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## Approach to the social sustainability of livestock farms

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Abstract. The social dimension of farm sustainability is significantly less documented than the economic and environmental ones. Our objective was to design a framework to analyze it, taking its subjective and context dependent nature into account. The social sustainability was thereby defined from the expression of actors and farmers interviewed in four French contrasted territories, two of which dealt with sheep farming. The different facets of social sustainability identified were organized in seven main axes. The first four are related to farmfocused sustainability: job meaning, work organization, quality of life and health. The last three take into account the embeddedness of farms in a territory and a society: territorial and societal conditions, local and social networks, and contribution to social sustainability of the territory. Our study enlightened the complexity of the social sustainability which refers to different interlocking organization scales (farmers, associates, employees, family, farm, territory), articulates facts and actors' feelings and expectations, deals with both professional and private lives, and relates to the farm's situation but also its dynamics.

Keywords. Work – Quality of life – Health – Networks – Territorial vitality – Livestock.

#### Approche de la durabilité sociale des exploitations d'élevage

**Résumé.** La dimension sociale des exploitations d'élevage est nettement moins documentée que les celles économique et environnementale. Nous proposons un cadre pour l'analyser construit à partir des propos d'une trentaine d'éleveurs et d'autant d'acteurs provenant de quatre petites régions contrastées (montagne, pastorale, polyculture-élevage périurbaine), dont deux avec des élevages ovins, pour tenir compte de sa nature subjective et située. Les différentes facettes identifiées de la durabilité sociale sont organisées en 7 axes. Les quatre premiers sont centrés sur l'exploitation: sens du métier, organisation du travail, qualité de vie et santé. Les trois derniers prennent en compte l'ancrage des exploitations dans un territoire et une société : conditions territoriales et sociétales, réseaux locaux et sociaux et contribution à la durabilité sociale du territoire. Notre étude a mis en lumière la complexité de la durabilité sociale qui fait référence à différentes échelles d'organisations imbriquées (agriculteurs, associés, employés, famille, exploitation, territoire), articule les ressentis, les attentes des acteurs et des faits, traite à la fois de la vie professionnelle et de la vie privée, concerne la situation des exploitations agricoles, mais aussi leur dynamique.

Mots-clés. Travail – Qualité de vie – Santé – Réseaux – Vitalité territoriale – Elevage.

#### I – Introduction

The concept of sustainable development, widely disseminated in the agricultural sector, led to many assessment methods (Bockstaller *et al.*, 2009) mainly dealing with economic and environmental dimensions. The social dimension of farm sustainability remains much less well documented (Lebacq, 2013), whereas it represents an essential part to understand how livestock farms operate, their territorial and societal roles (Guillaumin *et al.*, 2007), and their evolution facing great socio-economical mutations at local and global scales. With the increase of social expectations concerning livestock activity (animal welfare, products' quality and environment friendly practices), the drop in the agricultural labor force, the enlargement of structures and the changes in farmers' expectations concerning their work (Dedieu and Serviere, 2012), this social dimension of sustainable development can no longer be ignored. Our objective was to design a framework to analyze it.

## II – Method

The social sustainability is a vague and values-laden concept (Bacon *et al.*, 2012), relative to privacy and inner self (Kling *et al.*, 2012). It is socially and culturally constructed in a given context at a given moment (Boogard *et al.*, 2011). To take this subjective and context dependent nature of social sustainability into account, we chose to develop a comprehensive and non-normative approach. The social sustainability was thereby defined from the expression of farmers and territorial actors interviewed in French contrasted territories, in terms of socio-economic and geographical contexts, but also livestock forms and dynamics. The different facets of social sustainability were identified through a thematic analysis of the interviews, and organized in axes considering two points of view on social sustainability: the first expressed at the farm level and second at the territorial scale (Terrier *et al.*, 2010).

## III – Results

The designed framework is composed of seven main axes. We will present them, illustrated with the words of sheep farmers of the Massif Central: in the North in Livradois-Forez with a meat sheep farm, in the center in Aveyron with a milk sheep farm and in the South in the Cevennes with a pastoral meat sheep farm.



Fig. 1. The 7 axes of social sustainability.

## 1. The farm focused social sustainability

The first four components of the framework, green on the figure, are related to farm focused social sustainability.

**The job meaning** refers to the choice to become a farmer, the professional career path with evolution of skills, what farmers seek in their jobs and the recognition they can get from their activity. This component refers to the idea that workers should be proud of their job, experience pleasure at work and evolve during their career paths.

*The work organization* component brings together different facets relative to working rhythms and duration (length of the working day, workload and distribution over the year), to workforce organization and work productivity. The idea is that the work organization should allow for appropriate efficiency, and be flexible enough to deal with hazards. It should give everyone a suitable place and a reasonable workload.

**Quality of life** refers to leisure time, the balance between private and professional lives, the living environment and the income. That means that each worker should be able to reserve time for his family, friends or hobbies, live in a suitable environment and get a fair remuneration for his work.

*Health at work* is about mental and physical well-being and safety. So in order to keep workers healthy, the work should avoid physically painful tasks and offer safe working conditions. Work overload is also psychic (societal pressure, climatic and economic hazards, administrative controls) and can lead to burnout. In the Cevennes, fear of the wolf is growing.

### 2. The extended to the territory social sustainability

The last three axes take into account the embeddedness of farms in a territory and a society:

A component refers to *territorial and societal conditions* that affect the social sustainability of farms. This includes infrastructure (road, internet coverage, slaughterhouse, hospital, school ...), services offered to farmers (such as job opportunities for family members, education and extra-curricular activities for children, heath care for the family), but also the possibility of finding employees, the organization of production sectors, and the proximity of cities. The expectations of local actors are also expressed with regard to livestock and the norms and values recognized by the agricultural profession, which play an important part in farm work and farmer well-being. On a broader scale, the societal expectations in terms of respect for the environment, animal welfare, and products' quality impact the evolution of agricultural models and therefore practices implemented by farmers, disrupting farm work.

A component of the framework is dedicated to the *contribution of farms to the social sustain-ability of the territory*. This includes participation in employment and territorial vitality by maintaining a population and services, preserving the landscape and cultural heritage.

The last component refers to the *local and social networks* in which farm workers are included. Farmers can belong to several forms of networks (professional, associative, elective and neighborhood). For them these networks mean resources for reinsurance, recognition, mutual help, exchange of practices or knowledge, learning, all of which may be very useful for their activity and well-being and therefore for farm work. Networks' participation also contributes to territorial vitality, which makes this component part of both contributions to social sustainability: the farm focused one and the extended to the territory one.

#### 3. Understand social sustainability in its complexity

The different facets of social sustainability refer to various interlocking organization scales. They concern the farmer himself (well-being, health), his potential associates (agreement) or his employees (safety), his family (living environment), his farm (amount and productivity of work) or his territory (employment). And all these elements are interdependent and interact with each other: for example, social relationships and working time are for example intertwined in an association. Furthermore, they evolve and modify their interactions, which can transform a problematic situation into a favorable compromise or the opposite, such as certain trajectories favoring expansion and investment. Addressing social sustainability cannot be limited to the description of the facts and needs to clarify the relationship between the farmer and his work, his values and objectives. Thus, the very easy quantification of the number of weeks of annual leave does not account for the per-

ception of farmers; one can consider that a week of vacation is enough "and that he really needs his wife to insist" "his wife has to insist to obtain more", while others consider that "two weeks are a minimum". The situations described in the boxes clearly illustrate the singularity of the situations that lead to highlighting different aspects of social sustainability: workforce and animal reproduction organization for the quality of life in case 1, the desire to work alone with animals in case 2, and understanding difficulties between associates in case 3 with research into social relations.

#### Box1 : A milk sheep farm in Aveyron – family association between parents and children

Parents associated with their two children drive nearly 900 ewes. Flock management was simplified with a single lambing period and no milking from Nov to Feb. Investments were made to facilitate the work (new buildings more functional with concentrate feeders added on the infeed belts and milking machine, hay distributor trailer...). Taking holidays and weekends is easier. "*Now we get to have alternate week-ends: one for the elderly, one for the youngest*". But industry found it difficult to accept a management that stops milking in winter. "*We had to fight so that Roquefort Society agrees to shift the milk of autumn …*" The expansion, the success of the farm and the installation of both children arouse breeds resentment among neighbors *"It created jealousy to have made these buildings and more … They didn't like it*".

#### Box2 : A specialized meat sheep in Cevennes – farmer alone

The livestock farmer drives 600 ewes with the help of his retired parents, especially during the lambing period from January to March. He employs a worker in June and July at haying time. Then, he looks after his flock in mountain pasture from August to October. The activity in mountain is almost considered by the livestock farmer as holidays. "*Staying in the mountains during several days, I long for those moments.*" In the village, however, relations with neighbors are strained. "*Once, bells sound, then these are flies, then it's the dog barking, it becomes really complicated.*" And CAPs controls contribute to add stress while the livestock farmer feels called into questions. "*Well, controls are getting more and more painful. It's my ninth control since I've been installed and the last one went wrong because of the controller*".

# Box3 : A large sheep farm in Livradois-Forez – family association between brothers and father

Two brothers settled successively on their father's farm after having worked out of agriculture. The structure is large: 1,300 suckler ewes and 24 suckler cows. Father-son relationships are complicated: "We don't have neither the same objectives not the same visions and are compelled to make compromises... it doesn't satisfy anyone." For the father, "going home at 7pm is not an option", while the long working days keep the two brothers away from their friends and neighbors: "When you are invited, I don't go there anymore (because it ends too late), that's what weighs on me". However, by living there, they can see their children "every day full of little times". They enjoy working in this environment where "the children are immediately outside to play, without cars, everyone knows each other". They contribute to the life of their territory: "the school called us regularly to check if we would place our children there".

## **IV – Conclusion**

Our study highlighted the complexity of the social dimension of sustainability. It is necessary to explore different intertwined facets, which deal with facts and feelings, are connected to individual and collective dimensions, are interested in professional and private lives, in order to ultimately understand how their articulation express a singular compromise in movement. The discussion about our framework with farmers, advisors, teachers and local actors confirmed the importance of this social dimension to draw the future of livestock.

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