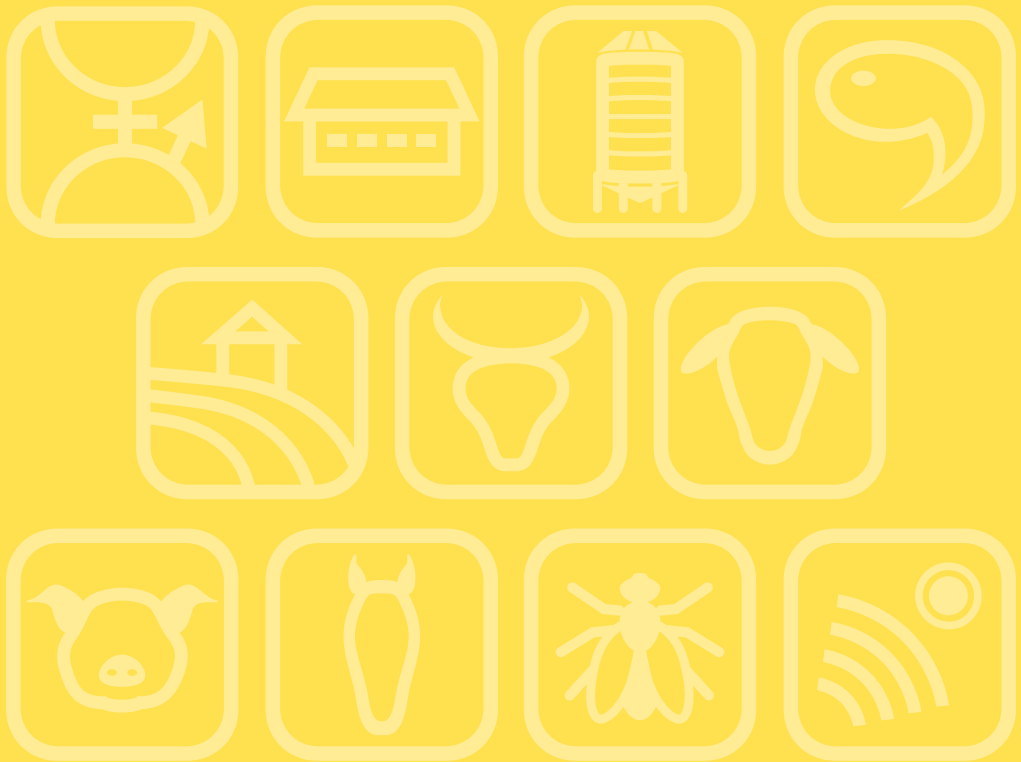


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Ecological transition in dairy territories: the role of collective brands sustainability standards

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Face to the end of quota systems and new societal demands dairy farmers started to organize collectively at a territorial level to creating new brands. These emerging brands promotes their 'ecological territorial' image and seems to push farmers to adopt sustainable standards (SS). While there is abundant literature about SS in globalized agri-food chains, little attention has been paid to these emerging local farmers' initiatives. The objective of this study is, therefore, to analyse the main SS adopted, and how they implemented and ensure compliance. We first identified 5 brands owned by collectives of dairy cow breeders in Occitanie region (France). Second, we collected data through semi-directive interviews with brand managers/coordinators and 15 breeders between April and June 2020. Our work has produced several insights. We shed light that the brands adopt different SS with a variability of formalization and practices requirement. Some standards are predefined by third-party organizations (e.g. organic agriculture). Others are specific to each breeders' collective. Some brands also combine both types of standards. The choice and implementation of the SS itself is not the result of a strictly internal process. It is based on interactions with various actors of the agricultural world such as professional organizations. Concerning the control systems, we note that they can be internal (self-declarations in the case of smaller groups of farmers) or external (third party certification). Trust-based systems involve the issuing of oral and written warnings in the case of non-compliance. Repeated non-compliance can lead to suspension or exclusion. Finally, the ecological transition seems to be operating in dairy territories trough the adoption of sustainable standards pushed by farmer's new collective brands. In this respect, these brands follow the general tendency of the agri-food sector, a sector characterized by the emergence of alternative standards that bring to the fore environmental virtues of certain production systems but also to certain territories.

The role of certification in the transition towards a more sustainable livestock sector

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The production and consumption of food is linked to many environmental, economic and social challenges of our society today. Sustainability certification is widely seen as a strategy to address these challenges and encourage sustainable food consumption and production. Producers can potentially receive an added value for their certified products, it can help consumers to select sustainable produce. In recent years, the number of certification schemes in crop, livestock and aquaculture production has expanded rapidly. Insight in the effectiveness and validity of certification schemes is, however, limited. This research compared approaches used in global sustainability certification schemes in crop production and Dutch certification in egg and dairy production. The analysis shows the myriad of approaches (e.g. for auditing, scoring and reporting), sustainability indicators and organisation structures underlying sustainability certification. Each certification scheme presents its own perspective on sustainability and selects different sets of sustainability issues and indicators. This raises questions with regard to the credibility of certification systems. Moreover, the transparency of certification schemes, the accessibility for farmers to participate and actual sustainability improvement on farm, are issues that require attention. The study shows the influence that sustainability certification has on food consumption and production practices. Sustainability certification inherently requires dealing with trade-offs between sustainability issues. How these trade-offs are addressed and prioritizations between sustainability issues are set by private certification organisations can have a large impact on food production. This raises the question whether a more hybrid form of governance combining public and private institutions is needed to support the transition towards a more sustainable livestock sector.