



Multifunctionality of Farmland and Farm Activities and Multi-Actor Involvement in Agricultural Development Planning

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The role of agriculture seems never to have been so discussed in so many parts of the world as now, both in developed countries and in developing countries. Agriculture has been a major producer of foodstuffs, and increasingly of healthy foodstuffs. At the same time, people, specialists and even farmers have become more and more preoccupied by the loss of good quality agricultural land to various types of urban development as well the negative effects of so-called productivism agriculture on human health, water resources and even on attractive and heritage landscapes, one of the plusses of many agricultural areas for tourism development (hence the term of agritourism!).

In many instances, land use planning has contributed to the takeover of good quality agricultural land because of many planners and local and regional politicians who have placed their priorities on population growth, its related subdivision development and the development of industrial parks. Money seems to be all that matters to many officials and professionals!

However, some communities and (in the case of Canada, the province of Québec) have made substantial progress in creating conditions in which many citizens' perspectives on agricultural land and agricultural activities have begun to change substantially. In Québec, agricultural reserves were created under the legislation to conserve farmland in 1978 in that province. However, there were still situations where agricultural land was removed from the agricultural reserves either because the province wanted to encourage other forms of development or by municipalities or by Regional County Municipalities (RCMs) who persuaded the province

to remove agricultural land from the reserves for similar reasons. This legislation was modified towards the end of the 1990s to include also the conservation of agricultural activities.

Shortly thereafter, this Province decided to encourage its RCMs to undertake a PDZA (Plan de développement de la Zone Agricole – Development Plan for the Agricultural Zone). In other words, this implied the development of a strategic development plan in the agricultural reserves for agricultural development. Furthermore, such a strategic development plan for agriculture needs to take into account all the pressures facing agriculture as well as the opportunities. This also implies that the actors who should be involved in the discussions should normally represent a broad range of actors including citizens with human values underscoring the different functions of agricultural land and farm activities. The involvement of such a broad range of actors has led in many instances to development plans that take into account the multiple functions, including the value of heritage landscapes for tourists and rural tourism, the obvious functions related to food production, the conservation of water resources, and the function of encouraging citizens to visit and appreciate farms and farmers and also to develop other functions to attract local citizens to visit the farms and even to encourage their children to visit the farms by creating small animal 'zoos' on the farms.

In Figure 1, the map of the region of Montréal shows the location of the municipality of Sen Neville at the western end of Montreal Island. From the perspective of our article, what is really interesting is the large area of agricultural land in this municipality. The

farmers are very interesting and the majority of them have had no family antecedents in farming! They are particularly focused on the production of healthy foodstuffs. The group of farmers contacted Bryant to see whether they could come to his office at the University de Montréal to talk to him about how their farming activities might be able to evolve to maintain their agricultural activity especially given the pressures to use some of that land for urban development. Instead, Bryant said he would prefer to go and visit them on their farms, which is what happened. As a result of this, Bryant and two of the graduate students in his Laboratory began a Research Action process with the farmers who essentially, after a major colloquium organized by Bryant and the graduate students for the farmers and creating different discussion groups with the farmers, the farmers began to take decisions about creating more sustainable agricultures and they themselves made a presentation to the Sen Neville municipal council as well as to other organizations who were involved in development planning of other ventures around the Island of Montréal.

It is also pertinent given the orientation of this short article to note that the farmers were also happy to have citizens visit their farms, and even to bring their dogs with them and take their dogs on walks around the farms and farmland, and to encourage these citizens to appreciate the values of maintaining this farmland especially because of its production of healthy foodstuffs ... and their appreciation of the landscapes supported by farming (Figures 1 and 2). The farmers also helped a social organization called Anatrope Foulant whose colleagues farm a small parcel of land in Sen Neville. This organization is based in the center of Montreal, but its major purpose is to provide good foodstuffs to citizens in neighborhoods where there are many poor citizens. This organization does this via its members; on the one hand there are members who are reasonably well off and are prepared to pay a higher price for the foodstuffs, and on the other hand, there are other members who are in need and who can therefore purchase their foodstuffs at a much lower price because of those members who pay more than the 'normal' price.

Thus, this recognition and development of the multi-functionality of agricultural land and activities can lead to an important increase in the values associated with agricultural land and farm activities and what is the most fundamental effect is to increase the support for conserving farmland and farm activities [1-7].

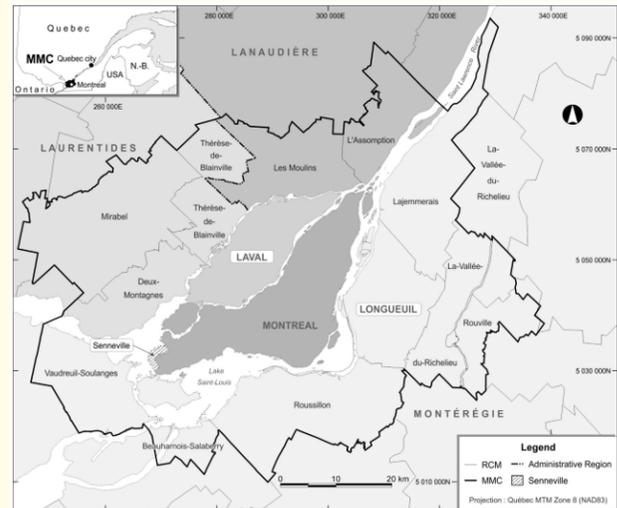


Figure 1: Map showing the location of the municipality of Senneville in the Administrative Region of Montréal.



Figure 2: Photo of a Sheep farm in the municipality of Senneville in the Administrative Region of Montréal. Photo taken by Christopher Bryant.

Conception and Creation

Marc Girard, cartographer for the Department of Geography, University of Montreal. Prepared for publications involving Christopher Bryant as author or co-author.

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