80 % of Toulouse AMAP producers live more than 45 minutes away from their distribution point. The proximity between producers and consumers is hard to achieve. The urban land pressure is not the only cause. Based on a sample of 18 collectives for which we had quantitative data on box prices, number of weeks and number of boxes

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<sup>7</sup> Le commerce en France, 2006, INSEE, coll. références

distributed in a year, we can roughly estimate at 25,000 euros the annual turnover of an AMAP and at 2,5 million euros a year the AMAP total turnover of the region.

In January 2008, during the International Symposium of Local and Solidarity-based Partnerships in Aubagne, several producers of the region expressed their concern regarding the "total deficiency" of market gardeners in Midi-Pyrénées. Aquitaine, Ile-de-France regions as well as foreign producers from Quebec also shared this point.

### **b Collective Farm Shops (CFS)**

The Collective Farm Shops (CFS) have an older history in France. In Midi-Pyrénées for example, the very first one was created in the 1970's. Rhône-Alpes is the French region where Collective Farm Shops are the most formalized. AVEC (Agriculteurs en Vente Collective Directe) is an association which had 21 CFS in 2004 in Rhône-Alpes . In 1991, this association wrote a CFS charter. There is no national network and the charter from Rhône-Alpes is still the reference to specify what is a CFS in France.

It is mainly a question of:

- Guarantee that the " products are from our farms and sold by ourselves ",
- Transparency on the production process and products quality,
- Management of every selling point by the producers in a collective way.

We found out from phone inquiry, in-depth interviews and shop visits that there are 26 PVC in Midi-Pyrénées. This amount is divided between all departments of the region, especially near urban concentrated areas.

21 PVC involve at least 6 farms, 5 other CFS involving 3 to 5 farms. Turnover varies from € 14,000 to € 580,000. The investigated CFS mobilize between 300 and 400 associated producers, and as many non associated producers who bring their products but don't participate in the decisions concerning the store.

The number of associated producers greatly varies, from 2 to 75. The number of products varies a lot as well, from 50 to 1090. Half of the CFS offers a vast range of products: fruits and vegetables, meat, dairy products, wines or grocery dry products, delicatessen such as jams, honey, oil, or canned food. Other half of the CFS is more specialized, generally in butcher's shop, pork and meat-caterer. These CFS are often associated with a meat butchery and sometimes with a die-cut shop. There is no CFS specialized in fruits and vegetables.

Nine PVC are organized around a charter. The content of the charter seems relatively opened. Most of the time it states modality of production for environment-friendlier practices (particularly the integrated farm management or the exclusion of practices like Genetically Modified Organisms or ensilage). The production systems described in charters also make reference to the direct selling farms, to the organic farming, and to the "terroir" (originally a French term in wine used to denote the special characteristics that geography bestowed upon them<sup>8</sup>).

It is necessary to underline here that CFS represents only a small part of the multiple forms of the direct marketing and short supply chains. A photographic observation of the setting up of the products in 12 CFS allows us to see three types of stores. "The farm", which is a strong marker of the production place, is very important in the communication of producers' stores. These stores has few associates and many resold products. "The peasant", understood here as a qualifying way of life, is the axis of communication developed by most committed CFS, where

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<sup>8</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terroir>, consulted on may 2008

the presence of all the producers is the strongest. For example, several shops contain "peasant" as name or adjective in their shop front. Finally the "terroir" is the main axis of communication chosen by agricultural cooperative stores. Although presenting similarities with the CFS, those shops do not go into our inventory. They are selling agricultural furniture as well as delicatessen. Table 1 show these three types of CFS.

Table 1 : CFS types

	CFS		
	"committed" CFS	producers' stores	agricultural cooperative stores
<b>communication words</b>	"peasant"	Direct "farm" product	"terroir"
<b>Product origin</b>	Department	Régional	Régional and national
<b>Sales organisation</b>	All producers with planning table	Producers (generally payed) and wage worker	wage earners
<b>Products range</b>	Wide food range offered by local producers often in deposit sale. Emphasis of fruits and vegetables	Some valued products + put down, often bought complements	bought Local and national products, with not food products
<b>Situation, localization</b>	Urban and suburban. In a Rented shop	In a farm located near a touristic road	In an agricultural self-service store (cooperative)

From: B. Mondy and Jean-Louis Vincq, in Rapport d'étude, pp 188

In terms of communication, the CFS is imbricated in a logic of competition, thinking more in terms of "customers" than "consumer partners". We noticed a lack of visibility of these CFS regarding an important amount of businesses of "terroir", stores of producers, peasant markets. We noticed during the study the existence of several projects about short food supply chains, helped by the Regional council, who actually finances the 2007 study presented here. We are presenting now three examples on three territories.

### 1.3 The action territories : the new "pays"

The Midi-Pyrénées regional council covers 8 departments, split since a few years into 32 "pays" (excluding Toulouse conglomeration), which define themselves as territories of project. In France, a "pays" is an area whose inhabitants share common geographical, economic, cultural, or social interests, who has a right to enter into communal contracts under a law known as the Loi Pasqua. In year 2007, the Regional council thus helped several "pays" and a future Regional Natural reserve. The objective is to set up or to strengthen initiatives around the alternative agro-food networks AAFN. These "pays", territories between communes and departments are not the object of political autonomy. They bring together political decision-makers and actors of the social and economic life of the territory.

For two years they have been the target of a "call for projects " in Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in Midi-Pyrénées, with a specific line on development of the AAFN called "From producer to consumer". They appear to the regional institution as relevant territories for the constitution of innovative projects in this domain. What is the reality? Those projects, being innovative, do not have enough experience to answer this question yet, and the French "pays" are too young as well. The oldest only date back 2003. Open to the economic and social life,

they remain dependent on political decision-makers implanted in middle-size towns (5,000-15,000 inhabitants). We present in table 2 the characteristics of three examples of development projects we were able to find out. The corresponding "pays" are situated between 50 and 100 km away from Toulouse.

Table 2 : "pays" and projects

	"pays" de l'Albigeois et des Bastides	"pays" Midi-Quercy	"pays" des portes d'Ariège-Pyrénées
<b>Département</b>	Tarn	Tarn et Garonne	Ariège
<b>Set up date</b>	2005	2004	2003
<b>Population</b>	125,000 inhabitants	39,000 inhabitants	40,000 inhabitants
<b>surface</b>	1,875 km <sup>2</sup>	1,220 km <sup>2</sup>	780 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Number of Communes</b>	117	48	62
<b>Density (p/km<sup>2</sup>)</b>	67	32	51
<b>Project title</b>	"fair and short supply chains"	"short supply chains and organic agriculture"	"Terroir canteens for schools"
<b>AMAP distributions</b>	2	2	1
<b>AMAP producers</b>	4	2	6
<b>CFS</b>	1	0	1

sources : [http://w3.cie.u.univ-tlse2.fr/pays/rubrique.php3?id\\_rubrique=2](http://w3.cie.u.univ-tlse2.fr/pays/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=2), consulted on april 2008

Albigeois and Bastides Areas named their answer "For fair and short supply chains".

The second one, Midi-Quercy, also answered the call to project by choosing to lean on organic farming. The third one, Ariège-Pyrénées, worked for one year on a project called "Terroir Canteens for schools" in its territory.

We can analyse these three examples by looking at their project titles. In two cases out of three AAFN is the object of a particular angle of approach: organic farming or school canteens. We notice that six AMAP from the third county serve Toulouse conglomeration.

The collectives observed in AMAP or CFS participate in a relocation of exchanges. It seemed to us important to present these examples of territories in Midi-Pyrénées to follow up with the reflexion of C. Hinrichs (2003) and Winter (2003), these authors being quoted by Lamine (2008). Some future investigations may show us if such regional policies are linked with an *"ideology of localism based on sympathy of farmers"* (Winters, 2003). The scale of the counties we chose is quite small. It covers a population from 40,000 to 125,000 people. We make the hypothesis that this scale is relevant in order to better understand AAFN in France and Europe.

In conclusion, we thus notice on the local scale (communes, "pays" or department) a real dynamic from a region aiming at pushing AAFN towards a social and solidarity-based economy (SSE). The initiatives supported at the regional level seem very limited. They are not strictly integrated into the agricultural regional politics. This regional agricultural politics have four statements: employment in rural zone, quality of regional products, mutualization of the means in small cooperatives (Coopérative d'Utilisation du Matériel) and protection of the environment.

The study, which allowed us to get the results presented in this article, could become a good argument for the Regional councillors to add this participative agriculture of proximity into the

regional politics. This dynamic carries strong values and is quite far from the notion of "terroir" which is still at the centre of the promotion of Midi-Pyrénées' agriculture.

For example, the speech of the AMAP regional network is in contradiction with the reflexions on the notion of "terroir". This speech is especially centred on the rescue of agriculture and of the farmers who are "dying" (according to a producer met in a distribution, who is a member of the Alliance Midi-Pyrénées core group). In their speech, the regional network wants to put the AMAP outside the market, by talking about peasant-feeders and eaters. However, regarding the exchange within the AMAP, we can see practices which actually "enrich" the trade exchange rather than countering it. The AMAP is well established inside the Market. The description of the motivations and the professional commitments of the producers explained in the following part is going to clarify this link with the territory and the Market.

## **2 Actors engaged towards more meaning in market relationships**

In this second chapter, we want to carry on the subject of the collectives in Midi-Pyrénées alternative food networks. We will underline here the motivations of their actors and shall examine the difficulties tracked down in groups organisation.

### **2.1 Committed consumers and realistic producers**

The four hypothesis made at the beginning of 2007 study<sup>9</sup> on AMAP and CFS are exposed as four questions: AMAP and CFS are they based on involvement speech which means a commitment in alternative types of production and consumption and, more globally, of societal change? AMAP and CFS are novelties, as producers-consumers relationships and as production and consumption organisation? Proximity does-it through away the link to "terroir"? AMAP and CFS are they everlasting and structuring organisation schemes? In this part 2.1, we exposed results we had through these four hypothesis.

#### **a Consumers' and producers commitment**

As other authors said before (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2004, and Holloway, 2007), the study on Midi-Pyrénées shows that for numerous consumers, the stimulations for entering an AMAP group exceed the search for quality products and for a supply chain different from the hypermarket. The wish to help a farmer and beyond, the small-size agriculture, was indeed very often expressed. Getting to know the AMAP system strengthens and widens the earlier commitments. Many AMAP members change their consumers behaviour after one year of getting their AMAP boxes. They plead for an alternative agricultural and food model. We encountered a similar commitment from some AMAP producers and, in a lesser degree, from producers in CFS. However, in-depth interviews in Midi-Pyrénées showed some consumers who started AMAP with too much opportunism: they were only looking for good organic and local products. They trust the producer and do not wish to visit the farm. It is also confirmed by C. Lamine (2008) who shows that consumers implication varies greatly.

Core group members regularly talk about fair trade, local and small-size agriculture. Norbert, treasurer and founder of an AMAP, explains that he buys some fair trade and organic coffee from Chiapas in a regional network, like other members of the AMAP. But he does not wish to

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<sup>9</sup> already mentioned : *Les relations de proximité agriculteurs-consommateurs : Points de vente collectifs et AMAP en Midi-Pyrénées*

use the boxes distribution to order his coffee. *"The stakes are different, we can speak about Chiapas fair trade coffee during boxes distributions, but this is not the place to get it"*. Dubuisson-Quellier (2006) notices about mass consumption that consumers commitment depends on the fair trade labels, with a maximal delegation. In the case of Norbert and his Chiapas coffee, we have at the same time a great implication, a minimal delegation and furthermore a consciousness of what social and local partnership and trade does mean. The fair trade coffee has not the same status as a quality good or as the AMAP vegetable box.

From the producers side, commitment is more realistic, especially in CFS where the relationships with consumers are the same as in a classic direct marketing scheme. Patrick, a supplier of an AMAP one hour away from Toulouse, expressed in an interview some disappointment after two years of AMAP local partnership. He finds that members are *"more consumers than activists. They do not easily come to work on gardening but only enjoy occasional meeting, fruits picking or canned tomatoes workshop. There are about three or four visits at the farm a year, with about ten members each time."*

In CFS, producers objectives are firstly a reassurance and a diversification of outlets, an increase of activity in an independent and mastered commercial frame. Secondly, the goal to enter a group of producers is to follow "peasant" values and personal commitment. Generally speaking, the producers have a more realistic speech rather than a committed one.

### **b Which quality? Quality of product? Quality of process? Quality of relationships ?**

In France, the box quality debate in AMAP regards the organic certification and trust (Lamine, 2008). Midi-Pyrénées regional network members are clear on this matter: it is the producer-to-consumer regular meetings that establish trust. Our questioning on the knowledge of the farm did not receive many answers. Very few consumers are able to give precise information about the farms (farming jobs, number of hectares). Indeed some of AMAP consumers have no interest in it, whereas others keep a very romantic and disembodied image: manual and tiring labour, mother nature, etc (Bulher, 2008). Most consumers do not participate at the farm visits or workshops. In-depth interviews with AMAP members tell us that they show more interest for the producer than for the farm itself. They are mainly linked to agriculture, production types and producer issues through box distribution meetings.

Generally speaking the reference to the "terroir" is limited compare to what we may observe in the other distribution networks. As we noticed earlier, AMAP even appears to be against the "terroir" trend in its most known meaning, since big supermarket groups have launched their own "locally produced" brands at the end of the 90' in France. The commercial meaning of "terroir" and the origin of the product have nothing to do with the geographical meaning seen as a whole as a specific territory. Neither AMAP members nor CFS customers ask themselves questions about all these links. However AMAP is well rooted in a local territory, easy to locate, even if AMAP consumers express it little, as if it was obvious for them. In CFS, the word "terroir" is absent but the territorial references are rather numerous. Nevertheless, with a few exceptions, the CFS territory idea has nothing to do with the "terroir", but rather indicates the origin of the product (Pilleboue, 2008).

### **c AMAP and CFS: long-lasting or trendy project?**

The AMAP and the CFS correspond well to a social demand (re-appropriation of product quality, environmental protection, help to small agriculture). However, this demand seems unstable and quick to turn to other experiences. Therefore, AMAP and CFS join mostly only as



a supplement to the other direct sale schemes and their perpetuity considers as many their capacities of adaptation. In this way, AMAP and CFS cannot structure alone, in a significant way, relations between production and food consumption. We certainly observed that the shared common values "cement" AMAP and that these are capable of adaptation (swarming, arrangements with rules) and of innovation. But these organizations, due to their functioning mode, also know fragilities. Difficulties which meets the CFS seem bigger. To sell their products in a collective way, farmers have to acquire new skills. We are going to clarify the characteristics of the diversification in the alternative food systems with the case of the professions and the skills.

## **2.2 Direct-selling project and diversification in agriculture**

Within the short food supply chains, skills diversification often touch several professions. Producing, transforming and selling food products require many skills, including customer service, and different types of motivation. Direct marketing projects lead sometimes to an F&B-catering concept at the farm. Food and Beverage and/or accommodation at the farmhouse are also a source of added value although it is often seasonal.

Putting together the production tools and know-how in traditional agriculture was always centred on storage, on commercial valuation and of course on the production tools. When farms started to work together, it resulted in region or national-wide cooperatives, whose goal was the insertion in long supply chains. Collective direct marketing strengthened the other side of the cooperation, that is the social and solidarity dimensions. It created cooperation on another scale, the "most local" possible one. This favours workforce and skills cooperation instead of equipment and storage systems cooperation.

CFS and AMAP follow at the moment an experimental mode of organization, where the intervention of its members and the information provided by wide networks (such as trade associations, interpersonal relations, movements of opinion, etc) have a strong impact. This experimental dimension is not necessarily a trendy and new concept- we saw that CFS could be older initiatives - it also seems to result from the absence of a professional model able of putting together the variety of initiatives coming from "peasant agriculture". Taking Region Rhône-Alpes as an example, Mundler (2006) gave some propositions concerning the AMAP:

*It is however important to underline that considering the systems of production existing today, the technical-economic references for this type of farms are rare, even non-existent. The gardener-type management of crop rotation system which would allow the supply of various vegetables all year round is very complex, from a technical point of view as well as from the work organization one. As a consequence, developing AMAP could mean quite an investment for the organizations who would take charge of it, an investment beyond simply animating consumers groups but which would also mean farmers installation, production of technical references , training courses, even the collective purchase of land.*

This kind of speech regarding the production of technical references is especially found upstream in the food chain and belongs to the tradition of French agricultural development organisations. We can notice the opened criticism about it from the regional network of AMAP in Midi-Pyrénées. The regional network considers partnerships in AMAP as being independent

from the institutions in place and as perfectly able of developing themselves, of swarming and creating their own references.

Is it necessary to answer to the AMAP strong development and to the CFS by more measures to help new farmers to set up farms? On one hand it seems that the expected measures are of traditional business development, that is a real support for the creation of commercial structures, a the actors of the CFS wish. On the other hand, the newcomers in AMAP need a support in training, in tutelage. The "farm incubators" were often brought up during the meeting in Aubagne on January 2008. By using agricultural land given by a township, these "farm incubators" could welcome during 2 or 3 years young producers wishing to settle down in AMAP. Such a project has already started in Region Ile-de-France (Lamine, 2008) and in Region Aquitaine.

During this same symposium in Aubagne, Jean-Martin Fortier of Equiterre, a Canadian network showed how a structured network allows to offer short and adapted training courses (two days in an existing farm). It has allowed the newcomers to avoid making mistakes on culture plans or on boxes. Just like in region PACA (Lamine, 2008), we have noticed in region Midi-Pyrénées that some young producers had failed to enter AMAP due to insufficient help. According to Lamine (2008), producers in AMAP in Midi-Pyrénées are divided between the *super-competent* and the *near-precarious*. Young and motivated couples, who often knock at the AMAP door, should be warned of the risks starting AMAP box systems, in order to avoid failure later.

As for CFS, we also noticed in interviews that the mutualisation of experience and knowledge requires important customer relation skills. These skills are often neglected by the group or by the project assessor. It seems that the CFS would like to get a support for the development of business skills, such as the management of "human resources", communication, sales and services.

According to C. Lamine (2008), "*there are two different visions for the diversification of farms: either the AMAP system within the farm, or the CFS one in a territorial collective, which allow each to keep a certain specialization and thus to optimise organization and working time*". The recent AMAP experience in France gives new hope for an old issue: diversification in agriculture. The political role given to consumer and the attractive way of settling down appealing to young farmers are two factors that may help others AAFN projects like CFS.

## **2.3 Crossed learning, difficulties and choice arbitration**

### **a An European example between AMAP and CFS**

In order to illustrate our two research objects, we choose a case study outside the region described by D. Van Dam (2005). The farm of Antoine and Leen, in Flemish Belgium, is associated with 10 producers. It has some characteristics similar to AMAP and CFS.

In the case of this organic farm which sells locally and with strong ethical and relational considerations, AMAP principles, according to Alliance Provence, are respected. The commitment contracts are more flexible and 11 market gardeners organize a common distribution. Antoine and Leen's farm described by Van Dam cultivates 45 different vegetables on 2,5 ha. A part-time worker and a trainee coming from a centre specialized in organic farming work with the couple. The eleven producers sell vegetables by subscription and with

the CFS in city centre. The part-time farm worker also works part-time at the CFS. Subscriptions system is carried out by the group of eleven producers. They meet monthly to establish agreements on production, distribution and price. Deciding on prices follows the AMAP logic, taking into account the expenses, the resources of each producer but also the official stoke exchange prices in the traditional agriculture. A price estimation is fixed for each product, and each producer can sell his products at the price he wants, except for the box system.

CFS belongs to the "committed" type (see table 1) and is an outlet for eleven farmers. Besides fruits it sells organic grocery and cleaning products. The relation between CFS and its customers is described as "*very rich, made of learning activities, trust, solidarity and pleasure, reflection and relaxation*".

Van Dam describes then five poles of the CFS, namely the cooperative store, the information leaflet, the opening days, the cooking lessons and the weeding days. The store is also used for the boxes distribution. About the information leaflet, we reproduce here a paragraph around the "carrot test":

*In association with a research center in organic farming, boxes were filled of a variety of carrots, with their name on labels. [...] customers were invited to give their opinion about their taste, etc, using the leaflet. The information were useful to 'realize what people find essential'. But more important, from Leen opinion, was the good response to a collective project simulated in this operation. According to Leen, the strong participation of the customers testified of their implication in the process of production ... The "carrot test" thus answers the double objective of production of knowledge and creation of a feeling of membership.*

## **b Overcoming difficulties**

After this "re-enchanted" vision of AAFN in Belgium, it is also necessary to describe tensions in the collectives and the fact that the militancy we have encountered in Midi-Pyrénées is running out of breath. Dubuisson-Quellier (2004), Mundler (2006), and Lamine (2008) evoke the limits met by French AMAP. Mundler notices that the AMAP is "the meeting place between farmers and consumers, [which] facilitate the exchanges, [which] make everybody think about food, etc". Interviews with AMAP in Midi-Pyrénées confirm that many exchanges and common social values exist within groups. However we repeatedly perceived situations of social pressure inside the groups, and of exclusions which indicate the fragilities inherent to consumers groups. Alain, member of an "activist" AMAP from Toulouse, takes rather badly the group pressure for a claimed conviviality. His girl-friend grows a little tired of the inescapable relation with the other members during distribution meetings. Alain says:

*"If you are not disposed to discuss, if you are in a hurry, you feel bad. We use vegetables, we weigh, it is necessary to wait. These small cores should open. Be careful not to be the "vegetables ghetto". People also choose the AMAP by supply facility".*

Reading in-depth interviews in Midi-Pyrénées, D. Coquart (2008) also underlines the comments of C. Pasquier (2007). She notes the existence in AMAP of "*a type of exclusion which shields from the group of people who have social failures*". This results to a relative social homogeneity of the AMAP group, which is gladly underlined by some members. For

example Anne, from in a little town AMAP in Midi-Pyrénées, describes the other members of her group as people having a certain level of culture. She adds that she often meets them in the same theatre shows, the same entertainment places in town, that many come from bigger cities like Paris or Toulouse; she notices that they are people who are quite open minded on a social level: "*in my AMAP there are very few local people or local people who came back to the country*".

Besides social pressure, the distribution meetings reveal other issues. Due to the opportunist behaviour of some members, there are sometimes not enough vegetables at the end of the distribution. On this matter, a young mother from Toulouse, who is a core group member, showed some embarrassment. After discussing about it, a diplomatic but clear reminder was made to the whole group regarding the baskets orders. From the producers side, in AMAP and in CFS, we often heard of a lack of patience towards AMAP consumers behaviour and especially a difficulty to handle a certain dependence towards the consumers group.

About group difficulties, we can here mention the tenth principle of Teikei (H. AMEMIYA, 2007) to show the interest of the pioneer experience in Japan:

*Perseverance for an evolutionary progress: in most of cases, it is difficult to start from the beginning with ideal conditions [...], whether it is for the producers or for the consumers. It is nevertheless important to choose well the partner members and to persevere to improve together, little by little, the points on which there are incapacities.*

### **c Routine and deliberation by the producers**

After having looked at the learning processes and difficulties in groups, we want to study the social links between producers and consumers from a larger point of view. By leaning on the researches around the trade intermediation of Dubuisson-Quellier (2004, 2006) we follow the examination of social link construction. I shall try to examine the case of the producer. Our first hypothesis in this part is that it is possible to apply the symmetrical approach of both sides (consumers and producers) to the notion of arbitration.

Can we transfer the situation of arbitration of the act of purchase for the consumer to an arbitration in the professional choices for the producer? This question is told, be aware that the market relationships stay nonetheless asymmetric, in a CSA, AMAP like in any other AAFN. AMAP and CFS in Midi-Pyrénées have brought us narratives and results that we want to interpret through this arbitration.

The situation of arbitration in which we place the producer thus has of course not no same criteria as the choice of the consumer, nor the same temporal scales. Our second hypothesis on this transfer of the arbitration of the consumer towards the producer is about the same social values shared by both sides: consumers and producers inside an AAFN.

As Dubuisson-Quellier (2006) explained the arbitration concept for the consumer in situation of choice, we thus propose to enlarge this concept of arbitration to the producer. As well as for the purchasing act, we try to establish a typology in the professional choices for the producer. As S. Dubuisson-Quellier explained, there are three types of arbitration for the consumer: deliberation, selection and routine. Routine corresponds to the stabilization of criteria of choice. The deliberation is when the producer (following the example of the consumer) would vary

every criteria, and could thus bring to the foreground new ones regarding analysis and managing of his farm. The third type, the selection, is an intermediate one, where only a few criteria may change.

Let's first examine the routine case. We can thus say about the producers that their participation in a secure supply chain, where income is sufficient and forecasts are acceptable, corresponds to this "routine" definition. Which agricultural system can be run in a routine way? None, would answer any skilled rural scientist. For example, the case of a very capitalized and conventional farm which depends on subsidies doesn't follow this routine. A gardener producer in AMAP having established good relations with one or several groups of consumers and distributing about one hundred of boxes could be in a "collective" routine. In this routine, decisions can be done to improve the system.

Secondly, the deliberation case seems to us to be the fate of the modern conventional farmers, managing important daily economic decisions. The point I want to underline is that this routine-deliberation transposition from the consumer to the producer sends us back to the evolution of our consumer society.

The consumer routine would correspond to a producer who deliberates non-stop: it is a way of describing the conventional modern agriculture. The deliberation of the consumer who gets more committed, asks himself questions and less delegates, allows him to reach a better mastered, more stabilized, environment-friendly production which is a more "routine" one.

It is the case of AMAP and CFS, the collectives we have studied, implication and commitment allow them to transform unacceptable uncertainties (excess of deliberation of the conventional producer, extension of food chains) in acceptable uncertainties. As Lamine explained, these acceptable uncertainties get a double irregularity in AMAP: vegetables production and boxes of products (Lamine, 2005) within the framework of a natural rhythm, like a routine.

## **Conclusion**

After listing the actors in Midi-Pyrénées, we have presented some conclusions about the relations inside AMAP and CFS, regarding quality product and trust between stakeholders: consumers and producers. The two objects we took (AMAP and CFS) wanted to get away from the embedding between the short food supply chains and the sustainable agriculture that we often noticed (Winter, 2003).

On one hand we considered that social and cultural capitals are important to join a collective project in AMAP or in CFS. The fact that many AMAP gardeners have no agricultural professional past underlines this relatively high social and cultural capital. Very few are traditional producers converted towards AMAP systems or towards organic farming, or both at the same time (Lamine, 2008). As we were able to notice it in Midi-Pyrénées, competent and motivated converted producers may belong to the leading producers in a regional network. Studying difficulties in groups underline the technical and relational requirement necessary to enter a collective. It is not always easy for producers to lose some autonomy by entering a group of consumers or producers.

We tried on the other hand to have a symmetrical approach of producers and consumers by using the notion of arbitration. We considered it as partially transposable between both actors. When we say that the small-size agriculture in AMAP or in collectives of producers as being

part of a routine, we want to look again at the production-aimed evolution of this agriculture which has no longer a natural and reassuring rhythm.

In January 2008, we met a manager of an agricultural cooperative in the north of the region, who is responsible for a project of developing proximity food shelves (the cooperative stores of table 1). He concluded the interview with two remarks: first a question which is one of the core concerns of our group of study: how to get the consumer involved? This question, coming from a professional of the agricultural cooperation but also of the marketing and the commercial franchising, shows that supermarket companies such as wholesale or franchised networks are already in the emerging market of fair trade and organic products. This interlocutor summarized the initiatives of the distribution groups in this new market: "*they are still there!*" Then, he suggested us the following idea: "*the guarantee of promise*". This attractive concept which is close to marketing nevertheless consolidated our questionings on the alternative food networks .

The guarantee of promise could be an oxymoron, that is an impossible and contradictory situation. However it illustrates a series of tensions which we observed in the Midi-Pyrénées. Let's take first the issue of trust. Although frequently mentioned by both consumers and producers, we did not want to go any further on a certain tyranny of trust in the AAFN and SFSC (Dupuis and Goodman, 2005). The meetings in Aubagne in 2008 served as a confrontation between the upholders of the organic certification for all the producers in AMAP, and the upholders of the trust as the core of the partnerships. The Participative Guaranteed System in AMAP launched in autumn 2006 by Alliance Provence, together with "Nature and Progrès" (European association of organic producers and consumers) and other associations seems to us to go towards the resolution of these former debates on trust of the local food. This participative certification would have an impact on the production, the production-consumption interaction and on the implication of the consumers. Can this implication be "certified", even by a group consisted of producers and consumers? The experiment is in progress.

Then there is the accessibility of these networks which we only mention in conclusion by moral obligation. As Goodman (2004), Dupuis and Goodman (2006), Lamine (2008) showed, those initiatives to democratise short chains are rare. At the level of economic or cultural accessibility, we have more promises than guarantees.

This guarantee of promise could also mean that the act of sustainable consumption is never a definitive acquired datum, whether for supermarkets or AMAP, whether for committed customers or consumers who want to delegate their commitment to a label or a certification. This guarantee of promise expresses clearly that the apparently stable balance, just like a routine, of a contract of partnership in AMAP between a producer and his group of consumers can be questioned by weather, a health problem or the simple departure of a member of the group. The contract can stop but let us guarantee that the group will know how to find some other promises with the other producers.

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