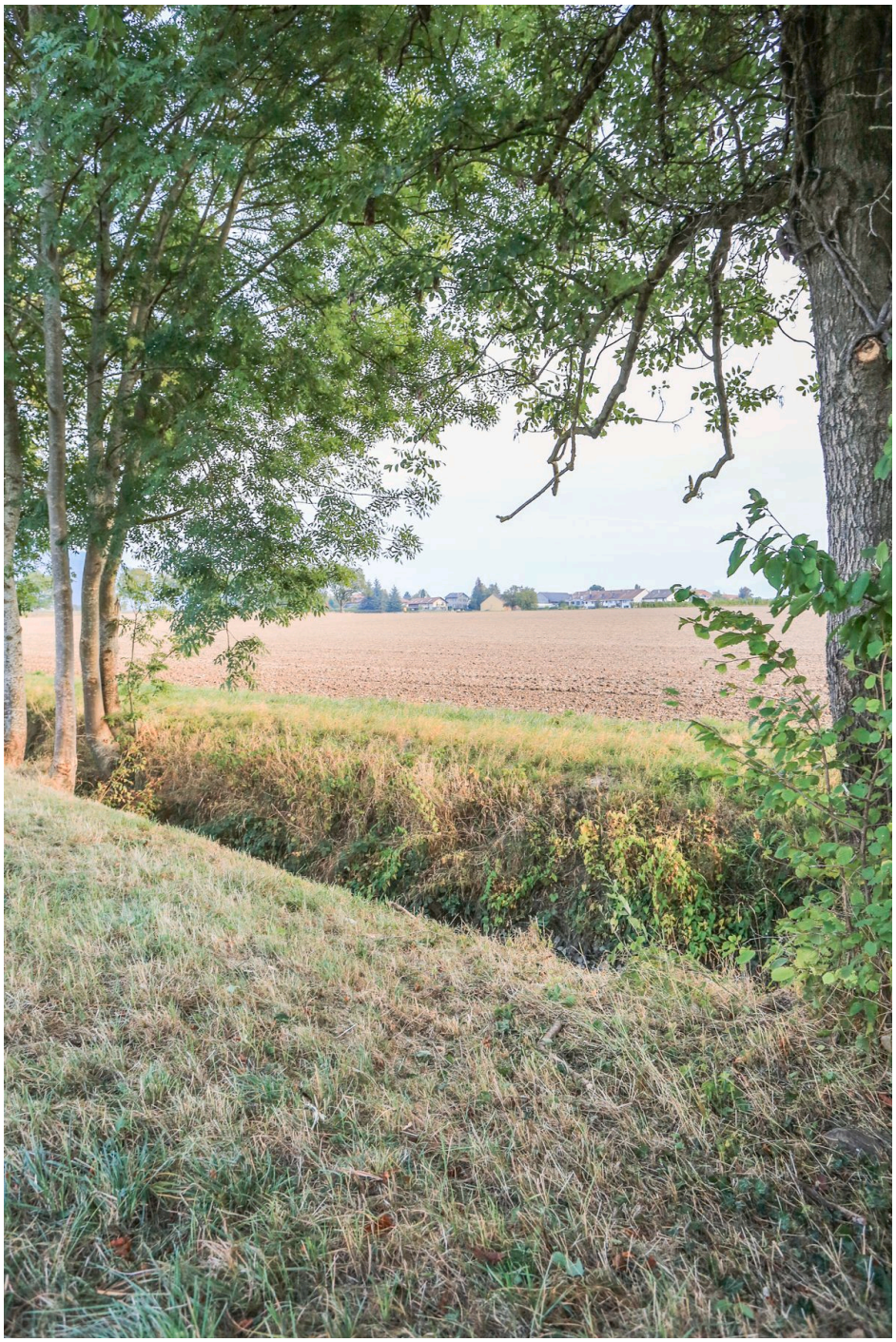
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Genève Campagne Rive-Gauche: (Agri) Garden City

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La Rive Gauche, or “the left shore” presents a specific situation we call Agri-Garden City. La Rive Gauche is Geneva’s wealthy suburbs where luxury residences and business facilities are found in a surprising and exceptional context of intensive cropland. The area, located in the vicinity to Geneva’s center, is also marked by multiple borders: national border France—Switzerland, cantonal border Geneva —Haute-Savoie and the border of Geneva’s agriculture free trade zone. Therefore it concentrates economic and cultural activities of an urban center next to peripheral locations and activates. In 2015 the Federal Statistical Office estimated 500.000 daily border crossings along the franco-swiss border.

The quality of its landscape environment and the desirable climate for international businesses made Geneva a sought-after place of residence, generating city growth since 1940. Given its comparably small size, the canton has repeatedly chosen not to be burdened with a hinterland, but rather concentrates most of its urban functions in close vicinity to the city center, on Swiss ground. Already in 1952, the cantonal government protected its peripheral farmland and restricted building activities, thus enhancing densification of the existing urban fabric and pressure on the available building land. Consequently, Geneva's urban center today is surrounded by a wide green belt, mainly composed of the protected agricultural land, the "Zone Agricole." Situated in this belt, la Rive Gauche still accommodates large rotation crops, cultivated by contract farmers, who lease plots from a few big regional landowners and companies.

In 1992, 40 years after the inauguration of the cantonal protection law, the federal spatial planning unit (ARE) introduced a Swiss-wide quota, requiring each canton to protect suitable land for crop rotation (Surfaces d'assolement Agricole, SDA). Accordingly, almost all of Geneva's agricultural land was 'frozen' for urban development. In France, agricultural land is not subject to specific safeguard measures, but rather considered as a land reserve. This difference between the two countries, coupled with the growing number of frontier workers, has resulted in the growth of French bordering towns, creating an expansionary urban fringe which surrounds the frozen agricultural landscape of Geneva. This is a unique setting in which the absence of residential density on Swiss territory counters the actual demand. Afforded by the geographic proximity and financial opportunities of working and dwelling in the cross-border situation, the urban pressure is released across the border to the French Haute-Savoie. Geneva's conurbation has gradually changed scale, encompassing the neighboring French municipalities. The result is an unlikely situation in which agriculture fields, occupy the most desirable land of Léman City.

This work by Joshua Andres and Tobias Häusermann was created as part of the design studio Metropolitan Countryside at ETH Zurich in Fall 2016. The PDF is intended for educational purposes only. Its commercial distribution is strictly forbidden.

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