

PEOPLE OF THE LAND

Photographic documentary by

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Photo 01 - Aurélien Vatin

I'm an organic farmer, soon to be certified « Demeter ».
The term implies observance of a set of specifications.

Industrial-scale organic farming has now arrived. You can find a whole range of hybrids, all well calibrated, with the same weights, forms and sizes.

On paper at least, it is organic.
Apparently the French eat more and more organic produce, but just what sort of organic produce is it?

I'm exasperated because everyone has fallen for it.
Even the farmers. They are the ones to whom the department of agriculture said "Invest!"
And now they find themselves with a debt of between 150.000 and 300.000 Euros.
So you have to produce more. And to do that, you plant hybrids!
Produce more, you borrow more and you work more. But you'll earn less at the end of the day.

And as my turnover dropped, I had to take a part-time job as a warden.



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Photo 02 - **Jean-Pierre Leverage**, cereal farmer

We started with twenty-five rented hectares and twenty head of cattle.
Now we have eighty.

Of course we borrowed to cover all that. We could never have saved a penny.

In the past, everyone helped everyone else with the work. It wasn't uncommon to have fifteen or twenty people come around to help, and everyone ate together.

Now it is a machine that takes care of the hay, you don't need anyone. From a labor point of view, it is great, but in terms of human relations it isn't the same.

Farmers just can't make ends meet any more. The prices for their produce are too low, and they are losing their motivation. Those who were in bad shape have had to sell or face bankruptcy.

As far as I'm concerned, I'm happy to be retired, despite my meagre pension of 847€ before tax.



Photo 03 - **Kristen Bodros**, sheep farmer

I have sixty ewes on twenty-five hectares. For cheese and meat. Plus twenty lambs and three rams. I milk once a day, which brings sixty liters of milk.

All of the milk (15.000 liters annually) is transformed into cheese and yoghurt that we sell at the markets, in organic shops, through internet-based locavore schemes or an AMAP (association for the support of traditional agriculture) and we supply some of our products to Paris.

We also produce our own meat, which we sell directly at the farm or to organic butchers.

We can't complain. But we do pity our colleagues.

The farmer's unions, and particularly the FNSEA, are no longer there to help the farmers. They aren't run by people of the land, but by businessmen.

Several times we were offered land to buy, but we refused every time. We don't want to increase our production, we don't want to go into debt.



Photo 04 - **Kristen Bodros**, sheep farmer.



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Photo 05 - **Olivier and Laurent Martin**, cattle farmers

We have seventy-five cows who produce 1500 liters of milk daily, and we're on a milk round. We produce quality milk, we observe all the health and environmental regulations, as well as taking the welfare of the animals into account.

We have a robot. The cows come and go freely and are milked as they please. But you have to be there all the time, 24/7, in case of accidents or births etc...

There was the milk crisis in 2015/2016 that did a lot of damage.

It costs us 28 centimes per liter to produce, while we are paid 27 to 28 centimes. We're working for nothing.

They're talking about a small improvement for 2017, 30 to 30, 50. That's a bit better.

The prices for cereals (wheat and barley) have also dropped over the past three years. Three years ago it was around 180 Euros a tone, and now we're at around 120 Euros.



Photo 06 - Olivier Godest

I set myself up in 1990, having bought the farm from my parents. I took out a loan over 15 years. It was hard going. I have 50 dairy cows.

I'm also growing potatoes on 60 ares. I sell all of them - 40 tonnes a year - directly from the farm.

I have an annual quota for milk of 330.000; if I go over that quantity, it gets poured away.

I've taken no holidays since 1990 but this year I'm taking a week off.

I'm careful, I treat the crops, I use fungicides. But we are strictly controlled and you can't do just what you like.

I work with institutional customers.

Potatoes are harvested by hand, having been pulled from the ground by a machine. It takes fifteen or twenty people the whole day to do it. Friends lend a hand. But helping neighbouring farmers is less and less common these days.

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Photo 07 - Olivier Godest



Photo 08 - **Olivier and Laurent Martin**, cattle farmers

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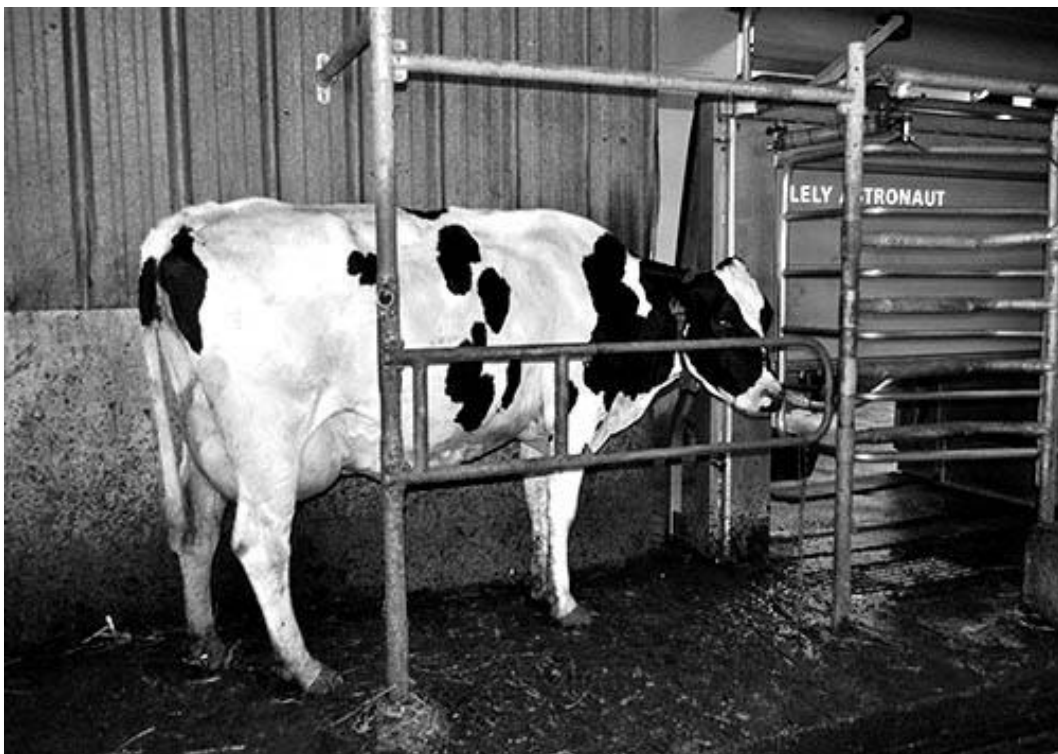


Photo 09 - **Olivier and Laurent Martin**, cattle farmers.



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Photo 10 - Serge Lanneshoa, pig farmer

I have four hundred and fifty pigs that I rear for their meat.

They arrive at 12kg, when they are five weeks old. I keep them until they weigh 120kg or 130kg, which takes roughly five months.

I've been certified "organic" myself for the past 16 years but it comes to crops.

The prices for pork haven't moved for the past three years.

Intensive, industrial pork is worth 1, 35€/kg, and we are paid 3, 40€/kg because we're organic.

Industrial farms allow 0, 80 m² per pig, whereas an organic pig needs 2, 30 m².

They are all reared on straw.

I don't take any holidays. It doesn't bother me, but it bothers my wife a bit more.



Photo 11 - Hervé Arzul

Up until 2014 I had a milking parlor, with sixty-five cows giving forty liters of milk daily. I spent three hours a day milking the cows.

At the time, the price for milk was 34 centimes. Today it is down to 28 centimes.

In 2014 I invested in a robot.

And now I have only fifty-five cows. But still as much milk. The robot doesn't replace the human, but it does help him. And it frees up more time for me to tend to the animals.

It is better for the cows too. They come to be milked as they please.

But it cost me 180.000 Euros. It will be ten years before I'll have paid it back.

I've been losing money every day for the past six months. 30 Euros a day.

The more you invest, the more money you lose.

We've been fooled by the cooperatives and the banks.

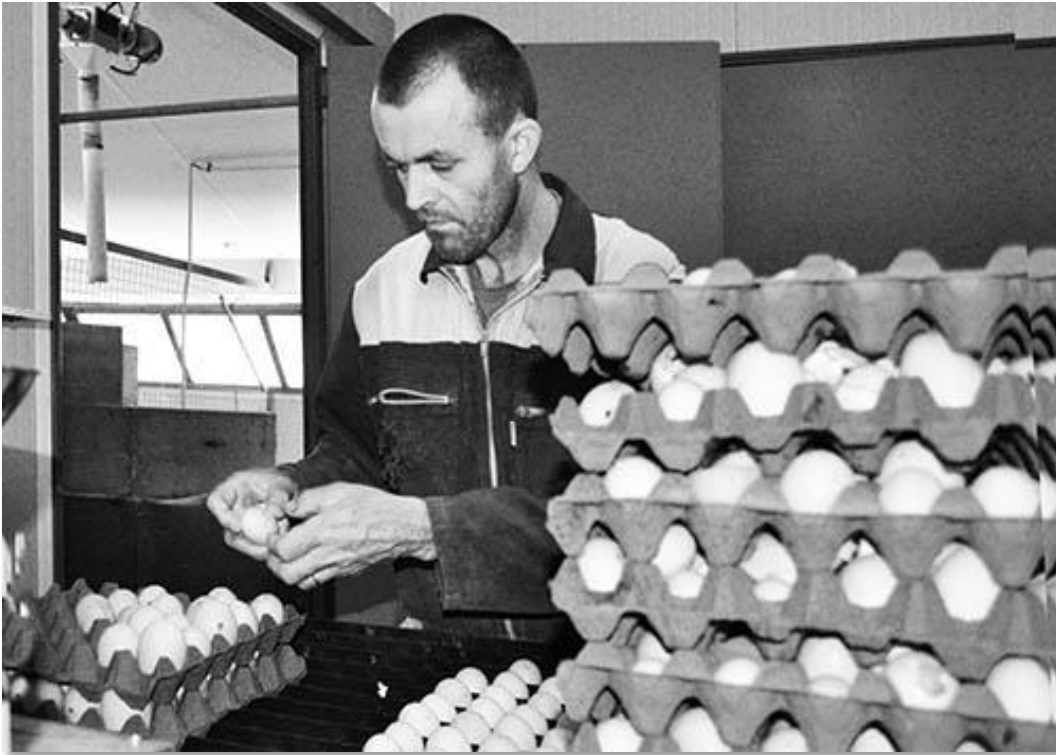


Photo 12 – Of the three brothers, Philippe is the only one to have continued. **Philippe Leverage**, poultry farmer. I'm still taking care of the poultry. There were two buildings with sixteen thousand hens and fourteen hundred roosters.

Today, as my brothers have now stopped, I'm the only one taking care of the farm.

I'm going to keep just this building, renovate it and add 36 meters so I'll be able to house eleven thousand hens and eleven hundred roosters.

Before, I had 3 million eggs every year, now I'll have 2, 2 million.

But I'll still have to borrow a little.

All the eggs go into an incubator to make chickens for meat.

I've been at this for thirty years and I like it.

I earn a bit more than the minimum wage. I put up with it. I'm from a fairly modest family, it's enough for me.

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Photo 13 - **Philippe Leverage**, poultry farmer



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Photo 14 - Rémi Flouriot

We started with seven hundred hens and two cows. Then there were fifteen of them, four or five sows and twenty thousand hens.

A laborer came in once a week.

In the beginning, we had a milking machine, and then in 1974 we installed a fully equipped milking parlor. We had thirty cows at the time who gave around 600 liters of milk a day. Sometimes we'd work until eleven at night. Without holidays.

We stayed at it for thirty years, up until 1998.

If I was to start over again, I'm not sure if I'd do the same thing. We get a pension of 1300€ to cover both of us.



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Photo 15 - **Yvon Le Bellec**, dairy farmer

I started in 1990 with around fifteen cows.
At the time the quota was set at 123.000 liters a year.

Four years ago, we were selling the milk at 34 centimes a liter. Now it is at 27. I've lost 22.000 Euros in two years.

I live on 1100 Euros a month and I'll get a tiny pension.
The farmers' demonstrations last year didn't achieve anything.
The Minister for Agriculture, Le Foll, announced a payout for every dairy farmer of 1000 Euros a few months ago.
I didn't get anything.

For the past two years we've really cut back, I haven't bought a thing nor made any investments. Just as well! I was going to change the car, change the tractor, but I didn't do anything.

Life on the farm was hard in the past, it was difficult but you made a good living.
Before, we worked together; now it's everyone for himself. That's progress for you.



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Photo 16 - Jean Trémel

Back in my day, there was no automation, everything was manual.

We started working very young. When we got home from school, we had just the time to do our homework and after that we had to go out and work.

When I was 5 or 6, already, one of the first jobs I did was to gather apples. And then I minded the cattle.

When I was around 10, I read a lot because it was a bit boring minding the cows, but my father didn't approve. He gave me a sickle, saying "you can cut some weeds while you're minding the cows". He said that reading was no use.



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Photo 17 - Olivier and Laurent Martin, cattle farmers

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Photo 18 - Michel Leverage, former farmer

I had sixty-five cows, and I knew the name and origin of them all. I'm very interested in genetics. We had twenty to forty liters of milk a day. But now I'm giving up. I've stopped since the 1st of January. I'm 58 years old.

As it was my own business, I don't get any unemployment assistance. I have no income anymore. Farming was so much hassle. And then there was the drop in prices. Incomes went down. I was barely earning the minimum wage. I started in 1979, so I don't have a pension yet. I'll get it when I'm 62. But it won't even come to 800€ net. It isn't logical to have worked so long to earn such a small amount. That's why I'm a bit disillusioned.



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Photo 19 - Jean-Yves Cavan, producer of Paimpol white beans, dairy farmer and renter of horse-drawn caravans

I have about a hundred hectares of beans, cereals (wheat and barley), beetroot, corn and pasture. And seventy dairy cows.

We started the beans twenty-five years ago. When I started, we did around 13.000 tones, and now we're at 5.500 tones.

In 2013, the rate for them was 1, 10€/kilo, and now it is 1, 19. But you see them on sale at nearly 3, 50/kg. All of the difference goes into the pockets of the middlemen.

We launched into rural tourism nine years ago. We're in a crisis at the moment, people leave for shorter periods so they don't stay as long with us.

Everyone regrets the olden days. Working conditions have improved, but now the stress is not physical, but mental.



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Photo 20 - Xavier Briand

I'm in the business of agricultural equipment. I rent machines and operators to farmers. We have seventeen tractors, nine combine harvesters, and four motorized harvesters. We buy and renew the equipment as we go along. We have 3500 m² of hangars to house the machines and for repairs.

It is the administrative side of things that is starting to weigh us down. We're in the countryside. In today's world, even the most remote farm needs to have internet. There is no paper anymore. It's complicated. Our trade is production, working in the fields, harvesting, and now we have a new job taking care of all the paperwork. We were never trained for that. It is stressful.

We suffer from the common agricultural policy, Europe, the multinationals. I don't see any way out. I'm fairly pessimistic about the future.

