

**Synopsis:****A FARM UNLIKE ANY OTHER**

Photographic documentary by

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**Prologue**

Belgium loses fifteen hundred farms every year and the trend is for an increase in specialised, intensive agriculture.

In such a context, the survival of small farms is becoming increasingly difficult. In line with today's focus on ecology and economy, "A farm unlike any other" tells the story, in photographs, of life at the *Ferme de la Baillerie*, a goat farm where cheese is made and sold in a self-sufficient, ecological and sustainable manner.

Agriculture remains the irreplaceable foundation of the food chain but it would seem that today it needs to start evolving in order to take account of social, economical and ecological factors.

The challenges are multiple: how to feed six billion humans, reduce inequality, eliminate hunger, conserve the environment, maintain solidarity, grant access to the land, become self-sufficient, recognise the value of farmers...

This documentary describes the workings of this young, small-scale cooperative, and puts the spotlight on those involved, who refuse to bend to the diktats of the agro-food industry.

**The Protagonists**

The *Ferme de la Baillerie* would not be what it is without the women and men who contribute tirelessly to its operation and development. The main protagonists are Johanne, Christophe, Sylvain and Simon.

Truly motivated, all four work on a project that is in perfect harmony with their values. Christophe and Johanne founded an agricultural cooperative in 2007, which Simon and Sylvain subsequently joined in 2012.

The statutes of the cooperative guarantee the respect of the criteria defined for the project, such as self-sufficiency, sustainability, solidarity and ecology.

They form a perfectly unified team, each capable of doing any of the tasks on the farm.

**Introduction**

The *Ferme de la Baillerie* was built in the 15th century on an outcrop overlooking the Try-au-Chêne plateau, in Brabant Wallony.

It went through several changes over the centuries until Christophe and Johanne, after having spent two years looking for a suitable place, decided to set up their goat farm and cheese production facility there.

They were faced with several problems and challenges, such as the purchase of the farm and the land, as well as attaining self-sufficiency and profitability.

They then set about a thorough renovation of the buildings, focused on energy efficiency and the blend between family lodgings and the agricultural installations.

### **The workings of the farm**

The flock is made up of one hundred and twenty milking goats, fifty kid goats and four billy goats. They are of the Saanen breed, originally from the Saane valley in Switzerland. It is one of the best and most common breeds of milking goat in the world. All the cheese at the farm is made from unpasteurised milk, without any added preservatives. Cheesemaking is an art mastered by all the members of the cooperative, requiring skill and experience; it puts the craftsman in direct contact with “living matter”. In charge of creating and adjusting the various recipes, Johanne “feels” the transformation of the raw material and delights in the symbiosis present between all the elements involved.

Five times a week, *la Baillerie* sells its cheeses at the markets, which constitute its principal source of revenue. The farm would not be able to function without short-loop, local sales, which reduce the number of intermediaries between the producer and the consumer. In this way, the farm keeps control over the prices and is able to invest any profits in sustainable agriculture.

Fertilisation of the ground is another focus of activity. The land needs to provide high yield and so fertilisation needs to be excellent. At *la Baillerie*, manure is the principal fertiliser, mixed with straw, and is rich in the organic material that plants need as food. The farm has attained self-sufficiency in the production of forage by optimising the use of its land. “Self-produced food”, an indispensable key to self-sufficiency and sustainability, is a way in which the farm shows its solidarity with third-world countries whose lands and farmers are too often exploited to produce the food additives needed by animals in the intensive industrial farms of the richer countries.

Land is scarce and is used only to grow forage, maize and beets. *La Baillerie* uses the ley, or temporary prairie principle, sowing ray-grass and the associated perennial leguminous plants (violet clover, hybrid clover).

The lands are divided into plots which are sown and harvested in rotation every three years, thus providing the daily food requirements for the herd as well as producing silage for the winter season.

The advantage of this method is that no herbicides are used, and even if some weeds like dock, thistle or shepherd’s purse should happen to appear, they are not eliminated. The spread of weeds is limited by regular mowing, coupled with the planting of early-developing plants such as Alexandria clover which occupies the ground quickly.

### **Alternatives**

The “green revolution” has succeeded in providing abundant food to the industrial areas of the West, but has also led to social inequality and undesirable effects for nature and for public health.

Now, today, instead of change, some are calling for an “agro-ecological revolution”. With sustainable development as a basis, this revolution covers economical, environmental and socio-cultural issues.