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**Staging Agriculture during On-farm Markets:  
How does French Farmers' Rationality Influence their Representation of Rurality?**

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**Abstract:**

While a significant number of French farms are diversifying into tourism as a remedy for farm financial stress, less clear is the extent to which this diversification process can create dialogue and understanding between the farm and the non-farm populations. In this article, we explore how agritourism can allow farmers to engage in the social debate surrounding agriculture, and to shape and control their image by getting beyond mere cultural conventions. Based on 15 interviews with farmers we focus on their “performance” of rurality during on-farm markets, an emerging and popular form of on-farm tourism, providing an opportunity for re-imagining agriculture. Our hypothesis is that the various ways of engaging with agritourism may shape differently how agriculture is put on show. Our results suggest that if our interviewees share common staging and choreographic devices when setting up their on-farm market (such as cleaning, tidying up the farm, or organizing farm tours and visits), two different rationales emerged. Based on these two rationales, one being more aligned with substantive rationality while the other is closer to formal rationality, specific staging and choreographing are at work, with different implications regarding the extent to which cultural conventions are being challenged.

**Key words:**

agritourism, cultural representations, farmers' rationality, on-farm markets, French agriculture, rurality

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# **Staging Agriculture during On-farm Markets: How does French Farmers' Rationality Influence their Representation of Rurality?**

## **1. Introduction**

In modern societies, agriculture holds a unique and complex place in collective imaginary. Either in its nurturing role, responsible for preserving century-old traditions and tending bucolic landscapes, or being blamed for damaging the environment and being in thrall to agribusiness corporations, agriculture is alternately venerated or rejected (Hervieu and Purseigle, 2008; Nicourt, 2013; Caquot-Baggett and Annes, 2016). In this context, farmers often express a feeling of disempowerment when it comes to dealing with these imaginary constructs which they see as assigned to them externally. In fact, in the late 1970s, in France, Bourdieu was already theorizing about the difficulty the farm population had in shaping its identity and its image for the rest of society (Bourdieu, 1977). He famously stated that the farm population can be viewed as an “objectified social class,” which is “a social class dispossessed of its power to define its own identity” (p.3). In this article, we want to explore the extent to which farmers can impact public perception of rural life and agriculture through agritourism. Over recent years, farms have been increasingly diversifying into tourism. In 2010, 12% of French farms (around 60,000) had diversified their activity into processing food, offering accommodation, food services, or leisure activities (Lerbourg, 2013). As an “encounter” between farmers and tourists, agritourism could empower farmers to shape and control their image, and get beyond mere cultural conventions. Indeed, agritourism might be the opportunity for farmers to engage with the social debate about agriculture and rurality. In this article, our intent is to explore the numerous ways in which farmers represent agriculture and rural life, according to their different motivations and rationales.

Recently, Silva and Prista (2016) showed that “rural tourism echoes two societal trends...the rise of a lifestyle-led and leisure-oriented society, and the widespread mobilization

of tourism as a strategy for rural development (...)” (p.183). Likewise, we see agritourism as a response to two trends: the need for farmers to diversify their activities through new strategies and the French population’s yearning for the countryside, nature and tradition (Urbain, 2002). Agritourism might thus reconcile the different users of the French countryside. Agritourism activities consist essentially in the commodification of socio-cultural goods relating to farming for tourists’ consumption (Jackson 1999). Its development coincides with the transition towards multifunctional agriculture, where production objectives combine with those of protecting the environment, promoting cultural heritage and fostering the social fabric (Flanigan *et al.* 2014). It also introduces tourists to agriculture (Dubois and Schmitz, 2015) through social interaction between tourists and farmers. By social interaction, we mean the process whereby two individuals enter a relation, then act and react on the basis of perceived behaviours and information. These interactions also produce meaning, create new behaviours (Goffman, 1973) and can be verbal or non-verbal. Interactions occurring in the field of agritourism may thus be seen “as a series of staged events and spaces, as an array of performative techniques and dispositions” (Edensor, 2001:60). Their ultimate objective is to produce a convincing performance and to convey the intended meaning. Here, we also follow Edensor’s approach to performance, which he sees as being “both deliberately devised and habitual or “an interweaving of conscious and unaware modalities, part of the flow of ongoing existence” (2006:485). By giving an opportunity to the non-farm population to come and consume the countryside, to rest and relax in a natural environment, agritourism reflects the shift in usage from food production to recreation and consumption (Brandth and Haugen, 2011). It also enables farmers to be part of this transition, creating a context for dialogue, knowledge-sharing and for participating in the construction of a discourse on rurality.

The literature on agritourism shows that the supply of activities is quite diverse (Dubois and Schmitz, 2015; Phillip *et al.*, 2010). These range from enjoying a meal and possibly staying

overnight, to participating in farm activities and picking your own vegetables, or touring the farm and having a party in an old renovated barn (Arroyo et al., 2013). Agritourism activities can also be seen as recreation-oriented, educational-oriented, or both. In this paper, we focus on farmers' "performances" during on-farm markets of rural and agricultural matters. Over the past few years, these markets have been increasing in number (Banos and Candau, 2014). They may be organized by individual farmers or groups, and be under the supervision of an official organization (agricultural extension services) or not. They usually take place during spring and summer time, but some go on all year around. During these on-farm markets, tourists/guests are invited to purchase food and visit the farm. On most occasions, they are encouraged to bring a picnic basket and chairs so they can have a picnic on the farm, eating goods purchased directly from farmers. Usually, entertainment is provided: music, horse-rides, farm tours, etc. Tourists are encouraged to walk around the farm, talk to farmers, relax and enjoy the countryside. We believe on-farm markets are particularly suitable to explore our research questions, since they provide a space for re-imagining agriculture. Like farmers' markets, they constitute "a site of exchange, but also (...) a venue for negotiated meaning in the local food landscape" (Smithers et al., 2008). They bring different people, farmers and non-farmers, rural and urban dwellers, to a particular place, at a given time. Farmers thus have the opportunity to stage and choreograph both agriculture and their own image.

In this paper, our focus is on discourses, practices and behaviours produced during these on-farm markets. We want to assess whether farmers stage the farm in a way that embodies the rural idyll or, on the contrary, give a more authentic picture of farm life. Although several studies in rural geography or sociology have started to explore this question (Brandth and Haugen, 2014; Wright and Annes, 2014), one empirical question that remains largely unexplored is how farmers' motivations and rationalities shape the image presented to tourists. If, as pointed out earlier, farmers and food production coexist within the rural space with other

populations and other uses of the countryside (recreation, leisure, etc.), different forms of social organization also coexist within the farming population itself (Hervieu and Purseigle, 2015). Homogeneity no longer applies when describing this population. Today, a range of different life trajectories lead into the profession, notably individuals with no farm background, and women now represent 30% of all farm operators. Dissimilarities in the way farmers do their job (from conventional to organic agriculture, including hybrid models) and meaning they give to their activities (with motivations ranging from the sole production of food to preserving local knowledge and know-how, or protecting the environment, or developing the social fabric in rural areas) have led several French sociologists to theorize about this wide, and sometimes contradictory, array of professional identities (Hervieu et Purseigle, 2015; Lemery, 2003; Nicourt, 2013). Researchers exploring farmers' motivations for engaging in farm tourism have found various different reasons (Barbieri, 2009; McGehee et al. 2007; Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007). Besides economic ones (diversifying sources of farm revenue), there are other rationales, such as a desire to educate consumers about agriculture, to create social bonds and prevent isolation, or to preserve cultural heritage and traditions. Therefore, our hypothesis is that the various ways of engaging with agritourism may shape differently how agriculture is put on show. Put simply, farmers could have dissimilar modes of staging agriculture, and indeed their farm and/or their appearance, depending on the rationale at work. These will be visible in the way cultural conventions regarding agriculture and rural life are dealt with. The staging of agriculture, a central component of farm tourism, is thus unlikely to be homogeneous, with widely different, possibly contradictory approaches and rationalities generating different images. This study is thus a contribution to the general literature on agriculture and representations, focusing on the farmers' role in shaping the latter, and providing a better theoretical understanding of agritourism's role in improving relations or in reinforcing forms of distinction and differentiation, between farmers and non-farmers.

## **2. Literature review**

French farmers are today a demographic and professional minority within their own working space. From holding a position of authority, French farmers have become an “othered” rural group. Over the last century, the farming population has steadily declined. Today less than 3% of the working population works in agriculture (Agreste, 2011) and 80% of the French population is considered urban (INSEE, 2011). Farmers constitute a demographic minority in France generally but also within their own working space. For just over two decades now, rural France has been gaining population, but not to the advantage of farmers (Gilbert, 2010). The newcomers, who are mostly involved in service jobs or retirees (Morin, 2011/12), add to the complexity and heterogeneity of a now multi-dimensional/purpose rural space (Perrier-Cornet, 2002) where different individuals (Gilbert, 2010) do not necessarily share the same ideas of what rural space should be. For instance, if farmers underline the productive function of the countryside, other social groups focus more on its recreational or residential uses (Banos and Candau, 2014). These different perceptions and usages can generate conflicts and misunderstandings between the farming and the non-farming populations, and hamper the sustainable development of the countryside. It is here that agritourism might offer ways to build bridges between these two populations and to overcome misunderstandings.

In this section, we discuss cultural representations of the rural and their role as a driving force in the agritourism experience (Bell, 2006; Bessi re, 2000; Silva and Prista, 2016). We see agritourism as providing a way for farmers both to challenge dominant (and stereotypical) representations of the rural and to offer a more “authentic” picture of rural life. In addition, we also explore farmers’ motivations and rationalities for engaging in tourism. We believe that depending on their rationality in doing so, they are likely to stage agriculture differently.

### *Cultural representations and agritourism*

Regarding tourism in general or agritourism in particular, Bessière (2000) has argued that socially and culturally constructed images and representations of an “elsewhere” hold a key role in explaining tourists’ desire to visit rural areas. In fact, the quest for new horizons, offering a break with the routine of daily life, is clearly a source of motivation for tourists. Analysing tourists’ imaginative constructs of rural tourism, Bessière (2000) identified three different representations of the countryside existing in French collective imagination: “the therapeutic and purifying countryside” presenting rural space as a lost Paradise providing comfort and curing the soul and the body; “the socializing countryside”, which underlines the existence of particular forms of social relations based on conviviality and solidarity; and “the nostalgic countryside,” keeper of the traditions and values of an idealized past. If, in collective consciousness, this idealisation might explain what motivates tourists’ journey to a reassuring (but nonetheless fantasized) place, it also raises questions. In fact, several authors have argued that this idealization of the rural (or ‘rural idyll’) offers a set of images and representations which hide the complexity of contemporary rural areas by erasing diversity, simplifying existing power relations and omitting potential tensions, between rural dwellers (Cloke, 1997; Hinrichs, 1996; Little, 1998).

In addition, in collective imagination, the farm population holds a special place within this idealized and fantasized rural space. Farmers and the rural are conflated. The farming population represents “a minority still cultivating the land and often idolized as the evident guardian of nature<sup>1</sup>” (Lowenthal, 1996). In the French context, as a social group, farmers represent a fundamental cultural reference, witnesses to the past, who, in a fast moving modern society, have become the keepers of our roots and national identity (Bages et Rieu, 1986;

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<sup>1</sup> Authors’ translation (“une minorité qui cultive encore la terre [et qui] est souvent adulée comme gardienne naturelle de la nature”)



Frémont, 1997; Reed Danahay, 2002). However, other authors suggest that historically, two conflicting images persist in cultural discourse—idealizing and marginalizing ones (Rogers, 1987; 2000). In their analysis of the popular reality TV program “Love is in the Field<sup>2</sup>,” Caquot-Baggett and Annes (2016) showed that both discourses still appear. Farmers may represent stability as keepers of the traditions of an idealized past, but they can quickly come to stand for immobility, unable to keep up with modern life, find a spouse or continue to be steward of the land. Other scholars have shown evidence of these negative representations, notably through the portrayal of farmers as destroyers of the environment or the allies of capitalist firms and agribusinesses (Hervieu and Purseigle, 2008). If this imaginative universe holds a key role in understanding tourists’ motivations for going into the countryside and onto the farm, it also raises the question of how the farming population is represented. Through the reproduction and perpetuation of the rural idyll and externally generated representations of farmers, a process of “othering” is at work (Eriksson, 2010). Whether idealized or marginalized, the rural and the farming population are constructed as the “other” in a reductionist and distancing way. This process constantly positions farmers as objects—rather than subjects—of cultural representations, therefore as a subordinate group whose power to self-define is denied.

This being so, we may question whether or not agritourism really empowers farmers to take control of their image and influence cultural constructs related to the rural and the agricultural. Edensor (2001; 2006) showed how rural dwellers “perform” rurality with their bodies, discursive practices and material artefacts. The everyday becomes “the realm of repetition, where cultural norms are played out” (Edensor, 2001:60), and specific tourist contexts, such as agritourism, reproduce praxis and discourses about what ought to be seen and done. In their study of Norwegian farms involved in agritourism, Brandth and Haugen (2014) showed that farmers draw on existing representations, expectations and images in seeking to

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<sup>2</sup> Authors’ translation (“L’Amour est dans le pré”)

create a unique experience for tourists. In that regard, they reproduce the ‘rural idyll’ during the staging of their farms, their appearance and/or the activities available to tourists. In the French context, Banos and Candau (2014) have suggested that a process of domination works to the disadvantage of farmers by confining them to predetermined roles. However, Edensor (2006) points out that the everyday is not just the realm of non-reflexive, mechanical enactments of cultural conventions; on the contrary, potential for new possibilities exist and the ability of the “other” to represent itself should not be disregarded.

### *The issue of “authenticity” and agritourism*

Resistance to cultural conventions might exist since rural dwellers may destabilize or subvert them. For Wright and Annes (2014) agritourism can actually give an opportunity to farmers to challenge these conventions and to present a more “authentic” picture of agriculture. They show that women farmers involved in agritourism, through their discourse and practices, perform a nuanced and complex representation of agriculture and rurality. This study and others (Edensor, 2001; 2006; Banos and Candau, 2014; Brandth and Haugen, 2014) show the complex relationship that agritourism maintains with the issue of “authenticity.” Performances and images produced might, under certain circumstances, reinforce cultural (and stereotypical) conventions, and, under other circumstances, constitute a transformative force, or a “symbolic vehicle,” challenging cultural representations. In this regard the work of MacCannell (1999) on staged authenticity is helpful to characterize these performances and images. Drawing on Goffman’s (1959) concepts of staging, frontstage and backstage, MacCannell (1999:101) identifies a continuum of six different stages of front and back regions to characterise tourists’ experiences of authenticity. On one end of the continuum lies the ideal-typical frontstage characterized by little to no authenticity (for example, a tourist going to a giftshop), on the other end lies the ideal-typical backstage characterized by authenticity but where outsiders (tourists)

are not welcome. In between, MacCannell identifies four other regions displaying different degrees of authenticity: from a front region showcasing artefacts of back region (for instance, agricultural artefacts exhibited at a marketplace) to a back region only shown to tourists occasionally and temporarily (such as tourists visiting the milking parlour or the cheese-making room on a farm).

Based on the type of agritourism activities involved, the degree to which tourists enter the backstage region of the farm might differ. Because they take place on the farm, the site of agricultural production, on-farm markets might offer a unique opportunity for tourists to experience agriculture in a more authentic way than traditional farmer markets. In fact, if the economic role of traditional markets in the vitality of a community remains undeniable, their ability to portray an accurate view of agriculture is questioned (Macias, 2008; Smithers et al., 2008). In the French context, Navarro (2012/13) and Scheffer (2011) showed that most vendors are retailers and not necessarily farmers/producers, which does not allow direct contacts and dialogues between producers and consumers. Furthermore, they suggested that traditional farmers' markets might give the illusion of village life and reinforce representations combining tradition, authenticity, countryside and nature. By letting tourists enter the backstage region of agricultural production, on-farm markets might constitute a means to deconstruct this illusion and to bring more authenticity.

#### *Farmers' rationalities and agritourism*

Depending on different intersecting social identities (such as race, class, gender, but also nationality or sexual orientation), individuals might represent the rural differently. Considering how diverse the French farming population is today, we can assume that farmers represent agriculture in different ways. Thus, according to their motivations to farm or the reasons that brought them to agritourism, their different strategies will lead to different representations.

Farmers' motivations are central to farm diversification in general and agritourism in particular. Several authors distinguish between economic and social reasons for developing on-farm tourism initiatives (McGehee, 2007). Economically agritourism is a way to diversify farm activities and thus boost a dwindling agricultural income (Busby and Rendle, 2000; Weaver and Fennell, 1997), although some authors have shown that the economic benefits are often limited (Busby and Rendle, 2000). Alongside the economic rationale, other researchers focus more on social (and cultural) motivations. Meeting people, reducing social isolation, but also educating and sharing their knowledge and passion, or even promoting local architectural heritage are all mentioned by agritourism entrepreneurs (Dubois et Schmitz, 2015; Nickerson et al., 2001; Weaver and Fennell, 1997; Wright et Annes, 2014).

To gain better insight into why farmers decide to embrace agritourism, some authors draw on a Weberian theoretical framework (McGehee and Kim, 2004; McGehee, 2007), particularly his conceptualisation of rationality. Under this framework, rationality stands as “the underlying force or reasoning (means) behind the creation of some form of economic activity” (McGehee and Kyungmi, 2004:162). More specifically, Weber's concepts of formal and substantive rationalities (Weber, 1978) are useful to provide subjective insights to understand farmers' rationales. Within this Weberian framework, formal rationality, or “capitalist rationality”, is based upon calculability of economic factors in monetary terms (Weber, 1978:85-86). Under formal rationality, the rationality of “capitalist economic action” (Mooney, 1986:55), profit maximization is the crucial end-goal of production, with calculability as a central feature. In other words, end goals can be defined in quantifiable terms. When it comes to agritourism, McGehee suggests that “offsetting falling income, supplementing a season of poor yield or providing additional income” are instances of formal rationality (2004:162). Economic motivations are therefore expressions of formal rationality. Weber opposed substantive rationality to formal rationality. Substantive rationality, or “value

rationality” appears as guided by some criteria of ultimate values that are not formally rational (Weber, 1978:85-86). Though, as pointed out by Mooney, Weber’s notion of substantive rationality is less clearly defined (Mooney, 1983), individuals aligned with this form of rationality all share the vision that the impact of “capitalist rationality” is quite secondary importance. In fact, profit maximization is set aside in favour of values. As pointed out by Weber (1978:85-86), “there is an infinite number of value scales for this type of rationality.” To obey this rationality, individuals can act in accordance with some philosophical ideal, a sense of morality and solidarity, or a belief in social justice. Socially and culturally-based motivations are thus expressions of substantive rationality. McGehee (2004) argues that formal and substantive rationalities stand at each end of a continuum and are in constant tension. Farmers, as entrepreneurs, must find their appropriate place along this continuum. Their actions may correspond to only one type of rationality, or to both. Similarly, the type of rationality that guides their decisions might evolve over time.

In this article, we question the extent to which the farming population is able to stage everyday life for the tourist’s gaze. Farmers may rely on a well-established, socially-recognised toolkit to produce meaning and represent rurality to others, or they can seize the opportunity to destabilize cultural conventions. We make the hypothesis that the way farmers embody the ‘rural idyll’ may be affected by their relation to formal or substantive rationality. In other words, depending on whether they are expressing formal, substantial or both rationalities, farmers might give different opportunities to tourist to access the backstage of agriculture and to experience authenticity.

### **3. Methods**

To explore these questions, we gathered data derived from qualitative semi-structured interviews. In the context of on-farm markets, our goal was to investigate not only how farmers

stage their farm, their own appearance and farm activities so as to embody the ‘rural idyll’, but also how they construct meaning around their work and involvement in agritourism. Central to this aim was gaining a deeper understanding of their rationality in incorporating tourism into their activity and setting up an on-farm market. As stated, we believe on-farm markets are particularly suitable to explore our research questions, in providing a space to re-imagine agriculture. Existing literature suggests that farmers’ markets in general provide new spaces of consumption where debates around food and agriculture occurs (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000). Farmers’ markets are often presented as “alternative to mainstream food outlets” (Smithers et al., 2008:338), strengthening social relations between producers and consumers. However, the degree to which farmers’ markets manage to reach this objective is uncertain (Macias, 2008) as well as the extent to which they create a space to challenge dominant (and stereotypical) representations of agriculture (Navarro, 2012/3; Scheffer, 2011; Smithers et al., 2008). Our hypothesis is that producers stage and perform rurality in the setting of on-farm markets differently from the way they do in traditional farmers’ markets. These on-farm markets bring different people, farmers and non-farmers, rural and urban dwellers, to a particular place, at a given time. Unlike traditional farmers’ markets, they move the site of exchange to the farm, the backstage region of agricultural production, where producers can stage and choreograph agriculture, as well as their own image, in their own way.

We began by selecting potential respondents through their involvement in existing agritourism networks or their presence in agricultural outlets showcasing farmers involved in direct selling or organic agriculture. We then used theoretical sampling to identify other respondents. Efforts were made to strategically include men and women from different ages, individuals with a farm background and individuals who chose farming as a second career, as well as farmers involved in various productions and different agricultural systems (from conventional to organic). We met with 15 farmers all located in South Western France

(Occitanie region) and conducted semi-structured interviews during the summer of 2015. The data described and analysed in the following sections all come from these interviews. Interviews took place on the farm and were usually followed by a tour of the farm. Our interview guide covered several themes: the farm history, farmers' life trajectory, values, motivations and networks, and the on-farm market. Special attention was paid to how the market grew up and was organized and run, and to relations with other farmers and visitors.

Our research sample represents a variety of experiences and life trajectories in line with contemporary French population (Table 1 and Table 2). It consisted of 7 women and 8 men, whose ages ranged from 24 to 62 years old. All participants work full time on their farm and all hold the official status of farm operator or co-operator. Most of our participants (n=9) come from a farming background and inherited their parents' farm. The other ones were not from a farming background and were not trained in agriculture. They chose farming as a second carrier. Interestingly, only a minority of our interviewees received a formal education in agriculture (including the ones from a farm background). The majority of participants (n=11) do not farm alone but with a business partner, a spouse, parents and/or children. Most had been actively engaged in farming for over 10 years, but years farming ranged from as little as two years to 35 years. Overall, between one and three persons work full time on these farms. Their farms range in size from 2 to 80 hectares, and only three are organic. Productions are quite diversified and typical of South West France agriculture: ducks, goats, beef cattle, as well as wine, vegetables and fruits.

It is also noteworthy that all farms in our sample are working farms with a tourism activity which is not their main source of income<sup>3</sup>. All farmers interviewed sold at least part of their production directly to consumers whether through on-farm selling, farmer markets, or a system of Community Supported Agriculture. Likewise, all participants share the same general

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<sup>3</sup> The main sources of income are derived from the selling of farm products.

involvement in activities of agricultural diversification, and farm tourism in particular, through the organization of an on-farm market. All markets organized were seasonal and collective, and gave an opportunity for tourists to picnic on the farm. Additional agriculture-related activities (farm tour, milking demonstration, animal feeding, etc.) and non-agricultural activities (concert, etc.) were provided for visitors. Farmers became involved in agritourism for different reasons, from generating additional income to reconnecting with non-farm people. This desire to communicate about their job and their enthusiasm for it, is regularly referred to in brochures or websites advertising these events. Educating people (about the production of agricultural goods, the specificities of one region and its products, particular customs and traditions, etc.) as well as linking up urban and rural dwellers, are also mentioned as a motivation for farmers to organize these on-farm markets.

A general inductive approach to data analysis was used. Both authors systematically read and coded each transcript which brought out the significant textual themes and categories. Links between these themes and categories were identified, defined and characterised (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The identified themes and categories were then analysed based on their congruence with concepts from the literature. Certain limitations to these data should however be noted; given the small sample size, it is not possible to say how widely these findings are representative of all agricultural entrepreneurs. We offer them to encourage further scrutiny of how farmers represent agriculture through agritourism. In particular, we believe this work reveals the existence of two somewhat contradictory approaches, resulting from opposing rationalities, with different implications regarding the images of the rural and agricultural world offered to tourists.

#### **4. The staging of agriculture and rural life during the market: common elements**

Our results show that the way they stage agriculture and rural life is a central component of on-farm markets organized by our respondents. Whether through paying special care to farm



surroundings, being attentive to one's physical appearance, or by organizing farm visits, the farmers certainly play on cultural conventions in their discourses and practices, but they also challenge and subvert them. In this section, we show common patterns our interviewees share when representing rurality. In fact, beyond differences based on diverging rationalities (that we will further develop in sections 5 and 6), all participants share some practices when setting up their on-farm markets; these are described here. We discuss to what extent our interviewees idealised the rural and agriculture by focusing on how they stage the farm and its surroundings, including their own appearance, and on how they set up activities to entertain tourists. In the sense, we show that on-farm markets provide an opportunity for farmers to stage, through their discourses and practices, the farm and its surrounding (the farm identity), as well as their own body (the farmer identity). By doing so, tourists witness a "performance" of both agriculture and rural life.

### *Entering the farm*

When attending an on-farm market, tourists' first encounter with rural life occurs when they enter the farm, so their first impression is a visual one. Farmers interviewed are clearly aware of that, and try to make sure this first impression is pleasurable for tourists. For all farmers, the on-farm market represents a "special occasion", a break in the farm's daily routine and this justifies preparing the farm for this event. Denise remarked: "We take a lot of care in organizing the place. It's like Versailles between the henhouse and the creek." Clearly, this quote emphasizes how carefully this special event is staged. If, unlike Denise, most participants did not claim to create Versailles-like surroundings on the farm, they all make sure they create a welcoming atmosphere for tourists. All of them share the same idea regarding what makes for a welcoming atmosphere; it is one where order, cleanliness and tidiness prevail. As Nadine says, "We try to mow the grass and we want everything nice and clean." On other farms, this

is one of many forms of staging, which can go from “putting up posters showing farm history” to “planting new flowers beds” in the farm yard. Creating a “festive,” “beautiful,” “joyful” or “friendly” environment was mentioned as an objective by a large majority of interviewees, seen as reinforcing some aspects of the rural idyll, as defined by Bessière (2000) and others (see for instance Bell, 2006). This process of embellishing the farm’s surroundings and green spaces (flowers beds, lawn, etc.) could also be interpreted as reflecting the spread of urban norms to the countryside. Bergues (2003) has shown, for instance, that in the 1980s and 1990s, farmers’ ornamental gardens started to replace vegetable gardens in the farmyard, in order to make the look of the farm correspond more to suburban norms.

According to Banos and Candau (2014) this embellishment of the farmhouse’s direct surroundings corresponds to the appearance of spatial norms that pushed back the limits of productive space in favour of leisure space. Our results revealed two distinct discourses and strategies on the question of separating productive and leisure spaces. First, a majority of farmers expressed a desire not to present an aseptized space, separate from the productive function of the farm. For instance, Sylvie acknowledges that: “[they] clean for the occasion. The farm must be clean. We don’t want stuff all over the place. It needs to be cleaned. But, other than that, weeds... I don’t mind. My [vegetable] garden is full of weeds and I am not going to pull them up.” As a vegetable producer using biodynamics, Sylvie bans chemicals on her farm. Weeds become part of the farm environment and she does not want to get rid of them just to create a more welcoming atmosphere for tourists. She just does not want “any plastic bags or other unsuitable material left lying around.” Other farmers mentioned not necessarily hiding farm equipment, nor wanting to create a different atmosphere than the usual one, Arnaud recognizes this, laughingly, “we don’t want to transform [the farm], we sweep the floor though, but that’s about it!” Making sure tourists understood they were on a working farm, “not in a

museum” as some informants put it, was important. These farmers were expressing a desire to show an authentic, contemporary working farm.

Another group of farmers expressed a stronger desire to separate the leisure function of the farm from its production function even if it meant hiding it. For these farmers, cleaning and tidying the farm up clearly implied setting aside its productive function, or at least its negative aspects. For instance, Philippe, a duck and foie gras producer, explains that “we have to try and keep things straight in our different farm buildings...make them seem welcoming, have buildings that are properly looked after.” When prompted to explain why, he said: “well, if you enter a building and it’s filthy, with grease all over the walls, people are not going to like it. So if you commit yourself to opening your farm, you also commit to showing something that is as clean as possible.” Here, Philippe aims to trade in only on positive aspects of the rural. This is also the case for Thomas, a goat cheese producer, who explained that “if I have a sick goat, I am not going to show it to people, otherwise, that’s the only thing they will remember and I don’t want that.” Smell, dirt and disease must be made invisible to the eye of the tourist.

The farm surroundings may be the first thing tourists get to see, but once on the farm, the farmers’ physical appearance itself becomes an object of scrutiny that conveys a message. In fact, recent research on farm tourism has pointed out the importance of this in performing rurality and agriculture. Brandth and Haugen (2014) showed that Scandinavian farmers perform “contemporary authenticity” (p.8) when choosing practical clothes (not traditional ones) to host tourists on their farm. Likewise, Wright and Annes (2014) showed that in the French context women farmers did the same thing, also consciously distance themselves from a traditional representation of peasant women by choosing to dress as contemporary modern women. Our results confirm these findings. Among our participants, there is a determination not to dress in a way that might seem like a relic of the past. No one mentioned trying to re-enact through their appearance an idealized rural past. However, what is at stake once again is the idea of

cleanliness: “I like to be fit to be seen (...), not too dirty, so that people won’t run away! I just try to find a nice a shirt, or sweater, or even a smart hat,” says Marc. Wearing casual but clean clothes was repeatedly mentioned by farmers. Some acknowledged trying to wear clothes that would make them stand out among the crowd of tourists and be easily identified as the owners of the farm and organizers of the event. In that case, they would wear a t-shirt with the logo of the farm or of the agritourism organization they belong to. Others, like Christelle, would wear an apron since food is being served, however, as she explained: “we don’t try to make a big deal out of it.” In fact, the only concession to a fantasized rural tradition that we observed was the wearing of a beret, as one farmer usually does during his market.

### *Touring the farm*

All farmers interviewed used the opportunity of the on-farm market to show tourists around the farm. “My husband organizes a 30-minute-long farm tour,” says Myriam, “he might give between 2 and 5 tours, it depends if people ask or not.” In some cases, as mentioned in this quote, tours are given on demand. In other instances, they are formally scheduled throughout the afternoon and/or evening. With the farmer leading the tour, the on-farm market takes on a more educational, civic dimension. Welcoming tourists in order to explain, educate and transmit, are objectives mentioned by our interviewees. This is what Arnaud implies when he says “I show them the orchard and explain how fruit is produced, how apple juice is made. In fact, it’s more pedagogical than touristic.” Sylvie tries to raise tourists’ awareness about food, agriculture and consumption by “explain[ing] food production and consumption, explain[ing] about the kind of food we are given to eat every day.” For some farmers, these tours enable them to show how they actually work and correct tourists’ mistaken representations of farming. “We show them how we work. We show them the tractor, we show them how we make animal feed to stop them imagining goodness knows what! We show them, we explain.” Transmitting knowledge about farm life and agricultural practices is crucial for our research participants.

Farmers, as knowledge holders, perform a role in educating, counselling and transmitting, by raising tourists' awareness about food production. As shown by other authors in other contexts (Trauger *et al.*, 2010; Wright and Annes, 2016), these results show that the farm becomes more than the site of agricultural production, it stands as a civic instrument to serve social interests as well.

During these farm tours, tourists can learn, see, touch, and experience agricultural activities hands-on. Their different senses are stimulated, and this makes it a special experience. Some farmers give them the opportunity to pick their vegetables, others, to become shepherds and bring goats or sheep to the pasture. For the first time this year, Nadine plans to set up a trail: "this year, there will be a short 2-kilometer-long trail going through the farm. Just for them to see where the garlic is planted, have them discover our production." Tourists can then walk around the farm and have direct contact with agriculture, but they can also relax, enjoy the natural setting, and admire the landscape. As Alice says, "people are here to relax. Like people tell us... around here, it's so different. People enjoy themselves, they stroll around the farm". Our interviewees all emphasized calm and tranquillity as inherent characteristics of the countryside. In fact, in their discourses, all farmers oppose the countryside to the city. Whereas the city is described as "a space full of constraints," "with traffic jams" and "anonymity," the countryside is presented as a place of "freedom," "peaceful," and "friendly". Likewise, when the city is said to be "polluted" and "covered in concrete," the countryside is considered "pure" and "natural." However, the city is not always associated with negative features and the countryside with positive ones; it can be the other way around. For instance, the city can be viewed as a place for "multiple social interactions," with "numerous cultural events" and the countryside associated with "remoteness" and "desertification." Nevertheless, as shown by other authors in different contexts (Ericksson, 2010; Silva and Prista, 2016; Vepasalainen and Pitkanen, 2010), the opposition between the two spaces remains, and, in both circumstances,

farmers think tourists are coming to an unfamiliar place. Therefore, although agritourism, and particularly on-farm markets, bring rural and urban dwellers into close contact, it perhaps fails to establish a genuine dialogue, and may even contribute to reinforcing binary oppositions between the rural and the urban.

*“Remaining simple” or “providing maximum entertainment”: emergence of different strategies based on different rationalities*

Our results show that all farmers interviewed shared a common goal of creating a tidy, welcoming place for tourists. However, on closer examination of how our farmers set the farm up to welcome tourists, two different strategies emerge. Whereas some want to make sure that cleaning the farm and tidying it up does not mean hiding its productive function, others, on the contrary, want to minimize this function, particularly its negative aspects, such as dirt and smell. This leads to a “sanitization” of the farm, creating a place that might be desirable in tourists’ eyes, but at the same time reinforcing dominant cultural conventions and disregarding the specificity of the place. Likewise, if some farmers choose to stick to basic farmers’ market settings, with farm booths and no additional decoration or activity, others decide to provide a real array of additional activities that are more or less related to agriculture, in an attempt to satisfy consumers. Consequently, two different strategies emerge and can be placed on a continuum with, at one end, the idea of “remaining as simple as possible, with little staging and entertainment, in order to show tourists farmers in their actual living environment,” and at the other “staging the farm in order to provide tourists with entertainment, even if it implies submerging farm activities in the midst of other unrelated ones.”

Both strategies show a desire to overcome the ideal-typical front stage of tourist experience (MacCannell,1999) and to present tourists with a more authentic picture of agriculture. However, the degree to which they let tourists penetrate the back region of the farm

differs slightly. One strategy (“staying simple”) results in on-farm markets where the productive activity of the farm remains at the centre of the market. Very few artifices appear, and tourists have access to most, if not all, farm spaces: from the milking room to the nursery, or from the slaughter room to the fields. The setting of these markets is limited to a series of booths where food products are disposed with very few ornaments. Here, tourists get to have a closer look at the backstage region of the farm. If, in the other strategy (“providing entertainment”), most farm spaces are also open to the public, some others are hidden (such as the nursery where sick animals are treated), embellished (“it’s Versailles between the henhouse and the creek”) or aseptified (dirt, mud, manure must disappear). This second strategy leads to on-farm markets where the productive function of the farm fades away in favour of its leisure function. The extent to which tourists penetrate the farm backstage is therefore more limited as well as the authenticity of their farming experience.

In the following sections, we present each strategy. We show how they fit in with substantive and formal rationalities respectively and hold different consequences regarding reproduction of cultural conventions and experience of authenticity.

## **5. On-farm markets to build social bonds.**

When talking about the on-farm market, its organization, their reasons for developing it, or when thinking about the meaning they give to this activity, one third of our participants (n=6) tend to pay more attention to socially and culturally based considerations<sup>4</sup>. Among these producers, five are women and five come from a non-farm background. For them, farming was strongly related to their desire to live in the countryside. Four of them were not formally trained in agriculture but received a college degree in other disciplines (Table 3). They are involved in

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<sup>4</sup> Among the 15 farmers we interviewed, 6 strongly expressed substantive rationality, 4 were more aligned with formal rationality and 5 incorporated elements of both rationalities into their discourses and practices.

vegetable production (3), chicken and egg production (1), raising dairy cows for cheese production (1). The remaining farmer owns a horse farm and give riding classes. Their farm size is on the lower tier of the average farm size of our sample: from 2 to 25 hectares. They share the fact that profit maximization was not the main driver for engaging in farm tourism. In fact, their involvement was more related to a desire to connect with people and educate consumers by sharing their experience on the farm. Here, their rationality is more substantive (Weber, 1978). In our data, this form of rationality was expressed in: (1) their desire to stay simple and keep agriculture at the centre of the interaction with tourists, (2) their motivation to start the on-farm markets, and (3) their eagerness to encourage tourists to be more reflexive regarding food habits. In this section, we use data gathered from interviews with these six participants more aligned with substantive rationality.

### *Staying who we are*

Overall, farmers motivated by substantive rationality want agriculture itself to maintain a central position in the on-farm market. They tend to avoid any complicated staging, and certainly do not look upon their market as show. For Sylvie and her husband, who produce vegetables and practice on-farm direct selling all year around, “it’s really simple,” as they explained. “For our vegetables, we keep the same setting, in our barn, so that people will not be surprised. Outside the barn are the other producers’ stalls with their sunshades.” They set up tables for tourists who want to have a picnic on the farm, and, although they may provide “table cloths”, they admit that they “don’t go in for any other decoration.” In fact, as they said, they “try not to complicate the organization.”

These research participants also expressed a desire to not “artificialize” the relationship with visitors. A determination to remain “simple,” not to alter their image or identity was also apparent in our interviews. For instance, Séverine, a women farmer who managed a horse farm



and took in children and teenagers on her farm all year around, explained that, because welcoming guests is part of her daily routine, she tries to promote a friendly atmosphere. However, she insisted that she does not do anything else the day of the market because “that’s not [her] farm’s philosophy.” When prompted to elaborate on this idea, she told us that she wanted to stay “genuine,” to express sincerity in the way she presented herself, her farm and her activity. So, not deviating too much from their usual behaviour was put forward by some farmers. “Showing how we actually are and live,” “not lying” appeared frequently in some participants’ discourses. Hostile to any process of “folklorisation” or touristic simplification, these discourses reveal a determination to transmit an image of agriculture that is far removed from any nostalgic view, or reduced to a museum, or even an amusement park.

### *The origin of the market*

For farmers among our participants expressing this type of rationale, economic considerations are not the prime motive for getting involved in farm tourism, on-farm markets in particular. Having people visit the farm and improve their understanding of it were often put forward as reasons. For instance, recalling why she first organized an on-farm market, Alice, a chicken and egg producer, explained:

My motivation was to open the farm to the public, to gradually get them into the habit of coming to the farm to pick up their eggs, to meet us, see us, understand what we do and why, to sell directly on the farm and meet people.

This quote exemplifies the need expressed by some farmers to build up connections with consumers and promote genuine understanding. It also reveals that this understanding can be targeted on food and agricultural production (“to understand what we do”), or on farmers themselves (“to meet us” and “to understand what we do and why”). Making the farm into a place for social interaction and conviviality, in other words a sense of togetherness, parallels this desire to improve understanding. Séverine, the owner of a horse farm explained: “we want

to make this a place for exchange and sharing.” Christelle, a vegetable and beef producer told us: “Here, there is plenty of interaction going on. There are always people [customers] meeting, chatting...that’s also the goal of the whole thing.” She also mentioned her wish to overcome the isolation she feels on her farm. In fact; later during the interview, she continued: “they come and we talk. That’s why I did it in the first place. I was always in contact [with other people], I worked in different companies and then, all of a sudden, nothing... we’re isolated here. So it’s very important to me.” Like Christelle, other farmers mentioned their feeling of isolation on the farm (“We’re a little lonely on the farm” or “you don’t see many people around here”). These quotes thus suggest that agritourism and on-farm markets offer an environment where farmers can satisfy their need for social ties and overcome their isolation.

#### *Encouraging consumers to develop new food habits*

Individuals guided in their action by substantive rationality tend to be driven by values (McGehee, 2004). Food quality, food justice, re-establishing ties between producers and consumers, but also reconnecting consumers with the production of their food is central to farmers demonstrating this form of rationality. The on-farm market offers a way not only to share these ideals with tourists, but also to influence their behaviour as consumers. “We are trying to make people change their food habits, having them come on the farm” says Alice. These farmers are highly critical of the current agri-food system, which they perceive as “misleading,” “poisoning,” or even “slowly killing” people. Therefore, farmers take the opportunity of this direct interaction with consumers to express their point of view: “I try to explain what we are fed on a daily basis, it’s killing us slowly and nobody seems to realize (...). All these things we add to food!” Later, Patrick continues: “it’s also to show that we can have food that looks a little less pretty but is of better quality and so much more natural.” These farmers want to raise awareness about the direct impact the food people eat has on their health.

As suggested by Carine, selling a product that is ‘high quality’ seems crucial: “It’s important for me to know that I am selling something that is good for people’s health”. Within this form of rationality respondents tend to see their role as going beyond the mere production of food; their work also has a civic function.

Our data show that on-farm markets can become an opportunity for farmers to transmit a general message about food and the excesses of the agri-food system, and to raise consumers’ awareness. After they have attended the market, Carine believes that “when they [tourists] go to the supermarket, they are more careful about what they buy.” On-farm markets also offer scope for bringing the act of consuming and eating into the public sphere. For Patrick, the current food system precludes building a relationship of trust and understanding between producers and consumers. Conversely, the market brings together these two groups; buying and consuming food thus becomes a public action which can be discussed collectively.

#### *On-farm markets to build social bonds: concluding comments*

Farmers more aligned with “substantive rationality” are more likely to emphasize a need for social interaction and the construction of social bonds. As pointed out earlier, the modernization of agriculture and the transformation of rural space have both led to isolation for farmers. On-farm markets represent one strategy, among others, for overcoming isolation. Among the six participants more aligned with this form of rationality, five were from a non-farm background<sup>5</sup>. Echoing motivations often expressed by newcomers into farming (Cazella, 2001; Mundler and Ponchelet, 1999), they chose to farm because of a desire to become their own boss, to have a more flexible rural lifestyle, and to live in natural surroundings. Farming was a way to satisfy these wishes, but brought isolation along with it. Developing on-farm

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<sup>5</sup> Among these six farmers, Christelle, the vegetable and beef producer, is the only one who inherited the farm. However, she took over the farm after working for twenty years as a journalist in a large metropolitan center.

markets was a means for them to re-connect with other people and to encourage them to think about food and agricultural production. Raising social awareness and participating in the debates around the role of farming in contemporary French society is clearly a manifest function of the on-farm market for these farmers.

Interestingly, five of these interviewees are women. Recent rural scholarship focusing on farm women and agricultural diversification has shown that women tend to be more involved in farm tourism, and with direct selling and food processing, than men (Annes and Wright, 2015, 2016; Brandth and Haugen, 2011; Giraud, 2011; Giraud and Rémy, 2013). The need to overcome isolation, establish social ties, educate people on food production and rural life, and fulfil a vital civic function within their community provided a strong incentive for women to develop such initiatives (Annes and Wright, 2016). These conclusions give insight into the greater number of women expressing substantive rationality. However, given the small sample size, additional research would be needed into a possible link between substantive rationality and gender.

In conducting this research, we aimed at evaluating the extent to which setting-up a market on the farm allows tourists to have a more authentic experience and meaningful dialogue around food and agriculture. By maintaining a minimal staging and encouraging tourists to visit and observe all farm spaces, farmers following this form of rationality definitively give an opportunity to tourists to penetrate the backstage region of agriculture. We also aimed to evaluate if farmers' involvement in on-farm markets is an opportunity to challenge dominant representations portraying them as "the other." Farmers using this form of rationality foreground the educational component of the on-farm market. During these markets, they are indeed perceived as holding specific knowledge they want to share, while introducing tourists to the complexities of the agri-food system. This social position (knowledge holder) challenges traditional power relations between rural and urban dwellers. As educators faced with a

population whose knowledge of agriculture and rural life is often limited, farmers hold a position of authority.

We would finally like to underline how much, for these farmers, the on-farm market above all fulfils their need for social interaction and their desire to contribute to creating vibrant rural communities. Through these markets, they want to become active participants in community life and have no desire to be left aside. It is however noteworthy that the economic benefits generated by their on-farm markets are low, if they exist at all. This might well be a limiting factor in renewing and sustaining such initiatives over the years.

## **6. On-farm markets to generate additional income and entertain tourists**

When talking about their on-farm markets, just under one third (n=4) of farmers we interviewed tended to put forward more economically-based arguments and be more attuned to formal rationality (McGehee, 2004). Among these four farmers, three are men (Table 4). If they did not necessarily receive a formal education in agriculture, they all come from a farm background and inherited their farm from their parents. Maintaining and perpetuating their family heritage was a strong driver expressed by these participants. They are involved in goat cheese production (1), garlic and crop production (1), duck production (1) and wine production (1). Their farm sizes stand at the higher tier of the average size of our sample: from 32 to 70 hectares. All of them are involved in direct selling whether through traditional farmers markets, on-farm shops, on-line sales, or local businesses. Developing this commercialisation strategy constituted a break from what their parents were doing and was motivated by a desire to acquire autonomy. The setting-up of the on-farm market appears as being part of a larger commercial strategy to develop customers' loyalty. We found different expressions of formal rationality in their discourses and practices, notably in: (1) their motivations for starting the on-farm market, (2) their rhetoric, featuring vocabulary borrowed from marketing, and (3) the activities offered

the day of the market, geared to providing tourists with maximum entertainment. In this section, we use data gathered from interviews with these four participants more aligned with formal rationality.

*Origin of the market: part of a long-term strategy for gaining economic autonomy*

These farmers' motivations are expressed in economic terms. "It brings money in, that's the first thing. It brings money in during summer time" stated Thomas. "From a financial viewpoint, it works really well" says Jean-Pierre. Here, the decision to launch into farm tourism and direct selling falls within a long-term strategy geared toward economic autonomy. Before adopting these strategies, this group (or their parents if the family farm is inherited) sold their raw commodities to cooperatives. Suffering economically and tired of having their commodity prices fixed by others, they first decided to add value to their activities by selling directly and/or processing their products. Nadine, a garlic producer, is one of these farmers. She recalls: « we sold [our garlic] to the coop. It was easy to produce garlic and deliver it to the coop. But, we get paid what *they* want... cooperatives, it's always the same system." Thomas, a goat cheese producer, went through the same process. He explained that if he started processing milk into cheese, "it was for economic reasons." He remembers when he started farming in the early 2000s, "goat milk was extremely well-paid." However, as he said, "the problem is that everything fell apart, [the price of] cereals went up, the price of milk collapsed. We figured that we had to find a solution to keep going. Cheese was one." In this logic, organizing a market on the farm becomes part of a quest for economic autonomy and efficiency: "Not being dependent on all these market variables anymore, it's great! Being able to say: 'I don't owe you anything, I handle things myself'" summarizes Philippe. The on-farm market is thought through and then developed with this aim in view:

These new markets [On-farm markets] are more promising than regular farmers' markets, because there are so many of those that people can't go every day. When you

organize an event on site, people come more easily. They are less regular. We get more customers. (Jean-Pierre)

This quote by Jean-Pierre, a wine and Armagnac producer, is tinged with marketing rhetoric. On-farm markets are seen as a differentiated, rare, unique commodity which is more likely to attract consumers. In fact, Jean-Pierre's discourse reflects that of other farmers about the organization of the market, in its abundant use of marketing rhetoric: from describing the original idea to the organization, justification and outcomes.

### *The marketing/business rhetoric of the on-farm market*

This rhetoric finds expression in strategies to differentiate the activity and products offered to clients. In their discourse and practice, farmers aim to distance themselves from retailers and mass production: "There is not the industrialization side of things, the mass production. People like that, finding just the opposite, the complete opposite. They are interested in that." When employing this rhetoric, farmers use the term *terroir* to differentiate their unique products. "Products of the terroir," "here, we have a specific terroir," "the special features of our terroir" were commonly mentioned by our interviewees from this category. Interestingly, although they try to distance themselves from large retailers, they simultaneously borrow their terminology:

We are not a supermarket, we are not an ordinary shop. We spend time with clients (...), we explain about our product, we explain everything, including how to consume it. If we can, we give a recipe. We tell them that if they have a problem, they can call us, it's almost like an after sale service. (Jean-Pierre)

In this rhetoric, tourists are seen as customers that farmers should satisfy. "We are at our customers' service" says Philippe. He adds: "There is no small or big customer. There's just one customer that we have to pamper." Philippe has been organizing his on-farm market for a few years now and he thinks it is important not to forget that, even if "you get to know and recognize them [tourists], to develop friendships, you need to keep in mind that they also come to buy. They are customers." Customers thus become the target audience to attract to the farm and win their loyalty. In some circumstances, the market may then become part of an

advertisement strategy. Some farmers started their on-farm market as a way to make themselves known, “we needed publicity to attract people to the farm”. The market, the resulting relationship between farmers and visitors, their familiarity and friendliness, all these become ways to create customer loyalty. “After that, people are sure to buy the cheese. If they see goats in the fields, the farm, well, everything, when they go to a shop and see my products, they buy them, [because] they know where it’s from, how it’s made...”

Taken to the extreme, the emphasis on educating customers (explaining the production system, showing them the animals, the feed, or telling them about farming culture) becomes a means to trigger the act of purchase: “I explain everything. There are no wrong questions. I try to be really clear in my explanations. People feel secure, and it’s probably [as farmers] what we need to do to be able to sell.” “If they are happy, then they will buy your products.”

#### *On-farm markets: maximum entertainment*

On-farm markets whose organizers express this type of rhetoric are markets where entertainment becomes a central component of the tourist experience. Farmers want tourists/customers to have a unique, positive experience, which is out of the ordinary and corresponds to their idealized perception of rural life:

During the tour, I only show them positive aspects, and I put it all in a beautiful gift wrap! It’s normal. When you’re on holidays, you don’t want to see... you don’t want to walk in the muck. For them, it’s always idyllic and that is what they need to come away with. (Thomas)

These on-farm markets tend to rely on the staging of a mixture of agricultural/rural elements and other elements not related to agriculture. In fact, our data show a decline in the agricultural content of the market. These markets feature agricultural and rural material encounters (livestock, old machinery displays, etc.) and practices (demonstrations, visits, tours, etc.) and other material encounters (art and craft) and practices (music, dancing classes, hot air balloon tours, inflatable kids’ games, etc.).



Next to the traditional farmers' market, some organize art or craft shows with local artists. Speaking about the market he was going to organize on his farm, Thomas explained that there would be "wine and other terroir products," but also "everything you can think of: craft ironworkers, a cutlery maker, jewellers, painters." Some farmers dwelled on wanting tourists to have "fun on the farm," "to enjoy," "to have a good time." They wanted to create an event which tourists would remember and which would also meet tourists' expectations. This is the point Jean-Pierre is making when he explains: "Of course we have decorations. We borrow lighting equipment and have party lights in different colours. People from elsewhere come here looking for that party atmosphere and friendliness our region is known for." Jean-Pierre wants to be sure his on-farm market is up to tourists' expectations. For some farmers this means sparing no expense. Staging the farm and attracting people can involve a range of activities: setting up a children's playground, organizing hot air balloon tours, giving dance classes or hiring a band for live music are amongst those noted during the on-farm markets we studied. The following quotes illustrate some of these activities:

We have activities, live music, last year we had country music and square dance for beginners, we had a Zumba class. We set up activities so that people enjoy themselves and have fun during their evening on the farm. We have a kids' playground with inflatable games. This year, I don't know, I think we'll have a make-up booth for kids? We also have local organizations coming and displaying their paintings, their sewing work. (Philippe)

Last year, we also had a hot-air balloon for those who wanted to see the countryside from above. There was a bouncing castle for kids. Then, as usual, I gave a tour of the farm, a tour in a carriage that usually works well. This year, to have even more fun, I wanted to exhibit some animals and people would have to guess their weight. The one who got the closest to the actual weight would get a prize. (Jean-Pierre)

Agriculture-related activities have become just one part of this entertainment. And the staging usually comes complete with slick, well-organized publicity. Agriculture and rural life are presented to tourists as a spectacle. Holloway (2004, p.322) noted that "the performance of agriculture as spectacle frequently includes displays of vintage machinery." This was also the case in our data where farmers would display old tractors for example. Traditional country dances or music were other forms of entertainment re-enacting tradition and the past.

‘Agriculture as spectacle’ also appears in our data in the farmers’ concern for creating an ideal farm with a variety of small animals that would correspond to those used to illustrate children’s books.

*On-farm markets to generate addition income and entertain tourists: concluding comments*

Our results show that farmers who echo elements of “formal rationality” in their discourse and practices tend to anticipate consumers’ demand when it comes to experiencing agriculture and rural life, or being entertained in a natural environment. As explained by one interviewee obeying this form of rationality “you give them what they want.” This standpoint can have different implications when it comes to power relations. Anticipating tourists’ demand could certainly be seen as farmers wielding power, if we argue that farmers hold control over the services and activities offered. However, following Giraud’s argument (2007), a second interpretation can also be suggested. In fact, Giraud contends that anticipating tourists’ demand is less a sign of farmers’ power than “the assertion of the power that tourists hold” (2007, p24). By capitalizing on cultural codes, such as when they recreate an ideal farm for tourists similar to those seen in children’s books, farmers are offering a “simulacra” (Baudrillard, 1981). They are giving concrete existence to oversimplified images. By doing so, they may be constructing a narrative which neither reflects the complexity and tensions of contemporary agriculture, nor foregrounds some set/fixed portrayal of rural culture. In that case, by opening their farm to the public, farmers do not necessarily provide tourists with an authentic experience of agricultural and rural life. Despite being on the farm, tourists’ access to the backstage region of agricultural production appear limited.

Interestingly, all farmers strongly expressing formal rationality mentioned the profits made from their initiatives. In addition, they all recognized these markets play a major role in showcasing the farm and farm products. One may therefore wonder if the economic success of such initiatives relies upon farmers’ incorporating dominant cultural conventions. These

farmers also said that their on-farm markets attracted a wide audience, ranging from people informed and concerned about food production, to others more inclined to come to the farm just to be entertained. Playing on cultural conventions would seem to enable farmers to attract this public. Having them on the farm enjoying the entertainment provided, but also taking them on a farm tour, showing them how to milk ewes or explaining the composition of goats' feed, might be a first step to introducing them to agriculture and engaging them in thinking about the reality of farming and food production.

Finally, if farmers more affiliated with substantive rationality clearly set up their on-farm market to participate in social debates around food consumption and agricultural practices, farmers more affiliated with formal rationality might do it for other reasons. For them, it would be inaccurate to state that generating profit stands as the only function of their market. As shown in our data, these farmers also aim at educating consumers. However, they are more embedded in a rhetoric of justification ("we want to show them [consumers] we don't do anything wrong), a desire to build bridges and reduce conflicts, even if it means playing on dominant cultural conventions and giving/telling tourists what they want to see/hear.

## **7. Conclusion**

In line with previous studies in different contexts (Brandth and Haugen 2014, Giraud 2007, Wright and Annes, 2014), we see that the staging of agriculture and rural life is clearly a central component of on-farm tourism initiatives. In a rural space which has been undergoing significant social and economic transformations for several decades now (Hervieu and Puseigle, 2015), agritourism in general, and on-farm markets in particular, give farmers an opportunity to gain control of their own image, and that of agriculture and rural life. As suggested by rural scholars, the social reconfiguration of rural space, together with the restructuring of French agriculture, has increased farmers' vulnerability (Banos and Candau, 2014; Deffontaines, 2014; Nicourt, 2013). Indeed, a decreasing farm population, increasing farm sizes, the globalization

of agricultural markets, but also the arrival of new residents in farmers' working space, which often entails growing land pressure and the emergence of land-use conflicts, all these lead to new working constraints for the farming population. Farmers are under constant pressure and feel they are being observed, judged and criticized. As summarized by Nicourt (2013, p. 265), "without moving out, they [farmers] became strangers in their own place of living." In short, for several decades now, farmers have experienced a feeling of alienation (Deffontaines, 2014; Mer, 2004/5). This is why developing on-farm tourism appears not only to be a way to satisfy tourists' desire for rural life, but also to diversify sources of income, whilst creating new social bonds. In the process, farmers challenge the feeling of disempowerment they experience in controlling their image. Through their on-farm market, they become the choreographers of rural life and craft an identity they see as more fitting. Conducting this research, our goal was to investigate an emerging agritourism initiative in the French context (on-farm markets), as a new site of, not only market exchange, but also knowledge exchange around agriculture. Our hypothesis was that on-farm markets might hold greater promises for the re-linking of the farming and the non-farming populations than traditional farmers' markets. In that regard, our data suggest that the way farmers stage and perform agriculture and rurality in the on-farm market setting appears to be different by allowing tourists to come closer to the backstage region of agricultural production.

Of course, the staging occurring during these on-farm markets does not go without pitfalls. Moving the site of exchange from village squares (where farmers' markets traditionally take place) to the farm, does not necessarily mean a complete entrance into the backstage region. Our results suggest that farmers also play with and capitalize on existing cultural conventions, notably by representing rural space and their farm as a place of relaxation, away from the bustle of the city, a place for celebrating nature and the simple life. Playing with these codes can certainly be interpreted as reinforcement of dominant cultural conventions. In that regard,

farmers clearly subscribe to the idealisation of the rural. However, this should not be equated with a loss of agency. Socially, geographically, and culturally isolated from the non-farming population (Banos and Candau, 2014; Caquot-Baggett and Annes, 2016), playing with these cultural conventions might offer a way for them to establish ties by focusing on shared references. Moreover, it is important to note that farmers' representations of the rural do not always exploit the rural idyll, they might also challenge it. During these markets, farmers avoid presenting themselves or their appearance in a way that would celebrate a nostalgic and idealized picture of the French peasant. Nor do their farms only stand for places of relaxation and leisure; during these on-farm markets, they also become educational spaces, with farmers taking advantage of the market to educate tourists about agricultural, environmental and food issues.

This research also aimed at linking the staging of the rural and agriculture with farmers' rationality. In other words, we attempted to link behaviour to ideology. As shown in our results, if our interviewees share common staging and choreographic devices when setting up their on-farm market (such as cleaning, tidying up the farm, or organizing farm tours and visits), two different rationales also emerged. These rationales hold different implications when it comes to the extent to which tourists' reach the backstage region of agricultural production, and, consequently, a more authentic picture of agriculture. Our research actually indicates that farmers do not necessarily enact the same representations of agriculture and rural life. We showed that two, partly contradictory approaches, resulting from widely different rationalities exist, and that these produce different images. Both are a response to needs perceived as important by our interviewees: the need to overcome isolation and the need to remedy an economic shortfall. One can ask if these strategies (i.e., expression of different rationalities) can be linked to farmers' characteristics. Given the small size of our sample, it appears difficult to answer this question. Our results show that farmers expressing most strongly formal rationality

and who developed direct selling (and on-farm tourism) to secure farm revenues, all inherited the family farm, which constitute a family heritage they try to preserve and transmit. Farmers expressing more strongly substantive rationality and who started their on-farm market to, first of all, overcome isolation and educate people, were all, but one, not from a farming background. Starting to farm was the result of a personal choice or a decision taken with a spouse answering a life project, but not necessarily as an obligation toward a family heritage. In addition, women were over represented (5 out of 6) in this group more aligned with substantive rationality. Alignment with a specific rationality results from the combination of different factors, among which stand motivations for farming, conception of farmer's role, background (farm versus non-farm), but also gender appear to play a specific role. Additional research is required to further analyse how different combinations of such factors might influence farmers' expression of rationality and, consequently, their staging of agriculture.

Finally, we would like to refer to a limitation in our research. Since our data derived from semi-structured interviews with farmers, our results are specifically and exclusively based on their discourses. The perspective of tourists was not considered nor their characteristics. Further researches should question tourists' reception of such initiatives to assess the extent to which their vision of agriculture is challenged following their participation in on-farm markets. Furthermore, questioning tourists' origin (urban versus rural, farmer versus non-farmer) can be relevant in order to evaluate how "host" farmers adapt their discourse (and their representation of agriculture) depending on their audience. In fact, tourists attending these markets might not all come from urban areas: other rural dwellers or even farmers might attend also. In addition, future research focusing on on-farm markets should incorporate participant observations in its methodology. Social interactions occurring during such events are not only the product of a pre-planned strategy. Conducting participant observations could shed light on the spontaneity which might occur during interactions between farmers and tourists.

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