

CALL FOR PAPERS

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

The role of Technicians and Agricultural Experts in the Modernisation of European Agriculture (1880-1980)

Leuven, Belgium
12 & 13 September 2024

Organisers
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Since the late 19th century, public institutions had fostered and promoted technical change and agricultural modernisation through various initiatives, taking the place of large landowners and elite associations which had carried out such action in the past. Governments (at regional, national and, later, European level) supported the modernization of the agricultural sector by promoting scientific and practice-oriented research and knowledge transfer to the agricultural community. After all, the small size of agricultural farms (with so little human and financial capital available) meant that it was mainly the state that provided the main impulses for agricultural research and innovation, although the farmers remained the central figure, with agricultural professionals playing a crucial mediating role.

Technical change in agriculture, as well as the transmission of agricultural knowledge, has received a good deal of attention recently. However, the specific role of agronomists, technicians, and agricultural experts as mediators between science and farmers has not received as much attention. In this workshop we would like to focus on the role of agricultural professionals in promoting the modernisation of European agriculture throughout the 'long 20th century'. Specifically, we would like to consider the following points:

- a) The features of agricultural professionals as a social group: Who was an agricultural expert? How did the definition of an expert in agriculture develop? Which skills and expertise were appreciated and desired by the state, farmers, and other actors in the food system? How and to what extent were agricultural experts able to convert their expertise into political and societal influence? How did they acquire power, and what did they do exactly with their authority?
- b) How did education and the social profile/background of experts evolve in the period under study? What was their relationship with professionals from other disciplines, such as sociologists, biologists and ecologists? Access to education and expert communities was for a long time in Europe governed by legal and political circumstances, social and economic constraints, as well as by gender barriers. How inclusive/exclusive were agricultural expert communities in Europe between 1880-1980?
- c) Their contribution to the various (mainstream and alternative) processes of agricultural modernisation: How did the exchange of knowledge and practices between experts and farmers proceed? What means and media did they use, and, in order to transfer new and old knowledge, why did they use those forms? To what extent was there cooperation between technicians and farmers' organisations and/or private companies?
- d) Their role as civil servants: What was their role in the public institutions and how did it evolve? What was their contribution to the design and implementation of regional, national and international agricultural policies? How did they react to social and environmental problems that emerged in the European countryside throughout the 20th century?

Please send a title, an abstract (250-500 words) and a short CV by 31 March 2024 to the following addresses: j.planas@ub.edu and yves.segers@kuleuven.be