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Action
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Europe

Visit to a Belgian Organic Farm: the Raucq Farm

Our AGM led us to visit an organic farm in the Belgian province of Hainaut. Farmer Daniel Raucq and his wife used have his 45 ha farm dedicated to meat and milk production with Belgian Blue cows. Today, the farm is completely autonomous and organic, provides 3 full-time jobs, and Daniel, his wife and their son work fewer hours! A question environmentalists often ask is: why did he change and how did he do it?

After starting out farming in the early 80's, Raucq started intensifying his agricultural practice. In 1988, he realized that he and his wife spent many hours working on the farm with limited incomes and that they were highly dependent on fertilizers and pesticides. He then decided to diminish maize production and modified his grazing technique by reducing the size of the pasture parcels in order to increase their productivity. He gradually improved his grazing technique, restored permanent grasslands, sewed alfalfa, clover, and peas and in 1998, completely stopped maize production and progressively stopped pesticides and fertilizers use. In 2009, he converted to organic and moved up the value chain, starting to produce butter and cheese, which now make up an important proportion of his income.

In Raucq's case, changes were thus not motivated by the desire to diminish his impact on the environment but by the observation that conventional system led to more and more work and less income. Bit by bit, his growing expertise and the will to become autonomous naturally led him to organic practices.

We were impressed by the fact that he was able to replace soy imports and maize production (both crops require lots of fertilizers and pesticides) with crops much more suited to the Belgian landscape and climate such as alfalfa and peas. These plants need neither fertilizers nor pesticides the way maize does and are good for pollinators such as bees. Further, a study by Belgian NGO Nature & Progrès demonstrated that in comparison to other farms, Mr Raucq's farm relied very little on subsidies, produced far fewer greenhouse gas emissions, and provided better working conditions to the farmer, his family, and employees.

We finished the visit at the shop where the group emptied Mr Raucq's cheese stock!

- For more information, see the [study on the Raucq Farm](#) written by Nature et Progrès (only in French for the moment, but soon to be translated in English) and [PAN Europe Video](#).