

Abstracts

AGRICULTURE, FOOD INDUSTRY AND RETAILING SYSTEM :
WHICH NETWORKING STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY ?

An example of the diversity of strategies implemented by stakeholders of the milk chain in Western France

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Abstract

We propose to analyse the case of the very dynamic development of organic farming, organic food processing and organic product marketing in the retailing system in France, taking the example of the organic milk chain in a Western France region, called Mayenne

This case study focusses on the role of the different food market key players in the development of complementary strategies : farmers developing organic production, food industry processing organic products and intending to market them and retailing companies negotiating with food industry and agriculture to get quality and volume at the best price. Those key players have their own specific constraints and rationality : productive, logistic, marketing... They are translated into organisational forms, internal and external ones through networks. Our approach is based on the innovation sociology concept of socio-technical actor network elaborated by Michel Callon : this instrument is mobilised to illustrate the different networking strategies implemented by the key actors to strengthen their competitiveness and their negotiation capacity.

Some of the questions raised in our paper are : - How those economic actors have to re-think their individual and collective organisation to make them compatible one with the others, and integrate other actors' rationality and strategy? - Can processing and retailing companies integrate the organic food specificities and develop other marketing conditions or do they have to modify and adjust structurally the organic production system according to their own constraints ?

One of the main issues emerging from those questions being currently debated within organic farmers' organisations is how organic production system can remain sustainable in economic, social and environmental terms and be in condition to satisfy the fast growing market demand ? If large scale organic farms or networks of organic farms, contracted directly by processing and retailing companies have to concentrate and develop very intensive techniques, will they still be considered as sustainable ? Probably organic farming cannot be anymore considered as sustainable per se ; the current differentiation process is already provoking a fragmentation of organic production system and induce a necessary reflection on sustainability criteria : those trends are clearly at work in the region we choose to present and are analysed in our paper