

Exploring the forms of work produced by collective farms

Dream or reality?

In search of an ideal model of collective work organization on collective farms

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Since the 2010s, new types of farms are emerging including **collective farms (CFs)**: challenges for making the profession attractive and for generational renewal

CFs rely on commitment of farmers, shared resources (land, work, capital), diversity of ag and no ag activities, and an agroecological production

Collective farms aim to establish collective governance based on the **principle of horizontality**. This raises questions about how this ‘ideal’ of horizontal governance is achieved, as these farms face a range of challenges relating to work (workload, turnover, etc.).

RESEARCH QUESTION

*What forms of work
do collective farms
produce?*

Similarities and differences,
cross-cutting elements

OBJECTIVE Identify the extent to which CFs do (or do not) fulfill their intended horizontal and shared governance of work.

SAMPLE

Exhaustive census of CFs in France (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, extended to the Southwest) → 27 farms surveyed

Criteria: more than 3 farm managers, at most 1 family-based setup, an explicit intention of horizontality

SURVEYS

Semi-structured interviews (production system, legal status, work organization)



ANALYSIS

Use of a theoretical framework on forms of cooperation in agricultural production

Transcription followed by analysis across 4 themes

Identification of differences and similarities between farms

THE 4 ANALYTICAL THEMES

- 1 Time management
- 2 Division of labor
- 3 Decision-making governance
- 4 Distribution of earnings

Framework: Plateau (2022); El Karmouni & Maignan (2019).

HORIZONTAL IDEAL

REALITY ON THE GROUND



What are theses collective farms? Some figures

3 to 8

co-farmers
(average: 5)

0.3–110 ha

farmland area
(avg. 37 ha)

22%

employ staff (0.2
to 14 FTE)

**Highly diversified
farms**

1 to 9 activities
(agricultural and non
agricultural)

Varied legal statuses (GAEC, EI, SCOP, SCIC, EARL, 1901 association...)

19 CFs with ≥ 1 livestock unit

Short supply chains.

Time management / management of working hours

◀ IDEAL · Strict equality of hours

Accepted differences · REALITY ▶

5 CFs

Equality sought

Defined number of hours and days worked (≈ 48–50 hrs/week) for all ; thinking about equivalence of hours across work units (gardening / Livestock / ...).

5 CFs

Equity sought

Respect for each farmer's rhythm and wishes; hours sometimes untracked.

16 CFs / MAJORITY

Accepted differences

Equal hours neither sought nor possible; a few rules sometimes formalized (min. 35 hrs) .

“No one has set hours — weekends are free, especially since the children were born.”

- Working hours (allocation and organization) regularly discussed within the CFs during their weekly meetings in order to review the work (workload, volumes) completed and its future allocation
- Main part of these CFs still in the process of setting up or launching their operations, and which often have to cope with staff turnover – the way in which working hours are managed has not yet been fully established

Division of labor



◀ IDEAL · Versatility (everyone does everything)

Strong specialization · REALITY ▶

6 CFs

Versatility

Everyone versatile across several workshops to promote autonomy, facilitate replacements, share mental workload, and/or avoid tensions

18 CFs

Specialization by workshop + sharing

To reduce mental workload
Based on preferences and skills
Shared tasks (sales, accounting) and mutual help between activities to avoid any one person from gaining too much power

3 CFs

Very strong specialization

Each runs his own activity, little pooling of resources

“The bigger the group gets, the more we specialize — 3 people per unit, so things don’t fall apart.”

Versatility gets harder to maintain as the group grows. A recurring challenge: limiting power dynamics tied to expertise.

Decision-making governance / Forms of communication

◀ IDEAL · formalized meetings

Accepted differences · No meetings ▶

17 CFs

Formalized weekly and yearly meetings

1 or 2 meetings per week (same day and hours) => discussion on work organization, decisions, well-being at work
Coordination meetings, conflict resolution meetings, general assembly (with other CFs)

5 CFs

Formalized weekly meetings

1 or 2 meetings per week (same day and hours) => discussion on work organization, decisions, well-being at work

5 CFs

No regular check-ins

Due to lack of time
Use of SMS / WhatsApp / emails...

‘That’s where everything has to come out – not just work’

Summary

A widely shared ideal of horizontality, but they have to adapt their practices with the realities on the ground: most farms **accept pragmatic differences while preserving the collective management**



Work, its organisation / decision-making / governance

- Central to the project and in the « lives » of the CFs
- The CFs devote time to reflection / discussion / dialogue on their work

Obstacles to their aspirations for horizontal and shared governance of work

- Power dynamics within the farm (founding members, etc.)
- Differing individual aspirations amongst members
- Turnover of associates
- Agricultural activities / workshops (diversity, livestock farming, etc.)
- Legal structures

No standard model of work governance

- Each CF: its own way of operating / its own approach to work governance
 - Evolving over the trajectory of these CFs with changes to their vision, their expectations and aspirations
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WHAT IT OPENS UP

Insights for rethinking work organization and decision-making — including for **non-collective** farms.

Collective farms: laboratories of practice

Time management

Versatility

Time for dialogue

Shared pay

Thank you for your attention
