THE FRENCH REGIONS’ WHITE PAPER

for Sustainable Agriculture and Responsible Food

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Towards renewed public action and reinforced regional action to meet the challenge of transforming agriculture and food systems.

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We, the Regions and Territorial Collectivities of Metropolitan France and the French Overseas Departments, are invested in the process of transforming our agriculture and food systems. This transformation will require targeted measures, introduced in our regional policies and numerous regional plans. Our agriculture, food and rural development policies have been reinforced in recent years through various territorial reform laws, particularly by the Common Agricultural Policy’s (CAP) second pillar financial tools and through regional Rural Development Programmes (RDP), which each Region now has the responsibility to run and manage on its territory. Certain constraints have slowed our efforts. Nevertheless, we already notice the positive effects of our actions in maintaining farmers in the business and, beyond that, providing them with long-term structuring perspectives.

Today, many players in the agriculture profession, representatives of civil society and local elected officials have a strong desire for the Regions to further support the necessary transformation of agriculture and food systems, in proximity.

We also observed this desire at the national level within the French National Food Conference that took place in late 2017 in France, having been earnestly involved in this national debate. We took part in most of the thematic workshops despite a dense schedule and co-presided Workshop 14, the only transversal workshop, entitled “Prepare for the Future: Which Research, Investments and Technical Support for a Better Environmental, Health, Social and Economic Results?”

One year after these discussions, however, our feelings are mixed. Overall, the participants had a good, balanced vision of the desired transition, corresponding to both a predominantly economic “sectors” logic and a “territories” logic, mindful of the transition’s multiple dimensions. Though there are numerous implementation plans within the propositions corresponding to this “sectors” approach, we regret that no major initiatives have been planned to implement propositions with a territorial dimension or primacy. This hemiplegia could jeopardise the hope for transformation that a large majority of our fellow citizens, our farmers and all our Regions’ economic players have expressed.

In parallel, and as the CAP’s future is under debate at the European level, this absence of the territorial component from the French National Food Conference’s conclusions calls into question France’s will to carry the strong message of a CAP that responds to the territories’ needs and the stakes of the systems’ transformation.

The issue of agriculture and food is too important for our Regions to stay in the background. It impacts all our territories, their environment, their economy and the longevity of their material and immaterial cultural heritage. This is why, during this critical time for the future of agriculture and food, the Regions have formalised a credible project to meet the challenges of multifunctional agriculture on both the European and world fronts, and of healthy, quality sustainable food, accessible to all.

To reach this goal, we, the Regions, wish to reaffirm and clearly state in this White Paper the central role we intend to play. We call upon all concerned stakeholders - economic players, representatives of civil society, state and other levels of territorial collectives - to join us.

HERVÉ MORIN,  
President of Régions de France
Our Vision and Objectives for Tomorrow’s Agriculture and Food

Our vision: multifunctional agriculture rooted in its territory in order to promote healthy, quality, sustainable food, accessible to all.

The agriculture and agro-food sectors create the most jobs and wealth for our territories. Furthermore, our agriculture and food are a vehicle for social connection and an integral part of our regional and national cultural heritage and, thus, their worth goes beyond the monetary dimension. Though faced with the challenges of environmental resource preservation and climate change, our agriculture can also provide solutions to respond to these environmental challenges and maintain cohesion and prosperity in our territories. Yet, these sectors are faced with numerous uncertainties and ever-growing difficulties in a globalised economy and subjected to the impacts of climate change. These difficulties are particularly complicated in the Overseas Regions and Collectivities.

This is why the French Regions believe that relaunching territorial food economies and responding to new societal expectations are key issues when it comes to the future of our territories, farmers and fellow citizens. These challenges can only be met through a vigorous agriculture and food transition process. This transition must be on both the macro level – meaning for territories and sectors – and the micro level, for each farm or agro-food business. Only by means of concurrent action, in synergy at these two levels, will this transition grow and thereby reach completion. Thus, the French Regions call for a transition that will allow for the future achievement of:

- **Multifunctional agriculture:** meaning agriculture that is more efficient than it currently is on both the economic front (if it is to continue to exist in the short term) but also on the social and environmental fronts (if it is to have the necessary human and natural resources to exist in the future). This multifunctionality must be sought on the farming or agro-food business level by reinforcing the company director’s decisions and encouraging him/her to have a “360°” perspective of his/her activity. The agricultural system’s multifunctionality relies mainly on an approach combining agronomy, ecology, economy - most notably in completing material cycles - and in recreating connections at the farming or territorial level between the livestock and crop sectors. Beyond the scope of farming, multifunctionality will only be achieved in crossing sector and territory strategies and in taking advantage of new opportunities to create value like bioeconomy (energy and material sectors, green chemistry, etc.), especially by reinforcing and valorising research, development, innovation and agriculture.

- **Healthy, quality, sustainable food, accessible to all:** Food is not a marketing commodity like the others; it fulfils a vital need. Furthermore, food has a cultural heritage value in France that must be protected and promoted. This justifies speaking of a “food exception” and considering the food question as an issue to take into account transversally within public policies. The valorisation of our food must not be a pretext to oppose the systems. First, French consumers’ increasing expectations spur the development of short distribution channels, upscaling, and differentiation. Furthermore, France’s role as exporter must be maintained when it comes to positioning itself on the European and global levels in terms of quality products and valorising our health and environmental excellence. Finally, there are opportunities for various systems, so long as they are sustainable, fair for farmers, from the North and South, respond to a demand and produce healthy, quality, sustainable food, accessible to all.

- **Agriculture and food reclaim their central place in our economy and territories.** Our agriculture must be relocated because it is a source of value, beyond the food it produces. In aiming for multifunctionality, agricultural systems are likely to provide - more than they already do - positive externalities for the environment, the fight against climate change, employment, etc. Our agriculture is a source of value and solutions to, for example, stock carbon, create energy, materials, maintain landscapes and biodiversity. By virtue of their potential, agriculture and food are excellent reservoirs for employment and value creation. In order for agriculture and food to regain and sustainably hold this central place, the created value must finally be shared more fairly between those who create it.

**OUR OBJECTIVES**

The propositions in this White Paper must help reach the following specific objectives:

- Ensure fair income for farmers and provide security for farms in the face of climatic and health hazards, as well as market risks, in order to meet the challenge of economic resilience and competitiveness;
- Valorise the multiple-use aspect of agriculture and the forest, of production of profit goods (food and non-food sectors) and non-profit goods (environmental and social);
- Respond to environmental and climate change-related issues;
- Meet the challenge of generational renewal in agriculture;
- ...in service of a transversal objective to support the transformation of agriculture and food systems toward multi-performance.
Our propositions to support the transformation of agriculture and food systems

To help reach these objectives, the Regions provide 24 propositions. These are the fruits of a co-construction with the concerned stakeholders who intend to form the strategic base for the shared agriculture and food transition on the national level, while accounting for the reality of various factors and territorial contexts. These propositions target public policies, initiatives and projects to support - or even systematise - as well as governance and the necessary means for their success.

Initiate, experiment, comprehend and valorise innovative and bottom-up approaches

Whether they initiate from private of public stakeholders, concern all or part of the food chain, or even the non-food chain, focus on environmental, economic and/or social issues, innovative approaches aiming to support the transformation of agriculture and food systems abound. No matter the geographical perimeter covered, these approaches all come from the territories and are often the fruit of trials. When they arise bottom up and from real situations, these approaches help implement teaching by example and help change practices.

In parallel, while the 2014 French Law for the Future of Farming created the notion of the “Projet Alimentaire Territorial” (PAT) in reality it only corresponds to a small fraction of projects aiming to develop proper territorial food systems2. Thus, the French Regions propose to:

1. Implement an observation and monitoring system for agriculture and food transition projects at the regional and national levels. The observation of PATs (territorial food projects) make up a much too narrow field of territorial approaches and projects that help the transition of agriculture and food systems. First, not all territorial projects that create value around agriculture biomass have a food-related purpose and, moreover, certain projects can respond simultaneously to several issues (food and energy-related issues, for example). Finally, the PAT label corresponds to certain precise criteria and, thus, excludes a large number of projects. In order to spread the projects and - whenever possible and pertinent - reproduce them, it is necessary to already be able to widely identify, characterise and build on territorial projects aiming to create value from agricultural biomass.

2. Accelerate and intensify the impact of research, innovation and development, especially through use of digital technology. The massive transformation of farm practices will occur through pursuing and reinforcing research, development and innovation in this sector. Digital technology especially is now part of farmers’ everyday lives. The data they produce is a gold mine when it comes to ensuring the transition of systems, provided the use of this data remains accessible to all and does not only serve the interests of a few. The use of digital data produced within trial networks on the farm are, for example, an effective way to test and evaluate practices and innovative technologies in real conditions and time, helping advance the agriculture transition. With this type of digital based “research-action”, practices and innovative tools become more largely transferable on farms.

3. Conduct large scale testing of innovative transition procedures within territories or test sites (For example, in French Regional Natural Parks or in farms related to agricultural schools, etc.): Based on the identified successful conditions, Regional Natural Park territories and agricultural high school sites are great laboratories to put these procedures in place and allow for feedback of experiences in “real conditions”.

4. Support collective approaches and territorial engineering. Whether they involve the same types of players (farmers’ groups, for example) or several players in the sector, collective approaches must be supported and prioritised since they allow for a faster “best practices” transfer and are a source of bottom-up innovation which, by definition, is better adapted to the territories’ challenges and needs. This support must, to the greatest possible extent, be concretised by factoring in the time needed for the collective work in the total cost of multi-player projects subsidised by public authorities. The collectively implemented projects must also receive more public subsidies than if they were implemented individually.

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1. Territorial Food Project
2. Cf. Rennes’ Declaration of Regions of 4 July 2014 for Territorialised Food Systems
As the challenges that players in the life sciences sector must face are multiplying, it is now obvious that sectors logic alone is not enough to meet the systems’ transformation challenges. The sectors logic has shown its advantages when it comes to achieving goals in economic performance, but its compartmentalisation keeps it from seizing new opportunities at the crossroads – or at the frontier – of “traditional” sectors.

This is how promising concepts like bioeconomy, which encompasses all production and biomass transformation activities - whether for food production purposes, animal feed, biosourced materials or energy - have emerged.

Meanwhile territorial logics, which are not opposed but complimentary to the sectors, are more transversal by nature. They guarantee a better inclusion of all of sustainable development’s pillars.

Ultimately, neither of these two logics are now sufficient on their own. Because the new opportunities to create value – and, especially, to extract it most efficiently at its source - are at the crossroads of sector strategies and territorial advantages, the Regions propose to:

5. **Support the creation and development of territorialised sectors by calling for regionalised projects.** The goal of this proposition is to create new opportunities for economic development through the emergence of new industrial sectors, as well as to modernise and renew more “traditional” sectors of activity in hopes of preserving employment. It would most notably include support for projects aiming to create shared industrial units or their reconversion (toward organic, for example), the sharing of technical skills among companies of the same sector in order to mutualise their research and development works, implementation of collaborative tools, etc. For the sake of proximity and in order to align with opportunities offered at a territorial level, the calls for national projects (for example, the Investment for the Future Programme) must be regionalised, which does not prevent – when pertinent – the implementation of inter-regional measures. *(cf. proposition n°18)*

6. **Establish regional sector contracts.** Drafted by regional sector committees uniting all foodchain, institutional stakeholders or NGO’s, these contracts are established on the basis of a diagnostic that lists the sector’s advantages and weaknesses on a regional level, as well as the issues it must face. The contract details the objectives to meet as well as a pluriannual programme of actions. In turn, the Region and the other contract co-signatories commit to supporting the programme’s measures that will favour the transformation of food systems towards multifunctionality and their own political priorities. These contracts are not duplicates of equivalent processes at the national level (regarding the sector’s plans, for example) because their purpose is to respond to the territories’ particular issues. The two procedures, top-down and bottom-up, still need to be reciprocally disclosed and taken into account as part of renovated national governance *(see below).*

7. **Create value through signs of quality and territorial brands.** At the national level, Regions propose to draft a chart of reciprocal recognition between the official signs of quality and origin, as well as territorial brands and banners. These are two complimentary tools to make French quality and origin a standard in order to support and promote the consumption of French products within and beyond our borders. At the regional level, it will consist in concretising the long-awaited and discussed principle of designing a single point of contact, run by the Region, in order to promote and export agriculture and food products in Europe and throughout the world.

8. **Develop the bioeconomy through the European-Regional axis.** The bioeconomy opens new perspectives of opportunity to players in the agriculture and food sectors and, moreover, promotes innovation and job creation. Thanks to their research, development and innovation competences, and through the Regional Scheme of Economic Development, Innovation and Internationalisation (SRDE-II) they are developing, the Regions can unite and support various players within the territories. With their strong ability to federate and their proximity, the Regions propose to reinforce their support for European project implementation, especially within the Horizons 2020 programme, which will constitute, after 2020, opportunities for increased funding in agriculture and food sectors within a strained European financial framework.
Food is at the heart of a complex paradox. On one hand, consumers and citizens, or at least some of them, seem to be increasingly mindful and demanding about the origin and quality of the products they consume, in the broadest sense. They potentially have access to increasingly diversified and segmented food. And yet, despite this, the French as a whole do not eat better than they did in the past. To the contrary, the increasing dependence on transformed and ultra-transformed products and the excess or insufficiency of certain types of foods or nutrients raises the question of our food’s environmental footprint and its impact on human health. Finally, the access to diversified, healthy and sufficiently nutritious food is not given in certain territories of the Republic; in certain socially underprivileged territories or in French overseas territories, for example. Behind this paradox lies the risk of contradictory approaches to diet and the illusion of a food transition that, in reality, is not one.

In order for the food transition to proceed and allow for healthy, quality, sustainable and truly accessible food, the Regions propose to:

**9. Inform, educate and put into practice responsible food choices within the educational system, particularly in high schools.** The Regions ask the State to integrate the “eating well” concept into the academic programmes, and to train school teachers and intendents on this subject. In parallel to these theoretical contributions for pedagogical purposes, the Regions would be able to intervene and help implement new eating habits in high schools within their competence.

**10. Make collective catering one of the main motors for responsible food choices and a territorial rooting of agriculture and food.** At a time when the proportion of meals eaten outside the home continues to grow, systematically setting and reaching a certain quantity of organic, quality and/or local products in collective catering under the Regions’ responsibility provides great leverage to educate and implement responsible food choices. It is also a way to act on demand and thus support quality regional agricultural production that is upgraded vis-à-vis the consumer. Setting a goal is the first step but giving oneself the means and tools to reach it is essential. Moreover, in keeping with the actions they already carry out in this field, the Regions ask to gain leadership competence when it comes to procurement of local and sustainable food. Such competence would allow collectives in the same regional territory (regions, departments, inter-municipalities and municipalities) to optimise their investments in logistic or transformation tools, in relation to the needs expressed by providers and buyers.

**11. Set up local programmes to fight against food insecurity and waste.** Even if these two issues are not exclusively linked, juxtaposing them highlights how absurd our production and consumption modes are. In France, they incite us to throw out the equivalent of one meal per week while a growing percentage of the world population cannot sufficiently feed itself. For the Regions, a good number of solutions to these two issues can be found on a local level and rely on solidarity and the pragmatism of proximity. Thus, the Regions call for support of responses that come from and are grounded in - the territories, particularly via European structural funds managed in close proximity to territories.

**12. Contribute to a national, European and international advocacy effort in favour of the “Food Transition – Territorial Development” duo.** Food security and sovereignty will become an increasingly central issue: In 2050 our planet will house 9 billion inhabitants, increasingly concentrated in urban zones. Faced with the possible threat of a deregulated globalised economy, the Regions believe it is necessary to replace the food systems at the forefront of sustainable territorial development at all levels. Furthermore, the State must more effectively implicate the Regions in EU-Third Country negotiations of trade agreements, which heavily impact our agriculture and jobs. Likewise, when it comes to international regulations, the Regions must be able to participate in works formalising French positions.
Our propositions to support the transformation of agriculture and food systems

Simplify access to public aide and redirect it toward transition, starting with the projects of sector stakeholders and territories

Within the constrained context of public spending and the need to demonstrate better efficiency in this area, as with the Common Agricultural Policy, the public authority must be concerned about its action’s leverage effect. For the pertinent and transforming projects, the beneficiaries must legitimately be able to have simpler and more direct access to public support. Access to aide often takes up too much of the energy that should be devoted to the project itself. French Regions thus propose to redirect public support, particularly of those aides it manages, toward the transition of agriculture and food systems and to simplify access to these aides. Thus, they propose to...

...at the business or group of businesses level:

13. Create contracts of territorial transition toward multifunctionality (CTT), be they individual or collective, to accompany farmers’ risk in changing their practices as they head toward multifunctionality. Beginning with an exploitation and territorial assessment to identify opportunities for progress, these contracts will define results and a trajectory by which to attain them. Once these results are met, these contracts will be financially supported by CAP European credits (European Agricultural Funds for Rural Development EAFRD), the Regions and national or local co-financers, depending on the territorial issues and objectives. They will replace current aides for investments, education, council, cooperation (for certain collective contracts) and a part of agro-environmental measures that currently aim to convert a very specific means of production (organic conversion) or respond to certain specific or territorialised issues. The allocations to young farmers would likewise be included in this context because they are also contracts established with young farmers on the basis of a business development project.

14. Compensate agriculture’s environmental services through payments for environmental services. This means setting up the eco-schema proposed within the context of the future CAP. This payment will be accessible to biological production systems as well as to other systems with significant environmental benefits.

15. Favour the criteria of employment and job viability within agriculture and food sectors. The employment criterion must be taken into account when attributing direct CAP aide. Thus, the activities and agricultural projects that will positively impact jobs and agricultural trade viability must receive more aide and favour when it comes to public support grants, both within the context of direct support (CAP’s 1st pillar) and within the rural development policy (2nd pillar and national aide).

... At the territorial and sectoral level

16. Protect economic players from exogenous risks. Faced especially with economic risks, the public authority must validate the establishment of a contra-cyclic regulation system within the context of the future CAP, so as to protect farmers’ income.

17. Establish territorialised coupled support to back fragile or specific productions, especially in ultra-peripheral Regions and Corsica. Because of their insularity, their climate or other types of handicaps (mountains, for example), the conservation of traditional agricultural productions or development of new territorialised sectors are compromised in certain territories. This is especially the case in ultra-peripheral Regions and in Corsica but could well be true throughout the national territory. Thus, the Regions propose that in the next Common Agricultural Policy, all sensitive productions on a regional scale benefit from coupled support and that the modes of support be defined on a regional level.

18. Develop inter-Regional support measures and reserve envelopes for interregional projects in each region. Agriculture and food production areas do not always coincide with a region’s or country’s administrative borders. In spite of a necessary food relocation, territories will always remain interdependent on the food production front. The Regions propose, then, that each Regional Council reserve a minimum percentage of its agriculture and food production budget for developing and supporting interregional measures and projects. For such measures, collectivities at the site of such initiatives must converge their intervention framework to ensure project leaders have simplified and incentivising access no matter their geographical location.

19. Establish a farmers’ collective economic organisation bonus. In parallel to increased State action in defence of French farmers’ interests within the international trade sector...
Outside of France, all major European agricultural countries have chosen to entrust regional collectivities with important responsibilities associated with farming, rural development, the forest and fishing. In these countries, the Regions organise amongst themselves and cooperate with the State in order to coherently and pragmatically reconcile national objectives with territorial needs and specificities and, out of these differences, create advantages for national economies. In France, however, the debate remains within the constant presumption that regional policies lead to a distortion in competition.

If required to have this debate, which our neighbours have had ten or twenty years ago, in order to keep with the times, The Regions of France are ready to have it. For it to be successful and constructive, the debate must be transparent and factually examine what decentralising agricultural policies has brought to farmers – proximity, adaptation, reactivity – and the difficult implementation conditions such as insufficient means and inoperative tools, rigid and unshared national framework, which have impeded or corrupted the principle.

Thus, the Regions call for an essential clarification of the State’s and Regions’ competence, and the re-evaluation of the local community’s role in the operation. An evolution in governance of public authorities and socio-professional players must result from this clarification, especially at the national level. More specifically, the Regions propose to:

20. Liberate the Regions’ action through a pragmatic and simplified regionalisation of the CAP’s 2nd pillar. The 2014 transfer of European structural funds to the Regions, including the EAFRD – 2nd pillar of the CAP – occurred within a context of increasing their competence in terms of economic material development and territorial land use planning.

While this transfer was supposed to provide them with commensurate means for this increased competence, in the case of the EAFRD, the State imposed numerous constraints on the Regions over which they had little or no power: a national aide framework that was both rigid and top-down, an inadequate transfer of resources, a complex and long-inoperative payment system. These constraints generated legitimately unacceptable delays for farmers and locally elected officials. In order to capitalise on the advancements that regionalisation has brought while avoiding the repetition of past errors, regions must be given legitimate managing authority in the regional management of EAFRD in European regulation and on the French level. Thus, after 2020, the Regions should be able to take charge of piloting, establishing and paying the subsidies related to the 2nd pillar’s current perimeter, according to a co-constructed national strategy, which takes into account the specificities of various French mainland territories, Corsica and Overseas territories.

21. Rely on local involvement within a stabilised institutional framework.

The most recent decentralisation laws allowed for the necessary and anticipated clarification of competence between various collective levels, communal – intercommunal, departmental and regional. However, certain evolutions such as the merging of Regions have created profound upheavals. Within a now-stabilised institutional framework, which should remain as such, the Regions can now establish a relevant level of planification as well as an action plan for certain regional projects within the spheres of agricultural policies and rural development. For other projects that are either departmental or very local in scope, they must be able to rely on local involvement within the framework of governance that is opened to them and use regional means to support local projects.

22. Refocus the State’s missions on its sovereign missions and the defence of French farming interests. Given that the agricultural and agro-food sectors in France must regain their strategic nature, and that public resources are declining while the resources that other large agricultural powers provide will never be equalled, it is urgent to end existing redundancies in the Regions’ and State’s actions. The State must reinforce and concentrate its action on sovereign matters: regulation, health, defence of French interests at the French and global levels, especially on the commercial, fiscal and social fronts. The State must stop rolling out national programmes that compete with existing regional programmes and must transfer the remaining human and budgetary resources in the interest of rationalising public action.

23. Improve governance nationally and regionally in order to develop a relationship of trust and partnership between the State, Regions and stake-
holders. The transition of agriculture and food systems toward multifunctionality calls for increased consistency and synergy amongst public policies (European, national, regional). We propose, thus, to legally create a State-Regions Council that would meet regularly and act as a forum for dialogue ensuring greater consistency. It would, for example, be the place of dialogue between State and Regions about the future CAP’s programme design. This council would draw on examples of co-construction with socio-professional players, renovated and co-presided by the State and Regions, especially the Superior Council for the Orientation and Coordination of Agriculture and Food Economy.

24. Develop and defend a shared national CAP strategy. The major European agricultural countries that transferred 2nd pillar management to the Regions have gone beyond the issue of distortion of competition and regionalisation is, to the contrary, experienced as the best way to exploit the territories’ various advantages. These countries were able to create shared strategies between the State, Regions and socio-professional players; strategies that cross top-down and bottom-up approaches. Thus, the Regions propose that the CAP national strategy defended by France at the European Commission be co-constructed bottom-up by the State and Regions in cooperation with socio-professional players. The choice of which types of intervention to maintain throughout the national territory would be defined on the basis of the regional cooperation forums’ expressed needs. The level of results to attain for regional operational programme interventions at the national and regional levels would be the fruit of dialogue between the players taking into account the regional circumstances, the levels of ambition and, of course, the available budgetary means to reach them. This new implementation method would thus, vis-à-vis Europe, ensure the best transversality and coherence between the tools of two of CAP pillars. It would demonstrate France’s collective ability to contribute to the CAP’s modernisation and simplification objectives. While providing the Regions leeway in steering the implementation of regional measures, this method would finally offer socio-professional players guaranteed access to certain, yet differentiated, interventions throughout the national territory.

5. Cf. proposition n°24