4.6 The dynamic management and regional marketing of a local wheat variety by farmers in the Lubéron, France

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Local varieties, farm management and the environment

Each local variety develops specific characteristics through interactions between farmers, with their own traditional knowledge, culinary and spiritual traditions, and the environment in which it grows. Local varieties can only be maintained if they are managed and cultivated by farmers year after year. Farmers may share and exchange the seed of those varieties with others who will then cultivate it in other places, leading to the adaptation of the varieties to other production environments and management practices. Local varieties are often used as a basis for traditional regional dishes, and as such they are part of the local culture. To promote the maintenance of local varieties it is essential to attach economic value to the products derived from them (Demeulenaere, 2008).

The environment, the soil and the farm management practices applied give local varieties their own particular taste. The use of significant amounts of inputs and intensive mechanization makes the environment more homogeneous but also artificial, and it weakens the relationship between the varieties and the environment in which they developed their distinctive properties. The result may be that specific characteristics of local varieties are no longer expressed or appreciated. In the current chapter, we share the experiences of a group of small-scale farmers, referred to in France as paysans, in promoting the use of a local wheat variety in the Lubéron region in France, and their search for the right legislative framework to support their on-farm management practices.

The Lubéron region is a dry, mountainous region in south-eastern France. Farming is still often a small, family-run business. Much of the produce is processed on the farm itself and sold in local and regional markets. These paysans cultivate their wheat using minimal inputs, and as such the wheat is often organic. Their agricultural system promotes an expression of the characteristics of local wheat varieties that have evolved in this region.

Meunier d’Apt: a local wheat variety in the Lubéron

About 20 years ago, a group of paysans revived the cultivation of an old, local wheat variety, Meunier d’Apt, with the aim of using it for the preparation of a local flour and special bread. The variety had almost completely disappeared. One farmer obtained some seed from a neighbour and began to grow and propagate it, distributing its seed to other paysans in the region. The flour of this bread wheat variety, when mixed with other local
varieties, gives the bread a special taste that is much appreciated. Today, paysans have joined forces with artisan millers and bakers to make the most of Meunier d’Apt wheat. Some of the paysans themselves are also millers and/or bakers. It is this social process that promoted the maintenance and renewed cultivation of the variety in its original environment, adapting it over the course of time to changes in agricultural practices, and to the eating habits and fashions of modern life. Consequently, traditional aspects were incorporated into modern lifestyles, such as the appreciation of regional and organic products. This adaptive process is restricted to farming and processing methods that do not alter the intrinsic qualities of the variety or the products made from it, and rejects those methods that could have a negative effect on its distinct properties (Zaharia, 2008).

Trademarks for products unique to the Lubéron region

Today, the group of paysans, artisan millers and bakers are not alone in their venture to promote the cultivation of Meunier d’Apt wheat. Their initiative is being followed by local officials, who want to promote the conservation of local heritage associated with the Lubéron Regional Nature Park, through the registration of the trademark Produit du Parc Naturel Régional du Lubéron (‘Product of the Lubéron Regional Nature Park’). The paysans, millers and bakers have drafted a set of regulations to ensure the quality and authenticity of Meunier d’Apt flour and bread from the Lubéron region. We further refer to this set of regulations as the Meunier d’Apt certificate of quality and origin.

The Meunier d’Apt trademark helps promote the product to consumers; moreover, it aims to recognize its importance and usefulness. The trademark aims to encourage consumers and farmers to value genetic heritage, agricultural products and the knowledge of paysans. The Meunier d’Apt certificate of quality and origin clearly defines the links between local varieties, farm management practices, farmer seed multiplication, and farmer-to-farmer seed exchange or trade. The certificate states that those farms that intend to produce flour or bread bearing the trademark must be located in one of the municipalities in the Lubéron Regional Nature Park area. Furthermore, it requires that the grain produced must come from family-run, organic farming operations (as far as possible). Seed used should originate from a farm within that production zone. The conditions defined in the certificate support on-farm management of agrobiodiversity as a means to contribute to the in situ conservation of local plant genetic resources (PGR), and aim to promote agricultural production systems that are adapted to their environment. As such, the certificate aligns well with the objectives of a regional nature park, in that it contributes to sustainability and conservation.

Intellectual property rights for protecting Meunier d’Apt

Option 1: The conservation catalogue

The Lubéron Regional Nature Park looked at the possibility of listing the variety in the conservation catalogue. However, this would involve the application of a number of constraints to the production system and to the farmers’ management of the local variety. These constraints relate in particular to the homogeneity and stability of the variety, limitations in quantity of seed to be produced and disseminated, quotas for the production and marketing of grains and derived products, and general bureauc-
racy in relation to seed production activities. These requirements are inapplicable to
the situation in the Lubéron, where farmers save seed from their grain production
using common practices that link seed production to grain production (i.e. they don’t
sustain the variety just for its conservation). Kastler and Moÿ in Chapter 6.6 further
describe the barriers created for farmers by regulations on the conservation of local
varieties as developed by the European Union Commission.

**Option 2: The seed catalogue**

Meunier d’Apt cannot fulfill the standards set out in the formal seed catalogue con-
cerning homogeneity and stability for the simple reason that it has been developed
from a population and not just one or few lines. Its heterogeneity, which is vital for
the ability of the variety to adapt to the difficult terrains in which it is cultivated, is
highly valued by the paysans in the tough farming conditions of the Lubéron region.
The variety has low yields but produces better than other varieties in the Lubéron. It
would be unable to pass the required cultivation and use trials if it were tested in an
experimental station under good conditions. In addition, its limited cultivation area
does not allow for the production of a sufficient volume of seed stock to cover the costs
of registration and to ensure its continued inclusion in the seed catalogue. Neither
the certificate that associates its production with the Lubéron Regional Nature Park,
nor the collective quality trademark for Meunier d’Apt flour and bread from the
Lubéron, allow for the circumvention of the rigid formal seed regulatory framework.
Kastler (Chapter 6.8) further discusses the implications of the seed and variety laws in
France on the management of local varieties by farmers.

**Option 3: An experimentation agreement for variety maintenance and
exchange**

The group of paysans from the Lubéron have found an alternative that is compatible
with both their management practices of the local variety, and the certificate. They
continue to use and exchange traditional cereal varieties in the Lubéron region by way
of an experimentation agreement. The farmers’ association and paysans sign agree-
ments for experimentation in the production of seed and grain of the local wheat vari-
ety, Meunier d’Apt. Through these agreements, the association commits to provid-
ing the farmer with (experimental) seed of the variety, monitoring crop production,
organizing crop demonstrations, and documenting results obtained. In return, the
paysan agrees to sow the seed, maintain a test plot, and record observations before
harvesting. The experimentation agreement specifies that once the farmer has har-
vested the crop and met all the obligations, the farmer becomes the sole and complete
owner of the variety of that crop. In this way, the farmers gain the right to freely use
and sell the grains of this crop. The farmers may not, however, exchange or sell their
seed with other paysans. Kendall and Gras (Chapter 1.7) describe how the Maison
de la Semence Paysanne (seed bank) in the Périgord region of France shares the
seed of local maize varieties with farmers across the country using a similar mecha-
nism. Kastler (Chapter 6.8) further elaborates on how farmer organizations that are
members of the Réseau Semences Paysannes (Farmers Seed Network, RSP) are com-
pelled to use such mechanisms to circumvent rigid seed and variety regulations in
order to achieve on-farm management of agrobiodiversity, and engage paysans in
practices for contributing to community biodiversity management.
Recognition of the need for the dynamic management of local varieties

Current operations in seed production and the exchange of local varieties in the Lubéron and in other regions of France are based on experimentation agreements. We realize that we are innovative in avoiding rigid seed and variety regulations. What would be more appropriate is a conservation framework that supports the dynamic management of local varieties, and which provides clear room for farmers to produce, exchange and sell seed of those local varieties. The practices that are used by the farmers in the Lubéron, where they use their own seed, and exchange or sell the seed of local varieties, have long been considered only relevant to small-scale farmers in developing countries. Even the on-farm management of PGR as a strategy for contributing to their *in situ* conservation was considered only relevant to developing countries and not to a country with a highly developed and industrial agricultural system such as France. However, our experience in the Lubéron with Meunier d’Apt, and experiences in other French regions (Demeulenaere *et al.*, 2008) and locations, as described by Kendall and Gras (Chapter 1.7), show the contrary.

Towards the end of 2009, the *in situ* conservation of local varieties was recognized by the Fondation pour la Recherche sur la Biodiversité (Foundation for Biodiversity Research; FRB) as a relevant practice in France. In this context, we should explain that the FRB was officially launched in 2008 by the ministries in charge of research and ecology, and includes eight public research organizations that work with biodiversity, including those organizations responsible for PGR conservation. FRB is a point of convergence between the different actors involved in science and society that relate to biodiversity. We hope that their recognition of *in situ* conservation will open the way for the development of frameworks that support rather than limit the dynamic management of local varieties. Such frameworks would allow the variability and heterogeneity of varietal populations in a country where static conservation appears to be the only officially sanctioned conservation strategy.

Although the geographically based quality trademark seems quite appropriate for the protection of local varieties, it still necessitates a change in the dominant scientific approach in France. This current approach views the seed as mere software for reproduction, following the logic of economies of scales, with one seed allowing the production of an infinite number of copies of the same variety. The existing legal framework in France allows considerable freedom for the exchange of seed for conservation or for research. The reason for this is simply because such varieties are not included in the catalogues, which either regulate seed sales or the conservation of local varieties. Experience shows that the advanced concepts of population genetics do not match the dominant logic that guides the catalogues. The concept of a variety should be modified in order to combine the science of population genetics, with the desire of groups of paysans and their associated millers, bakers and even consumers to use and appreciate locally adapted varieties. In such a new approach, varieties should be considered as living organisms, endowed with an ample capacity to adapt, favouring their co-evolution with the farmers who cultivate them, and with the environment in which they have gained their distinctive properties.