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Which purpose for pastoral lands in French cattle-breeding intensification? The keys to improving and exploiting European pastoral zones imported by French agronomists (1940's-1950's)

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- ▶ 7th Biennial Conference of the European Rural History Organisation – Science to the Rescue? Applied Research and Pastoral Lands in Europe (1945-Nowadays)

Which purpose for pastoral lands in French cattle-breeding intensification? The keys to improving and exploiting European pastoral zones imported by French agronomists (1940's-1950's)

Charlène Bouvier

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Introduction

- Chapter of my thesis
 - Structuration of french grassland agronomy from 1946 to 1974
 - Grassland and pastoral lands as complex objects
 - Question french agricultural modernization



Sheep grazing on pastoral land of the Larzac plateau in the 1970's (France)

Introduction

- Creation of the Inra in 1946 and the beginning of grassland agronomy
- Catching up with foreign agricultures
- Joining international scientific exchanges
- Two main types of contributions



Sheep grazing on pastoral land of the Larzac plateau in the 1970's (France)



1. Scientific contributions: understanding botanical evolutions

1.1. British grassland ecology

- Ley-farming system
- Grassland as a phase of the ecological succession
- Permanent grasslands and pastoral lands as climax
 - "Can we, by agronomic methods, level up all these different types ranging from ryegrass to Nardus and bring the poorest up to the level of the present best. What would a "potentiality" map of the grasslands of England and Wales look like ? I think it would be a very simple affair and need have no more than two major types of grassland shown on it, namely (a) the ryegrass-clover group of leys on the lowlands and (b) the Agrostis-clover group of leys on the higher hills above 1000 feet."

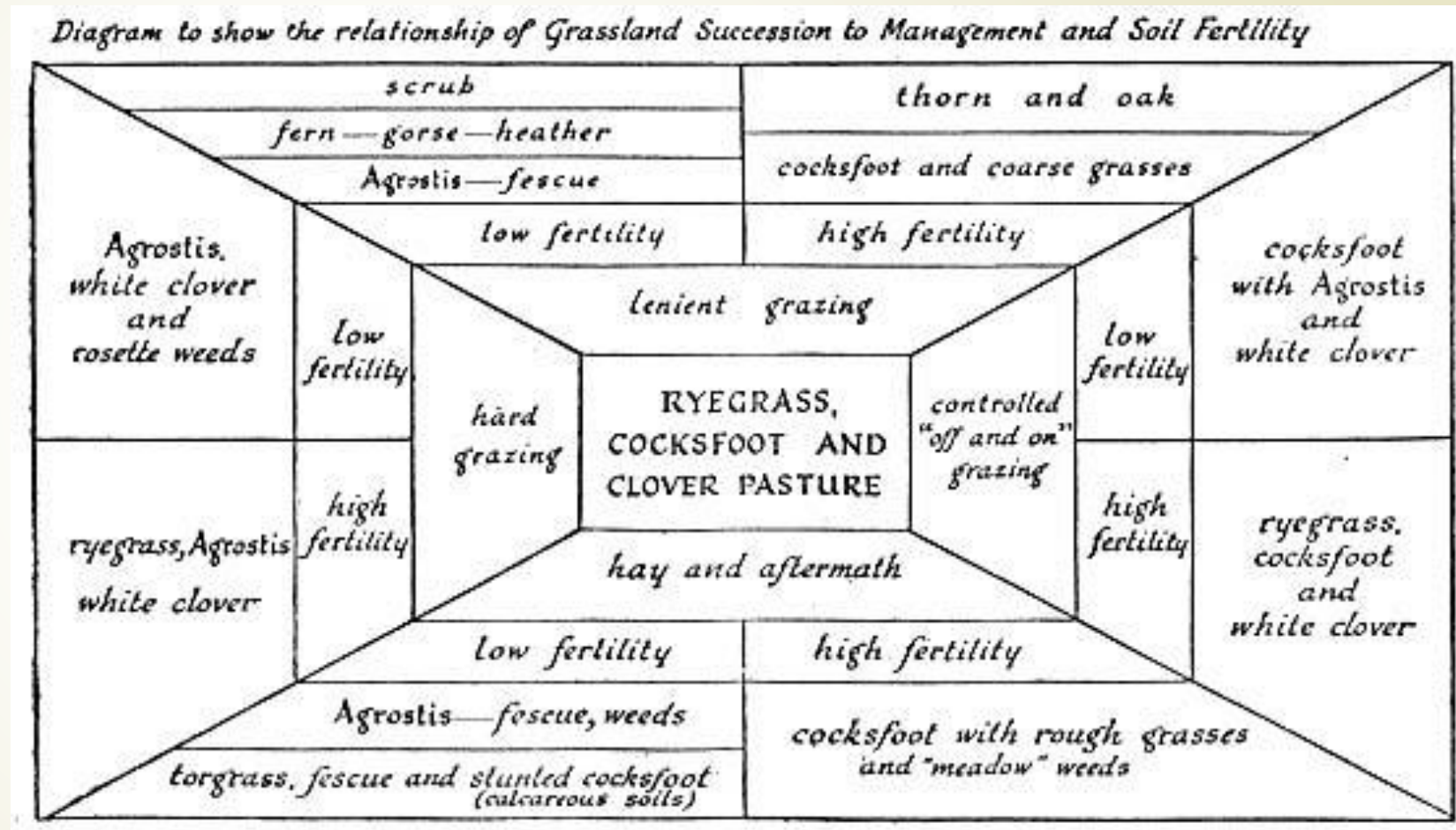
DAVIES William, "Grassland as a biotic community", *The Journal of the British Grassland Society*, n° 3, vol. 3, 1948, p. 175.

- Management practices to reach ecological potential

1. Scientific contributions: understanding botanical evolutions

1.1. British grassland ecology

- Theory of ecological succession imported in France by Louis Hédin
- Concept of "grassland agroclimax" (agroclimax prairial)
- Lack of scientific tools




STAPLEDON Georges et DAVIES William, *Ley Farming*, 2nd ed. (1948)., London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1941.



1. Scientific contributions: understanding botanical evolutions

1.2. Dutch phytosociology

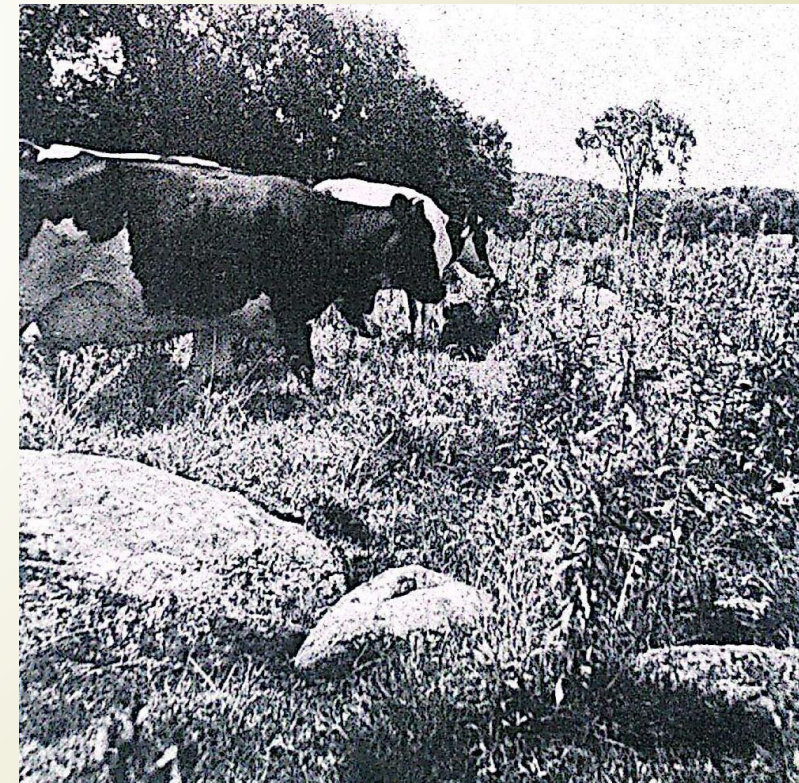
- Articles written by Marius Dinand de Vries
 - Development of phytosociology
 - Mixing phytosociology and agronomy: a method to list species and give herbaceous covers an agronomic value
 - Imported by Louis Hédin
- 

2. Practical contributions: complementarity between types of herbaceous covers

2.1. United-States of America

- "Productivity mission" in 1951
- Cattle breeding for beef production on the hills of the "Cotton Belt"
- "For the past twenty years, faced with the ever-growing threat of erosion ravaging the light, decalcified soils of the East, soil conservation services have been campaigning intensively to encourage farmers to expand grassland areas and improve existing pastures."
- "nothing comparable, as we can see to the feeding grounds of the Pays d'Auge or Charolais, or even the 'mountains' of Auvergne"

Cattle grazing pastoral lands in order to renovate them
Enquête en vue de l'accroissement de la productivité. « Production fourragère ».
Mission française aux États-Unis. 15 juillet – 17 septembre 1951, Ministère de
l'Agriculture, 1951.



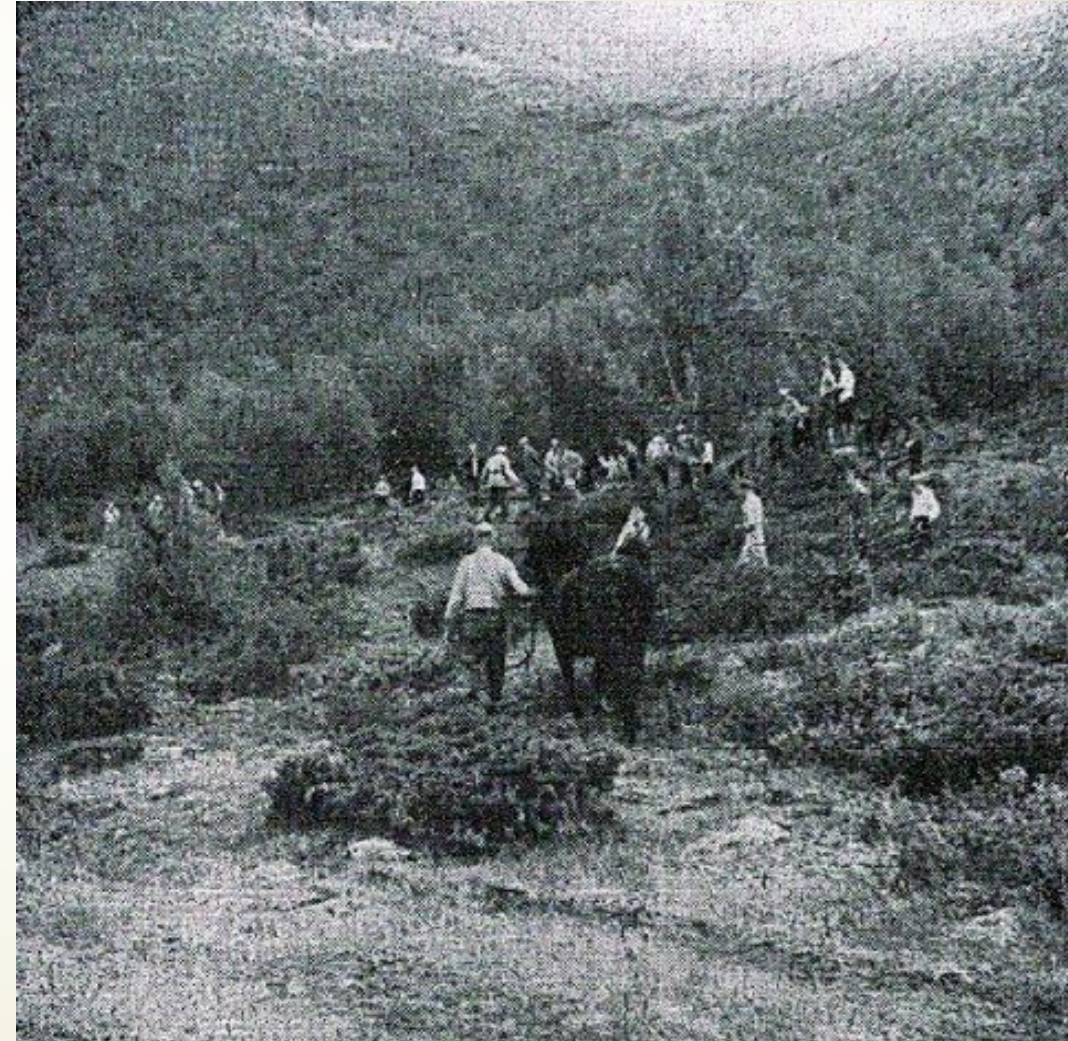
2. Practical contributions: complementarity between types of herbaceous covers

2.2. Northern Europe

- René Dumont's travel in 1953
- The central role of temporary grasslands
- From forest to communal pastures
- Social measure to keep mountains cultivated

Tree felling in a Norwegian mountain pasture

Dumont René, *Progrès fourragers dans les pays scandinaves et en Grande-Bretagne*, Paris, Éditions SADEP, 1954, p. 32.





Conclusion

- French agronomists turned towards foreign agricultures and agronomies
 - Scientific contributions: useful concepts and methodologies
 - Practical contributions: farming practices
 - A real interest for pastoral lands and permanent grasslands: taking advantage of every forage resources
 - An ecological or territorial approach
 - A key lesson learned: grasslands and pastoral lands to protect soils
- 