Florent Piard, a young restaurateur supporting a network of producers and the most vulnerable in society

The premise of Florent Piard and his restaurants, Les Resistants and l’Avant-Poste, is a righteous one, down to the name. It aims to strengthen links with rural areas and local farmers who respect the environment, as well as to preserve traditional know-how. Since the start of the pandemic, Florent has been in constant contact with the hundred or so farmers who were most affected by the crisis, following their situation daily and helping where necessary.

I am 35 years old and I live with my partner and our two children in an apartment in Pantin, a commune bordering Paris. I have founded two restaurants in the 10th arrondissement: Les Résistants and l’Avant-Poste. We work directly with a network of 250 producers, winemakers and craftsmen.
When the restaurants were closed in March 2020, we started phoning everybody in our network to evaluate who was in most need, week after week. We were in constant contact with the hundred or so farmers who were most affected by the crisis, monitoring their situation on a daily basis and preparing to provide assistance where necessary. That is, if their situation worsened, they could call us for help.

Fortunately, the vast majority of these farmers were able to keep their activity going in a relatively normal fashion, thanks to the wide range of distribution channels and collective initiatives they are involved in. But some were more affected than others, especially those providing perishable or not easily stored groceries. This is the case for producers of fruits and vegetables, as well as fishers. The situation was complicated by a mild spring, which impacted a large volume of fresh products. On top of that, the temporary ban on open markets, drastically reduced selling opportunities.
As a solution, we sold baskets containing the products of producers in difficulty twice a week.

The initiative proved to be very successful, and we managed to allow some producers to keep up to 100% of their turnover. We repeated this initiative in November during the second lockdown. This underlines the importance of not occupying too significant a place in a producer’s turnover and not creating reciprocal dependency.

In parallel, we have worked with four associations who mainly help homeless people and migrants. We prepare on average 400-500 meals per week for them.

These sections of the population have suffered a lot throughout the crisis, significantly more than the doctors who grabbed the world’s attention, especially during the first lockdown.

What does this story teach us?

The restaurant is like a lung that lets the cities breathe, but also like a heart that beats in the countryside where there are producers. It is in the restaurant that we eat, that we share, that we exchange, that we meet. It is also in the restaurant that we make society. And the restaurant can also be an important point to help each other and share difficulties. Florent teaches us that restaurateurs can do a lot in difficult times, like the Coronavirus.
“These initiatives are very easy to replicate,” Florent concludes, “as long as we all network together. There are many things restaurants can do, and so can their customers. Such as? For example, visit - if possible - farms near us, to support local agriculture instead of supermarkets and agribusiness. Learning which farmers do direct sales and which ones are particularly in need of support. Or prioritizing perishable products to avoid waste...”