

## European Initiatives on Access to Land for Local, Ecological Agriculture

Experience 1:

### TERRE DE LIENS, France

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**Name:** Terre de liens (= Land/ earth of connections) (TdL)

**Background:** France has a highly regulated land market and rich history of agricultural and land policies (regional land use authorities, capping of land rent..). These however have shortcomings or have become inadequate to a changing environment. Key features are:

- Large amounts of agricultural land are turned to urban/ infrastructural uses (69 000ha per year on average and 15% of the UAA since 1960). Soil sealing often impacts excellent arable land.
- Land concentration and reduction in farm numbers: -24% farms and -18% agricultural workforce from 2000 to 2007; average farm size went up from 42 to 80 ha over the past 25 years.
- Relatively low land prices, as compared with the rest of Western Europe (about 5,400€/ha on average), but in sharp increase (+40% over the past 15 years).
- Aging farming population: 45% of farmers are above 50 year old, a third of them don't know who will be their successors; increasing number of newly established farmers do not meet the criteria (age, acreage, output, etc.) needed to receive setting-up subsidies and support.
- Organic agriculture is lagging behind: only 2.5% of the UAA - the government took a commitment to reach 20% by 2020. 40% of organic food consumed in France is imported.

**Main Goals:** According to its founding Charter, TdL aims at:

- Supporting access to land for aspirant or established organic, biodynamic and peasant farmers and other pluriactivity projects in rural areas;
- Promoting solidarities and citizen dynamics in rural/ peri-urban areas, to foster collaboration around land use and access, as well as pool together tools, funds, and experiences; and
- Fostering public debate on land ownership, management and use.

**Legal Status:** Civic Movement composed of:

- Not-for-profit associations: One national association, and 19 regional ones, united together by the founding Charter and governance ties (not a federation).

- A private company limited by shares (Ltd), *la Foncière*:

It collects savings from the public who adhere to values and goals set in TdL Charter; it then buys agricultural land and buildings, which are rented out to farmers on long-term lease. Advantages: it has a variable capital; it can make public issues of shares (after approval by the Financial Market Authority); management (formed once and for all when creating the Foncière) is separate from shareholders, so as to ensure that the land is preserved and managed in the long-term goals of TdL.

- An Endowment Fund, *le Fond*:

It collects donations (in cash or kind) from individuals and companies (patronage). It rents (donated or bought) farms to farmers. It also has a more general mission of informing and mobilising citizens and other stakeholders. The Fund is currently undergoing government screening to become a fully-fledged trust, classified as being in the public interest. It will improve its capacity to raise individuals' and companies' donations, as well as enable it to receive donations from public authorities.

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**Start Date:** 2003 for the national association; 2006 for the *Foncière*; 2009 for the *Fonds*. Between 2007 and today for the 19 regional associations.

**Geographic scope:** nationwide

**Members and supporters:** Regional associations are typical membership-based associations, which altogether have 1700 members. Members of the national Association are regional associations as well as partner organisations (FNAB, Biocoop, MRJC, Relier, La Nef...<sup>1</sup>). TdL also relies on a network of about 10,000 shareholders, donors, local volunteers and resource persons.

**Key partners:** At local and national levels, TdL is part of a dense network of agricultural and rural organisations promoting organic/ peasant/ civic agriculture and supporting the establishment of 'alternative' farmers (GAB/ FNAB, ARDEAR, CIVAM, Confédération paysanne...), fostering rural development (MRJC), engaging with consumers and urban people (AMAP), protecting the environment, etc. It is an essential support network (for information, contact, expertise, outreach...).

## Main activities:

- Building awareness and support on land access by working with citizens, civil society organisations, companies and local authorities - including raising investment and donations;
- Assisting local, ecological aspirant farmers in finding land, setting up a collective land ownership structure, or becoming tenant on a farm acquired by TdL;
- Acquiring land and renting it to established or aspirant farmers in the long run; managing buildings; monitoring good land stewardship;
- Preserving agricultural land by acquiring it and maintaining it in sustainable agricultural use as well as through cooperation with local authorities and via general advocacy work;
- Working with local authorities to inform and train them about land access issues and existing tools as well as building local dynamics to preserve land or establish a farmer;
- Working at European level to foster networking among organisations from various countries, as well as to raise awareness about land issues and existing civic and public initiatives.

**Type(s) of agriculture:** Organic, biodynamic and peasant agriculture. Peasant agriculture understood as defined by Via Campesina. In practice, only 2 farms are not organic/ biodynamic farms, and only 5 to 10 are not certified. Most farms are engaged in short supply chains.

## Initial Results:

- Large mobilisation and support from citizens and civil society organisations. Good Visibility: TdL has raised support from nearly 10,000 citizens, and impacted even more broadly through awareness-raising activities. It has raised 26 million Euros in investment (25Mi) and donations (1Mi).

- Support to 200 to 300 farmers:

TdL has advised and brought technical support to established or aspiring farmers throughout the country, in their search for available land, in their attempt to set up a collective ownership scheme, in their efforts to continue farming land they are established on, in finding local support, etc. About 220 farmers are now established on 115 farms owned, or in the process of being acquired, by the *Foncière* and *Fonds*. Others have formed collective ownership structures, farm on communal land...

- Preservation of agricultural land:

Altogether, TdL owns or is about to acquire about 2500 ha of land, rented out to farmers. Following TdL's goals, this land is meant to remain in agricultural use and in organic/ biodynamic and peasant farming in perpetuity. To foster good land stewardship, TdL and farmers agree on agricultural leases,

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<sup>1</sup> FNAB is the French IFOAM member, Biocoop is a chain of local organic shops, MRJC a movement of youth rural development, Relier a people's education organisation on rural development, La Nef an ethical bank.

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which include legally binding environmental clauses. These clauses may include item such as certified organic farming, soil preservation, diversification of crop rotation, creation or preservation of slopes, hedges, ponds, etc.

- Gaining leverage:

TdL receives increasing interest and demands from local authorities, seeking to maintain agricultural activities in the municipality, to establish organic farmers to improve local supply, to establish green belts, etc. It is now known and, at least partially, recognised by institutional stakeholders on issues including farmers' establishment, agricultural land use and management, local, organic agriculture, rural development, and, ethical finance.

### Current Challenges:

- Consolidating cohesion, efficiency and financial sustainability of the TdL Movement:

TdL has developed very quickly over the past 5 years. It now needs to stabilise its functioning, to promote internal transfer of skills, tools and experiences (including of shortcomings).

Regional associations largely depend on public (mostly regional) funds; some have been able to diversify funding and consolidate, while others are still fragile. They are the core of TdL: they are the ones assisting farmers, engaging with citizens, building relationships with civil society organisations, meeting local authorities and stakeholders, etc (the *Foncière* and *Fonds* only have 2 staff each).

Collecting money also seeks new paths. At the start, shareholders benefited from good tax rebates on income or wealth tax, which made investing in the *Foncière* attractive. Since 2010, tax rebates have progressively decreased, which impacted investment (5 Mi € in 2011 versus 9Mi € in 2010). One path is to get back tax rebate, and/ or reach a broader circle of investors; another one is to progressively convert investment in donations. Turning the Fund into a Trust will also bring new options.

- Assisting farmers and managing farms beyond the initial phase

A first challenge is to nurture a relationship between TdL and the farmers, which goes beyond owner/ tenant relations, while respecting farmers' autonomy regarding their activity. Is it TdL's role to assist beyond access to land, and how? One aspect is to create and maintain meaningful social dynamics around the farm, drawing from existing connections with local members and shareholders as well as other stakeholders who mobilised in support of the farm.

On a more practical level, TdL is faced with a major challenge in terms of property management. Overseeing and maintaining buildings take up most of the time and resources dedicated by TdL for the administration of its properties. Beyond initial investment, how to fund the necessary maintenance or improvement works?

- Upscaling:

One way is to work with local authorities which have major competences and leverage to preserve agricultural land to be turned to urban uses, to foster the establishment of farmers and sign environmental leases, to develop local supply chains, etc.

Another path is to consolidate TdL's participation in public debate, based on its experience. It implies to expand awareness-raising activities with citizens and local authorities, as well as to express more clearly analyses and demands, and to formulate policy recommendations.

### Additional resources:

Website: [www.terredeliens.org](http://www.terredeliens.org) (in French – some pages in English to come)

Terre de liens: removing land from the commodity market, and enabling organic and peasant farmers to settle in good conditions (case study in English) <http://www.terredeliens.org/spip.php?article591>

TdL Charter (in French) <http://www.terredeliens.org/spip.php?article1>

Constitution of the *Foncière* (in French) [www.terredeliens.org/IMG/pdf/Statuts\\_Fonciere-2.pdf](http://www.terredeliens.org/IMG/pdf/Statuts_Fonciere-2.pdf)

Constitution of the *Fonds* (in French) <http://www.terredeliens.org/spip.php?article418>

TdL Mode d'emploi (in French) (internal document)

Example of Environmental Lease (in French) (internal document)