

# From niche to volume with integrity and trust

## CASE STUDY FACT SHEET

# Biovallée - France

C. Lamine, S. Bui  
Inra-Ecodéveloppement  
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### Historical development

The Drôme valley is the most developed area in France with respect to organic agriculture. In this small region (2200 km<sup>2</sup>, 54000 inhabitants), organic production represented 30% of agricultural land as of 2013, high above the national average of 4%. This area is considered a cradle of French organic agriculture because some of its pioneers started there (both as newcomers and long-time local farmers). Moreover, a coherent vision of the value chain was built there quite early, beginning with the aromatic and medicinal plants industry in the 1970s and 1980s, and more recently with the cereal and the wine industry in the 1990s.



General Assembly 2014 of the Biovallée association®, which brings together 69 associations, municipalities and local businesses who wish to “do their share” to reach the Biovallée’s objectives

A public project was launched in 2009 by the districts (gathering 102 municipalities) of the valley: the Biovallée project ([www.biovallee.fr](http://www.biovallee.fr)). It builds upon the long experience of local public policies focused on rural development from the 1970s and 1980s and on sustainable development since the 1990s. This Biovallée project aims at making the Drôme valley a pilot territory in terms of sustainable development.

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*“Perceptions have significantly changed, in this territory. There is more boldness, more self-confidence.”*

(A board member of a local civil society organization)

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It includes operational objectives for 2020 in diverse sectors, including energy (coverage of 100% of household consumption with renewable energies), waste (a 50% reduction), land use (no more destruction of arable land), housing (5 eco-neighbourhoods), education and training (developing high-level training programs on sustainable development). Agriculture is one of the main components of the program, along with energy and training. The aim is to convert 50% of all farms and surfaces to organic farming, invest 80% of public food procurement funds in local and/or organic, and reduce pesticide use by 50%.

Biovallée is one of the three territorial case studies of the HealthyGrowth project, along with the Biodistretto Cilento (It) and the Bioregion Mühlviertel (Au). Territorial case studies do not consider a single chain but a whole territorial agri-food system and focus on the modes of coordination between various actors and institutions.

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**Legal form:**

Territorial project led by local districts

**Date of foundation:**

2009

**Homepage:**

[www.biovallee.fr](http://www.biovallee.fr)

**Logo:**



**Google Hits:**

30200 (3<sup>th</sup> May 2015)

## **Actions in the agricultural and food sector**

The Biovallée project supports and implements projects at all levels of the agri-food system: access to land, training, food production, processing and distribution. For example, in 2011, the districts bought a farm to create a farm incubator, a place where people willing to enter organic farming can stay 1 or 2 years and test themselves, with assistance provided by a local organization. Then they created an agricultural land intervention fund to encourage new farm enterprises (rather than existing farms' enlargement).

The Biovallée project also supported the creation of a meat processing plant for local livestock farmers and of a distribution platform aimed at supplying food canteens, local restaurants and groups of inhabitants with local, organic products.

## **Participation and ownership of local actors**

Participatory approaches were set up during the elaboration phase of the Biovallée program. High attendance showed local actors' and inhabitants' strong expectations for involvement in the project. Yet the process was more consultative than participatory (as is often the case in rural development) and generated criticisms. One critique, for example, was that officials tried to appear as the initiators of the organic transition, thus denying the efforts of the pioneers.

Regarding the agricultural program specifically, agricultural organisations benefit from Biovallée's financial support for specific initiatives, but this has not led to strong partnerships in practice. Biovallée's agricultural program is still rather top-down and the local actors' ownership seems relatively weak. However, this is probably a matter of time; these dynamics are young and not yet harmonized.

Within the Biovallée project, various cooperation tools were developed, such as the Biovallée® brand and the "Observatory of practices and know-how", which fosters networking, information exchange and collaborative work. This tool forms a database of good practices. It gathers information for external communication and offers training material for both local and external actors. Thanks to the foundation of the Association for Biovallée® Brand management in 2012, the number of people and organizations who support the Biovallée project has risen. The association, which developed mostly through word-of-mouth, gathered about 70 members in 2014. One half are local authorities (municipalities or districts); the other half is composed of civil society organizations and local businesses. The Association's purpose is to bring together the actors who wish to get involved in outreach and networking.

**For further information**, contact Sibylle Bui ([sbui@paca.inra.fr](mailto:sbui@paca.inra.fr)) or Claire Lamine ([clamine@paca.inra.fr](mailto:clamine@paca.inra.fr))

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