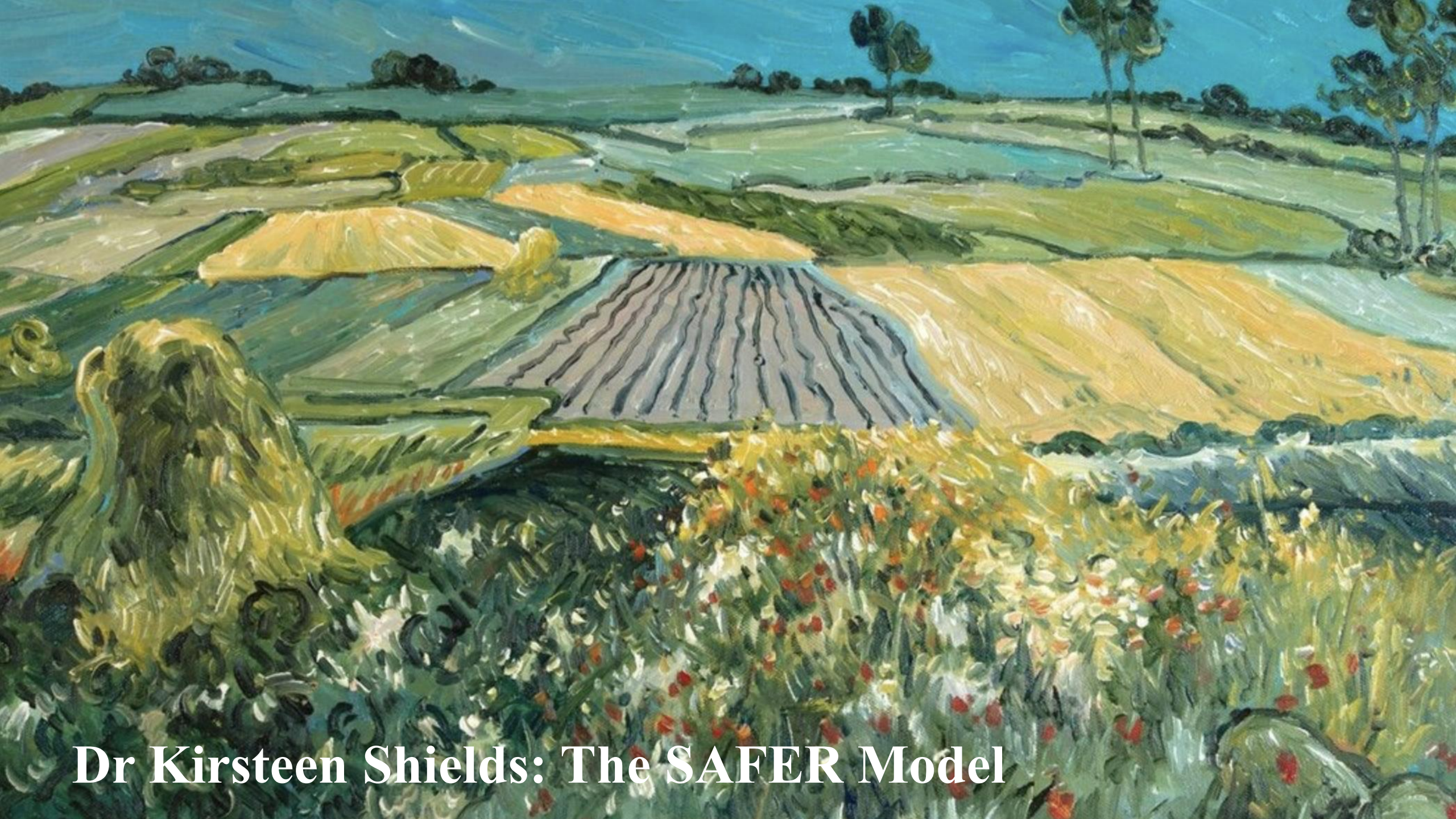


The SAFER system in France

Dr Kirsteen Shields

University of Edinburgh



Dr Kirsteen Shields: The SAFER Model





15118



gettyimages
Credit: Library of Congress

Bien adapté
aux besoins
de la moyenne
exploitation...

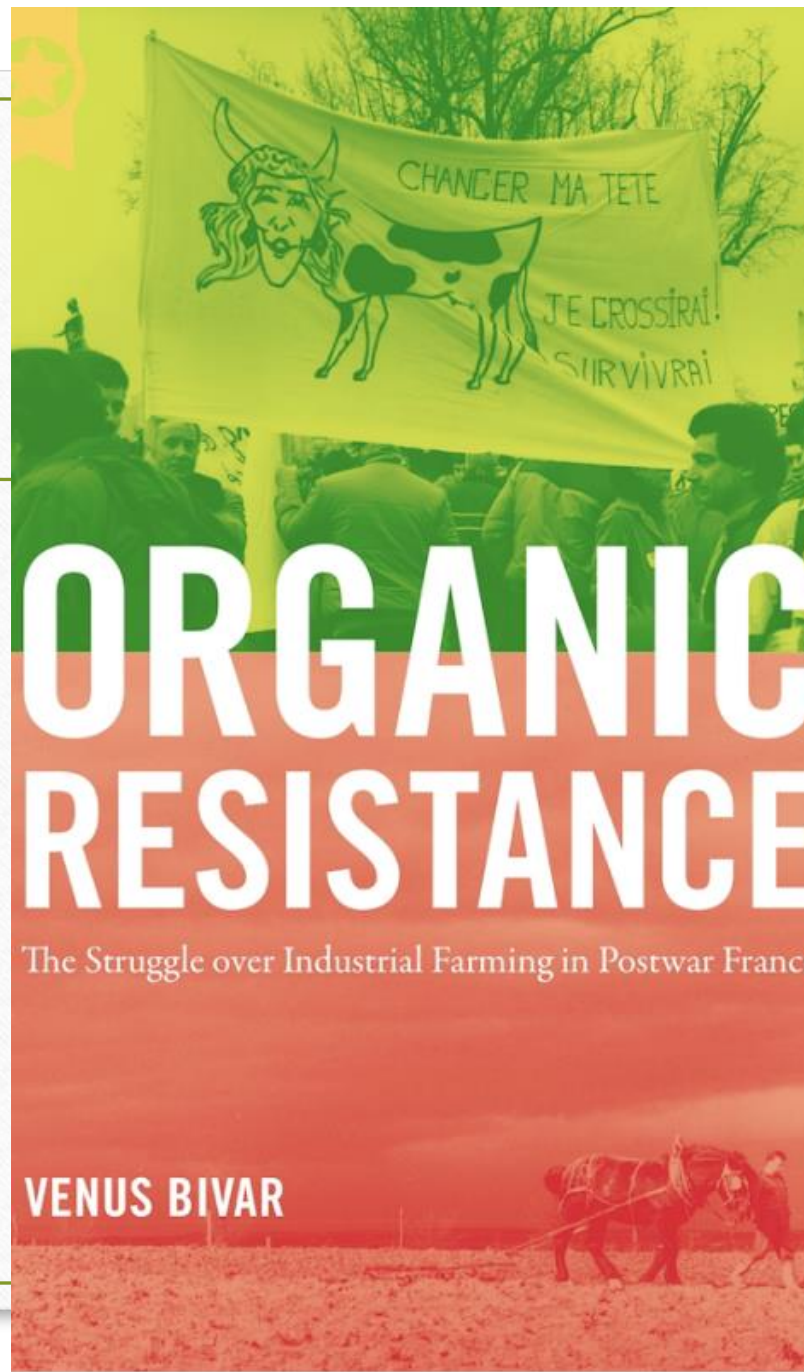


RURAL INVENTIONS

The French Countryside
after 1945



SARAH FARMER

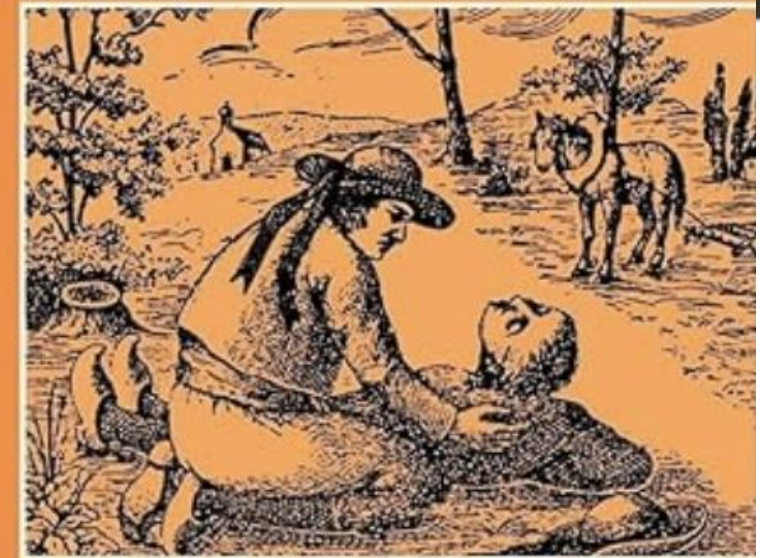


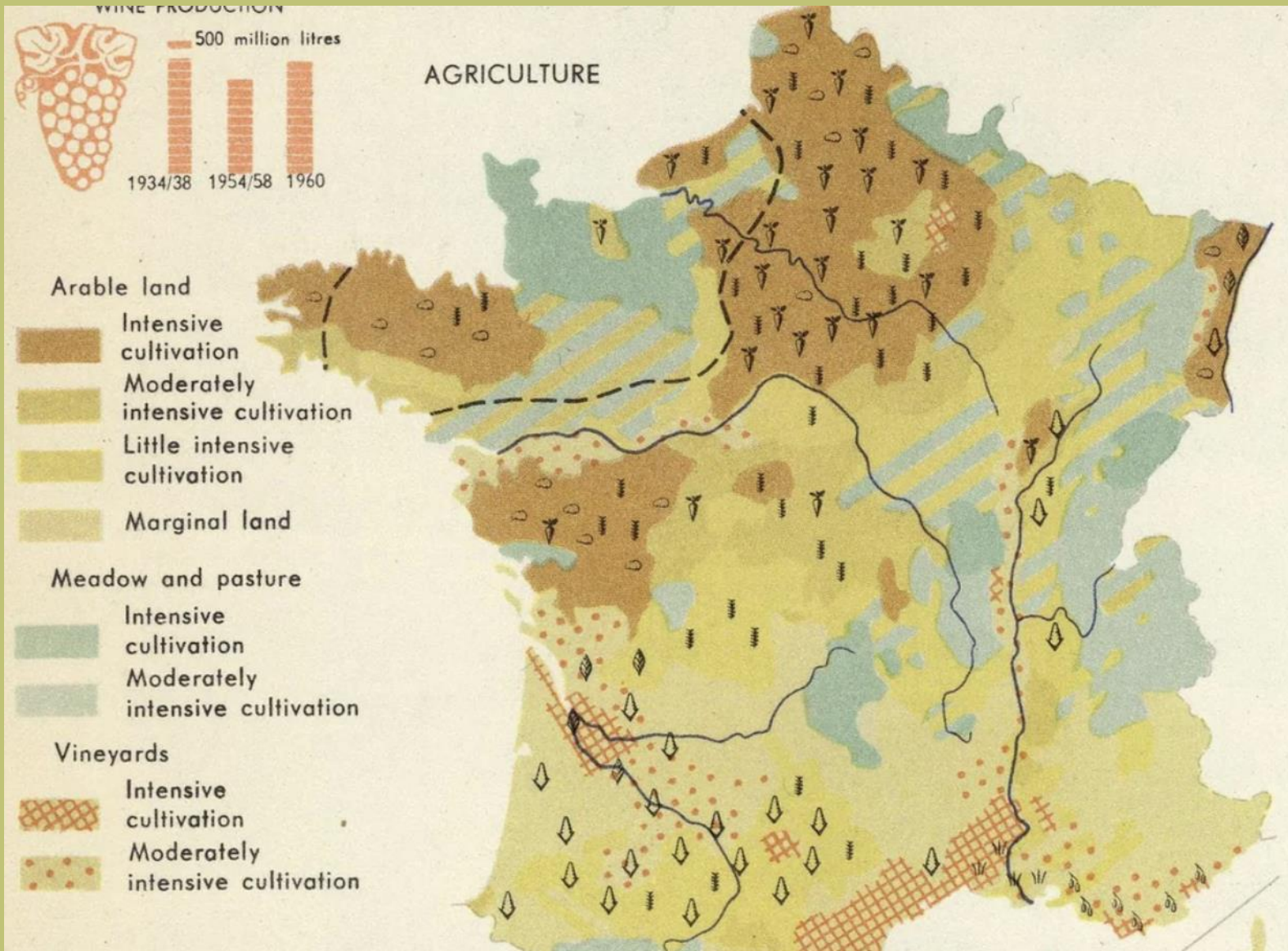
Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography

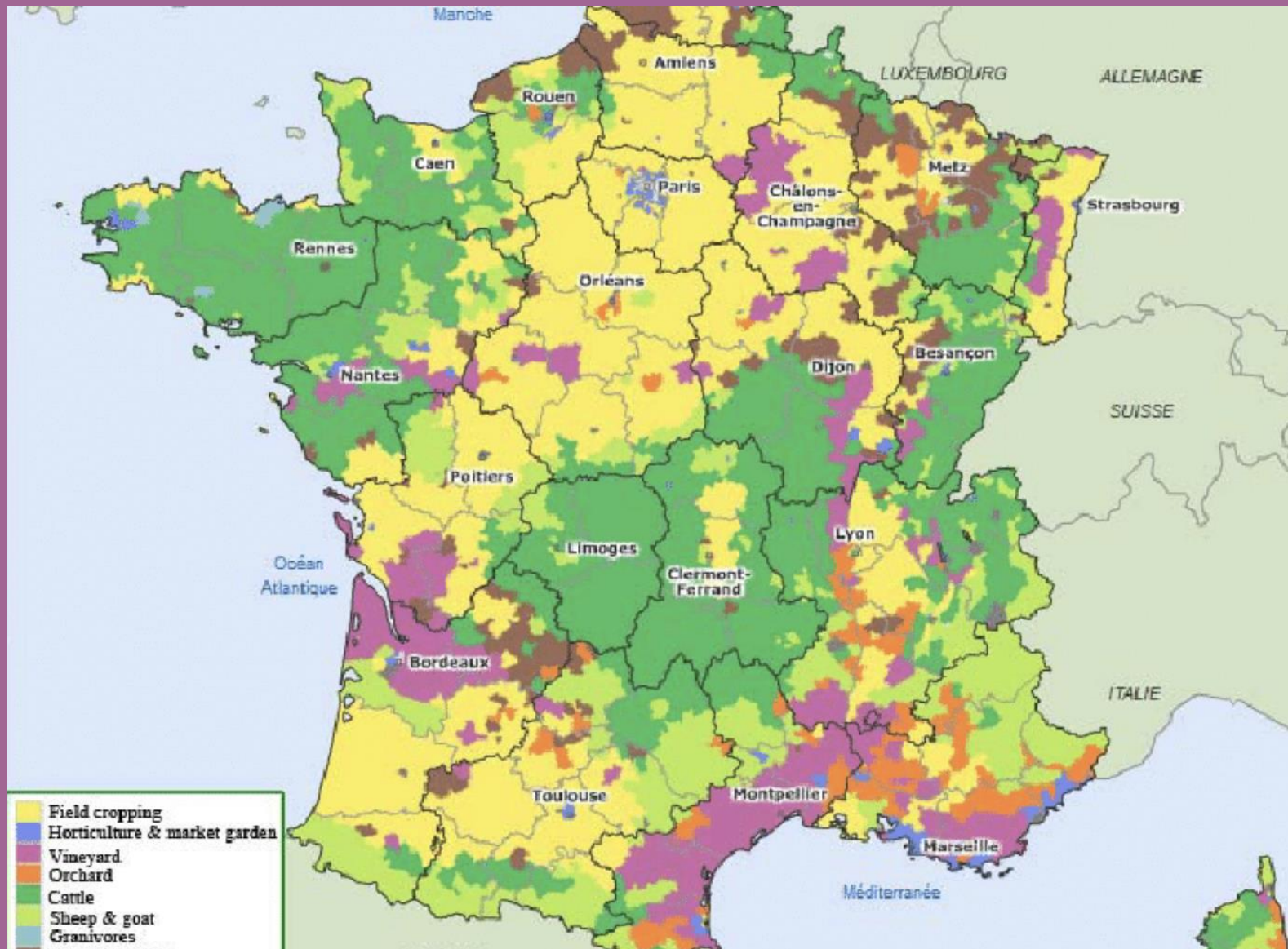
Peasants, politicians and producers

The organisation
of agriculture in France
since 1918

M.C. Cleary

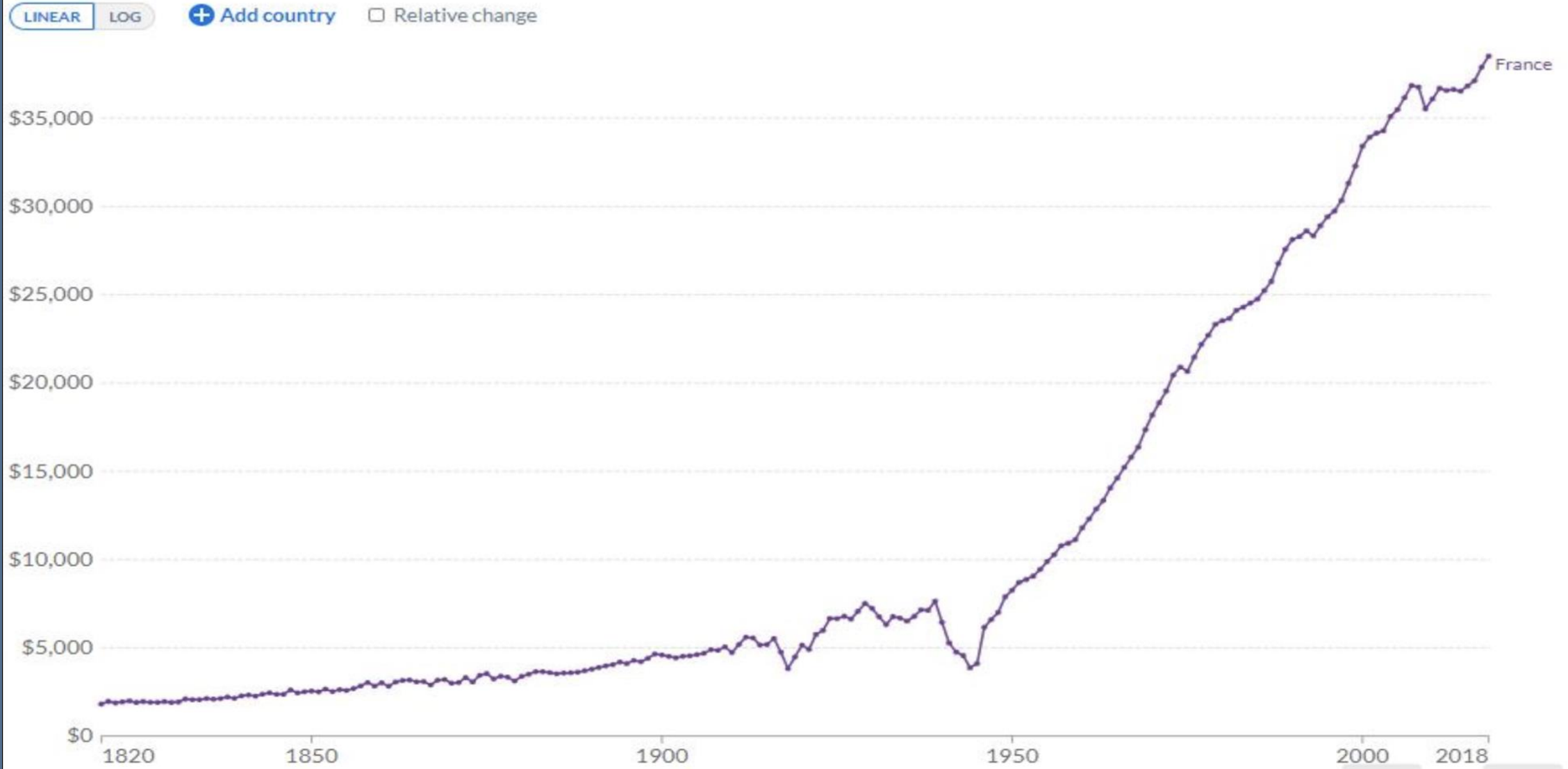






GDP per capita, 1820 to 2018

GDP per capita adjusted for price changes over time (inflation) and price differences between countries – it is measured in international-\$ in 2011 prices.



How did France do it?

“It took 30 years of youth movements to impose a new agricultural policy in the 1960s. France had a (trade) deficit and wanted to modernise agriculture. At the same time, it wanted to create a common market with 6 countries. [...] Young farmers were keen to set up these SAFERs, and the state made this possible.”

- Robert Levesque, President, AGTER, France.



The Four Key Policies

The reforms are commonly referred to in terms of four key policies:

- The statute of agricultural tenancies introduced in 1946, stated that the tenant could not be removed by the landlord and that the rent was governed by a prefectorial decree (in other words the law defined the method of calculating the rent).

Through the Orientation Law of 1960, three further policies were legislated:

- The creation of SAFERs as a governance mechanism to oversee agricultural land transactions.
- The creation of 'control over farm structures' which aimed to ensure farms are neither too big nor too small according to the model of a modern farm operating on human level and keeping its family trait.
- The creation of subsidies to support the setting-up of farmers considered to be 'good' or 'preferable' farmers by the agriculture ministry and the farming unions. These were known as 'installation policies'.

- Four general (public) missions

PARTICIPATE IN THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT



DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY



SUPPORT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT



ENSURING TRANSPARENCY IN THE RURAL LAND MARKET



Regional Variations:

“One of the roles of my SAFER is to fight against “sprawl”. People try to build houses without permission, they will put a trailer on the land, they bring rubbish things, cut the wood without permission. We have a pre-emptive right; we work with local authorities. We are informed of the sale and if there is a danger, we can use our pre-emptive right and there is no sale.”

- Pierre Missioux, Director General of the SAFER Ile-de-France,
2023.



ECHR and ECJ Compliant

Widely and wildly misunderstood:

For example, Sarah Farmer notes that;

“[I]n the Ardèche, some observers thought the SAFER aided neo-ruraux [urbanites who were new to rural life]. Others perceived it as acting primarily in the interests of the larger farmers (represented by the FNSEA, the largest farmers’ trade union), with the Confédération paysanne playing only a consulting role. Indeed, some néo-ruraux in the Ardèche criticized the SAFER for not serving the agricultural community at all and of supporting sales to second homeowners rather than providing land to those who wanted to farm.”

Farmer, S. (2020) Rural Inventions: The French Countryside after 1945. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. pp 68-69.

And still is:

- *“There is a danger that, however well intentioned, the bill begins to resemble the kind of state control that we have seen elsewhere in Europe. Some have suggested that it echoes the French reforms of the 1960s, which created the SAFER model—a system in which the state has extensive powers over land transactions.*
- *It is true that that model reshaped rural France, where feudalism was abolished centuries earlier than in Scotland. It achieved some success in supporting young farmers and reducing speculation, but that was a long time ago and things have moved on. It also brought layers of bureaucracy and market distortion and reduced transparency. We should be careful to not repeat those mistakes. Scotland’s strength lies in its diversity and its ability to combine private enterprise with public purpose.”*
 - Tim Eagle, Nov 5th 2025, Scottish Parliament.

...Spoiler: SAFER is not the STATE!



Points of distinction

- SAFER is not the state.
- SAFER a private enterprise with public purpose.
- Land is not agricultural land.
- SAFER increases not decreases transparency.
- SAFER is not 'safer'.



Thanks for listening