

## CHAPTER 5. EVALUATION OF THE AGRI-ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES IMPLEMENTED IN FRANCE FROM 2000 TO 2002 UNDER THE CTE FARMING CONTRACTS SCHEME

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### **Abstract**

*While various agri-environmental measures have been available in France since the early 1990s, a single scheme based on regional farming contracts (the *contrat territorial d'exploitation* or CTE) was established in 2000 as part of the Rural Development Plan 2000-06.<sup>2</sup> This was a major shift to broaden the scope of applicability to cover the whole country. As required, a mid-term evaluation of the RDP was conducted in 2003. Within this, the evaluation of the CTE was split into 22 contracts (one national and 21 regional) which were awarded to eleven evaluation consultancies, and cost over EUR 1 million. At this stage, the main findings indicate that the measures appear to be working adequately with regard to maintaining biodiversity and the quality of landscape in grazing and mixed crop/livestock zones but fairly poorly in terms of mitigating the negative impacts of agriculture, such as water pollution. As a follow-up to the evaluation, working groups were established to consider changes to the measures to improve their performance.*

### **The policy under evaluation**

The policy in question involves the agri-environmental measures (AEM) implemented by France in the first three years (2000-02) of its Rural Development Plan (RDP) for 2000-06, the main instrument transposing into French law Council Regulation (EC) 1257/99 on support for rural development, known as the second pillar of the CAP.<sup>3</sup>

Aimed at encouraging farmers to shift to more environmentally friendly cropping practices (or production systems), these AEM take the form of five-year contracts signed on a voluntary basis by farmers and co-signed by the Departmental Prefect on behalf of the State. The contracts specify the agri-environmental commitments, the parcels concerned and the relevant payments that will be provided.

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1. Office for Evaluation and Study Programming, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Rural Affairs.
  2. The phrase “agri-environmental measures” (AEM) in this paper refers specifically to payments provided to farmers for undertaking certain specified activities beneficial to the environment.
  3. For the remainder of this paper, the EU Council Regulation on support for rural development will be referred to as the RDR (Rural Development Regulation).

The commitments must involve more than the application of usual good farming practice. Payment is granted annually and calculated on the basis of estimated income foregone, additional costs resulting from the commitment given, and the need to provide an incentive (restricted to 20% of income foregone and additional costs). Several commitments may cover the same parcel of land, provided they are complementary and compatible. Details of the range of AEM to which farmers may sign up are specified in the RDP and in regional documents (26 regional agri-environment summaries).

The French scheme, launched in the year 2000, is characterised by a large number of standard measures, tailored to regional needs where necessary. They fall into 11 broad categories:

- converting to organic farming,
- integrated farming with regard to mineral/organic fertilisation and the use of plant-health products,
- diversified cropping patterns,
- planting with grass
- managing grassland on an extensive basis,
- opening up environments that are falling into decline,
- shifting to grassland systems,
- managing ecologically valuable environments in compliance with standards,
- managing linear and other features (*e.g.* hedges and ponds),
- protecting threatened breeds, and
- creating and managing agro-forest habitats.

Over the period in question, there was a fundamental shift in the implementation of agri-environment policy in France. The previous period (1993-99) had been characterised by a combination of three very different schemes:

- regional environment management projects developed by local players, with their own “tailored” sets of standards (OLAE),
- a wide-scale measure with a single, straightforward set of standards applying throughout the country with a view to promoting extensive grazing systems (PMSEE), and
- regional programmes based on seven sets of standards (converting to organic farming, reducing inputs, etc.).

The year 2000 saw the launch of a single scheme based on regional farming contracts (the *contrat territorial d’exploitation* or CTE) signed by individual farmers, the aim being to manage all agri-environment issues at the national level. This was a major shift that broadened the scope of agri-environmental support compared with the previous period. Whereas the earlier arrangements focused

heavily on environmentally sensitive areas (*e.g.* wetlands, abandoned farmland) and extensive pasture, the stated goal here was to use CTEs to cover the country as a whole and target a large share of the French farming community.<sup>4</sup> This radical change was due to the concomitant implementation of a new EU Regulation (known as the 1999 Rural Development Regulation, or RDR) and a major reorientation of French agricultural policy with the introduction in 1999 of the new outline Agricultural Act, which made multifunctional agriculture a core concern and created a comprehensive new management tool in the form of CTE contracts, signed by individual farmers.

In 2002 and 2003, this new scheme was supplemented and substantially revamped with:

- the introduction of a new wide-scale measure early in 2002 targeting arable farmers willing to sign up to contracts other than CTEs (the aim being to promote diversified cropping patterns and crop rotation);
- the suspension of CTEs at the end of 2002 and their replacement by a new instrument known as the *contrat d'agriculture durable* (CAD) or sustainable farming contract, aimed at enhancing environmental efficiency by tailoring the measures more closely to local requirements. To date, 49 400 CTEs have been signed (most of them in 2001 and 2002) and 6 300 CADs (most of them in 2004); and
- the introduction in 2003 of a new scheme to promote grassland, following on from the PMSEE but with more detailed standards and the award of an agri-environmental grassland premium (*prime herbagère agri-environnementale* or PHAE).

As the title of this paper indicates, the evaluation exercise focused mainly on the contract-based AEM implemented *via* CTEs signed in 2001 and 2002; its remit also included a review of how France had implemented two wide-scale measures at the end of the period in question, one providing support for longer crop rotations (4 200 beneficiaries) and the other awarding the new grassland premium or PHAE (56 500 beneficiaries).

One important point to stress in concluding the introduction is that this agri-environmental policy, which is gaining ground all the time and has a strong local dimension, is central to the second pillar of the CAP.<sup>5</sup> This is the only mandatory measure for inclusion in rural development programmes. AEM accounts for almost one-third of the expenditure planned for under the RDP 2000-06 (EUR 4.1 billion out of a total of EUR 12.6 billion), with 50% co-funding from the EAGGF-Guarantee Section.<sup>6</sup>

## **Type of evaluation**

The fact that this evaluation focused largely on measures implemented in 2000, 2001 and 2002, that contracts are signed for five years and that the evaluation was conducted in 2003, makes this a mid-term evaluation. As specified in the 1999 RDR, it was the whole implementation process of the scheme in France that was addressed by this mid-term evaluation in 2003, an exercise tightly framed

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4. Hence the large number of standard measures.

5. Payments amounted to around EUR 50 million (2003 euros) in the early 1990s, around EUR 300 million (2003 euros) in 2000 and around EUR 600 million in 2003.

6. 75% in Objective 1 regions.

within the European Commission guidelines, and in particular the Common Evaluation Questions, which are fairly numerous and detailed for each of the nine chapters of the RDR.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to AEM (Chapter VI of the RDR), the Common Evaluation Questions look at impacts on the following environmental issues:

- Protection of natural resources: soil (erosion and chemical contamination) and water, in terms of both quality (contamination by nitrates and pesticides) and quantity;
- Biodiversity in terms of farmland wildlife (fauna and flora), the conservation of high nature-valued habitats in farmed areas and the genetic biodiversity of livestock breeds and plant species; and
- Landscape.

Each Common Evaluation Question has its own evaluation criteria (similar to sub-questions) and evaluation indicators to help with responses. Member states were also given scope to add programme-specific evaluation questions; in the case of France and AEM, these additional questions related to the method of implementation and to other environmental issues (air quality, energy use and risk protection) or socio-economic issues such as employment and working conditions, and the situation in agricultural markets.

To facilitate the evaluation, the Ministry of Agriculture, in charge of implementing the RDR and evaluating the process, opted to divide the exercise into a summary and eight sections on separate themes (including one on agri-environmental support), all of which were contracted out to private consultancies following a call to tender.

As this was an innovative policy with a very marked territorial dimension, the evaluation work was split into a regional component, supervised regionally but mapped out in advance at the national level (in the 21 mainland regions) and a national component, supervised nationally. It was therefore a major exercise, involving 22 government contracts (one “national” and 21 “regional”) awarded to eleven evaluation consultancies, some of which were selected to cover more than one region; the full cost amounted to over EUR 1 million (out of a total of EUR 3.6 million for the mid-term evaluation of all RDR programmes<sup>8</sup>). The linkages between the two types of work are described in the section on methods and tools.

### **Specific goals of the policy under evaluation**

The three main objectives assigned to AEM in France’s RDP are as follows:

- AEM should help farms (*via* CTE farming contracts) to move to sustainable, multifunctional agriculture;
- AEM should help to protect and enhance the environmental assets of farmed areas in the Natura 2000 network; and

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7. Details of the EC common monitoring and evaluation approach, including the requirements for the mid-term evaluation, can be found at [http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/eval/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/eval/index_en.htm).

8. Evaluation costs were also co-financed (50 %) by the EAFFG-Guarantee Section.

- AEM are expected, in particular, to generate a major shift towards combating the adverse impacts of agricultural policies on the environment.

Clearly, then, the policy goal is environmental, *i.e.* to help introduce or maintain farming methods that are compatible with the increased need to protect and enhance natural resources (water and soil), landscape and biodiversity, be it outstanding (Natura 2000 sites) and otherwise.

However, the goal of moving to sustainable, multifunctional agriculture also means combining environmental conservation, which is deemed to be a strength, with socio-economic goals (*e.g.* capitalising on products, developing employment) and the achievement of territorial balance.

Specific quantification for each AEM was established in terms of the number of farms signed up and the area of land concerned. Confined to resources, it covers the whole country, unlike the environmental issues which are for the most part localised.<sup>9</sup> This makes the scheme harder to evaluate.

### **Evaluation criteria and information**

The evaluator's judgement was based upon the four classic criteria used in any government policy review, namely:

- relevance (suitability of policy objectives to requirements and issues);
- effectiveness (at meeting objectives);
- efficiency (output compared with input); and
- internal consistency (linkage between the various objectives) and external consistency (linkage with connected policies).

To help form an opinion on these four criteria and meet the specifications laid down for the exercise, the evaluation work took numerous elements into account:

- an in-depth analysis of the scheme's design since this is, again, a new scheme that breaks with the past;
- a comparative study of remuneration provided by the various types of AEM, and the nature of the services delivered (*e.g.* off-farm services, on-farm work);
- a very detailed analysis of how the policy was implemented, a key factor when the policy is highly decentralised and the evaluation is mid-term;
- an analysis of physical and financial achievements (*e.g.* types of AEM under contract, geographical breakdown), and the profile of farmers under contract for AEM (farm size, system of production, corporate structure); and

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9. For other schemes such as the planting of trees on farmland and other forestry measures, requirements and resources were quantified on a regional basis (broken down into the five main forestry regions).

- the estimated environmental impacts, based on previous work including the calculation – for each environmental issue – of the area of land covered by the relevant AEM as a share of the overall area concerned by the issue, taking into account the scale of the impact achieved by that particular type of AEM; for the “water quality” issue, for instance, the areas specifically concerned are known as “sensitive” zones.

Another important part of the work looked at how these payments were administered, in particular with regard to monitoring and inspection. The evaluator in charge of drafting the summary, for instance, was asked to estimate the administrative management costs pertaining to the various systems of payments awarded under the RDP (expressed as a percentage of the support granted).

## Methods and tools

As indicated above, work was carried out in each of the 21 mainland regions by independent evaluators under the supervision of the regional branches of the Ministry of Agriculture. A summary of their work was drawn up by the “national” evaluator.

To provide guidance for the regional work and facilitate the summary, in particular the aggregation of cross-comparison data on “environmental zones” and “contract-based AEM in those zones”, a large amount of preparatory work was done in 2001, *i.e.* well before the actual evaluations were carried out in 2003.

- A guide was drawn up with the help of a specialist consultancy, to facilitate work on the summary; it gave advice on subjects such as ranking AEM by environmental issue, and carrying out cross-comparisons.
- Four training courses on evaluation took place with input from a specialist institution; they were attended by 80 officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, half of whom were employed in regional branches.
- Several workshops were held for regional officials in charge of supervising the work done at the regional level.
- Regional CD-ROMs were produced, containing monitoring data on physical achievements (area of land under contract by type of AEM at a very fine level of geographical detail, namely the commune), as well as other regional CD-ROMs, at the same level of detail, showing the area of land covered for each of the environmental issues.

As well as the summary work, where the main focus was on analysing how the measures had been implemented and what the achievements were in each environmental zone, the national evaluator was asked to analyse policy design, and compare the funding involved for each type of AEM, and four broad types of specific AEM: conversion to organic farming, protection of threatened breeds, extensive grassland management and longer arable crop rotations.

To provide as much assistance as possible with preparations for the evaluations and the subsequent monitoring of work done by the consultancies, steering committees bringing together a range of expertise (services implementing the AEM, the Ministry’s departments dealing with the environment, universities and research institutes, representatives of the industry and technicians from farmers’ advisory bodies, environmental associations, etc.) were set up at both the national and the regional levels. The remit given to these steering committees included the drafting of specifications for the evaluation questions that France would be adding to the Common Evaluation Questions and for

various aspects of the work to be commissioned; those specifications then served to select evaluators in the bidding process.

When it came to monitoring the work of the evaluators and, of course, reviewing the draft of the final report, the steering committees gave advice at crucial points in the evaluation process (listing those directly or indirectly concerned by the policy and those to be interviewed, drafting model interviews, picking a survey sample of farmers, drafting a questionnaire, etc.). Some 350 people (330 of them in the regions) sat on the various steering committees for this mid-term evaluation of France's agri-environment policy. The emphasis on a "participatory" approach to the evaluation meant that information could be shared and diverging opinions heard, both of which are crucial factors in an area where changes in farmers' attitudes play a vital role.

The main tools used were:

- a bibliography, in particular for analysing policy design;
- physical and financial information to monitor achievements, and background information from statistical surveys (*e.g.* agricultural census) or environmental administrative sources (*e.g.* areas within each administrative district identified by zones which are relevant with respect to various issues: sensitive areas, watershed areas etc.);
- interviews by evaluators with those directly or indirectly concerned by AEM ("resource persons") and surveys of farmers receiving payments but also others not in the scheme.

Owing to the emphasis on process-based analysis and the fact that implementation was largely decentralised and the issues "place-based", the collection of primary data by the evaluators was particularly important: 550 interviews were conducted with "resource persons", together with some 1 200 surveys of farmers receiving (or not receiving) AEM support. A large amount of work was done to cross compare the data, both at the regional and national levels, in order to estimate the potential impacts of the AEM. An example of this work, using the mapping tool, is shown in Annex 1.

### **Problems encountered**

Because of the large number of evaluations required in 2003 for all the programmes co-financed by EU funds (*e.g.* the RDP, involving over 30 government contracts, plus regional programmes under the regional cohesion policy), it was in some cases very hard to select consultancies with the necessary references and skills.

The evaluation confirmed that the data-processing system was designed above all as a payment tool rather than a real database for physical and financial information; sifting through the data was harder and more time-consuming than planned, and this detracted from time spent on training in evaluation skills. Furthermore, some of the basic statistics were probably not exhaustive (environmental infrastructure). Finally, prior quantification of objectives and resources was insufficiently precise.

### **Main findings**

As this was a mid-term evaluation held shortly after the programme was launched, the findings below focus mainly on physical achievements.

By the end of 2003, some 115 000 farmers,<sup>10</sup> approximately 30% of French commercial farms, had signed up to AEM under the RDR, which in terms of land meant just over 8 million hectares (ha) (or 28% of the national AAU). These figures are a little below target in terms of the number of farmers under contract (130 000 by the end of 2003) but well over target in terms of the share of AAU under contract (5.3 million ha by the end of 2003).

In terms of area, the main types of AEM accounting for the largest share of the land under contract are as follows:

- Extensively managed grassland which, combining AEM under the CTE scheme with other AEM (PHAE), account for some 45% of all French pasture;
- Managed mineral/organic fertilisation and integrated use of plant health products; and
- Diversified crop rotation.

The AEM relating to hedge maintenance has attracted some 30% of the farmers under the CTE scheme, thus covering 15 to 20% of all the country's hedges in linear terms.

Finally, conversion to organic farming accounts for a fairly small share of the land under contract but a relatively large share of the payments awarded for contract-based AEM under the CTE scheme (20%), owing to the high amount of support per hectare.

Farmers with grazing stock (cattle and sheep) are heavily represented among those who have signed up to contract-based AEM. Geographically, the same applies to less-favoured areas (upland and other less-favoured areas); thus agri-environmental policy is accordingly playing a major role in terms of territorial balance.

The environmental impacts of the policy under evaluation are obviously very hard to assess in a mid-term evaluation, particularly as there may often be a very long time-lag before they are noticeable. At this stage of the work, however, in particular on contract-based AEM and the area of land covered for each environmental issue, the evaluator considers that they appear to be working:

- already adequately in terms of maintaining biodiversity and the quality of landscape in grazing and mixed crop/livestock zones, but
- fairly poorly so far in terms of mitigating the adverse impacts of agriculture, particular as regards water pollution by inputs and the quantitative management of water resources.

The evaluation also shows that the programme has promoted environmental awareness among farmers, which is a crucial first step in the longer-term process.

### **Recommendations and outcomes from the evaluation**

The evaluator's report makes a number of recommendations aimed in particular at enhancing the scheme's environmental efficiency, recommendations which could be implemented for both the current programme covered by this mid-term evaluation (2002-06) and the future programme (2007-13).

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10. As there are two computerised databases, it is difficult to give a precise figure.



Soon after the evaluation was completed, the Ministry of Agriculture, in charge of implementing the RDP, set up two working parties to discuss possible changes to AEM in response to some of the comments in the report but also to reflect changes in the regulations, such as the “conditionality” of support awarded by the first pillar of the CAP, introduced under the 2003 reform. One of the working parties has a broad remit, while the other is confined to the AEM designed to reduce pollution from plant-health products, given the complexity of that particular issue. Importantly, the evaluator sits on both of these working parties.

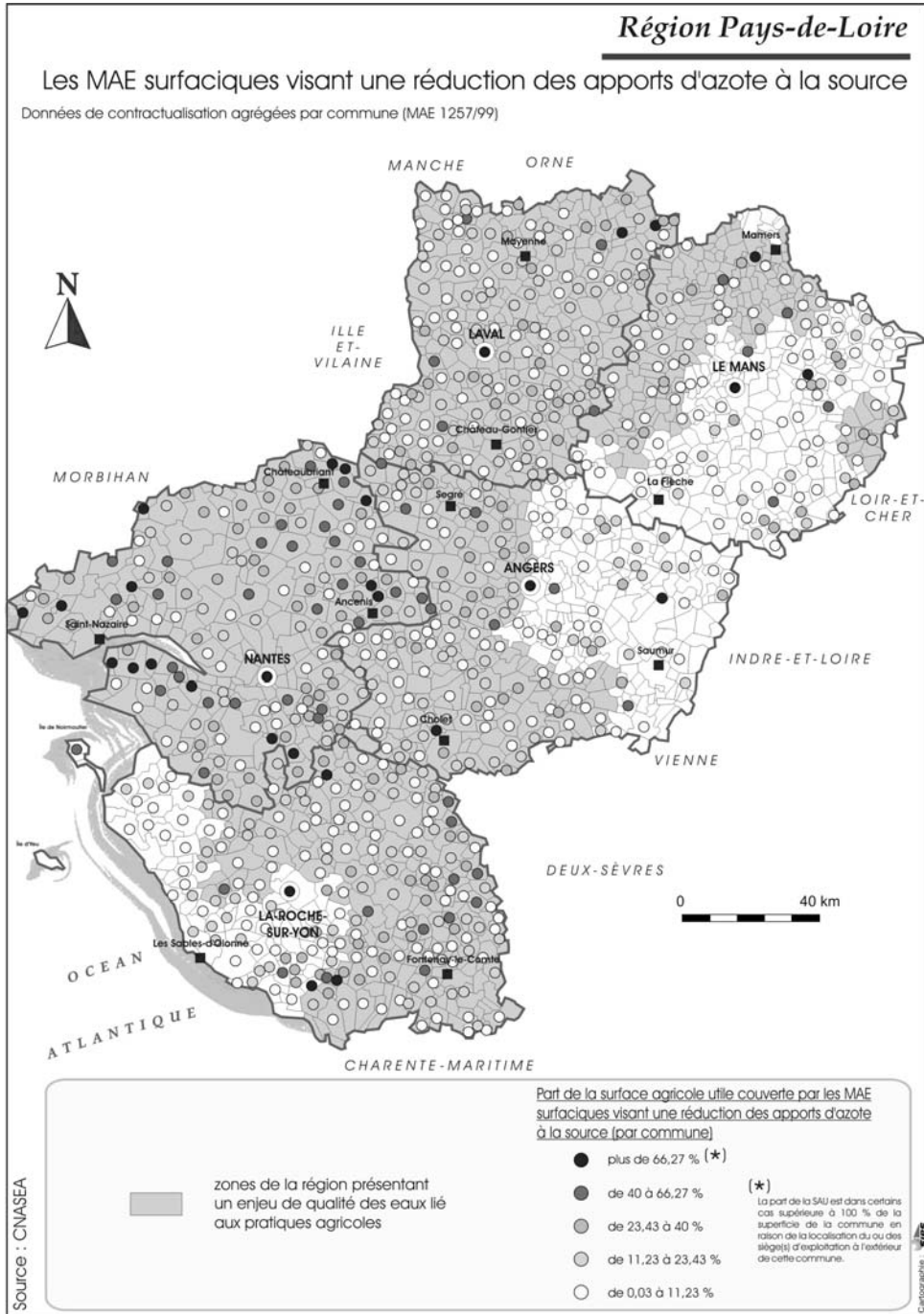
In terms of outcomes from the evaluation, it is worth noting that, because this “regional” work was contracted out, a large number of consultancies were involved and this has generated growth in supply in this field. The arrangements have also helped to promote an evaluation culture at the regional level.

Finally, the amount of work and the number of people involved in this mid-term evaluation are clearly expected to have a noticeable impact on preparations for the future programme (2007-13) in terms of promoting greater environmental efficiency.

To conclude, this mid-term evaluation meets the requirements of any government policy review, with goals that are transparent, an evaluation that is independent of the departments running the scheme, basic information that is fully available, and coverage of a wide range of opinions.

## ANNEX 1

The following is an example of the method used to estimate potential effects on water quality of nitrate pollution.



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- Alsace region: BLEZAT Consulting with ARGOS
- Aquitaine region: EUREVAL-C3E
- Auvergne region: OREADE-BRECHE
- Burgundy region: ACER Campestre
- Brittany region: PASCAL Consultants
- Champagne-Ardennes region: BLEZAT Consulting with ARGOS
- Centre region: Impact et Environnement
- Franche-Comté region: BLEZAT Consulting with ARGOS
- Ile de France region: PASCAL Consultants
- Languedoc-Roussillon region: TERCIA
- Limousin region: Ernst & Young Entrepreneur Conseil
- Lorraine region: BLEZAT Consulting with ARGOS
- Midi-Pyrénées region: SOLAGRO
- Nord-Pas de Calais region: AND International
- Lower Normandy region: EUREVAL-C3E
- Upper Normandy region: AScA with Ouest Aménagement
- Pays de Loire region: EUREVAL-C3E
- Picardy region: BLEZAT Consulting with ARGOS
- Poutou-Charentes region: OREADE-BRECHE
- Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur region: EURAVAL-C3E
- Rhône-Alpes region: ISARA with Mosaïque Environnement.



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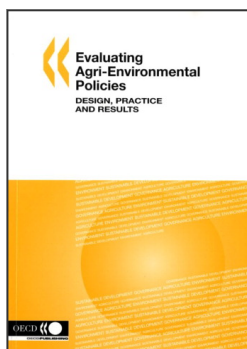
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