

Sciences Po – The Great Transition: Commons, Innovation and Responsibility

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NOTE OF INTENT



SPRINGUP TEAM:

Lina Messaoudene

Corrado Negrini

Violaine Ferrandez

Shiyi Wang

Taisija Nachtebel

MISSION

SpringUp is a student association created with the aim to tackle the dramatic phenomenon of suicides among French farmers all over the country.

The roots of the problem

The suicidal rate is about 50% higher for farmers than for the rest of the population¹. The problem is unevenly spread across the country, both geographically and age-wise: data are more alarming in specific region of France (namely in the Brittany and Loire regions) and among men aged 45-70.

SpringUp has analysed various trends and factors that may be responsible for this scenario:

- **ECONOMIC TRENDS AND FACTORS:** selling prices of dairy and bovine farmers' products are quite low due to the competition of other countries that has established a falling trend of prices². Moreover, French farmers are required to pay a rather high amount of tax. Consequently, farmers are obliged to work more in order to, at least, cover their expenses³.
- **SOCIAL TRENDS AND FACTORS:** being forced to address much of their time to work and being their activities generally arranged in solitary, farmers are spending a relevant part of the day alone. Combined with the physical detriment arising from their all-consuming daily activities, the result is a mental state of isolation and exhaustion that frequently leads, as data seems to suggest, to extreme life-threatening decisions.

Why is it relevant?

France has recently been experiencing social turmoil⁴, whose roots are difficult to relate to specific or independent factors. SpringUp believes that further public discontent must be avoided and that to replenish social concord it could be wise to start working specifically with farmers, one of the lower social groups the most affected by the current unfavourable context and for whom only some insufficient measures have been adopted. France is the first agricultural power in Europe, proud of the quality of its production and this issue should be a major worry. Solving their economic problems is out of reach, since the concurrence of both national and international factors makes this side of the issue difficult to be dealt with. However, we are convinced to have the instruments to tackle the social dimension of the problem, namely the impact that loneliness and isolation could have on the decision to commit suicide.

VISION

As Spring is the season of the clean slate associated with starting anew and new beginnings, that more than any other season conveys a message of renaissance, positivity and hope, the aim of SpringUp is to bring the sun back out to shine for the hundreds of French farmers currently facing tough situations.

¹ (Paccalin & Dungalhoff, 2018)

² (Alpeyrie, 2016)

³ (Paccalin & Dungalhoff, 2018)

⁴ *Gilets Jaunes* movement, for instance.

Plus, the verb *spring up* conveys the idea of something growing up from the ground which in our mind, clearly relate to the agricultural field. The logo of the association is enriched by an upward arrow, which reinforces the concept of *amélioration*.

What has already been done?

As mentioned earlier, some sporadic measures have been already deployed:

- A hotline called “*Agri’Ecoute*” was activated in 2014 by MSA (*Mutualité Sociale Agricole*), providing farmers with psychological support. It nevertheless works once the service is activated by the farmer, meaning that his mental health is already in a state of deterioration.⁵ And it still remains a large part of people that do not want to ask for help and share the issue they are facing.
- *Solidarité Paysans* is an organisation made by 1000 volunteers and 80 employees that offers different services to farmers, such as consulting and administrative support or updates about availability of governmental allowances. However, it operates on a “case-by-case” basis.⁶
- *AgriPousse* is a website acting like an intermediary between food’s producers and consumers helping the latter to order fresh food and to have it delivered. It only aims to give extra-income to producers, avoiding intermediaries such as retailers, fret companies, supermarkets, etc.

We need to find a more global solution which provides support not once farmers have already hit rock bottom: we should help them to not hit rock bottom in the first place, not only by providing them with financial solutions but by helping them recreate bonds and the idea of community. We do believe they need a social support that could improve their daily-life, making it more enjoyable and fuller of life.

What does SpringUp want to do?

SpringUp has thought of developing an application for smartphones, which offers two different services available everywhere in France, with further efforts made in Loire and Brittany regions:

- The first section of the app is about the “*Open Farm Days*”: periodically, farmers are encouraged, with the assistance of SpringUp, to open their farms to visitors: the day consists of a variety of activities, such as simulations of daily tasks where visitors must be actively involved in the farmer’s work and interaction with the animals living on the farm. The programme could include an on-the-spot lunch made of the products that visitors have contributed to collect during the day. For the kind of activities proposed, the service is particularly suitable for families, whose children have likely never experienced a direct contact with such contexts. Visitors will be charged a fee that includes the price of the meal and a financial contribution that farmers have to evaluate in order to cover the amount of loss arising from missing one *classic* day of work. Other more punctual activities can also be

⁵ In 2015, an average of 90 calls per month; in 2016, about 160 calls per month; in 2017, more than 300 calls per month. From 2014 to 2018 more than 4000 calls. But from march to august 2018, 3200 calls reached the hotline. This witnesses the urgency of the problem (Carpon, 2018).

⁶ 3000 farmers are assisted every year by *Solidarité Paysans*.

proposed like for example: making jam from 2pm to 4pm at Ferme des Lilas on a specific day.

- The second one allows the farmers to notify when they are available to sell products directly to individuals. The users can see which farmers are offering this service nearby, select a time slot and directly go to the farm; there, they'll be personally able to pick up the products they need (as in going to gather their potatoes directly from the field, for instance), thus dipping in the everyday-life of farmers and allowing them to feel more appreciated for what they do. Moreover, customers will also personally certify the origin, the biological treatment and the environmental impact for each product they buy. The prices of the products will be calculated in order to allow the farmers to gain some profit.

SpringUp believes its project to be greatly supportive since it allows farmers to enrich their routine with human relationships tailored to provide a deep exchange between them and their customers. This project could be seen in contrast with the general tendency to reduce at a minimum level the direct interactions between consumers and producers, as it happens with home delivery services or online purchases. But it is indeed the rediscovery of the enrichment arising from social relationships that SpringUp believes this app will be beneficial for both farmers and customers. Farmers will be persuaded **to reevaluate their role, being aware that people esteem and are interested in what they are doing**. They will also benefit from interrupting the ordinary routine, focusing on the arrangements for the new activities they will deliver with SpringUp. At the same time, customers and visitors will have the unusual opportunity to escape from the equally ordinary and exhausting urban jungle, allowing them some time for relaxation in a rural environment without the constant stress of the buzzing city life. And, thanks to the selling service, they will be provided with the rare and special chance to truly choose the origins, the quality and the environmental impacts of their products.

Major risks

- The major risk SpringUp has to face is the possible reluctance of farmers to trust the positive impact the app could have on their situation: together with the prospect of sacrificing some energies and time to focus on the services provided by the app, there might be an insufficient amount of farmers willing to subscribe for the service.
- SpringUp is considering the possibility to introduce new features to the app, so that farmers can perceive more involving and appealing: one of them imply to record short videos where each farmer introduces himself and his activity and post it on the app. This would give them a better sense of the spirit of the app.
- On the other hand, consumers could not be attracted by the services offered by the app, since they imply reaching the farm by their own means of transport and paying a slightly higher price for products.

PLAN

Investment appraisal: costs, resources, return

Seeing as to how SpringUp was born from a university association, gaining profits or just covering expenses for salaries is not an issue: in fact, the assumption is that over the years new students will join the association and support farmers to manage their activities with SpringUp. All the money generated from transactions on SpringUp's app are therefore entirely address to farmers.

The two major categories of costs concern:

- **DEVELOPMENT OF THE APP:** an estimation conducted by the *Junior Entreprise de l'Ecole des Mines de Nancy* suggests SpringUp should plan to pay around €7,000/9,000 for the technical development of the app; a partnership with the *Junior Entreprise* will support SpringUp in the development of the app and the assistance to farmers in case of problems connected with the use of the app. The app will be delivered on Apple Store and Google Play Store: \$99/year is the fee requested by Apple, while €25 *una tantum* is the amount requested by Google.
- **MARKETING:** since the success of the project deeply depends on its advertisement, all the money that SpringUp will be able to get through financial aid will be invest in marketing activities, that could include social networks advertisement and more conventional marketing (e.g. on public transports) in the region of Loire and Brittany.

Financial resources will mainly come from NGOs and public funds aid: for example, SpringUp will reach *Agronomes et vétérinaires sans frontières (AVSF)* as well as *WWF* in order to get funds and promotion, even through a sponsorship between SpringUp and those organisations. Also, we will reach out to mayors of towns located in the Brittany and Loire regions to ask for financial support for the project or to help SpringUp with local advertising campaigns. The Ministry of Agriculture may also play its role by supporting SpringUp with relevant data and information about the farmers, as to assess how to deploy the project in the best way. The project will be also presented at the MIT Challenge, with the hope to win and get funds.

Strategic path

- **ASSESSING POTENTIAL INTEREST AMONG FARMERS:** with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, the very first step is to assess how farmers respond to the project. This can be done through interviews and meetings.
- **COST ESTIMATION:** if reactions are considered positive, the next step must determine a precise estimation of the costs to develop the app and a gross estimation of the minimum amount of money required to efficiently promote the app.
- **FINANCIAL AID:** once a cost estimation is established, SpringUp will start contacting the potential funders earlier mentioned to support the project.
- **APP DEVELOPMENT:** if financial resources are found in a sufficient amount to cover both the app-related costs and the expenses to reasonably advertise the project, the stage of technically developing the app can start.

- **MARKETING:** SpringUp will contact the mayors and the potentially interested partners in order to advertise the project. Among the others, content-based media (e.g. Kombini and Brut.) and public celebrities who have stood or may stand for the likes of such a project (such as Guillaume Canet⁷) will be reached out to in order to agree on a sponsorship.
- **LONG TERM IMPLEMENTATION:** A way of assuring the long-term implementation and success of our project would be to get next generation students interested in the project to get involved. This way, SpringUp's survival would be guaranteed with a steady flux in volunteers assuming that student associations such as Pavés and SciencesPo Environnement would take interest in our project.

After these preliminary steps, to be developed in about 8 months, the project can start to be implemented: an impactful launch can be conceived, for example organising the *Open Farm Day* with all the farms involved in the project, assuring a great press coverage of the events.

Results

It may be difficult to assess the actual effects that the project will deploy: being the aim of SpringUp the improvement of psychological conditions of the farmers, focusing primarily on isolation, an estimation of results cannot be computed with a precise level of accuracy. Because of the essence of the project itself, it may be helpful to constantly evaluate the feedbacks from the farmers involved and, possibly, comparing them with some interviews conducted among those who refused to join SpringUp. However, a potential indicator of success may be the decision by this latter group of farmers to finally join the project: it could mean that sharing of positive feedbacks from the former group have made them change their minds and that the project is working out as desired. Data from sales by the app will also provide some indications, but not sufficiently meaningful to evaluate the project, since, as said, the hope is not to gain profits (by high sales) but to get farmers aware of the appreciation and esteem the French society, and particularly their communities, have for them, turning these feeling into acts of concrete support. Naturally, a decrease in the suicide rate among the farmers located in the regions in which SpringUp operates, will be regarded as the most relevant measurement of success.

⁷ (Kerdreux, 2019)

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