

Biodiversity and Resilience Interventions

Analysis of Interviews with Farmers in France

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This note summarizes the results of interviews with 17 farmers in France to identify the motivations and challenges that impact farmers' adoption of practices that improve biodiversity.¹ Respondents were identified through the Chamber of Agriculture Nord Pas de Calais and through the farmer network of the team leader with a further snowballing approach to find additional potential participants, and thus were not representative. All interviews were conducted either in-person or on Zoom. This work was part of the Enhancing Biodiversity and Resilience in Crop Production project, which was commissioned by Bayer and implemented in collaboration with ETH Zurich and IFPRI. The project analyzed information that can contribute to guidance on using agricultural practices to improve biodiversity and resilience of farming systems. It focused on intensive maize, wheat, and soy production systems in France, Germany, Brazil, and the United States.

Findings

We found that many of the farmers we interviewed in France currently use some biodiversity enhancing measures but are restricted in their ability to adopt more because of costs and a lack of access to necessary equipment. In the interviews, farmers discussed their experiences with biodiversity enhancing practices, perceived benefits of biodiversity, neighbors' perspectives, public policies and agri-environmental programs, and aspirations for their farms in the future.

Biodiversity Knowledge & Experience

1. **Flora and fauna variation and support of soil health:** When farmers were asked to describe the meaning of biodiversity, over half defined it as the existence of diverse crops and wildlife. Several farmers also characterized biodiversity as a means for improving their soil.
2. **Experience with biodiversity is already established:** All interviewed farmers currently use some practices that improve biodiversity on their farms. The most commonly used practices are reduced tillage or no-till farming, crop rotation, application of organic matter, decreased use of chemical inputs, and use of grass strips, hedges, and mandatory cover crops.

¹ For additional details about the project note, please refer to the full project [report](#) or contact: Nastasia Boul Lefevre, nastasia.boullefeuvre@usys.ethz.ch; Anne Dray, anne.dray@usys.ethz.ch; Wei Zhang, w.zhang@cgiar.org

Adoption Limitations

1. **Fear of negative impacts on current production:** Many farmers are concerned that adopting new biodiversity practices will increase their expenses, decrease their crop yields, and result in a loss of area that can be farmed.
2. **Cost challenges:** Farmers frequently noted that cost is the biggest limitation they face in implementing biodiversity enhancing practices.
3. **Lack of access to equipment:** The most common cost concern discussed by farmers was the equipment required for biodiversity enhancing practices. Several farmers shared that they would like to adopt more practices that favor biodiversity but do not own the necessary equipment or have the financial means to purchase it.
4. **Additional resources required:** Farmers also discussed how biodiversity enhancing practices are more time-consuming than their current practices and require additional labor.

Adoption Motivations & Influences

1. **Soil health:** Farmers are driven to adopt biodiversity enhancing practices because they can reduce soil erosion and improve soil quality.
2. **Appreciation for wildlife:** Many of the interviewed farmers are hunters and stated that they are motivated to adopt biodiversity measures because they value a strong and diverse presence of animals on their land and surrounding areas.
3. **Family generation changes in farm management:** Several farmers shared that their farms had been owned by their families for a long time and were passed down to them. Some farmers indicated that they chose to continue to use the farm practices that their families had previously used. Others said that once they became responsible for managing the farm, they used it as an opportunity to adopt new practices that favor biodiversity.
4. **Reduce chemical inputs:** Some farmers said their adoption of biodiversity practices was driven by a desire to reduce chemical inputs. Farmers wanted to become more environmentally responsible or save on costs, since chemical inputs have become increasingly expensive.

Neighboring Farmers

1. **Open to sharing experiences:** Most farmers said they are willing to share their experiences with farm practices with neighboring farmers.
2. **Mixed willingness to adopt biodiversity enhancing practices:** Some farmers believe that their neighbors are open to adopting biodiversity enhancing practices even though they have not yet implemented them. Others said their neighbors are not interested in adopting new practices that favor biodiversity.
3. **Limited collaboration:** A few farmers said that they share some equipment with their neighbors but that is the extent to which they work together.

Experience with Public Policies & Agri-environmental Programs

1. **Positive GIEE participation:** All interviewed farmers are part of Economic and Environmental Interest Groups (GIEE), and many spoke of having positive experiences in them. Farmers use GIEEs to exchange information, experiment with new practices, and receive guidance from technicians. Farmers also discussed the economic benefits of GIEEs and noted that they can receive funding from them.
2. **Unfavorable perceptions of some policies and programs:** Farmers largely hold negative views on the Common Agriculture Policy and feel it reflects a disconnect between farmers and decision-makers. Several farmers also expressed a negative view of the High Environmental Value (HVE) certification. Farmers said that there are limited benefits to receiving HVE certification and that it is strict in its requirements and eligibility criteria. However, half of the farmers interviewed are either working toward receiving HVE certification or hope to receive it in the future.
3. **Limited decision-making freedom:** Farmers said they would like to be granted more freedom and autonomy in their decision-making regarding the policies and programs in which they participate.

Aspirations

1. **Prioritize soil conservation:** Some farmers said that, in 5 to 10 years, they hope to expand their soil conservation efforts on their farms.
2. **Continued family farm management:** A few farmers said they would like to be able to pass down their farms to their families in the future and hope that new generations continue to farm with biodiversity enhancing practices.
3. **Increase innovation:** Farmers also said that, in the future, they want to test new practices and hope they can create their own farming techniques.

Conclusion

Interviewed farmers demonstrated a general understanding of biodiversity. However, farmers' recognition of the benefits of biodiversity enhancing practices is challenged by their fears of decreases in crop yield and in increases in expenses. Farmers can be better supported in adopting biodiversity measures by providing them with assistance to access or purchase required equipment. Farmers' main motivations for adopting new practices are soil conservation and quality, desire to reduce costs by limiting application of inputs, and an appreciation for wildlife. Farmers can also be encouraged to adopt biodiversity enhancing practices by improving existing policies and programs. All interviewed farmers participate in policies and programs that support biodiversity measures and several highlighted their positive experiences in GIEEs. However, farmers believe that many policies and programs are not well designed and lack benefits. Farmers would like objective-oriented policies that grant them more freedom in their work.

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