Abstract

Against a background of contestation of European agricultural policy, the territorial dimension is one of the prominent factors in proposals for shaping new rules of public action. This situation has been brought about by shifts in the nature of the challenges facing farming and in society’s expectations of it, but also by a change in the forms that public policy may take, which is challenging the hegemony of the nation states in matters of economic and social organisation. We attempt to characterise this territorialisation of public policy in agriculture from a regulationist standpoint and on the basis of research conducted in France. This involves three points: the renewal of decision-making procedures, the adaptation of public action to local specificities and the offsetting of market effects. Empirical findings show that these three factors are only marginal aspects of the changes that have come about in public action in farming: the territorial dimension is not at present the vector of any far-reaching change to the underlying principles and ground rules in this domain. However, these three emerging rationales do give a preview of new forms of regulation in the farming sector.