

Local Food Systems and Public Policy: The Case of Zoning Laws in Quebec

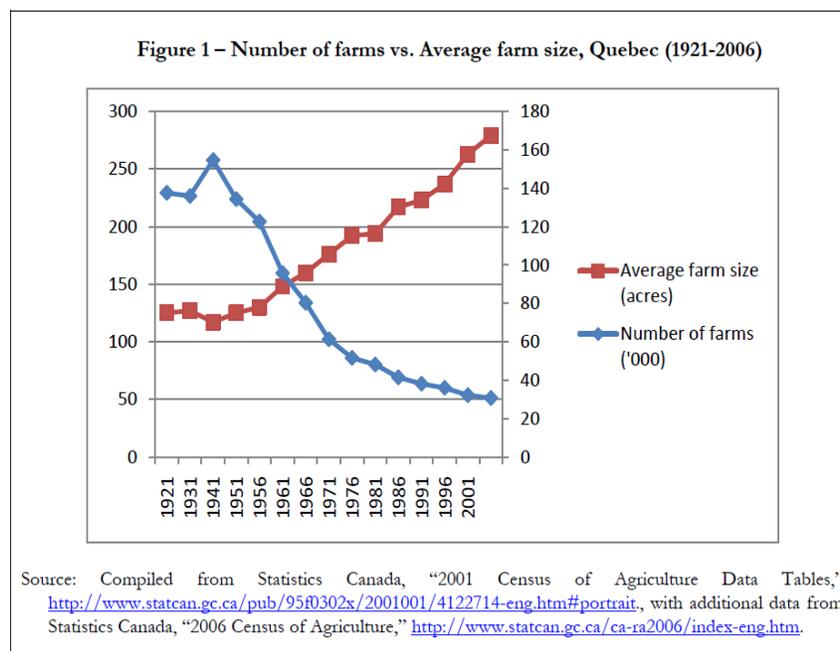
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Our paper intends to present the context of local food systems in Quebec in relation to the challenges of land policy. We believe that the problematic in Quebec and the state land protection initiative taken in the 1970s could be of great interest for other Canadian provinces and European countries faced with a similar land use and ownership problem in relation to local food systems. Based on our case study, we believe that new models of land use and ownership should be developed using cooperative practices in the context of a clear state-led framework that positions agricultural land use as a priority for the future.

Introduction

In Quebec, the agricultural, food processing, and retail sectors account for 6.8% of GDP and 12.5% of all jobs. The province produces fresh and processed food worth \$19.2 billion, while consuming only \$15.4 billion (a 25% surplus), and retailers imported \$6.9 billion worth of fresh and processed foods last year. About 44% of Quebec's raw and processed food production finds its way onto Quebecers' plates, the rest being exported to other Canadian provinces (30%) or overseas (24%) (MAPAQ 2009).

The evolution of Quebec's agricultural landscape is characterized by a declining number of farms and a market concentration in the hands of few producers. This tendency can be clearly observed since 1941, and is very similar to what we see in other Canadian provinces and other industrialized countries.



Faced with many problems related to agriculture (e.g., declining revenues, pollution, bad image, etc.), the government of Quebec gave a clear mandate to the *Commission sur l'avenir de l'agriculture du Québec* (Pronovost Comision) in 2006¹ to

1. assess the state and challenges of agriculture in Quebec;
2. analyse the effectiveness of existing public interventions;
3. make a diagnosis;
4. make recommendations based on needs for agricultural competitiveness, social needs and valorization of Quebec's regions.

The report causes us to foresee a paradigm change towards a more localized and sustainable agriculture. However, the food movement is currently waiting for the new policy that the government is supposed to propose in 2011-12.

The State of Local Food Systems

Local food systems and organic production are proliferating in Quebec. The province accounts for 316 certified organic livestock production units, 341 organic maple syrup producers, and 585 certified farms (CARTV 2009). There is a network of 82 open markets, whether permanent, seasonal, daily or occasional. Community-supported agriculture (CSA): Équiterre runs such an initiative with over 100 participating farms. Similar alternatives are also emerging, including the *Paniers paysans* belonging to the alternative syndicate *Union paysanne*, and the multi-stakeholder cooperative La Mauve in Quebec. New phenomena are also occurring, like web-based markets (i.e., *solidarity markets*) that are a very flexible box scheme in which consumers place an order through a web portal.

Despite the growth of these initiatives, there remain many obstacles inhibiting their expansion. Our literature review targeted three broad categories, outlined below.

1. Lack of financing: banks are often not willing to issue micro-loans at competitive rates
2. Economic power: the food retail sector is marked by high rates of market concentration; supermarkets have been able to achieve economies of scale because they do not have to pay for the social and environmental costs of their business practices
3. Knowledge: the lack of demand for local foods is attributed to a lack of information about where to procure it, and a lack of information about prices

We reviewed the literature to identify every obstacle, policy, and existing initiative related to the nodes in the value chain (see Blouin & al. 2009). The table below gives an example for distribution and marketing.

¹ The report was published in 2008 (see: <http://www.caaq.gouv.qc.ca/>)

Category of policy	Barriers	Policy proposal	L	P	F	I	Examples		
Distribution and marketing	Lack of organisation and marketing skills for potential facilitators of a local food marketing system	Business and development services for retail, marketing		x			CFAI (BC), Agri-Food Market Development Program (NB), Agri-Food Promotion Program (PEI) CFAI (BC), Direct Marketing Community Development Trust (NS)		
		Fund training for facilitators and organisers			x				
		Mapping of SFS initiatives to promote networking	x	x	x				
	High transaction costs when dealing with small producers and/or processors	Lack of infrastructure (warehousing, cold storage, etc.) relevant for LFS	Support marketing groups/co-ops/organisations		x			Direct Marketing Community Development Trust (NS) Meat processing capacity development (YT)	
			Develop local and stocking facility that could be developed by a regional or local development policy	x	x	x			
			Anti-trust laws			x	x		x
			Contract regulations			x	x		
			Platform to link local producers with local buyers (lower transaction costs)	x	x				
			Supporting the multiplication of farmer's kiosks	x	x				
			Offering urban land for farmer's markets	x					
Poor access to retail space						Agri-Food Market Development Program (PEI) Prince George (BC), Healthy Eating Nova Scotia (NS)			

The Case of the Zoning Law and Agency: The Dilemma Between Land Protection and Land Access

One of the more problematic obstacles is the case of zoning policy. In 1978, the Quebec government passed a zoning law (*Loi sur la protection des terres agricoles* (LPTAA)) in a context of rapid economic development, speculation on land, fragmentation of the land and non-agricultural use. This law reflected a desire to plan and regulate in this area and a zoning agency was also created; the *Commission de protection du territoire agricole du Québec* (CPTAQ).

Except for a similar law in British Columbia, this law is the only one of its kind, and it effectively organised the use of agricultural land over the years. The problem is that today, with greater concentration of ownership and fewer people in the business of food production, this law is starting to cause trouble since it acts as a barrier to entry for smaller and more value-added producers who need smaller plots. At the same time — and we can see this internationally — the pressure for city expansion, speculation and non-agricultural use is still strong. The question that the new food and agriculture policy will have to address is how to allow young and smaller-scale farmers to access land without allowing to occur what we wanted to prevent from happening in the first place?

Some possibilities exist within the current law, however, other aspects require reform. For example, in one case, the CPTAQ has agreed to allow municipal authorities in Ste-Camille to take over the management of a large farm that was for sale, in order to help new young families establish small farms. In order to do this, the CPTAQ de-zoned the land, thus empowering municipal authorities to develop it however they chose; though there was an understanding that the municipality would keep the land for agricultural use. If this case is inspiring, there should be a formal way to make such arrangements without necessarily de-zoning the land and placing it at risk. Within the boundaries of the existing law, new initiatives are emerging elsewhere and could be developed in the provinces. These include cooperative land trusts and the collective buying of land and green belts. The main question is how to allow for the creation of smaller farms without endangering land protection for the future of agriculture in Quebec, especially in the context of rising non-agricultural activities in farming areas (e.g., the shale gases exploitation).

References

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