

Transition to organic production

France, Camargue

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The Camargue: key features

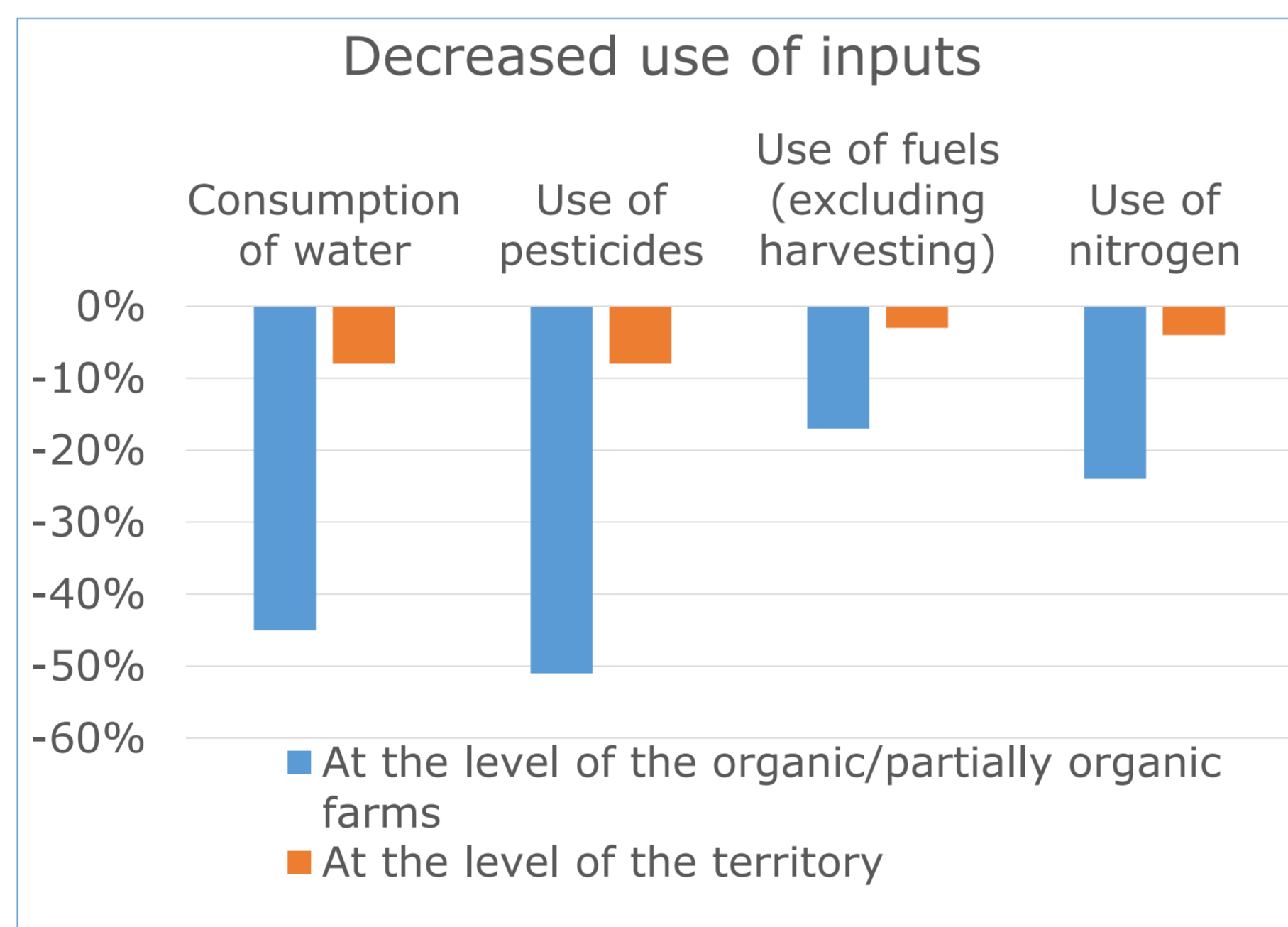
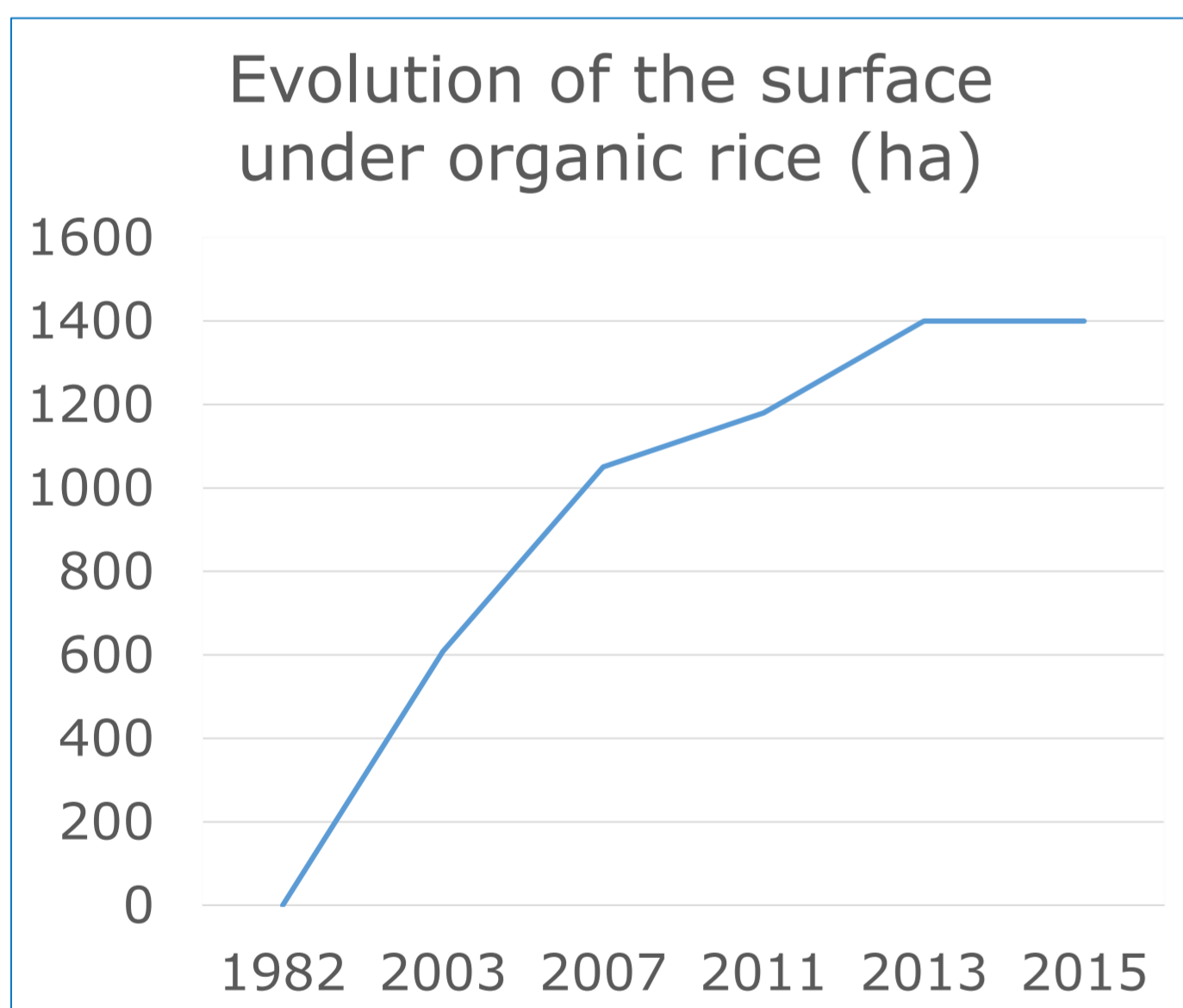
- The Camargue is located in the south-east of France, covering a surface of 145,300 ha.
- Severe environmental problems, e.g. soils affected by a high rate of salt hindering a good development of the crop production.
- The single European market formed in 1962 has led to a severe decrease in the rice area (from 30,000 to only 5,000 ha in 1984).
- A "recovery plan for rice" was launched in 1984 to ensure the preservation of the territory, since rice is the only crop that helps avoid severe soil problems due to salinization.



- In 2000, the local research institutions (INRA, CIRAD, CFR) decided to focus more of their research on organic farming, with particular focus on weed management which is the main barrier to converting to organic production.

Impacts of research programme and related innovations

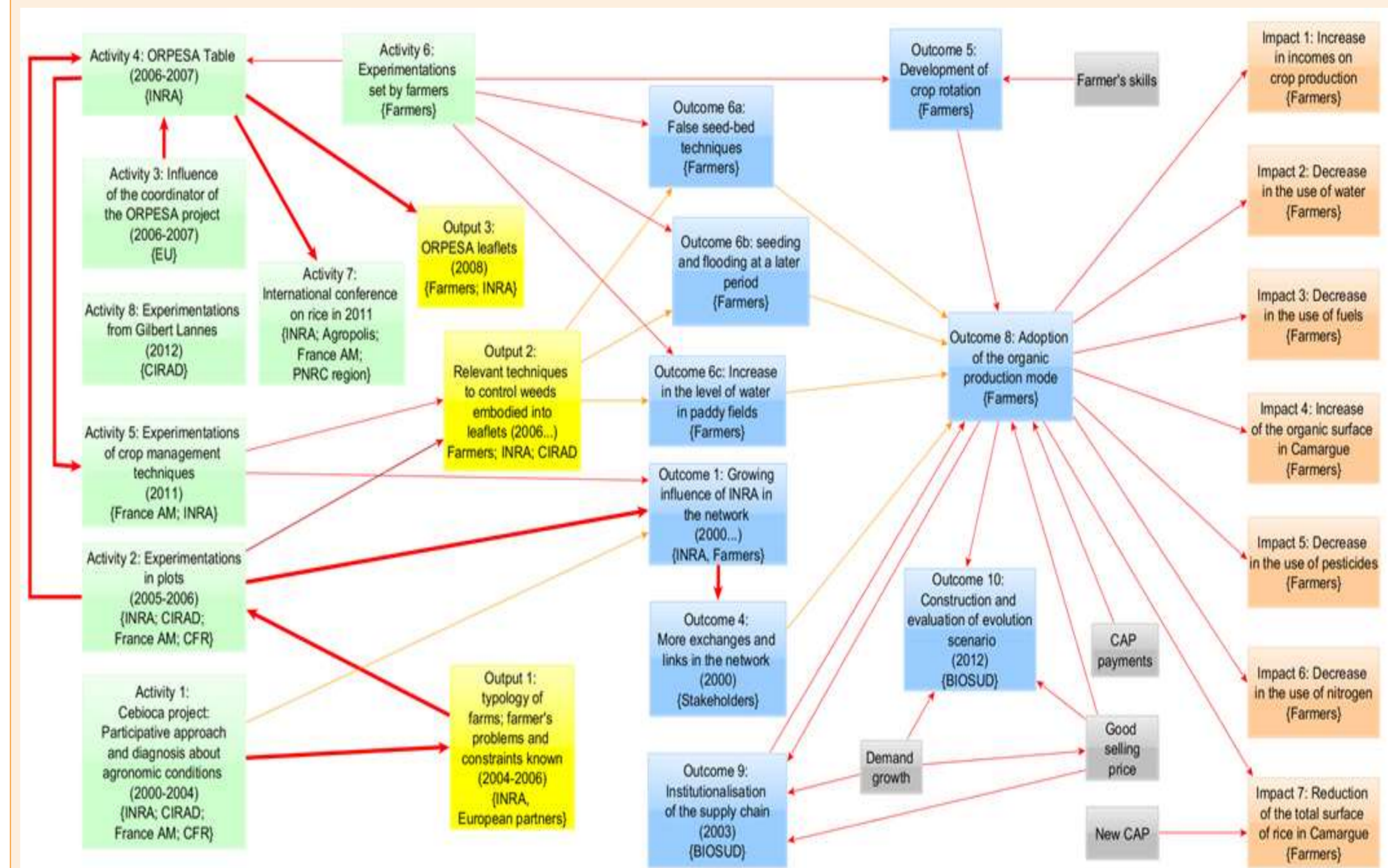
Significant impacts have been produced, including an increased surface under organic rice farming, a significant decrease in the use of inputs, and an increased revenue of 111% for organic farmers.



External factors have significantly supported the conversion to organic farming, such as CAP payments, developing organic market or informal testing conducted independently by farmers.

Pathway towards organic farming in Camargue

Below is a schematic illustration of the impact pathway undertaken by the research programme and related innovations.



- The scientific experimentations allowed developing specific organic farming techniques to regulate weeds, e.g. appropriate extended crop rotations or "false seed-bed" techniques.
- Although co-learning interactions between researchers and farmers have developed, they remain insufficient (distant institutions, lack of research outputs adapted for all farms, etc.).
- On-farm trials and farmer's own testing appeared more essential for successful adoption of organic farming than the scientific experiments conducted without a direct link with farmers.
- The good selling price of organic rice was one of the most important factors leading to adoption of organic farming.



Key lessons learned

- The research raised the acceptability of organic farming in the Camargue, mainly through informal discussions, which may even be further developed.
- External factors like a relevant agricultural economic policy are indispensable to support research outputs and enhance the uptake of research outputs.
- Close collaborations between local researchers and farmers are key to the success of this type of research programme on sustainable farming systems.
- On-farm trials allow adapting scientific experimentations to the specific conditions of the farms, thus encouraging adoption of organic farming.
- External experts should regularly assess whether results of such research projects are actually achieved in order to make research more successful and useful for farmers.

