

Experience of agro-ecology in French farms

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We are two Nicolas, farmers in the West of France.

For many years we have been trying to improve our way of farming by setting back agronomy at the centre of our farming

Since the beginning of the ninety's, we've stopped plowing and moving our soil.

The main objective was to reduce fuel and time cost, but we quickly faced some troubles such as compaction, volunteers and decreasing yields. The machinery was changed and we still needed to fully revise our way of thinking. It took several years to realize that we had to feed the life in our fields and to improve biodiversity in our farming system.

The BASE association that we represent here today (Biodiversity-Agriculture-Soil-Environment) was created to share good practices between farmers and soil specialists like Odette Menard (Quebec), Frederic Thomas (France). The farming trips (farmer to farmer) helped us to understand that we were not working on a percentage of clay sand and loam but on a living system that we had to take care of and improve.

Today, we still believe that chemical synthesis inputs are necessary to secure our crop production, not like a way of farming but like an insurance to counteract when it goes wrong. But we also believe that conservation agriculture by introducing cover crop between cash crop, longer diversified rotation (legumes, grass, oil seed, spring and autumn crops), companion cropping are necessary to build and feed healthy soils.

This would be easier if legumes crops, hemsps for construction or buckwheat crops were more profitable in terms of yield or law requirements.

We consider that helping farmers to reintroduce diversity and by this way reducing pest and fertilisers' levels is now the easiest way to reach both environmental and economic benefits. It has been our mission for several years although crop market or world trade's rules do not help us.

We hope the discussions with the audience today will allow us to develop all other environmental benefits of this farming practices like reducing carbon footprint, reducing soil leaching, fertilisers or pesticides, and at the same time maintaining yields level.

Thanks for your attention.