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THE AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSITION: CHALLENGES AND KEY ISSUES

Since French agriculture is part of a globalised system, at a time when certain markets are undergoing deregulation it must get to grips with a range of significant challenges: to do with food, health, the environment, the economy, social rights and society, territories and techniques. The Prime Minister asked the ESEC about how agroecological production systems might be able to respond to these challenges.

As a scientific discipline spanning both agronomics and ecology, agroecology does not just aim to transform agriculture but also to review food systems as a whole with a view to making them more sustainable. It combines agricultural production and reproduction of natural resources, and has both territorial and global implications. It could be described as a system of interactions between the stakeholders involved in running farms, sectors and natural resources.

Agroecology helps to make soils more fertile, can increase the agronomic yields of farms, cut their costs and thereby shore up their independence and resilience. It can also improve the living conditions of farmers and employees and play a part in boosting the appeal and value of their occupation. For consumers and citizens, it must provide healthier and more

nutritional food, all the while protecting biodiversity and landscapes. It can also help to create jobs and fight back against the rural exodus.

There are barriers to agroecological development across the sectoral spectrum: they may be economic, social, cognitive but also regulatory and tied in with public policy. Interactions abound, creating a systemic whole in which the strategy of each stakeholder strengthens those of others. There is an element of risk involved in the agroecological transition which collective approaches are helping to overcome. Some of these have already long been under way, and they reveal the crucial role played by observation, experimentation and exchange of practices.

"As a system that reconnects agriculture, food and natural resources, the agroecological transition concerns all of us"



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THE RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ Clarify the definition of agroecology and assess its development

- Mention the role of soils and the importance of protecting them in the Rural Code
- Work towards the sustainable economic viability of farms and quality employment
- Monitor the implementation of agroecology via complementary indicators

➤ Raise society's awareness with a view to encouraging "agroecological dietary choices"

- Communicate on the initiatives and practices already under way
- Round off available information, particularly on the source of products and their processing methods
- Clearly refer to the importance of agroecology for health in the French National Nutrition and Health Programme (PNNS)

➤ **Shift the focus of research priorities towards agroecology**

- Link up the different strands of work where previously these had been kept separate, coordinate them and facilitate dissemination of their findings
- Broaden research for the benefit of emerging sectors, cultural and genetic diversity
- Apply ideas bearing on innovation and technological transfers to the transition
- Expedite improvements in practices via interaction between agriculture and applied research
- Give precedence to the independence of research amid the growing concentration of power in the agrochemical sector

➤ **Tailor all training schemes to agroecology**

- Finalise the standards-based reform so as to more widely accommodate the systemic approach
- Place agricultural high schools centre-stage in partnerships with the other local stakeholders
- Capitalise on successful experiences, particularly through continuing professional development

➤ **Support farmers in the agroecological transition**

- Scale up the means of collective support structures and encourage synergies
- Involve all those who partner up with farmers
- Support farmers during the transition phase with regard to the economic risk

➤ **Act at all sectoral levels**

Steer production towards agroecology

- Make agroecological products the new gold standard in terms of quality
- Equip farmers with appropriate tools
- Encourage the creation of added value and value-added production

Encourage the processing and marketing of products within territories

- Ensure that there are storage and processing tools available within territories
- Get cooperative structures involved
- Develop local supply circuits

Shift the focus of sectors towards agroecology

- Meet expectations in terms of health, food, the environment and jobs
- Protect the nutritional values and taste of products during their processing
- Factor in the timeframes specific to farming

➤ **Shift the focus of public policy and aid towards fostering the transition to agroecology and ensure they are consistent**

Get the local authorities involved

- Steer food purchases more firmly towards local produce
- Develop complete, coherent local sectors
- Establish agroecological specifications under the auspices of the regions

Ensure that national action is consistent for the benefit of agroecology

- Call on devolved departments to play their part to the full in terms of implementing, coordinating and monitoring the "agroecological project"
- Include the agroecological objective in public health policy
- Separate out plant protection product sale services from consultancy services

Organise the tools and forms of support available through the CAP according to the agroecological objective

- Revise the rules of the Common Market Organisation in favour of agroecological practices
- Shift the focus of available support:
 - replace an undifferentiated support per hectare model with a system geared towards agroecological practices, the transition and the employment content of farms
 - set up a fund for guaranteeing risks associated with the agroecological transition
 - support collective structures and approaches
 - develop a food support policy dedicated to the consumption of agroecological produce

***Underline agroecology as an objective of the EU, particularly in social terms and in the fight against global warming
Champion the agroecological approach in international negotiations and organisations***