

## Session 4: Making the transition

Convenor: Alain Peeters (Agroecology Europe, RHEA, Belgium)

### Session talks:

- Marco Bertaglia (European Commission) - "A "research-embedded-in-action" framework to foster agroecology"
- Xavier Poux (Legouvé, France) - "Ten Years For Agroecology (TYFA) – a scenario exercise exploring the feasibility of an agroecological Europe"
- Vincent Delobel (Fermes Novatrices, Belgium) - "Farming novelties: our way forward"
- Marjolein Visser (Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium) - "Can we avoid extractivism while doing research in agroecology? A critical view on co-optation and institutionalisation of agroecology"
- Carine Herbin (Institut Français de la Vigne et du Vin, France) - "Guide for agroecology in viticulture, a tool for the sector"

This session brought together presenters from different backgrounds, from the practical to political, to speak on how we can make the transition to agroecology. Marco Bertaglia works with the European Commission's Joint Research Centre in order to help inform EU policy. As someone that works with connecting science and policy, he believes that what we need is a revolution in agriculture, not just a change in cosmetics. In order to achieve this structural change towards agroecology, we must conduct research that is in the service of action. In addition, we need to involve more people from in and outside agriculture in the process. The framework we can use to achieve this change is a steering group that generates business plans, farmer's involvement, and legal framework, combined with a catalyst that instigates change.

Xavier Poux works with TYFA, a project that explores how Europe can shift to agroecology by 2015. By developing a radical (yet plausible, coherent, and scientifically-sound) scenario for agroecological transition, TYFA plans to trigger public debate about our current state of agriculture, and thus force a plan for agriculture onto the policy stage. The early findings of TYFA show that there needs to be a radical land use change, more diversified cropping systems and livestock-crop systems, more extensive permanent grasslands. Furthermore, there needs to be a change the EU diet, one that does limit the need of industrialized livestock production. But in order to begin this process, there needs to be a trigger, a radical policy debate for transition. For example, what if we banned pesticides? How would that shape European agriculture going forward?

Vincent Delobel works on his family's dairy farm in Belgium, and his and his family's story is a living testament to ability of agroecology to transform the land and the community. They switched from conventional to organic, and then from cows to goats. But it was only by incorporating the value-added products of cheese production, as well as opening up the farm to educational groups, that the farm was able to stay viable. The Delobels rejected the external pressure, and instead learned to listen to themselves, to their land, and to their consumers. The Delobel farm is part of the Réseau de Fermes Novatrices, a network of farms and farmers who strive towards more sustainable and responsible farming practices. This network is premised on the fact that change comes from the bottom up, and can be driven by the autonomy of the peasant movement.

Marjolein Visser is an agroecology researcher and university professor who warned that agroecology is in danger of being co-opted. If co-opted, agroecology will be institutionalized, which will suppress the creation of new ideas and instead only allow

for a subset of the original ideas, stabilize new networks and thus solidify new power relations, limit new opportunities, and give no thought to the redistribution of benefits, thus allowing the benefits to remain in the hands of a few. To fight against this, we as researchers must force ourselves to be less comfortable, and continue to ask ourselves the hard questions: Who decides on content and focus of research? Which knowledges/experiences count? Who benefits? What does the research generate/make disappear? What and where to (or to not) publish?

After the impulse talks, the room was opened up for a question and answer discussion. Some participants saw the institutionalization of agroecology not as co-optation, but a sign that agroecology is winning the battle of ideas, though still some worried that it would merely be an institutionalization of organic agriculture, and thus not the paradigm shift that many are calling for. Many agreed that agroecology will not be able to move forward without a change in political economy, and without proponents of agroecology playing a more active role in politics. Some called for radical measures, others think we should be more measured in order to stay credible. This goes for the social process as well - many agreed that the broader society must also be part of this transition. With so many perspectives and experts in different areas brought together, it was challenging to close such an important and fruitful session, but most everyone agreed that more lively discussions like this would be to the benefit of the agroecological transition.