

The SAFERs, an evolving and multiscale tool of the French farmland regulation

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Some facts about the (exotic?) French context of farmland ownership

2/3 of farmland are **rented** by farmers...

under the auspices of the **fermage** status (cheap and secured lease)

Ideal type owner = old men from the farming sector and the province

Mean estate surface = **6,4 ha** →
14 owners/farm

Data on ownership of land = **open access** only for non-individual owners (38 millions plots)

1,5% of farmland is **sold every year**
(6,200 €/ha)

Main purchasers = **farmers**
(preemption right on rented land)

2nd main purchasers are the **SAFERs** (25%)

Outline



SAFERs are mostly **locally-led** and their agency depends on their insertion within **power relationships**

SAFERs carry out **short- and long- term** activities on the **land markets**

SAFERs **produce data** on the land markets both continuously and for more precise surveys

The recent **extensions of SAFERs' prerogatives** open debates on land regulation and its tools

1. SAFERs are mostly locally-led and their agency depends on their insertion within power relationships

From a **governance of farmland by the peers** → **of rural land by experts** (Sencébé et al., 2013)

Extension of duties from agriculture to environment and local development

Shrinking of public subsidies (-> need of profitable operations, less land banking)



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SAFERs are **intermediaries between sectors**, tending to legitimize the role of **local authorities** (information providing, consulting) and alternative **land trusts**.

The majority farmers' union is still pivotal in the intern governance

SAFERs are less linked to firm agriculture + the leftist farmers' union



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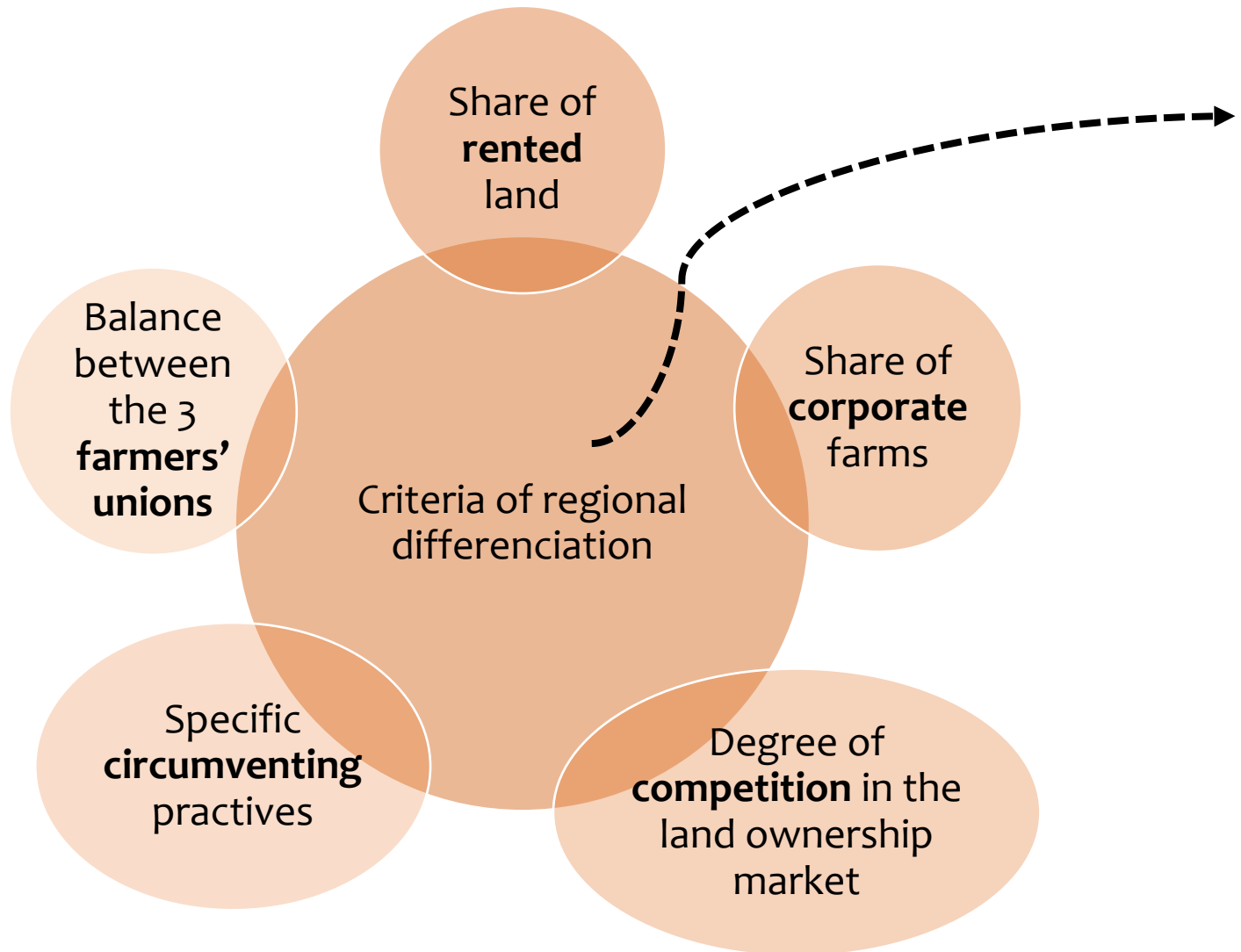
SAFERs are less linked to firm agriculture + the leftist and right-wing populist farmers' unions

Difficult to asses the **neutrality** of SAFERs

Rules happen to be circumvented by the majority farmers' union to allocate land to its supporters

Control of information is crucial and disadvantages aspiring farmers.

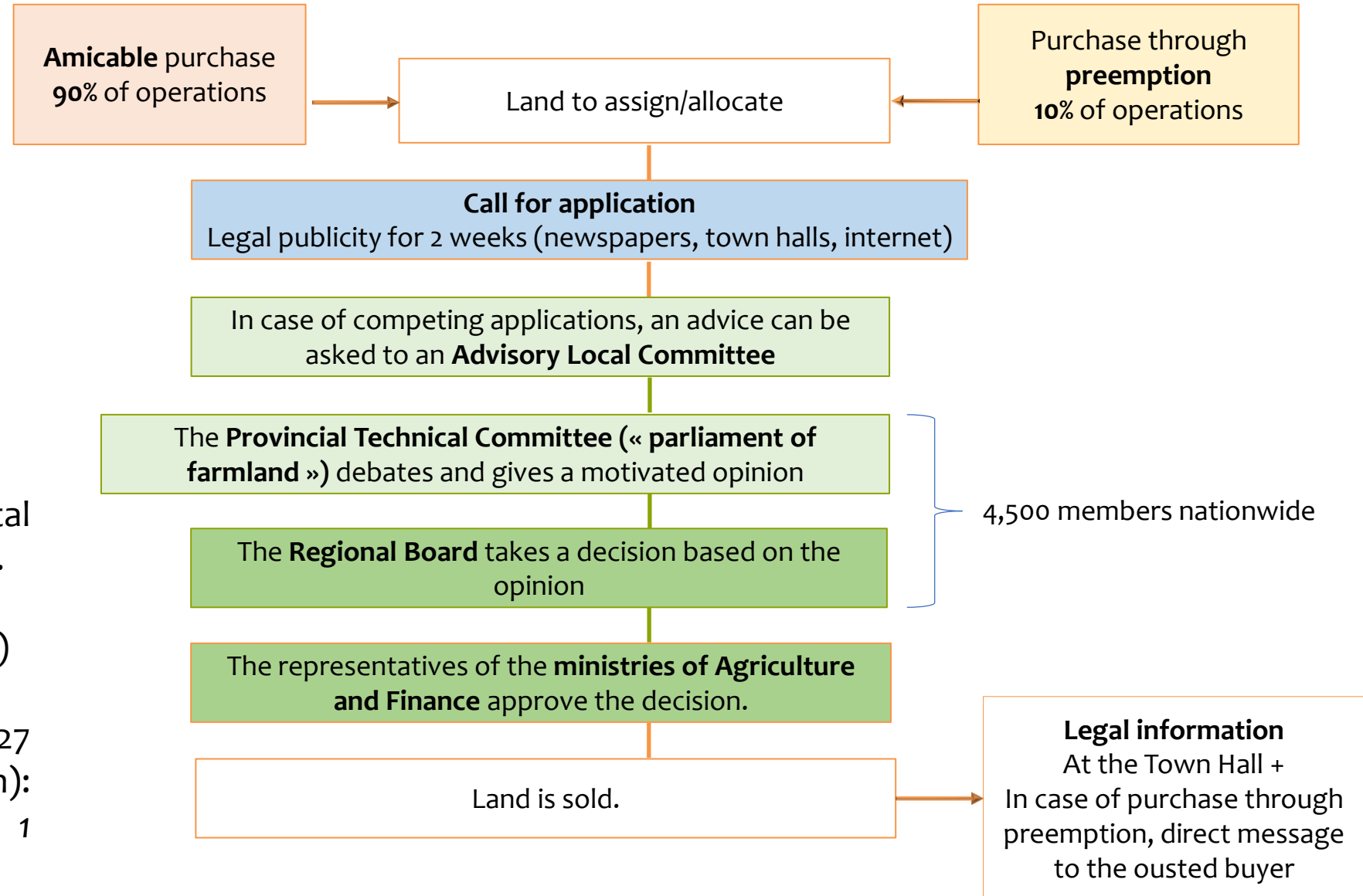
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Type of relationship with farmers
+
Size of the « reachable market »

SAFERs are more fit where the farm structures are similar to those of the 1960s... than where they evolved towards firm agriculture

2. SAFERs carry out short- and long-term activities on the land markets



On a regular basis, SAFERs purchase and sell land

2023

-> **98,700 ha** sold (0,35 % of total French farmland) for 1,6 billion €.

-> **14,270 operations** (mean: 7 ha)

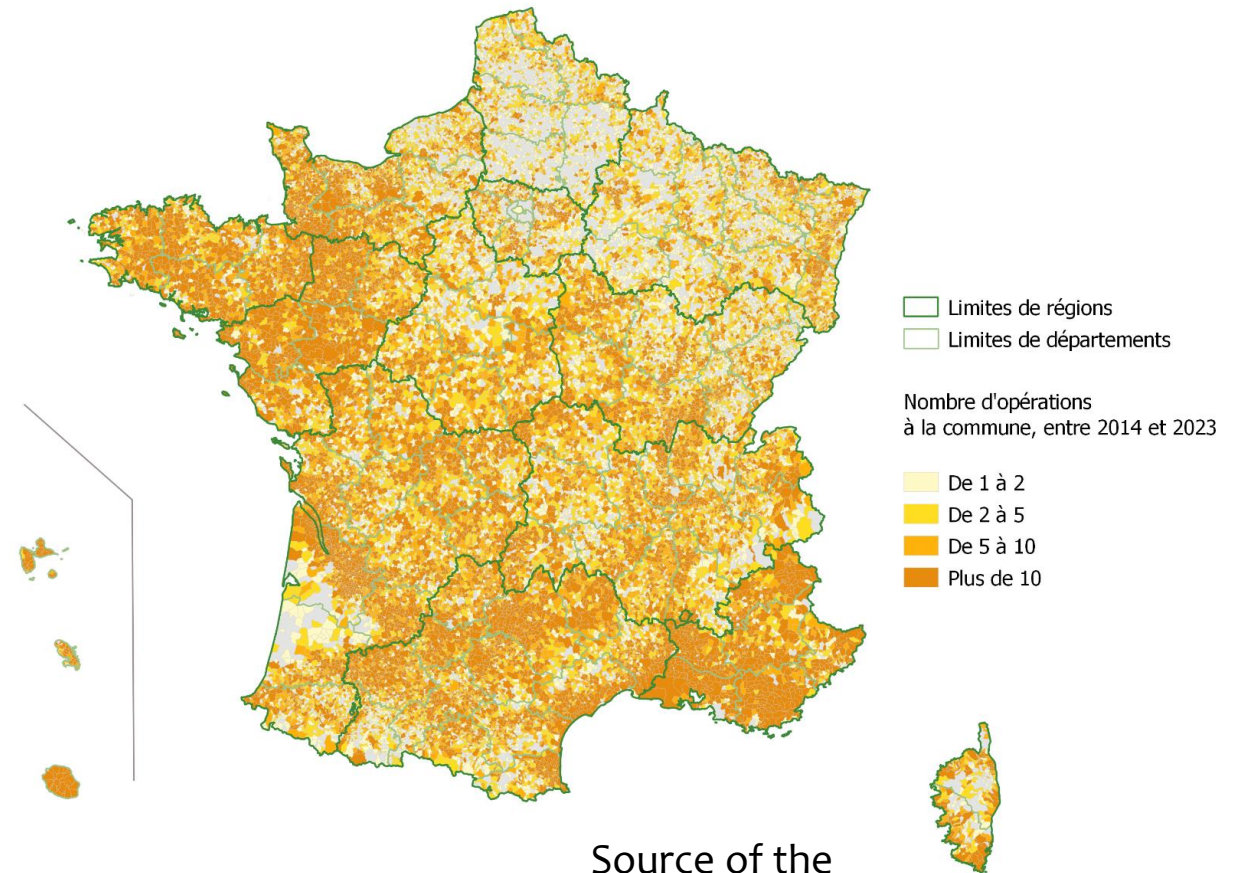
-> **384,000 applications** (27 applications/operation in mean):
« 100 displeased people and 1 ungrateful person ».

2. SAFERs carry out short- and long-term activities on the land markets

On a regular basis, SAFERs purchase and sell land

Within the 10 last years, SAFERs have carried out operations in **80 %** of the 36,000 **French municipalities**.

Number of operations by municipality (2014-2023)



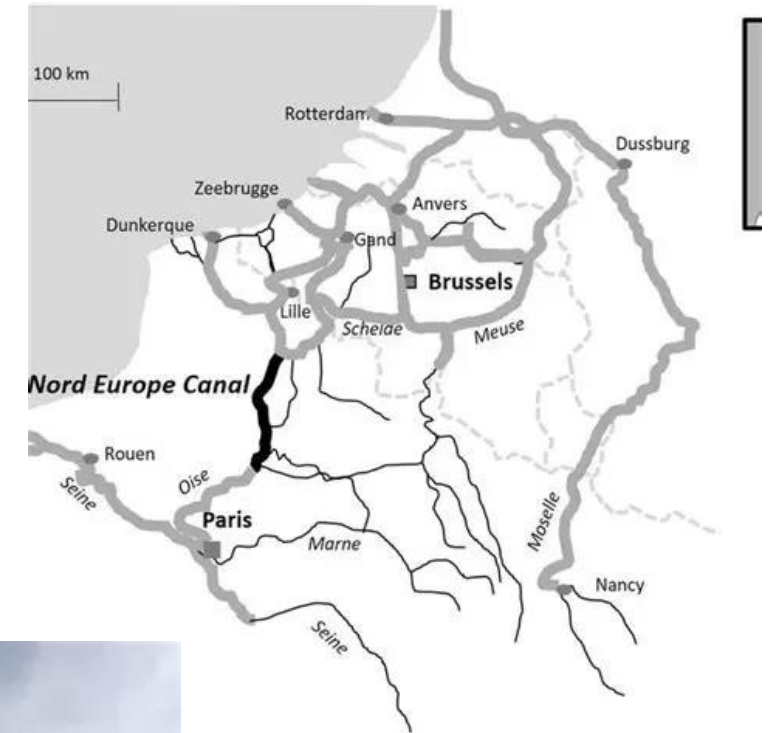
Source of the map: FNSafer

2. SAFERs carry out short and long term activities on the land markets

SAFERs also act as on the longer term

2023: **39 000 ha** of banked land
-> 63% on behalf of public organizations (e.g. projected **infrastructures** or farmland consolidation)

Partnership with public or private organizations willing to purchase land in a defined area for a general interest purposes (e.g. **water quality protection**)



Petitimberty et al. (2020)



Source: France Bleu

3. SAFERs produce data on the land markets both continuously and for more precise surveys

SAFERs publish every year the reference price of land at a local scale

Thanks to the information regulatorily provided by **notaries** (nearly **400,000/year**, in 95 % of municipalities)



← Report

Interactive website

The screenshot shows the website 'le-prix-des-terres.fr' with a search bar and navigation menu. The main content area displays a map of the 'Vallées et plaines nord et est de Lyon' region. A data box for 'Saint-Georges-de-Reneins' shows '24 projets de ventes observés' and '7 110 €/ha' for 'Libres non bâtis'. Another box shows 'Prix moyen des terres et prés en 2024' with a '+6% par rapport à 2023' increase. The footer includes '© Le prix des terres 2025' and 'Mentions légales et vie privée/CGU'.

Source of the illustrations:
FNSafer

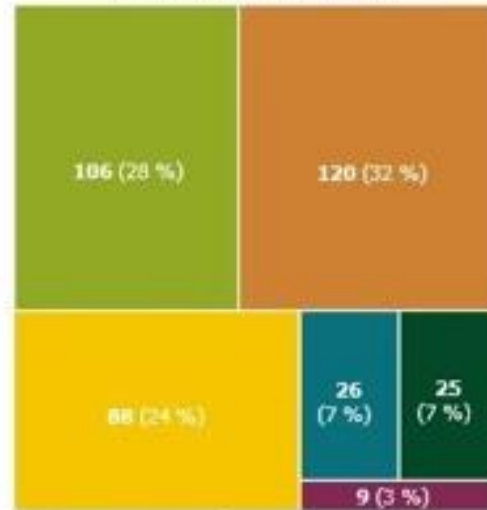
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SAFERs identify 6 main « markets of the rural space »

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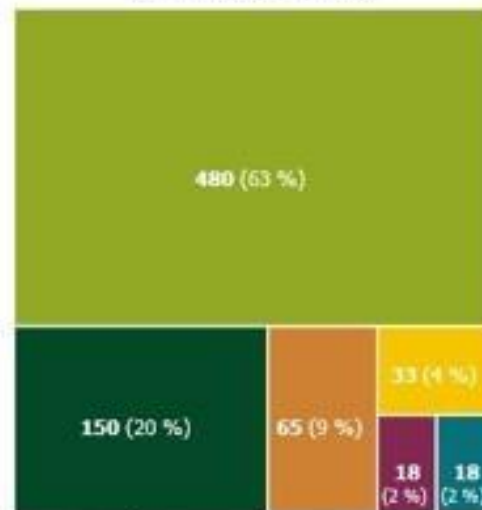
Répartition des sous-marchés de l'espace rural en 2022

Nombre
(en milliers de transactions)



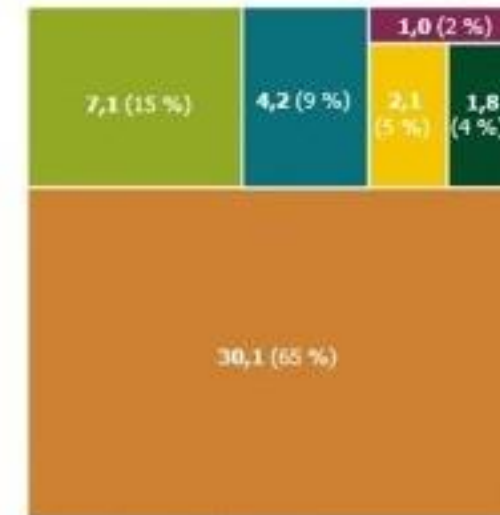
374 000 transactions
Évolution 2022/2021 : - 6 %

Surface
(en milliers d'hectares)



763 000 ha
Évolution 2022/2021 : - 0,9 %

Valeur
(en milliards d'euros)



46,2 milliards d'euros
Évolution 2022/2021 : - 6 %

- Agricole *
- Forêts, landes, friches et étangs **
- Maisons à la campagne
- Vignes
- Espaces résidentiels et de loisirs non bâtis
- Urbanisation

Number of operations
(thousands)

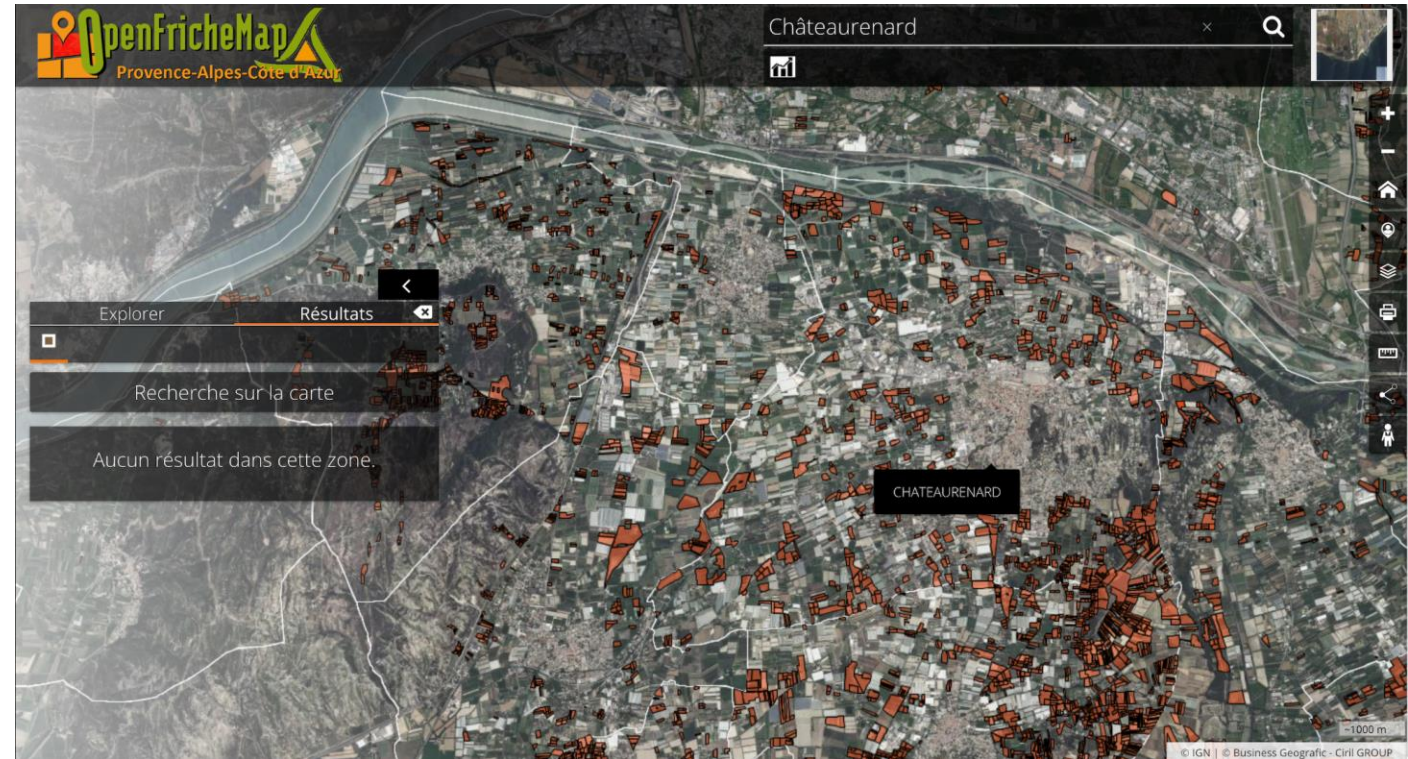
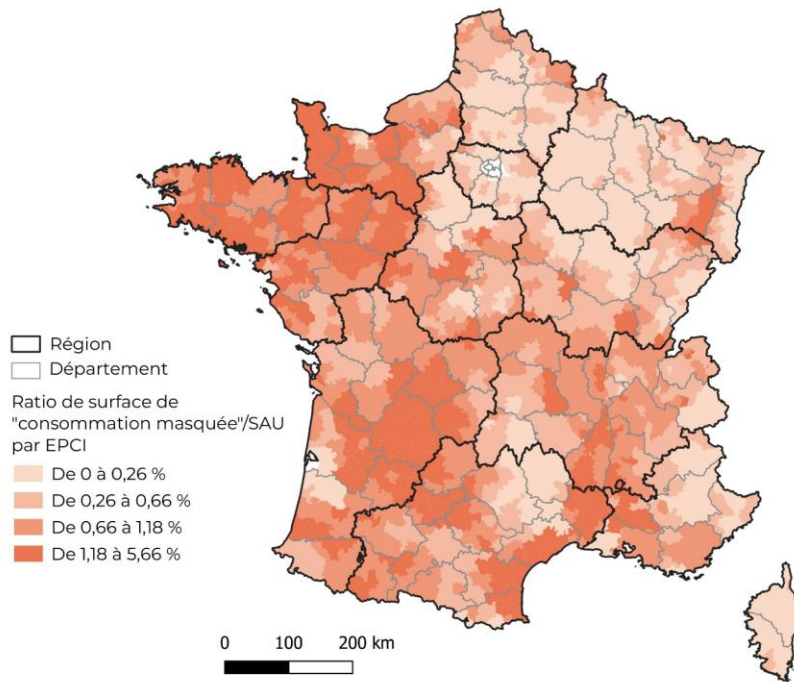
Surfaces (thousands
of ha)

Value (billions of €)

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SAFERs also provide knowledge tools and analyse data

Ex. 1 in the South of France: automatized mapping of **abandoned farmland**



Ex. 2 nationwide: mapping of farmland surfaces **diverted from farm use** without being urbanized.

Source of the illustrations:
FNSafer

4. The recent extensions of SAFERs' prerogatives open debates on land regulation and its tools

The « 4th leg » of an ambitious, but incomplete and splited farmland regulation

		Markets regulated since the 1960s	More recent markets
Ownership of land	kind of ownership	Direct ownership	Indirect ownership, through shares of companies owning land
	regulation authority and kind of market control	SAFER holding a right of pre-emptive purchase on all farmland sold	Up to 2023: no regulation (From 2023: SAFER , administrative authorization of the sale of shares)
Use of land	kind of use right	Fermage long-term and renewable lease agreement	Shorter-term subcontracting of farm work, subleasing and oral leasing
	regulation authority and kind of market control	CDOA , administrative authorization to farm	No regulation

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The « 4th leg » of an ambitious, but incomplete and splited farmland regulation

The State delegated the control to SAFERs due to its own lack of resources

Sempastous Law:
SAFERs now control the market of **share capital of companies owning farmland**.

→ **Legitimacy** of SAFERs contested by some rural law and real estate professional organizations.

→ Ideas of **merging SAFERs** with other bodies, to connect silos of public policies.

2022 : 800,000 ha sold indirectly through shares vs. 480,000 ha sold directly as plots of land.

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