Dear all

Agriculture is a wonderful profession. And it is important to remember that it is agriculture that feeds us.

Compared to the past, agriculture is more complex to manage. **Why?**

1/ Our era is producing new public policies:

- for the environment,
- for water management,
- for biodiversity
- for landscapes,
- for neighborhoods
- and so on, and so on …

These policies are very important and very useful. But they also have impacts on agriculture. **The farmer needs to integrate these new rules and standards into his practices.**

2/ The majority of agricultural products are sold on the global market. **Farmers have no control over prices, and their ability to negotiate commercial margins is very weak.**

3/ Agronomic research needs time to develop new production models. Their work requires several years of field testing. **But society is accelerating, and solutions or new models are slow to emerge or arrive late.**

4/ The professional unions are no longer able to contain the societal impacts on agriculture. **They are on the defensive and they do not participate in the development of public policies other than those related to agriculture**.

The result is that the farmer must move forward without much support from these partners. This is not always easy.

Let's take some examples

Exemple 1

In France, dairy producers sell their milk to companies that have become very large.

These large agricultural companies are important for feeding the 8 billion people who populate the planet.

Lactalis, the French leader in milk collection, has a turnover of almost $30 billion and operates in 49 countries.

In this case, a farmer represents one vote out of 460,000. Producers' negociation

power over milk prices is very low. When Lactalis changes the rules for setting milk prices, the producers suffer.

Exemple 2

Governments are responsible for public policies, particularly those affecting the environment, water, biodiversity, and so on.

Following the publication of legal decrees, operational implementations are often organized within tight timeframes.

In 2018, the French government banned neonicotinoids. These products have

proven to have a very harmful effect on insects.

This ban was imposed abruptly without any transition to sustainable solutions being developed.

Consequently, in 2019, beet production fell sharply, and even today, there are no alternatives. Agriculture was forced to integrate these practices without foresight.

Okay, the cause is just. But farmers need time to implement these alternatives, when they exist !

Exemple 3

A year ago, during a day of agricultural protests across France, a group of farmers built a wall in front of the entrance to INRAE's headquarters in Paris (the French national research institution in agriculture).

This event came as a shock to INRAE's internal staff. The researchers consider themselves allies and friends of farmers. They never thought farmers would rebel against their institution.

My intention is not to judge one side or the other. Faced with major societal challenges, agricultural research is

working on new models of agricultural production. It must find solutions in a shorter timeframe than before, and that's not easy.

But in the meantime, farmers are also struggling.

Exemple 4

If I ask you how discussions with your children or grandchildren go, or with some of your friends, on environmental issues ; are your exchanges calm or rather passionate or even tense ?

Two years ago, a group of students from the most prestigious French agricultural

school protested during their graduation ceremony. It was an extreme gesture and required a great courage.

But in my opinion, it demonstrates the strength of the current thinking today.

Increasingly, farmers are subjects to the scrutiny and judgment of their neighbors, their friends, their children, when they use fertilized or plant protection products.

Alternatives : yes of course, but only when they are widely available.

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Example 5

One final example concerns farmers' unions and their professional organizations.

Their motto can be summed up in two word: oppose everything.

Just to illustrate, in 2024, the unions worked with the French Senate Council to develop a law limiting constraints on agriculture.

Okay, we understand their exasperation with all these standards and other injunctions of all kinds.

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But what a failure to manage dialogue and contribute in advance of the measures taken.

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Last but not least

Added to this are the effects of climate change.

In agriculture, the climate changes are characterized by

- periods of water stress,
- stress due to temperatures,
- extreme events like storms, heat waves. In France, we are beginning to observe formation of some tornadoes,
- late frosts,
- but also the consequences of this, with the emergence of various diseases or infestations.

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Regardless of the geographic area, arid, temperate or northern, these effects disrupt farmers' practices, reducing and affecting the quality of production.

For example, wines become high in alcohol and more acidic. Winemaking becomes more complex.

Conclusion

This professions of farming involves more risks.
This does not mean that the profession is lost.

But the profession needs new skills, and above all, it needs stakeholders to work

together and with open minds, alongside other components of society.

The agriculture of tomorrow requires a shift in production models. Whereas the previous century specializes farms, the actual century must on the contrary, diversity them.

This requires new skills to be able to manage and combine several types of productions in parallel.

Current crop models correspond to a probability of 2 in 10. In short : 2 bad harvests out of 10. But today, the risk is increasing. Knowing how to manage risk becomes a mandatory skill.

But the farm of tomorrow needs data and advanced algorithms to enable agriculture to make the right decisions every day.

In the end, the solutions are already there. They just need to be deployed one a large scale.