**FU2 - Interview president farmers union - 22-11-2021**

**To start, could you introduce [name] to us?**

Yes, [NAME] is a union of small farmers on national level, we also have permanent representation in Brussels, but our focus is on Jaen. And we work to improve the interests of small scale family farmers, which is the dominant model here is Jaen, but also in Spain and the rest of Europe. To make it more sustainable. We work as a union/syndicate, to defend the rights of these small farmers, in different levels, local, regional, national, European. All the norms that are made in these levels, they first consult us and we look at the effect that norm/law will have on smaller scale farmers and we protect the interests of them. We work apart from that syndicate work, also in services for farmers, our members, with translation and help of the CAP, all relations with employees that work in their exploitations, fiscal help and administration, we also have irrigation communities within our union, courses in different themes, management of fertilizers, informatics, animal wellbeing, everything that can help their exploitation. Insurances, everything that a farmer has to deal with. Also we do project, for example in the use of biomass, effective use of irrigation, studies of climate change impact on agrarian practices, and adaption to this in our exploitations. We are a progressive organization, we need to adapt to the new circumstances and get the most value out of our exploitations.

**How many members do you have here in Jaen?**

In Jaen directly 3000 members, but we provide services to over 10.000 farmers, for example in the help with CAP.

**Ok, so you also provide services to farmers that are not members of [NAME]?**

Yes, because we work with different cooperatives, or irrigation collectives, or maybe in one family, one member is member of [NAME], but other family members also use the services. So therefore we provide services to more people than to our members only.

**Ok, and of these 3000 members, the majority are olive farmers?**

Yes, the majority is, about 95%. There is a small area, in Andujar, where they cultivate cotton, or in another area where they have almonds or pistachio, but that is much smaller.

**Ok, so these are small or medium farmers, how large are the plots of your members?**

The average plot size here in Jaen is about 7-8 hectares, but every time there will become bigger, because the youth is not interested and so they sell the land. But the average in Jaen is between 7-8 hectares.

**And so the average of the members of [NAME] as well?**

Yes.

**We would like to understand more about the services that you offer. You told us that you assist with the CAP for example, can you explain this a bit more?**

According to the CAP, the norms from the European Union, farmers need to solicitude every year. They need to show the changes that they made, and a technical advisor will come and assist them. That is also a service that I forgot to mention, we have a department of technical advisors that assist farmers on their plots, for example in making a plan for the application of fertilizers, soil management, biodiversity, sustainability, irrigation. We have agricultural engineers that provide these services, so they are more efficient.

**And all the members receive support from the CAP?**

Yes, you need to know that in the province of Jaen are 680.000 inhabitants, of these, 90.000 people receive help from the CAP. It is the province of Spain, and I also think of whole Europe, with the highest percentage of people receiving help from the CAP. So this policy has a lot of impact here in Jaen, because here are a lot of small and medium sized farms, that can make use of this support. The CAP complements the income from the exploitations, so it is viable/profitable.

**And how much money do farmers receive, on average?**

There is a lot of diversity, but I can give you a rough number, of these 90.000 people receiving support from the CAP, they receive less than 5000 euros. There are people that receive 3000 or 4000 euros, but the majority receives about 5000 euros. In the majority of the cases in Jaen, it is complementary to the incomes that are generated. The profile of the olive farmer in Jaen is that the majority of them also has other work to generate income, within the agricultural sector or outside, to complement the income from the olive farms. Those that are exclusively living from the olive farming in Jaen are about 6000/6500 people. The rest have it as a complementary activity to generate income. They have an own company, or are civil servant, or they own their own olive plot and work on the plots of others as well. That is the scenario we have here.

**Ok, and in order to receive that support, you need to comply to certain norms?**

Yes, every CAP has some norms about good agricultural practices, farmers receive also help with that, we have worked for years to support farmers with these norms, so they know how to comply with them.

**We also understood that you need to have cover crops for example, is that a norm of the CAP?**

Well, now you have to have cover crops in one form or another. And every time, this will become more obligatory. In the new CAP, they want to have a more sustainable focus, and to leave cover crops, for example by chipping the pruning rests and leaving it on the soil, that is something they will stimulate.

**And that is also the case for smaller plots?**

Yes

**Ok, and so every time, more people are leaving the pruning rests on the fields as cover crops?**

Yes, more people leave it as cover crops, alive as well as inert, they leave herbs or select species that are best compatible with the olive, that don’t compete with the water that the olive trees need. And also the pruning rests are also more and more chipped and left at the soil. A few years ago, the majority of the farmers burned the pruning rests, with the environmental costs. It is not a good practice, we need to change that. That is also what we did with our project, we think the pruning rests are also valuable, a subproduct that needs to be valorized.

**You also said that you also provided services to help with the employees and workers on the field. Is [NAME] also for the workers that don’t have their own land?**

Yes, because one of the services that we offer is to assist in all the things that need to be taken care of when you hire employees. When you are hired by an agricultural company, what should be your salary and working conditions. Here we also assist in yes. We also have an important service, provision of ..? laborales, here the workers of the farmers, we provide with information, and courses, precautions they have to have in order to not get accidents.

**And what are the main challenges in the sector according to you?**

The challenge is very clear, we cannot replace our current system with a new system, which is intensive or superintensive. The challenge of this province is to get more added value out of this olive oil. Better market it, improve that we don’t sell it in bulk, but that we bottle it ourselves, that in that way, we differentiate in the price. So we bottle the olive oil in this province, we generate more added value here and more employment opportunities.

Also we have a great opportunity with the circular economy, we have a large volume of olives, that generate a large volume of byproducts, that can have an added value. We also need infrastructure to make sure this added value stays here, we now lack the energy infrastructure to absorb the energy that can be generated by all this biomass. We need infrastructure to make use of the possibilities that we have in this province. That is fundamentally the challenge.

We are the main producers of olive oil in the world, Jaen produces 40% of all olive oil in Spain and about 25% of the whole world. In addition, we produce healthiest fat in the world, the world consumption is very little, there is a huge opportunity here. We need to make sure that this province valorizes the product maximum. The commercialization of the olive oil is not yet at the level that is should be. That is the main challenge, together with the incorporation of youth and also of women. They are participating but they are not visible. There is a potential and talent in this province that we need to use.

**And do you also do projects specifically for youth and women?**

The incorporation of youth is always a focus of us, together with the government, who are supporting the incorporation of youth in the sector, with economic support. And also with women, we have a very direct work, we have an association, parallel to [NAME], FADEMUN, which is a federation of rural women, that work exclusively with women, with a platform to support and improve their yields, to support their businesses. They also offer courses on gender equality, because we need work to eliminate this difference that exists in terms of gender.

**Yes, because is there an inequality?**

Yes it is true that women are not that incorporated, or not that visible in their work in agriculture in the way that I would like it. It is not that women are not working in agriculture, but they are not that visible. Not only in our sector, but it is a characteristic of our whole society and I think that should change.

**They are not that visible in the management of the cooperatives?**

Yes, not in decision making positions in cooperatives, or in irrigation communities, or often in the fields, they do the same work as the men, but the men have the titles, ownership of the land. We need to correct that little by little.

**And the youth here, are they interested in working in the sector?**

There are difficulties, especially related to the prices. We don’t have a stable perspective, and every person who will enter the sector, and especially young people they need to have the perspective that they can live from it. That is difficult right now. I am sure that if we can offer that, that they know that they can cultivate olives and receive a fair price for it, that they will incorporate in the sector. Right now, the sector is aged, it is a sector with a lot of farmers with a high age.

**And if you could change or improve something, what would that be?**

With our organization, we always works towards more regulation of the market, we understand that the free market doesn’t work and that the industry tales away the biggest part of the price that the consumer pays, the part that finally reaches the farmer is minimal, because they are at the lowest part of the chain. And we are working towards a legislation, at national but also European level, that they regulate the market and that a fair price is payed to every actor in the chain, starting with the farmers, which is the most important and most vulnerable, so they can secure their livelihood. That is what we fundamentally work for, that a fair price is paid.

We do that at a European level and also national level, so that they will regulate the market, to provide our farmers with a security, that they will receive a fair price for their products.

**What are the challenges related sustainability?**

The method of cultivation of olives is the most sustainable that exists. The traditional cultivation method is adapted to our conditions here, in terms of soil, precipitation, here in the Mediterranean climate, we have the best circumstances to cultivate olives. In addition, we have a very sustainable use of resources, such as water. One of the main challenges we have in olive cultivation is soil erosion, but the way we do it now, with the use of pruning rests as cover crops we protect the soil and you minimize the loss of soil quality.

It is also a cultivation that generates a lot of biodiversity, which is a very important problem in Europe. Because this forest, with sustainable practices, generates a lot of biodiversity. The trees also absorb CO2, we are minimizing the environmental impact. We are a great purifier, and these are services that the olive trees are providing for the whole society. We not only produce olive oil, the society also benefits from the cultivation. In addition, we also take care of the territory and the environment, because if we didn’t have the olive cultivation here, there would be a lot more diseases and plagues. We are also asking the authorities to provide money to manage the territory. The traditional cultivation system, which is the majority of the cultivation here, have the opportunity to adapt in a good way to the European policies, such as the green deal and from farm to fork, they put the sustainability of the exploitation in the centre. The traditional cultivation is already doing that, we have nothing against it. We only ask to be compensated for the services that we already provide. And everything that has to do with circular economy, with the management of byproducts, the alperujo and energy. There are a lot of opportunities, but the authorities need to provide an impulse. The traditional system, which I believe has a lot of benefits, not only for the health of people by consuming olive oil, but also for the services that the sector provides, what I was just describing.

**Ok and are farmers here also concerned with this topic, for example by doing ecological cultivation?**

Well here in Jaen not at the level as I would like to, here in a lot of areas they have integrated cultivation (in between normal and ecological) but, and this relates to the challenges that we have here, especially in the less productive regions, or with a more difficult landscape, they should go for this type of differentiation, to transform to ecological production so they can differentiate in the market.

**And are farmers open to these kind of changes?**

Yes, the because for the farmers, this will in de end contribute to their economic profitability. And I think that this transformation towards more ecological production won’t reverse, there is no way back. We need to stimulate this.

***I am showing + explaining the Biohub infographic***

**How do you see this concept?**

I see it as positive. Do you also take into account the production of gas?

**No, biodiesel will be the main product**

I think it will be possible, but you need to quantify the quantity of biomass you need and also the costs that need to be made for this transformation, for the installations that are needed to convert this biomass into biofuels. I think it is possible, I see it as an opportunity.

**And do you think that the farmers will be open to provide biomass?**

If it will be economically profitable yes, because then they can generate another income out of their production, that they now don’t earn. To the contrary, they have to make costs to process the biomass now. So if you can reduce this cost, it will be a success.

**Ok, we understood that the majority of the farmers now chip it and leave it on the soil, and that that is a way to comply to the CAP norms. Do you see that as an obstacle?**

Not if you leave life cover crops, you comply as well with the CAP and the rest you can chip and sell or manage in another way, this can exist next to each other. It is not a problem.

**And what kind of benefits could this system bring to the region or the farmers?**

To get a maximum output out of your exploitation, to generate also value from the residues, reduce costs and maybe a stimulus to generate extra income. That will all depend on how this technology will be developed. If the technology is viable and if the transport will be possible, because that is the main challenge here, the price of transportation. If that would be viable, or for example if you can have multiple smaller plants, where you can collect and store biomass, I think that will be interesting.

**Do you also see obstacles?**

The people always react to change, and especially the agrarian sector, they are used to do things in a certain way for whole their life. But if they see a benefit, they can change.

**Could a new system like this also harm or interrupt an already existing system?**

I know that alperujo is used for electricity generation, I don’t know there, but you need to speak to someone from the secondary industry. But I think that will be the only interruption, but if this new system will be more efficient, I think there will be room for it.

**Do you also see a role for [NAME] here?**

Yes, we are in direct contact with thousands of farmers, we could group farmers together and facilitate this process. We could be involved in an initiative like this, without any problem.

***Showing + explaining the power-interest grid***

**How do you see the position of these actors in this power-interest grid? Are they well positioned?**

The junta de Andalucia and national government are well positioned, they have high interest and also high power. So I would put them both in both high power and high interest positions.

**Yes they have high interest as well?**

Yes I think so, yes. The municipalities less, I would put them lower, they have less possibilities to be an important actor. Their interest could be high, but they will have low power. I would put them lower.

Olive mills and cooperatives I would put on the same level.

And what do you mean with academia?

**The universities**

I think they have higher power. I would put them in high power and high interest position.

**And in what sense do they have power?**

They have power when they do their studies and communicate about it, to the government, that is important. They can influence policy. If they have a serious study with important data, the government will do something with it. The university has prestige.

For the rest, I think it is well. I wouldn’t change the rest.

**And the farmers?**

Well the farmers, in terms of interest, I would put them in the middle, not as high as now.

**And why?**

Because it is something new, they are not that flexible, they should be very convinced of the benefits it could generate for them. People are open for changes, but currently there is not a high interest.

**And where would you put [NAME]?**

We have high interest and I think medium power.

**Thank you very much, that was all we wanted to ask you**