

10 Minutes For The Planet

French Neo-Farming ©

by Valentine Rinner



Hello everyone and welcome to this week's episode of 10 minutes for the Planet.

They call themselves "permaculturists", "agroecologists" or "agroforesters", and ten of them were welcomed by the Minister of Agriculture Stéphane Le Foll on January 24th. They were **awarded a prize** for **setting up** innovative **organic** farming projects. The prize was organised by a network called "Fermes d'avenir", which was **launched** in 2013 and is a **growing** national **success**.

From **goat** cheese to **educational** farming, from **gherkins** to magical edible forests, the selected projects cover a wide **range** of farming **activities** but all have **pledged** to reinvent **agricultural** practices in our country and to prove there are **sustainable** alternatives to large and **environmentally**-costly monocultures. These mostly newly-converted farmers will receive participative **funding** to **develop** their projects as well as knowledge support from the "Fermes d'avenir" network.

Estimates say that before the 1940s with one **fossil energy** calorie we could produce over two calories of food. Now we need between five and ten fossil energy calories to produce one single calorie of food. This is mainly due to food having become an **industrial commodity**. Today food production depends on high levels of chemical input, heavy **mechanical engineering** and long distribution chains. The farming industry seems to have gone from being dependant on **hordes** of low-paid over-worked farmers, to being **dependant** on the **availability** and prices of fossil energy and a few less farmers however still low-paid and overworked. It looks as though we've got **a tiny bit** of it right but a whole lot still needs to be reinvented.

to award a prize (exp.) to give sby. a prize or reward because they have achieved sth.

to set up (phrasal vb.) to create

to launch (vb.) to start

growing (adj.) increasing

goat (n.) an animal, similar to a sheep, that is domesticated for its milk and sometimes meat

gherkin (n.) a variety of cucumber that is preserved in vinegar

range (n.) variety

to pledge (vb.) to make a solemn promise

sustainable (adj.) ecological

funding (n.) grants, money

fossil energy (exp.) energy coming from fossil fuels (gas, coal and oil)

hordes (n.) large numbers

a tiny bit (exp.) a very small part

New farmers rewarded by the Fermes d'avenir prize all seem to adopt a “**back to basics**” attitude towards farming practices. Practices that exclude most heavy **machinery** and require more manual labour. Practices that hopefully will lead them to be less dependent on **fluctuating** external resources. Today in France the farming industry is highly **subsidised** mainly through the **European** Common Agricultural Policy (the infamous PAC), sometimes by as much as 50% of the final product price. This leaves quite a lot of **room** for **innovative** farming projects to prove more **sustainable** than the 21st century **mainstream** practices, but **sets** a high barrier to entry for these new alternative systems as prices are strongly **biased**.

Additionally, new ways of producing also come with new ways of distributing and with today's **sovereignty** of supermarkets and centralised pricing, the current system is not quite the ideal **fit** for new small local **productions**. However, the demand for food from non-intensive farming practices is raising in France. It is now becoming less risky for **conventional** farms **to switch** to organic farming thanks to the **rising** and stable **demand**, which wasn't the case a few years ago. This rising demand also allows neo-farmers **to go one step further** than organic farming, testing **alternative** techniques and inventing their own specificities. Once they prove that some of the **techniques** are sustainable then **political leverage** will be crucial in order **to lift the barriers** that today promote **outdated** ways of producing. Unfortunately **agriculture** is a sensitive topic in French politics as it is usually identified with the **extreme** left. But we'll talk about that in a future episode...

Bye everyone and see you next week for a new episode of 10 minutes for the Planet.

back to basics (exp.) a return to the simple and fundamental principles

to subsidize (vb.) when a government gives money or advantages to an activity which is in difficulty, in order to keep it going

room (n.) space, opportunity

mainstream (adj.) common, practiced by the majority

to set (vb.) to fix

biased (adj.) unfairly prejudiced against sth.

fit (n.) match

to switch (vb.) to change

rising (adj.) increasing

to go one step further (exp.) to make more advances in the same direction

political leverage (n.) the influence of people with political power

to lift the barriers (exp.) to remove the obstructions

outdated (adj.) old-fashioned and no longer appropriate today

*Tip!

Syllable stress can help us to understand spoken words.

Let's take the words 'install' and 'installation' as an example.

First count the syllables : 'in.stall has 2 syllables, 'in.stal.la.tion' has 4 syllables.

Syllable stress is when you say one of the syllables slightly louder and with more emphasis.

So in this example we say : **install** and **installation**.