

MARK NEVILLE  
PARADE (TEXTS)



Pen-Quelen

Kerhardy

Ty-Nevez-Mouric

Penquer Disque  
Disque  
TY NEVEZ MOURIC

S<sup>t</sup> Houarne

Indevet  
Coat an Drail

Parc Loch  
Coat Charles

Vy Vian  
Kerlec

Le Hellou  
Kerg...

Joulin de  
Ker...

Coat Lige  
Coat Coët

Uhellan  
Coat Lige

Le Harz  
Kerl...

Ar Louise

Ty Nevez  
Danouët

Ker...

Kerguissac

Ville Blanc  
Gollédic V

Le Gollédic V

Go

Les Qu...

Ker Pan Légu...

Coat Lige

Felha...

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PARADE (TEXTS)

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Mark Neville

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8. INTRODUCTION  
Mark Neville
12. ACCESS TO LAND FOR FARMERS:  
A CALL TO ACTION  
Véronique Rioufol, Ruth Curtis,  
Ruth West, Michel Vampouille
18. GRÉGORY AND AURÉLIE  
Pig farmers
26. ALAIN SCOUARNEC  
Farmer of pigs, cows and poultry
30. MÉLINDA LE GALL  
Specialist in animal mediation
36. NICOLE LE PEIH  
Farmer of poultry and cows, and political  
representative for Morbihan
42. FLORENCE BOCANDÉ AND  
JEAN-FRANÇOIS GUILLEMAUD  
Cattle farmers
48. ELODIE GUELVOUT  
Poultry farmer
52. JEAN-ROCH LE MOINE  
Horse trainer
57. FURTHER RESOURCES
59. THANKS

## INTRODUCTION

Mark Neville

In 2016, on the day Britain voted by referendum to leave the European Union, I began work on a project based in Guingamp, Brittany (“little Britain”), France. Commissioned by the Centre d’Art GwinZegal over a three-year period, I produced *Parade*, a photographic portrait of this provincial agricultural region. Exhibiting the work at the local football stadium, the farming community – which constitutes the primary demographic of the team’s supporters – became both the subject of, and the principal audience for, this project.

*Parade* features a variety of subjects and people, but it is mostly about how we form communities, whatever our nationalities. What struck me most from my encounters in Brittany were the many people, not only farmers, who have evolved complex, unconventional relationships to animals (even if the endpoint is animals as food). These relationships are explored both metaphorically and directly in my images in the photobook *Parade*. Notions of utopia, or *ecotopia*, underpin these images of farmers, nuns, Breton dancers, baton twirlers, people breeding pigs, dogs, or horses, supermarket shoppers, football supporters and football players, families on the beach or attending a beauty pageant. Some of the photographs seem to express a real optimism about our chances to achieve that better world, whilst others display an anxiety about the gap between the ideal and the real.

The opportunity to exhibit *Parade* at The Photographers’ Gallery supplied the platform to produce and send out *Parade (texts)*. As well as interviews with, and texts by, some of those I met in Brittany, this book also includes a Call to Action from the Terre de Liens / Access to Land network. If you are reading this book, you may have visited the exhibition at The Photographers’ Gallery, where it is being distributed for free; or you may have received it, alongside the photobook, because you are in a position to help change things. I am sending copies to key UK policymakers, to the European

Ministries of Food and Agriculture, to UK agribusiness leaders and farmers, and to rural and urban schools, libraries and community centres in France and the UK.

Small-scale farming is far more prevalent than we often think. More than 90% of farms worldwide are run by an individual or family and rely primarily on family labour. Moreover, they produce about 80% of the world's food. Even in Europe, more than two thirds of all farms have less than five hectares of land. But while it is widespread, small-scale farming is also vulnerable – and becoming more so every day. Too little is known or discussed about this, and the aim of *Parade (texts)* is to give urgently needed support to those independent farmers who are trying to safeguard and develop what they do. The farmers I interviewed speak from many years of experience; each one of them has their own perspective and nuanced way of reaching towards a more dignified life for their animals.

Brittany mirrors Britain, and the issues which farmers face in France are the same they face in the UK. The photo-book contains visual metaphors for the relationships which are described here in words. The combination of the two publications, disseminated to a targeted audience, is intended to make an impact in a way which other forms cannot.

ACCESS TO LAND FOR FARMERS:  
A CALL TO ACTION

Véronique Rioufol *Terre de Liens / Access to Land Network*

Ruth Curtis *Soil Association*

Ruth West *Real Farming Trust*

Michel Vampouille *Terre de Liens*

CONTEXT

Across Europe, common trends severely impact food, farming and rural areas: urban development, the industrialisation of farming systems and the ageing of farmers. These trends mean that the EU has lost over 10% of its farmland in just twenty years – an area the size of Romania.

Meanwhile, industrial agriculture has rapidly expanded: larger and larger farms, greater mechanisation, and the narrowing of production to only one crop or animal species, often in an intensive way that destroys jobs, depletes natural resources and homogenises the landscape. Today, 3% of EU farms (over 100 hectares) control 50% of farmland. In turn, small farms are disappearing in their thousands. Agricultural subsidies fuel the problem: payments to farmers from the Common Agricultural Policy are based on the scale of your farm, rather than encouraging food quality, farm employment or nature conservation. So the more you farm, the more aid you get, and the more you want land to get more.

With the ageing of farmers, millions of hectares will change hands in the coming two decades. What happens to that land when it reaches the market is crucial to the future of our food and farming systems. And current trends point in the wrong direction: land is increasingly concentrated, expensive, used for non-food production or diverted away from farming.

In this crucial moment of land transition, a new generation of farmers is emerging. Many are promoting new ways of farming: organically or agroecologically; in direct relation with consumers; providing educational services or other social services; developing on-farm food processing and reclaiming a better share of the added value. An increasing number do not have a background in farming: some are career changers, others grew up in the countryside but have no prior experience with farming.

But access to land is now the number one obstacle to entering farming. The majority of young farmers – and novice



farmers of all ages – struggle with land access, affordability, and tenure. They sometimes have to wait four, five, or six years before finding a viable piece of land that the owner is willing to sell or rent to them, rather than to existing local farmers. When they have it, they often have only temporary or insecure conditions of lease, or have to go into debt for decades to buy the land.

The question of who is going to be the next generation of farmers is a very pressing one. Who will grow our food? Who will sustain rural economies and communities? Who will maintain open landscapes for everybody to enjoy? And how can this new generation access land in good conditions?

Grassroots projects are emerging: community land trusts, cooperatives, and farm incubators, for example. They are charting the way forward for securing land, to encourage a new generation of farmers and enable a transition towards agroecological farming and food systems. The Access to Land network, established in 2012, brings together grassroots organisations from across Europe to share experiences and promote the significance of access to land for agroecological farmers. Amongst its members are Terre de Liens in France, and the Soil Association, the Real Farming Trust and the Biodynamic Land Trust in the UK.

## CALL TO ACTION

### *I. By the government*

How should public policy respond to what we know about the importance of securing land for a new generation of farmers? The Access to Land network and other advocacy bodies in France and the UK have made a range of recommendations for governments, including the following:

1. Reverse the vision of farmland as a reservoir for urban, infrastructure and tourism development. Stop farmland consumption and preserve farmland for its unique role in food production, nature conservation and rural development
2. Reform the agricultural subsidy system – support small farms, agroecology and on-farm jobs, instead of encouraging the creation of ever-larger farms.
3. Set up a participatory and inclusive decision-making process about land use and management through local and national land commissions, to balance the diverse, potentially conflicting uses of land – e.g. food, energy, biodiversity, development, recreation
4. Strengthen land regulations to prioritise the use of farmland for food, farming and agroforestry; prioritise farmers over agribusinesses, and secure tenant farmers' rights
5. Reduce land prices and cut speculation, by giving priority to direct users over investors, and limiting prices through taxation, land market regulations and public land rentals
6. Promote forms of common and non-profit land ownership and land management, which support new farmers.

## II. *By farmers*

Farmers still have a major role to play in our societies. Reclaiming the pride of farming, producing food and taking care of the land is part of transforming how farmers view themselves and how we view them. Farmers also need to make themselves heard through unions, associations, local public consultations and agricultural committees. We encourage farmers to:

1. Maintain farming on a human scale, where farmers have a direct relation to the land, crops, animals and surrounding communities
2. Opt for more sustainable farming models, which protect food quality, land, jobs, local activities and natural resources
3. Support the early careers of a new generation of farmers through mentoring, on-farm training, farm incubation, land sharing arrangements and progressive farm transfer
4. Plan for farm succession well ahead of time. Allow for time and options to find a new farmer rather than sell to the big local farmer

## III. *By all of us*

Whether we are living in towns or in the countryside, actively committed to sustainable farming or just people who believe that farmers remain an essential part of our societies and economies, we can all do something. Here are some of the things we might do:

1. Ask politicians, both local and national, about their position on the preservation of farmland and the farming models they support, especially before elections.

2. Ask the local council about their plans and strategies for preserving farmland, promoting local food systems and small-scale agroecology, and supporting new farmers. Demand that these are made a priority.
3. Find out about the origin of our food, where it comes from, how it has been produced, whether it is seasonal and what impact its production may have on the environment. Progressively try to source more of our food locally, from organic and agroecological farmers who respect animals, natural resources and the land.
4. (Re)connect with land and farming: sign up for a community-supported box scheme; join a community garden; meet farmers at farmers' markets, producers' shops and open days.
5. Find out about local and national organisations promoting access to land, and other bodies supporting new farmers. Volunteer, donate, and spread the word about them. Some organisations are listed at the back of this book.

## GRÉGORY AND AURÉLIE

### Pig farmers

*A friend's local butcher had told her about a couple who were supplying them with some amazing pork. Grég and Aurélie hadn't grown up with farming, but, having moved to Brittany on a whim and spent their first two years living in a mobile home with no hot water, they were now serious farmers on a mission to raise pigs more humanely. I was curious as to what had led them down this path, with its risks and inconveniences.*

*I was struck by their plot of land, full of that raw, chaotic energy that pig farms often possess; and by the pigs themselves, who approached us excitedly like dogs, and were clearly so naturally at home among people. It was obvious Grég and Aurélie weren't interested in crafting some kind of idyllic public image, but just in using what they had to live out that rich and complex question: what does it mean to raise farm animals with dignity?*

*Grégory:* We're trying to rear our pigs in a way that's as close as possible to their conditions in the wild. We respect their rhythm and their freedom. We keep them for a period of at least a year, during which we feed them partly from crops grown on the farm. In the future, we're going to try and feed them entirely from our own crops.

*It was great to see the pigs earlier, down the road. They seem very happy.*

*Aurélie:* Yes, there's no stress for them!

*Grégory:* Zero stress. I just see them twice a day, to feed them. Since they're living outside, there's a bare minimum of domesticating that I'm obliged to do, so that I can interact with them. When you're outside, you can't be going after a pig for five hours trying to do a medical check-up.

*Aurélie:* You can't be running after a pig like that, so yeah, they're very trusting of us.

*Grégory:* That's right. And and that means they're pretty zen. They live a pretty relaxing life, outside the whole time.

*How many pigs do you have?*

*Grégory:* At the moment there are ten, of which three are breeders – three females.

*Do you have the impression that they recognise your voice?*

*Aurélie:* Yes! They're at about as intelligent as dogs.

*Grégory:* In fact their behaviour in general is very close to that of dogs. Except that unlike dogs, pigs don't fight all that much. The one who pushes hardest is the strongest, and they leave it at that.

*Aurélie:* Also, they have very good memories. At a certain point, if you hurt a pig you can be sure they'll remember it. So we train them, meaning that we stop them from pushing us over when they go to feed, for example. All of this is done very gently.

*Grégory:* And when they're small. Once they've gone beyond, say, fifty kilos, you can't do anything faced with a pig that size. If it hasn't been trained, eventually it will push you because it's not happy about being led around so quickly. So if a 100 kilo pig pushes you – you fall. On hard ground, with the consequences that can have, and so on. It'll try to chew at your legs.

*Aurélie:* There were some people near here who wanted to rear pigs free-range in fields, literally normal fields. These were people who'd been doing industrial breeding. They saw that free-range and organic methods were working, and said to themselves, "Let's give it a go". But they carried on with pretty much the same approach as before. It just doesn't work.

*Grégory:* Let's say they had maybe a hundred pigs. They had to take a bucket to a hundred pigs every day. They were two people, you need ten. They tried as two people, and after six months they'd had enough of ruining their backs and getting thrown around all over the place by the pigs. You just don't have time. So you can't reproduce the same system between rearing outdoors and indoors.

*Aurélie:* When we get to a point where we can't train the pigs properly any more, we'll leave it there. It's the same thing

when you have to take a pig to the abattoir, and you have to get them in the van to take them away, it can be hell. So when they're small we get them used to climbing into the van – they're always happy to see the van, they even climb in on their own. Grégory takes them right into the abattoir up to the last moment, so that there's no stress when the time comes.

*Do you think the regulations need to be changed at a national or EU level, or in terms of organic labelling?*

*Grégory:* I think the methods need to be changed more than the regulations. Basically, I don't think we can adapt animals or human beings to the logic of mass production, which is meant for objects. With animals, it's us who need to be adapting to them. Otherwise people won't want to do this job any more, because it's too difficult. I can understand when people who work for certain dairy or pig farms say they want to quit, because it's become a thankless task. They don't look after their animals. They look after the feed, the excrement, the medication they give to just keep the animals alive (because the system doesn't work properly). Just imagine, on industrial pig farms, people working there are going around seeing pigs' corpses. Every day. Because once you're talking about two or three thousand pigs, there's bound to be a dead one every day. How is it possible that people just get used to that?

*Aurélie:* I don't think regulation is the problem. I think people will need to learn to consume differently. Of course, people don't always have the means to buy the best-quality meat, but that doesn't mean just eating complete rubbish. A product like ours is more expensive, but you don't have the same waste as when you buy a rack of pork ribs at €8 a kilo. It's already a pretty big sum of money, and you'll often waste half of it, meaning it's actually €16 a kilo.

We've had comments on Facebook, not insults but almost, from people who say that we love animals but we send them

to the abattoir, or who criticise our prices. There's a kind of consumer education that needs to happen.

*Grégory*: I have to put my pigs on at a certain price, because they're growing for thirteen months. Most pigs will get sold at six, even five months. So I need to feed them for twice as long, and that's twice as expensive. In the supermarket you can find Hénaff sausages, which are French, but they're not organic and they're full of chemicals. And they cost €14 per kilo. The same price as mine. So people don't realise it, but they can actually buy good quality stuff. Those Hénaff sausages sell. If I could manage to sell my sausages for €14 per kilo, I wouldn't be rolling in it but we'd be able to live decently. I mean, we live with animals, we don't care about money. So ultimately it's doable.

*Aurélie*: When Grégory finished his basic agricultural training, he came home with serious doubts about his whole plan. They'd managed to put ideas into his head which weren't in keeping with the plan we'd figured out.

*Grégory*: They said to me, "Oh, you want to rear pigs outside – it's impossible. You want to feed them for a whole year, it's going to cost you too much".

*Aurélie*: Whether they're agricultural or livestock farmers, they've been working with the same model for so long that when you come along and say you're going to farm pigs outside, I think they get scared.

*Grégory*: And in fact it's their methods which no longer work. We've ruined the soil, we've ruined the relationship we used to have with animals. Some of these farms have tractors that cost €200,000, other equipment costing even more, and they spend all their income paying off the loans. So the whole thing suits the manufacturers and the banks very well, but now the farmers are just there to generate cash for the manufacturers and the banks.

*Aurélie*: Then there are people like us – we're not from a farming background, we're just very keen and have some common sense.

*Grégory*: To be honest, if you're not from the farming world, if you're, say, twenty years old and not from that world, it's almost impossible to get into it.

*Aurélie*: And they don't teach the right things at school, and they'll have trouble finding land... And yet it's that wave of younger people that could really improve things, because they have no preconceptions.

*How can that kind of consumer education be provided to people?*

*Aurélie*: I think it starts with the media, and word of mouth.

*What about regulations? That can help things as well.*

*Grégory*: Well, it's a complex issue, and we might make some enemies... But for example – we're not organic at the moment. We could get the label, but it would be a lie. At the beginning they said the conversion [to organic farming] lasts five years, now it's three, even two years. But a plot of land can't be decontaminated in five years. There's the air, the rain, the running water coming from other places. I don't know how many people in France right now are doing real organic farming, but it can't be many. They might say it's organic, but certain things are still accepted. Just as one example, in organic farming you can still use antibiotics, but not everyone knows this.

*Aurélie*: There's always a way round it. Organic farms can't be beyond a certain size, but I heard about a chicken farm where they split the building in two, so it technically becomes two separate farms. We were talking just today about how there's organic produce that's almost cheaper than non-organic produce. It makes no sense. The fact that you can buy organic produce in a hypermarket makes it meaningless. We're now returning to the same system that we had fifteen or twenty years ago, where the supermarket chains have the producers in the palms of their hands.

*Would you agree that you can almost tell when the methods are actually healthy, because the taste is better – that's the result?*

*Grégory*: Yes. But we took a real risk with the pigs, because we didn't have any real examples to follow. It took us a year and a half of crossing our fingers. And finally a butcher tries it and says "wow", and that was a relief. But you can never be certain. We're a country which has this image where we're associated with high quality produce. So let's take advantage of that, and head in that direction. We'll always be behind when it comes to mass production.

*Aurélie*: France is a beautiful country, and I think we should stop making mediocre produce. We should concentrate on local and regional produce – we have a fantastic terroir in France. The Chinese and Russians are coming and buying up our farmland. At a certain point we should maybe consider safeguarding that farmland, and commit to producing great food.

ALAIN SCOUARNEC

Farmer of pigs, cows and poultry

*On the farm of Goas ar Gall, about a fifteen-minute drive from Guingamp, 58-year-old Alain and his family have slowly created an extraordinary home for their livestock – currently ninety suckler cows and fourteen pigs, as well as poultry. The little houses (it seems absurd to call them sty) he’s built for the pigs are so exquisite you half expect to see miniature televisions and libraries in them.*

*I got to know Alain towards the end of my time in Guingamp, and his warmth and curiosity made me sad we had met so late. To me, the quality of his work never seemed to be about creating luxury produce, but just the simple desire to cultivate patient, meaningful relationships with his animals. In his kitchen, with one of his sons looking on, he told me a story about how he’d been asked what the fundamental difference was between industrial breeding and small-scale breeding. “Everyone talks to their animals”, he’d replied, “but in smaller farms, they tend to actually respond”.*

#### DON’T LET “ORGANIC” BECOME THE ULTIMATE DIRTY WORD

Thirty years ago, organic farmers were considered weirdos, poets and utopians. Quite a few of us heard ourselves described in these terms. I found it funny, personally – I couldn’t understand what was so different about our way of doing things. Our connection with the land was real and necessary: organic farmers rarely had spare land available, and where they did, we’d have had to cross a whole département, or more than one, to get there! So you had to adapt your methods to the land you had available. The scale of activity, whether for animal or arable farming, was quite constrained out of necessity, and I think that animal (and human) well-being benefited from that. Various incidents (“mad cow” disease etc.) helped lend visibility to organic methods, and consortia, developers and suppliers all started to turn up. Having derided our whole system for decades, they were suddenly converted.

Maybe we weren’t vigilant enough, but the balance of power was unequal. Localism, ethics (animal and human),

the environmental impact of our actions, respecting difference, all these things were inherent to our mode of production – the non-use of chemical products was just a starting point. Now they've turned the tables on us. Localism is nothing more than an economic strategy (one which risks undermining your hardworking organic neighbour!). As for animal ethics, just look at the dairy cows who don't come out of their stalls any more (because the robots have taken over!); land allocated for pigs calculated right to the limit of the regulations, down to the last square centimetre; the 24,000 laying hens with, lucky devils, 10 hectares to roam on (has a hen ever been known to stray that far from its coop?).

The connection with the land is completely severed, with the sole aim of enriching the middlemen; and now, greenhouses heated using “clean energy” (yes, biogas plants can produce “clean energy”... as long as you don't look too closely at how they work). Best to hide those organic fertilisers that are actually derived from conventional ones. We could go on forever. And yet, are there not other topics to explore? The extravagant consumption of meat and dairy (their being organic is not an excuse!), or our carbon footprint and energy consumption (intensive ploughing, use of drying machines etc.). We urgently need, in my view, to start questioning our own methods, before “organic” becomes the ultimate dirty word for farmers.

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MÉLINDA LE GALL

Specialist in animal mediation

*I found out about Mélinna and her work, defined mysteriously as médiation animale, in a local Guingamp newspaper. I learned that it involved a “support link based on an exchange between people and animals”, but I only really began to understand Mélinna when I visited her house. It was like Noah’s ark, with birds flying around all over the place, and dogs, guinea pigs and hens muddling along together. A pair of doves sat nonchalantly on her wrist throughout the interview.*

*I met many people with different relationships to animals during my time in Brittany, but there’s something almost mystical about what Mélinna has. It’s almost as if her whole life has been defined by her relationship with animals – in contrasting but ultimately inspiring ways.*

My job involves visiting different health facilities with my animals. Before that, I was a veterinary technician with the Ministry of Agriculture. I spent fifteen years working in abattoirs. I would inspect the animals before they died (health and traceability checks) and afterwards. The post-mortem inspections are about the actual killing process, but also hygiene checks on the carcasses and innards. Every animal killed in an abattoir gets checked by an inspector.

Working in abattoirs is obviously tough: the blood, the smell, animals grunting and groaning, the noise, the humidity, the irregular hours, an exhausting workrate, and so much more.

I remember my first day very clearly: I ate with my mother that lunchtime and said, “I can’t do this, it’s horrible!”, and I spent fifteen years there. My goal every day was that animals should be able to die decently. At the site where I worked, a large quantity of animals were being killed in religious ways, so kosher or halal, meaning that the cows are bled while still alive.

The cow is kept in a trap device to enable this. It rotates 360 degrees. The animal gets hauled upside-down with its four feet in the air, a chinstrap is attached to hold its head in

place, and a religious person comes, places themselves on top of it and drains the blood. Then the animal gets turned back over, its blood empties out, it twitches and struggles, and a few seconds later it falls into a sort of gutter in the ground. At this point an operator ties a chain around one hoof and hangs it several metres in the air. The death is slow and, above all, painful. And at the same time, the pace of work is nightmarish.

In abattoirs, accidents are a daily occurrence for the animals, at every stage: transport, unloading, placement in cubicles, transfer, and the killing itself. I fought really hard all those years to get the regulations enforced. I made a huge effort to tolerate the horror I was witnessing every day. Luckily my own animals at home helped me make it through! I was suffering from serious neck pain, and even now just thinking about it, my neck contracts and the tingling starts.

Later I was working on horse killings, which I've always found unbearable. When they were knocked out, I wouldn't be able to control myself. I'd feel a great ache at the back of my head and I'd retch when they were disemboweled. My body was telling me: STOP! It's been two and a half years since I quit my job, and with time I'm getting fewer nightmares, I'm less haunted by those images, but I'll never forget it. I really avoid the abattoir industry now, otherwise I instantly feel nauseous.

Now I have a fantastic job. I improve people's well-being, and thanks to my amazing animals my aches and pains have almost disappeared.

*What sort of animals do you have here?*

I've got horses, hens, cats, dogs, doves, budgies, guinea pigs and rabbits. They all live happily together. And some of them work together, too. The horses live more among themselves, there's an annex as well as the main building. But everyone lives together very happily.

*Do you sometimes have handicapped animals here?*

Yes, so I have Bonnie, a golden retriever, who is disabled from birth. And I have Piou, a hen, who has a crippled foot, she's two and a half. So those animals don't work, they don't come to the sessions. Bonnie is sort of frightened of everything, but she's a very good family dog. At the same time these are animals which have been socialised since a very young age.

*Would you say that you have a special relationship with the animals here, that you've really built up?*

Yes, but it's just a question of respect. Of time, and patience. There is something else – but I wouldn't be able to say exactly what.

*Is there a way of being with animals that humans should be trying to adhere to?*

Of course. People should know where the food they're eating comes from – the conditions the animals are bred and kept in, and especially slaughtered. Farmers get a really bad rep, but abattoirs are where most of the problems are found I think – the conditions in which the slaughtering takes place. So there is work to be done on that, a lot of work.

*How can that be changed?*

I don't know, video cameras were a good idea, but who is actually looking at that footage of the slaughtering? In a way, it's just that the existing regulations need to be enforced. And then it's about the next steps.

*How do the doves manage to sit on your hands like that?*

Well I got them from a gentleman who had already domesticated them a bit. At the start, you know, they were flying all over the place. I used to feed them without making eye contact, that helped. But gradually they grew comfortable,

after five or six months. I don't know, maybe something happened - I just try to be calm. As for whether that get transmitted to the birds, I don't know! But when I use the doves in my sessions, it really does help calm people down, I sense it, especially if I lower my voice. And then everyone lowers their voices [whispering]. It's really nice.

Part of the reason I took part in this project is that I wanted people to see the passion I have for my animals. Lots of people say that I'm making the animals work, and yes, I agree with that. At the same time, I give them everything in return. And it's for a good cause, I bring happiness and well-being, I'm able to lift people a bit out of their daily lives. I can see that this calms people, that it brings them happiness to see these animals.

NICOLE LE PEIH

Farmer of poultry and cows, and political representative for Morbihan

*After working in hospitality, including stints at 4-star hotels in Paris and Chartres, Nicole returned home to Brittany and got into farming, specifically free-range poultry. Currently, she serves on the departmental agricultural committee, leads the regional section of the “agriculture au féminin” network, and was elected to the National Assembly in 2017, representing the La République en Marche! party.*

*How did you get to this point in your career?*

Well, my path has been quite unusual. After my degree I decided to go to catering school. I worked in high-end hospitality, which allowed me to discover a part of society I didn't know, or barely knew. So I worked in hospitality in Paris, and in Chartres. Then I came back to these parts because I met the person who would later become my husband. I started working in agribusiness since it was the core industry here.

To begin with I worked in import/export, for the company LERIAL. But eventually I decided to start my own business with my husband. There was a catastrophe at LERIAL, because the business had been hit by a fire meaning that 650 people were laid off, including 90 couples who worked there. So I said to myself, well, I'm thirty years old, I'm capable of starting again with another business. My husband also wanted to set up a farm. We both had a yearning to work outside, not to be closed off in a building all day. That's what initially led us into extensive farming. Also, my husband had technical knowledge about farming, about management too, while I had the commercial side. I went back to study at agricultural school, to get training in order to set up a company with my husband.

*How did you get the land? Had it belonged to your parents?*

Yes, so, both our parents were farmers of dairy cows, like many farmers in this Centre-Bretagne area, and we brought

together their small businesses so we were able to generate a decent income.

What I really like is that I work outside, that every day I'm breathing outdoor air, and that I work on my farm – it's twenty metres from my first farm building to my farmhouse made of Breton granite!

*Do you think that pesticides could be better regulated?*

In terms of phytosanitary products, as they're called, that was necessary. After the war, Brittany was asked to get out of the rut it was in and feed the country, that was the mission given by the French government. They managed to get Brittany on its feet, with its head held high, because we managed to produce food for the whole of France. So we're self-sufficient in food production. In fact we manage to supply a large part of Europe, the Grand-Ouest in general supplies a large part of Europe. And in order to get these top results, it was essential to work with specialist colleges, agricultural councils, experts who brought their skills to farmers so as to make their farms profitable and improve them.

Today, we're realising that we may have gone too far, and got to saturation point. Except that we're still responsible for France's self-sufficiency in food production. So where are we heading? There are undoubtedly imbalances that need to be improved. Maybe a little less meat consumption, a bit more vegetable consumption. Of course, why not? By the way, Morbihan is the top département in France for the production of field vegetables. That's why cooperatives like Triskalia have been set up next to those places. These cooperatives get set up next to the farms, to process what those farms produce.

We produce, we process, we supply. And this combination means that we now have skilled workers, men, women, working in farming and agribusiness, and it's the powerhouse of Morbihan. Wherever you go in my constituency,

the strongest investment is in farming and agribusiness. Behind this, there's a lot of job creation, in transport, in management, in veterinary services, in labelling, packaging and so on. It creates added value. It's a whole set of essential skills around farming and agribusiness which create this regional powerhouse. And in financial terms, I would say to you that this triangle of investment is right at the heart of my constituency.

*You're describing a model of agriculture that has been dominant for many years. Hasn't this been responsible for soil erosion, and is there something we could do to prevent this, or to slow it down?*

Soil erosion has of course been studied by agricultural committees and specialised farmers. They're now clear that during winter, plant covers must be used, to prevent erosion and the best soil falling away into the adjacent ditches. So that technique is now known by all but a few farmers.

*What are the best ways of encouraging people to buy local? And what are the specific issues to do with distribution and price wars – how can we moderate this?*

When I decided to set up my own business, it was because I wanted control over the products from start to finish. In other words, I wanted to be responsible for production, processing, delivery and billing. Meaning that I take responsibility for all the different links in the chain. It's me, and my husband and our employees, who manage our production. I produce free-range poultry, in a direct supply chain. But I chose that control over my production, even if that means doing less, but doing it better, that's my choice.

*Should regulations be stricter in terms of labelling organic produce, and really informing consumers what it means?*

At the moment I would say that there are several profiles of customers. And their attitudes are sometimes a

bit schizophrenic. Because sometimes they want a cheap product, and sometimes they want something upmarket. That can be difficult to cater for. In France, we tend to aim high in terms of quality. We now have full traceability, some of the best traceability in the world. And why? Because for fifty years, we've been training our farmers, men, women, to work better, to understand their produce, to understand food consumption. We understood how to progress slowly but surely.

*Often farming has quite a negative image. What do you think could be done to improve this?*

Well, having worked in farming for a long time, having organised farm visits for years all around this area, I think I've got the message out to consumers, by getting them to come and meet farmers in situ, to see the opportunities and the challenges. Because we work with living things. I'm not sure if every person really understands that. I think the notion of time is really not embedded in people's understandings, the notion of seasons.

*Perhaps the negative image is also generated by the media, who aren't always impartial in what they say?*

Absolutely. I think that, unfortunately, the media often have a point to make, something to criticise, and they just go for it. It's a real shame, because we're not attracting a new generation of people to get into farming. Except, if I'm being optimistic, new people will come – they will be skilled, they'll have a completely different background, different career paths, and they'll bring real technological, digital skills. And the farms of tomorrow, they may well be like laboratories, really like laboratories.

*Can you tell us about the status of women in farming?*

Well, I started out in farming in 1990, at a time when there were a lot of women in farming, but their status wasn't

recognised. So we fought for them to have the same status as men, because they have the same everyday responsibilities, they take the same physical risks, the same financial risks, because they take out the same bank loans; the same social risks, in that they put money aside for their retirement and so on. So let them have the same status. That was a struggle, and it was accepted. And now, only now in 2019, we've had to wait until this year for a vote in favour of equal maternity leave [for the self-employed]. You can see how women have seriously tough everyday struggles to deal with.

So that's done, now. I think women are going to start getting into farming, and that they'll take over entire companies, with a particular emphasis on the environmental side of things. I think when I'm older and I stop farming, I have this image that by that point there will be someone on every farm who is responsible for the ecological side of things, in the broadest sense. In terms of animal-rearing, in terms of production, and just in general. And that will be precisely what draws other kinds of people into farming. I really believe it.

FLORENCE BOCANDÉ AND  
JEAN-FRANÇOIS GUILLEMAUD  
Cattle farmers

*Florence and Jean-François have been rearing cows on their land near the village of Hëllean since 1984, after Jean-François' parents, also farmers, took their retirement. I met with them to learn more about their organic methods, and how the networks they're part of help them to keep adapting.*

*Better access to land for young farmers was an issue that came up repeatedly during my time in Brittany, but it was Jean-François and Florence who made me realise just how much of a game-changer this could be. They might not benefit from it directly, but in their view, those who could are brimming with new ideas.*

*Jean-François:* We actually took over the farm without any plans to modify how it was being run. We figured my parents had got on quite well with the farm. Then, twenty years ago, so in the late 1990s, we began to feel that our methods weren't really consistent with our ideas. The relationship we had with society, let's say – whether us, or our friends or other people linked to the [environmentalist] movement – we noticed there was a tension between what we were doing on the farm and what we were campaigning for outside of that. So we felt that modifying our approach was...

*Florence:* It gave us some motivation to keep going!

*Jean-François:* Yeah it's true, It was a phase where we'd kind of had enough of the job. Intensive, production-driven farming using a lot of chemicals was getting really boring. We took the opportunity to go organic, to try and recover our enthusiasm.

*So organic methods weren't very common twenty years ago?*

*Florence:* No, well, we're part of an agricultural workers' union called the Confédération Paysanne, and at that time we had a few – not many – colleagues who had been doing organic farming, starting in the early 1990s. That was a motivation, too. And around here, we were surrounded by collectives and working groups who...

*Jean-François:* who were helping farmers to go organic. But we should add that the Confédération Paysanne was, and

still is, about a broader questioning of the intensive farming model – the constant escalation of quantities, escalation of work, of the use of chemicals and fertilisers. So this conception of another kind of farming was really interesting to us, and it made us feel motivated again.

*Are there lots of unions in this sector?*

*Jean-François:* There are three that are really recognised. In particular there's one called the FNSEA, which promotes production-driven farming, claiming we should constantly be increasing our productivity if we want to keep our jobs as farmers. It's a completely different way of thinking about the profession. By contrast our union involves people working on a much smaller scale.

*Do unions like that exist in the UK?*

*Florence:* I don't know, I was going to ask you!

*Jean-François:* I'm not sure, they must exist but they probably don't have much access to media coverage. When you go walking in the countryside you get the impression that agriculture is the same everywhere, whereas in fact there's a multitude of different kinds of farming, and farmers – and obviously lots of different collectives and unions that represent them.

Certainly in France this union means a lot to us, because if you're not involved with the kind of farming that gets supported by the *chambres d'agriculture* [public bodies which connect key stakeholders in the farming industry], it's very difficult to take an alternative route.

What's becoming more common now is so-called local farming, local agriculture. People who basically produce, process and sell locally. Often these people have had to develop a certain independence. They also don't have much need for technical training. At the time when we were going organic, ours was more or less the same kind of farm as any other – our neighbours for example – so it was hard to take

an alternative path like that. We had to find organisations and people who could support us.

The issues today aren't so different, but there are certainly more and more young people who are setting up as farmers. They often do things unconventionally and that benefits them, but it also benefits the whole profession and the local population in general. They're making good quality produce. And of course they also pollute less, since they sell locally. It's good for local employment too: they're working with less technology, so they're really making use of human skills.

*Florence:* And it's good for community cohesion too, in rural environments.

*What could be done to encourage this approach, do you think?*

*Jean-François:* One obstacle is access to land or property. For me, my parents were farmers, my grandparents were farmers and so on, so it was easy to get set up. And there was a certain familiarity with things. What happens is that farms gradually get vacated, and that means you can expand and grow. But for a person from outside the farming world who wants to get into it, it's much harder, especially if you have an unusual project.

Partly because the profession is quite.. it can be quite defensive. They'll say, "Oh yeah, him, what's he up to" and so on. So there are fewer and fewer farms, but they're bigger and bigger. They really swallow up all the land. Lots of young people want to get back into farming, a huge number of projects, they really want to get set up, but the main obstacle is getting land. It's a huge shame because there's a real hotbed of people with interesting ideas.

In political terms, we need to be able to distribute land better. There need to be more restrictive policies for farmers like us, who are easily replaceable. What I mean is that we shouldn't have priority in being able to get land, those young people should.



*Florence:* Some of them have really great ideas, like combining farming and baking for example.

*Jean-François:* But if there's no political will, that will be difficult. It's not that these new projects are guaranteed to succeed, but if you don't give them a chance, you'll never know.

*Is money an obstacle too?*

*Jean-François:* Yes, but particularly for those who want to take on large-scale farms. Whereas we encourage them to take on smaller farms, where you don't need so much money. We're experiencing this ourselves at the moment, because the plan is to pass on our farm in two or three years. Our farm isn't worth a huge amount of money, so there are young people who are interested in it. Because they know we're not going to be asking for €500,000. If they carry on in the same way, and don't do anything stupid, make any bad investments, we think they can keep it going. And improve it too, because there's a lot that needs improvement.

*Are you part of any activist groups?*

*Jean-François:* We're close to the environmentalist movement, certainly. We're activists – the day before yesterday I was at a demo campaigning to stop the closure of the hospital in Ploërmel. We're very aware that if the hospital closes, it's a public service disappearing, it's rural life disappearing... We're very attached to living in the countryside. It's kind of a moment where we need to take action. We're farmers, but we're citizens first and foremost. And we're convinced it's possible to have a life here in the countryside which is rich and interesting, and that we really need to keep people living here. That's sort of our incentive at the moment!

*You've got 25 days of school visits coming up. Are the pupils well-informed before they come on your course?*

*Florence:* In general the teachers do work with their students on it. They have their curiosity, their questions and so on.

*Jean-François:* When we're working with them they're at primary age. I'd say that the children are basically there to come and look at the animals on the farm! But there's a message that the teachers want to pass on to them. And we take that opportunity to send a message too, about the way we work with animals, how milk is produced, and so on. How does food get produced and processed? How does milk get produced? And we take the opportunity to discuss these things with the teachers, especially. We talk about revenues, annual leave, health issues and so on. I do enjoy the change in that sense. We believe that the children hear these things, see these things, and that can only be helpful in the years to come – to have another view of the farming profession.

ELODIE GUELVOUT

Poultry farmer

*Having grown up with farming, Elodie initially had little interest in taking over the family business. She worked for seven years with the emergency medical services, but eventually returned to the nest and took over her parents' farm in the commune of Brignan. As well as an 'ecological' building for her 10,500 chickens, she also has a nursery for those who are injured – though this is rarely more than one per month. In many supposedly 'free-range' poultry farms, only a fraction of the animals actually get outside. But here, thanks to automatic hatches set up across the full length of the building, all the animals have easy access to the land outside.*

Brittany – a land full of life and human potential, but which bears many scars from intensive farming. Produce, produce and produce some more. This was the way in the 1950s, a logic which nowadays is illogical. At that time there were no concerns about the environmental and social impact.

This Brittany is changing, but at a slow pace. It shouldn't be forgotten that agriculture is dominant in the region, with numerous agri-food processing plants creating jobs and a strong economy.

A well-conceived and organic model of farming could generate even more jobs, because this kind of farming requires more human labour.

I am convinced that organic farming is the farming of the future if we want to save our planet. But to succeed in convincing other people, we need to educate them about ways of eating, about using products that are seasonal and local, and that respect animals, farmers and processing methods. With transparency about the process from start to finish. Raising awareness must start from a very young age; in my view, it's essential to be going into schools and leading by example.

*Regarding pesticides, what can be done to better regulate the way they're used?*

For me, to begin with I'd be talking about regulation at a global level. I think it should be equal across all countries. The same regulatory requirements.

I'm primarily talking about organic production here, because currently the organic label doesn't have the same meaning at all in European legislation as it does in French legislation. And I often hear people say "the thing is, for me, with French organic produce I believe it. But when it's European, or has come from abroad, for me that's as if it were non-organic food in France". So that's the thing. We actually have to start regulating pesticides at a global level. Then in terms of the French context, there are farms which are allowed to carry out different kinds of production, i.e. organic and non-organic – for me these things cannot go together. I mean, with those who are making the transition to organic, they should be given a chance, because it takes work, it can't be done overnight. But once the transition has been made, it should be that all their farms have to go organic, and they don't just keep up the conventional farming on the sly, because they're too nervous, or worried about finances. Anyway, that's kind of my position.

*What do you think of the growth of vegetarianism and veganism?*

It scares me, personally it scares me. I can understand that people don't necessarily wish to eat meat. I can understand that, and I totally respect that choice. But we shouldn't impose our choices on others. That's something I can't accept. The methods they employ are very tough, very violent. And that's precisely not the way to move forwards. It's fundamentally violent. So whenever people talk about veganism, vegetarianism, I say, "be careful", because they're putting across an image that is violent.

*Do you think it has an effect on healthy growth for children?*

Yes, in my view it's dangerous, totally. Humans are built for eating meat, protein. Of course, you can get it in different

forms, but I think – you can't impose it on your child. Of course, at the age of 10 or 15, you can choose to reject that and say, "I don't want to eat meat". But you can't impose it on a small child, on a newborn.

*What is the danger exactly?*

Well it's medical, it's the lack of proper growth, the deficiencies, which are massive for children, who need to be properly fed in order to be well-equipped for their later development as adults.

*Are there any studies on that, or is it more a sense that you have?*

Well, so far I've not necessarily come across them, I'm not aware of any reports looking specifically at that. There are some, but I'm also talking about things like the growing numbers of people getting into plant-based dairy substitutes.

*Soya for example.*

Yes, careful: they're endocrine disruptors, young girls in particular should not be consuming them. Through his job my husband is making a lot of parents aware of this, because there are people who have no idea. It's fashionable, it's anti-gluten and so on.

My children have meat, they have dairy on a daily basis. One of them is always asking "mum, why do we eat animals?", and that builds our awareness. So I explain to them, using their own words, that humans are weak: we are carnivores, that's the way we're built. There's always a way of finding other solutions to avoid eating meat. And with climate change and so on, eating less meat is important. Not stopping altogether, but to slow down out meat consumption. But anyway, in terms of healthy growing, I explain to my children that they have to eat meat in moderation, and bred in ways that respect animal well-being through the whole of the production chain. That's something I'm very particular about.

## JEAN-ROCH LE MOINE

Horse trainer

*Jean-Roch le Moine, 33, works with horses that have behavioural problems, or are unstable, even dangerous. He spends a lot of time establishing relationships of trust with them, thanks to his experience, and by adapting to each animal. In parallel, he works with the owners by raising awareness in their approach, teaching them how to build better relationships with their horses.*

*I first witnessed Jean Roch from afar... He was with a remarkably confident horse standing on the re-enforced bonnet of his specially converted black Volvo car. I had been documenting a festival in a field, and, walking over a hillock, suddenly the trio of man, machine, horse, came into view.. The arrangement of these three elements brought to my mind the Lautréamont description which inspired Breton's thoughts on Surrealist dislocation: "beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella". Even from afar, I understood implicitly from how both Jean-Roch and his horse were standing, and from their posture in relation to the car, that some special relationship between man and animal was being created, something beyond human language.*

*Later, when I arranged to photograph Jean-Roch at work on his horse farm in Saint Agathon, he explained to me how horse owners and breeders from all over the region bring their animals to him in various states of distress and anguish. Jean Roch works to rehabilitate them, so they can regain their sense of ease and feel comfortable around people again.*

*How long does this process take? What state are the horses in when they come to you?*

Sometimes a horse will have been deliberately abused, or sometimes they may have been involved in an accident. They are often unresponsive around people, or actively afraid of them. This process of rebuilding their confidence around people can easily take months, even years, and the smallest scare, incident, or misunderstanding between me and the horse can seemingly set that road back months. I learnt my craft from my mother, who was well-known for

her amazing work in this field. Both she and my father encouraged me to develop my skills with horses from a very young age, and thus I am now walking in their footsteps.

I think it is something you are born with, a talent, but it is something which you always need to develop. These horses are always teaching me new things. One day I might see real progress, a tangible connection with the horse, but this might evaporate the very next day! The horse takes me on a spiritual journey of sorts, whereby I have to believe in the process, in both the horse, myself, and the owner, in order for recovery to take place, no matter how many setbacks I feel we have. The car is a therapeutic tool in that journey, and when the horse feels confident about standing on the car bonnet, it means there exists a real confidence in me as both a trainer and a healer.

*Does your work impact on the owners of the horse too? I mean, you have to educate them as well, on how to build a relationship with the horse.*

Exactly that. It is a triangular relationship between myself, the horse and the horse owner, and that needs to be balanced and harmonious. It means, in certain instances, I have to develop a real awareness and sensitivity as to what is going on in the lives of certain customers, as this can really affect the well-being of the horse too. I remember in one specific case I was working with a young couple. They were trying for a baby, but without success. It was beginning to get stressful and worrying for them – she doubted if she would ever become pregnant – and this stress was actually reflected in the horse. At this point I started to work with their horse, who had developed certain behavioural problems..The horse quickly became better, and the wife was able to develop a very close relationship with the horse again, and that relationship seemed to totally free her from the stress she was feeling about falling pregnant..and after a couple of months in positive contact with her horse, she fell pregnant....

## FURTHER RESOURCES

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## EUROPEAN ACCESS TO LAND NETWORK

[www.accesstoland.eu](http://www.accesstoland.eu)

## FRENCH ACCESS TO LAND ORGANISATIONS

Terre de Liens  
[www.terredeliens.org](http://www.terredeliens.org)

Terre de Liens in Brittany  
<https://terredeliens.org/bretagne.html>

Passeurs de terres - Pays de la Loire  
<http://passeursdeterres.org/>

Lurzaindia - Basque country  
[www.lurzaindia.eu](http://www.lurzaindia.eu)

## FRENCH ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTING NEW FARMERS:

Pôle Inpact  
national platform of organisations supporting alternative agriculture  
<http://www.agricultures-alternatives.org/rubrique12.html>

RENETA – national network  
of farm incubators  
[www.reneta.fr](http://www.reneta.fr)

Support network for new  
farmers in Brittany  
<http://www.paysans-creactiv-bzh.org/>

#### FRENCH FARMERS' UNION

Confédération paysanne  
[www.confederationpaysanne.fr](http://www.confederationpaysanne.fr)

#### UK ACCESS TO LAND ORGANISATIONS

The Soil Association Land Trust  
[www.soilassociation.org/the-land-trust](http://www.soilassociation.org/the-land-trust)

The Biodynamic Land Trust  
[www.biodynamiclandtrust.org.uk](http://www.biodynamiclandtrust.org.uk)

The Ecological Land Co-op  
[www.ecologicalland.coop](http://www.ecologicalland.coop)

The Scottish Farmland Trust  
<http://www.scottishfarmlandtrust.org/>

The Land Justice Network  
[www.landjustice.uk](http://www.landjustice.uk)

#### UK ORGANISATIONS AND UNIONS SUPPORTING NEW FARMERS AND AGROECOLOGY

The Real Farming Trust  
<http://www.feanetwork.org/>

The Kindling Trust  
[www.kindling.org.uk](http://www.kindling.org.uk)

The Land Workers' Alliance  
[www.landworkersalliance.org.uk](http://www.landworkersalliance.org.uk)

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*Mark Neville*

