

FARM FORESTRY IN SOUTH-WESTERN FRANCE: FROM FATHER TO SON, INTERACTIONS IN REPRESENTATIONS, OWNERSHIP STRATEGIES AND POTENTIAL ECOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Sourdriil, G. du Bus de Warnaffe, M. Deconchat, E. de Garine and G. Balen

ABSTRACT

Studying the transmission of farm and farm forests, i.e. forest owned and/or managed by farmers, is of primary importance to understanding land management dynamics and the evolution of French rural societies. Farms and farm forests are generally transferred from father to the eldest son at two different periods, on the retirement of the father and at his death. The transmission process favours one child in order to keep the integrity of property and this scheme corresponds to a social logic of perpetuation of corporate groups. An ethnological investigation reveals complex details of the reality of effective transmission of inheritance and of succession; consequently the father's and the son's roles appear to mix on both farm and forest activities. It reveals an attempt of the father to find a legitimate place on the farm and the forest and to help overcoming the installation of his son.

Keywords: farm forest, agriculture, knowledge, succession, inheritance, ethnology

INTRODUCTION

In many parts of France, farm forests are embedded in family farms, providing timber, firewood or stakes. However, since WW2 the trend of modernization and specialization seems to induce a diminishing interest in forest activities. It is particularly evident at the time when fathers pass on the farm to their sons or to other persons. According to statistical studies, woodlots are more often separated from the farm and become private forests (Normandin & Cinotti 2002). This process can affect forest sustainability because it could change the management of a large part of the forests in France.

Sociological and ethnological literatures about transmission of agricultural inheritance show its great diversity. Augustins (1989a) shows the difference between the "succession" as a transfer of social status and the "inheritance" as the transfer of material or immaterial goods. He shows that it is possible to identify the logistics of succession and heritage due to regional and social differences in the reproductions of individual status and of corporate groups (Augustins 1990). The mechanisms of transmission between two generations can be observed at three times according to Jacques-Jouvenot (1997): (1) the transmission of inheritance, (2) the transmission of knowledge and (3) the interactions, during works on the farm and on the forest for example, between ascendants and successors at the time of the transmission; during these interactions we can see exchanges: the representations and the technical knowledge of both generations, are opposed and combined and their social status (i.e. farmer (successor), retired farmer (ancestor), farm forester or not) and

their roles (i.e. what they concretely do on farm and forest) are reallocated. To understand the transmissions of farms and farm forests and their implications for the management of the forest, we need to observe the transmission of property and the reallocation of status between father and son upon the father's retirement. Indeed landholding is just an aspect of the complex process of inheritance and succession. Therefore the study of the transmission of the forest and the farm must be based on two generations of farmers and on the scale of the family farm and the farm forest.

Seventy-five percent of the French forests are privately owned, and 17% are considered to be "farm forests". Some sociological studies go beyond statistics to a point; in various parts of the country the inheritance scheme might be very different for the farmland and the forested part of it: fathers transfer the ownership of the farm to their son on their retirement, while keeping the forest for themselves until they die (Audigay 1998; Nougarede 1999). The farm seems to become the domain of the son—active farmer, while the forest belongs to the elders—retired farmers (Cardon 1999). Can we deduce that forestry and farming are becoming separated fields of activity on the retirement of the father and that it leads to exclusive roles in both domains (Larrère & Nougarede 1990)? The categorization of the actors should be refined to account for the various roles and status involved in family farm forest management: "owners", "decision makers" and "workers" are non exclusive roles to be considered (Sourdriil & du Bus de Warnaffe 2003).

The first question we need to ask concerns the transmission of property. We would like to know if the farm and the forest are transmitted separately in Southwestern France. But to understand the transmission nowadays we need to understand the evolution of the transmission process since the beginning of the 20th century. We will then study how the transmission and the reallocation of the statuses and roles of both generations are carried out. The time of the retirement of the father can lead to exchanges and discrepancies, between fathers and sons on the farm and the forest. These exchanges can be expressed in technical know-how, representations of forest and/or knowledge which can reveal the way the transmission of status and role is done.

METHODOLOGY

Our study area was in southwestern France in Haute-Garonne in the Coteaux de Gascogne at 80 kilometers from Toulouse (Map 1). We studied two villages where ecologists, sociologists and forest scientists from our research laboratory had focused their research for almost 15 years (Balent, 1996). The two adjacent villages cover respectively 2012 ha and 884 ha and count respectively 180 and 121 inhabitants. It's sparsely populated country and it has 15 farms; agriculture is mainly domestic. Small farms are usually exploited by father, mother and son(s). Farms cover on average of 30 to 180 hectares. Agriculture is based on mixed farming: most of the farmers engage in cattle-rearing (veal and dairy-cows); herds are of about 100 animals each. There is also free-range chicken-farming and the force-feeding of ducks. All the farmers cultivate

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Map 1. Situation of the field of work.

Table 1. Methodology. Number of interviews (I), visits (V) and observations (O) with fathers (F), sons (S) or both (F+S) in five families (A to E).

	Family A				Family B			Family C			Family D			Family E		
	F	S	S	F+S	F	S	F+S	F	S	F+S	F	S	F+S	F	S	F+S
Age	7	3	3		6	3		7	5		7	5		8	5	
	5	5	4		2	3		3	1		6	0		1	4	
I	3	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	3	1	0	3	2	0
V	3	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	2	0
O	1	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	0

fields of 1 to 20 hectares. They grow wheat, corn and sorghum. Farmland dominates this area, which includes around 25% of forests, with a majority of private and farm forest. Farm forests cover about 4 hectares per farm. This leads to a fragmented landscape with small woodlots isolated into a matrix of pastures and crop fields. The forests are mainly oak hornbeam coppice-with-standards. Despite their small area, most of the forests display a high heterogeneity of structure, determined by a mosaic of practices (Sauget 1995; Tran 1995).

An ethnologic study is being carried out and focuses on 5 families (11 informants) in the villages, with both father (retired farmer) and son(s) (farmer) being involved in farm and/or forest activities. They are also owners of a set of forests studied by ecologists and forest scientists through the mapping of structures into an Arcview GIS (Guyon 1996). Our methodology is based on a constant presence of the ethnologist on the field during 12 months in order to obtain detailed information that is not easily obtained through statistical or sociological studies on larger samples. Interviews were held from a diachronic standpoint to understand how forests and farms were transmitted; we summoned up the memory of the informant to tell what the history of the forest was. Interviews were also held from a synchronic standpoint with the informant about their role in the forest. Interviews were held with the father and the son alone and together in order to compare their representations. These interviews were carried out during visits to the forest and observations were in accordance with current techniques (Table 1).

The interviews were all recorded and transcribed and the information obtained during the visit and observation was put down on paper. These notes were categorized into main themes and we find that according to what the informants said or did, the main products provided by the forest are: firewood which is the energy for heating systems, used in a chimney or sold; bundles of small wood; timber wood which is used for construction or sold; stakes; food for cattle; mushrooms. The main representations

are: a utilitarian forest; a potential source of incomes; long-term capital; family inheritance, a recreational place, an element of the landscape with aesthetic potential or a source of biodiversity. Different techniques are set up in order to obtain these products and/or to answer to their representations and preoccupations. We see clearing of wood; felling and forwarding of firewood or timberwood; splitting firewood; clearing edges; cattle grazing; making bundles of small wood; the planting of trees; gathering mushrooms; hunting (boar, roe deer, hare or woodpigeon). These techniques are general and the way they are done can change depending on the informants.

We analyse these notes in order to understand the transmission of the farm and the forest and how it has advanced over 3 or 4 generations. We also seek to discover who is the successor and the heir, which is the role of the father and the son, at the retirement of the father on both farm and forest. The study of the

representations, the techniques and the knowledge of the father and the son and the discrepancies we can see between them allow us to do this.

RESULTS

Evolution of Transmission Schemes of Farm and Forest

Shall daughter or son inherit the forest: A question of knowledge?

According to the informants, it seems that until WW2 the farm forests were divided up between the children; a part of the forests were transmitted through a matrilineal way to the daughter as a dowry, while farms and other parts of the forest were generally reserved for the eldest son. Daughters got married in the village often to a farmer, so that the forest stayed attached to a farm and could be exploited by the husband of the daughter. Thus some woodlots of family D and E come from the inheritance of the mother or the grandmother.

Nowadays, many daughters get married to non-farmers, which are supposed to be less able to take care of the forest, due to a lack of knowledge and of time. At the time of our investigation and for about two generations, the father preferred to keep the forest in his ownership and give it to which ever of his sons could best take care of it. Furthermore, the father prefers the heir of the forest and the heir of the farm to be the same person (Family A); parts of what the father considers to be a unit (farm and forest) must not be separated (Family A, B, D). The daughter agrees: the wife of the son of family E said she left her parents' farm when she got married and so left the forest and its future production to his brother who kept the farm.

In family D, another mode of transmission appears. The father retired for about 15 years and prepares the transmission of his farm and forest. He thinks that he will give the farm to his son who takes care of it but he will give the woodlot as a jointly-owned property to his son and his daughter.

Social path of the forest and the farm: the times of transmission

Until WW2, the farm forest could be transmitted to the daughter when she got married. This could be prior to the 'retirement' of the father or the heir could get the farm and the forest together at the time of the retirement of the father. Thus inheritance and succession could be made at the same moment (Family B, C and E); but often the parents and the heir and his or her family lived together so the parents enjoyed the products of the wood too.

At the time of our investigation, the farm and forest are most of the time inherited by the elder son in order to maintain the integrity of a family's property. The other children inherit money or other goods in compensation (land to build a house for a son of family B). Family A is an exception, whereby the two sons of the family were successors and the farm and forest are to be split equally between the six children.

Nowadays succession happens upon the retirement of the father. But in some families (A, B, D and E) the farm is just given to the disposal of the son; it was not given to him as property. Furthermore the father keeps the forest and a few hectares of land for his own needs and he has the right to control the agricultural and forest activities. The effective transmission of the farm and the forest is made at the time of the death of the father.

Table 2. Principal products of the forest for fathers (F) and sons (S) of family A to E.

F/S	Family A			Family B		Family C		Family D		Family E	
	F	S	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S
Wood for Heating system	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		
Production of firewood for the chimney	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sale of firewood				*	*			*			
Wood for construction	*										
Sale of wood for construction				*		*		*			
Production of stakes	*	*	*	*	*						
Cattle-Grazing		*	*	*	*						
Mushrooms	*			*	*	*	*		*	*	*

Social path of the statuses: the times to be the successor

Until WW2 it seemed that the father maintained an important role on the farm and the forest even when his son became the main farmer. It was because he and his wife often lived with their heir and his family (all the families). The successor, who was also the heir of the farm and of the most important part of the forest, was more often, as today, the eldest child of the family: a daughter or a son. In the case of the daughter her husband, often farmer, came on the farm as son-in-law and took care of the farm activities with his wife and in-laws (Family B).

Today the effective transmission of the statuses of farmer and retired farmer are made at the time of his retirement. The father seems to stay active on the farm and on the forest but he has no more real status on the field. In fact, mixing roles of father and sons co-exist on both farm and forest. The next results about the representations of farm and forest and the techniques used by the two generations will help us to understand the passing on of the roles and the general statuses.

Roles of the Father and the Son on the Farm Forest

Roles that depend on the representations and the necessary products of the forest

For father and son the forest is mainly utilitarian. It provides firewood, which is a real requirement (Table 2): for 8 households the main heating system is wood-based. For the other 3, firewood gives out heat for the kitchen; other rooms use oiled-fired heating. In another case the use of timber decreases. Family A's father used oaks from his forest to build a verandah. At the same time his son renovated his house; but he used pine, bought by the entrepreneur carrying out the work. This son thought it is easier to buy ready-to-use wood than to cut and to saw it.

Forests represent either short-term or long-term income for both the father and the son. It can represent short-term income as firewood. Two fathers (B and D) sell firewood every year. On the other hand, forest provides for long-term income; three of the fathers sell wood for construction to entrepreneurs every 20 years (Family A, C and D). In the case of the firewood as of the wood for construction it is the father who benefited from the income. But in the case of the firewood a part of the income was re-invested in the farm to the benefit of the son.

Forests represent capital and/or an inheritance which cannot be sold but which has to be kept and maintained for future generations. Generally fathers and sons try to manage the forests in order to favour the forest's growth in order to provide future incomes.

Forest products changed according to agricultural activities. When sons continued the same agricultural activities as their fathers, some products did not evolve (e.g. stakes or food for herds). However, when sons introduced changes in the agricultural activities upon the retirement of the father, some products were

not necessary anymore. For example, because the sons of families C, D and E had a job besides their activities on the farm, they spent less time on the farm and they decided to stop the cattle-rearing. They also stopped making stakes allowing the cattle to graze into forest, when it was done before.

Upon retirement, some fathers' representations of the forest develop. They seem to become more sensitive to the aesthetic of their forest or to its ecological potential. They also see the forest more as a recreational place where they spend time for planting or gathering mushrooms. They can disagree with their son when his practices may reduce the possibility of such activities or alter the scenic character of the places they like.

Roles of the father and the son: who practices what?

All the fathers are owners and decision-makers, while only three are workers but not the main worker (Table 3). None of the sons is owner but all are workers and just one is not the decision-maker: the forest is not simply a father's concern. Interviews and observations indicate that fathers make decisions about the place in the woodlot where trees should be cut for firewood, wood for timber or cattle-grazing. Sons make decisions during logging (e.g. which trees to cut and with what tool). They also make decisions on when the work should be done, in relation to agricultural activities (cutting out the edges for example). However the son always needs the agreement of his father before acting. On the field, sons cut firewood and clear edges; fathers take care of clearing the wood, the bundling, the cattle-grazing or the gathering of mushrooms (Table 4).

The retirement of the father is a period when activities are shared out between fathers and sons. In this period sons are in charge of the main agricultural activities and of the hardest work in the forest; fathers can help on the farm in order for their son to cut firewood. For example they deal with agricultural activities such as feeding animals so that their sons can concentrate on their forest work. In other families, the fathers specialized in particular agricultural activities with high economic value (foie

gras for family B), which take place at the same time as some forest activities. The sharing out of the forest activities depended not only one's physical ability but on one's knowledge and know-how. Thus in family B, C and E the son was considered more able to use a chain saw. In the case of family C and E the son worked at the DDE where he received regular training in cutting out which made him more competent for this kind of activity. To summarize, the postulated gap between farming and forestry does not appear to be a clear cut division of roles and skills.

If there is a sharing out of certain practices, discrepancies or minor conflicts can appear between generations. For example father and son may disagree about the time to cut out the firewood and the father may ask someone else to do the work (family D). A father (family A and C) may disagree with the clearing of the edges with chemicals and herbicides which help the son and decrease his work but which the father considers non ecological. However the edges are the responsibility of the son because of their proximity to farming and the father seems to have nothing to say regarding in which way the clearing is done.

These minor conflicts and the sharing out of the activities can find an explanation in the knowledge of the two generations. There was a difference in the importance they give to traditional knowledge. If sons viewed knowledge of the seasons to be important when cutting out they saw it as less important than their fathers. We can ask if these discrepancies between generations are structurally generated by the traditional status system or if they reveal a major transformation of the local society that will eventually result in the separation of farming and forestry activities, knowledge and ownership.

DISCUSSION

**Transmission of Inheritance:
Keeping the Integrity of the Property**

The transmission of farm and forest in our area generally results in the elder son's material inheritance but also the status of successor. The other children usually get financial compensations or are well-educated in order to earn a living away from the farm. This scheme is evident in all the families except family A. However for about two generations some houses and forests can be given to the all children as a jointly-owned property; this way of transmission is not always appreciated by the elder son who wants to keep them. G. Augustins show that 'idéel' types of goods' devolution over the last century could be described in some European areas and societies. In south-western France the type of devolution is the "système à maison" although in north-western France (where the first family come from) the type of devolution is "le système à parentèle" (1989a; 1990). The "système à maison" is characterized by exclusive primogeniture: the elder child received all the inheritance and the succession. This system favoured the maintenance of the integrity of the farm (the 'house'). The "système à parentèles" is based on an egalitarian heritage between the children. We find traces of the first type. But the primogeniture is not absolute. It is always the son who is the abler one to take care of the inheritance (often the elder son) and who therefore keeps it. We can draw a parallel between this way of transmission and the evolution of the agriculture. More and more farms are abandoned by the potential successors because to continue their fathers' activities leads to a hard way of life and little income. So agriculture has decreased a lot since WW2 and the transmission of both farm and forest seeks to save a farm which exists on borrowed time.

Table 3. Repartition of roles in the forest activities. Owners are... D-makers are....

	Family A			Family B		Family C		Family D		Family E	
Father /son	F	S	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S
Owner	*			*		*		*		*	
D-Maker	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
Worker	*	*	*		*		*		*	*	*

Table 4. Repartition of the techniques between fathers (F) and sons (S). Brackets mean that the informant was not the main person practicing.

	Family A			Family B		Family C		Family D		Family E	
F/S	F	S1	S2	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S
Clearing	*	*	*		*		*		*	(*)	*
Felling	(*)	*	*		*		*		*		*
Forwarding	*				*		*		*		*
Splitting			*		*		*	*	*		*
Edges cutting		*	*		*		*		*		*
Cattle-Grazing				*	*						
Bundling						*				*	
Plantation	*										
Gathering of mushrooms	*			*	*	*				*	
Hunting					*		*				

For two generations parts of the forest represented a compensation for the children who were excluded from the inheritance. How can we explain that nowadays the transmission of the forest and the farm is done together which, according to the father and the son is the best way? In the past, two events saw the transmission of the forest (the wedding of the daughter or the retirement of the father) and of the farm (the retirement of the father); they were complementary and answered the needs of matrimonial structures and exchanges. The dowry does not exist anymore but there are always different times of their transmissions like Cardon (1997) and Audiguay (1998) said. The way they are transmitted relates to a social reality of rural society: it gives a role to the father on both the farm and forest.

Reallocation of Roles and Statuses: a Matter of Continuity

Father and son have the same representations of the forest but they use the forest's products differently. It is due either to a change in the way of life or in the agricultural activities and it leads to different technical logistics and roles in the forest. Moreover, fathers and sons have not the same project for the forest. For the father the forest takes its place in a long-term perspective and, as P. Cardon said, deals with a familial project: the management of the forest for future generations (1999). But for the son the forest represents an opportunity to obtain products for agricultural activities; they do not yet place the forest in a perspective of transmission. When sons become fathers, their perceptions of the forest evolve.

The observed discrepancies between the practices of father and son are a sign of conflicts about management and future transmission. However, they are also a sign of the father's conflicting views concerning the role of the ascendant as in charge of and maintaining the property and his desire to guide his successor. The aesthetic and ecological representations which increase on his retirement reveal the father's reaction against the type of agriculture that his sons practice and that they have themselves set up; this type of agriculture is based on research of the productivity and an intensive use of the territory (weeding of the hedges and creation of big farmable fields). This view is the result of experience the evolution of agriculture (mechanization, land consolidation or CAP). A father can disagree with the practices of his sons, which can be aggressive, for the forest. They are a sign of the death of trees and perhaps a sign of the death of an ideal agriculture and environment. Nevertheless the past practices of the father were as intensive as the practices of their sons (frequent cutting out; intensive cattle-grazing) but according to the father they allow the regeneration of the forest. The use of the territory and their sons' land has for them dramatic consequences on the quality of the environment that they are going to transmit to their descendants.

The specific role of the father in the management of the forest in decision-making on both farm and forest and the long period of transmission reveal serious consideration on the part of the father of a son's ability to take over.

Knowledge of the father and the son are combined and opposite on the farm and in the forest. The father favours popular knowledge and empirical know-how although the son puts to good use the technical knowledge that he got at school. This knowledge corresponds to opposite technical views, more 'traditional' for the father and more productive for the son, which influence forest and farm activities (Darré 1991; Delbos & Jorion, 1990). Thus discrepancies appear between them which can influence the two times of transmission (of knowledge and during the interactions between the two generations) which were shown by Jacques-Jouvenot (1997). The retirement of the father is a good time to

observe these moments and the way the status of successor is passed on. Indeed during his retirement, the father tries to impose and to inculcate his knowledge in his son in order to make him a good successor; the son will receive this knowledge but will keep only the part of it that he needs or that he can combine with his own knowledge. A new status of farmer and forester is created but in a matter of continuity for both father and son (Salmona 1994).

Prospects: Contribution of the Study to Ethnology and Ecology

In order to continue our study, we need to consider the transmission of forest and farm over five generations of the five families to understand how the manner of transmission changes: we will carry out new interviews with our informants and begin a consultation of the archives and the cadastre. This investigation can gather data on events (conflicts, changes of owners) which could lead to modifications of forest activities. The social determinants of the actual ecological structures foresters or ecologists of our research laboratory study could be explained.

A study of the ownership strategies and the logistics of transmission of farm and forest can allow us to question the general types of transmission of agricultural inheritance today and to question the perpetuation of corporate groups in particular areas. It is really important to understand the perpetuation and the evolution of the actual rural society because this has been neglected by ethnologists although rural society is central to European debates and this society changes a lot with the arrival of new populations like strangers, neo-country people. We can ask what's happened when there is no potential successor and/or when farm and forest are sold to non farmers and/or strangers as appears to be more and more frequent in French land.

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Gérard Balent
Researcher in Ecology / Laboratory Manager
INRA
Laboratoire DYNAFOR
Chemin de Borde-Rouge
BP. 27
F 31326 Castanet-Tolosan
Ph: 05.61.28.52.58; Fax: 05.61.28.54.11
balent@toulouse.inra.fr

AUTHORS

Anne Sourdril
PhD in Ethnology
INRA
Laboratoire DYNAFOR
Chemin de Borde-Rouge
BP. 27
F 31326 Castanet-Tolosan
Ph:05.61.28.55.60; Fax: 05.61.28.54.11
sourdril@toulouse.inra.fr

Gaëtan du Bus de Warnaffe
Forester / Post-Doc
INRA
Laboratoire DYNAFOR
Chemin de Borde-Rouge
BP. 27
F 31326 Castanet-Tolosan
Ph:05.61.28.55.60; Fax:05.61.28.54.11
gdubus@toulouse.inra.fr

Marc Deconchat
Researcher in Ecology
INRA
Laboratoire DYNAFOR
Chemin de Borde-Rouge
BP. 27
F 31326 Castanet-Tolosan
Ph:05.61.28.55.60; Fax: 05.61.28.54.11
marc.deconchat@toulouse.inra.fr

Eric de Garine
Researcher in ethnology
INRA
Laboratoire SYCOMOR
Chemin de Borde-Rouge
BP. 27
F 31326 Castanet-Tolosan
Ph:05.61.28.53.45
edgarine@toulouse.inra.fr