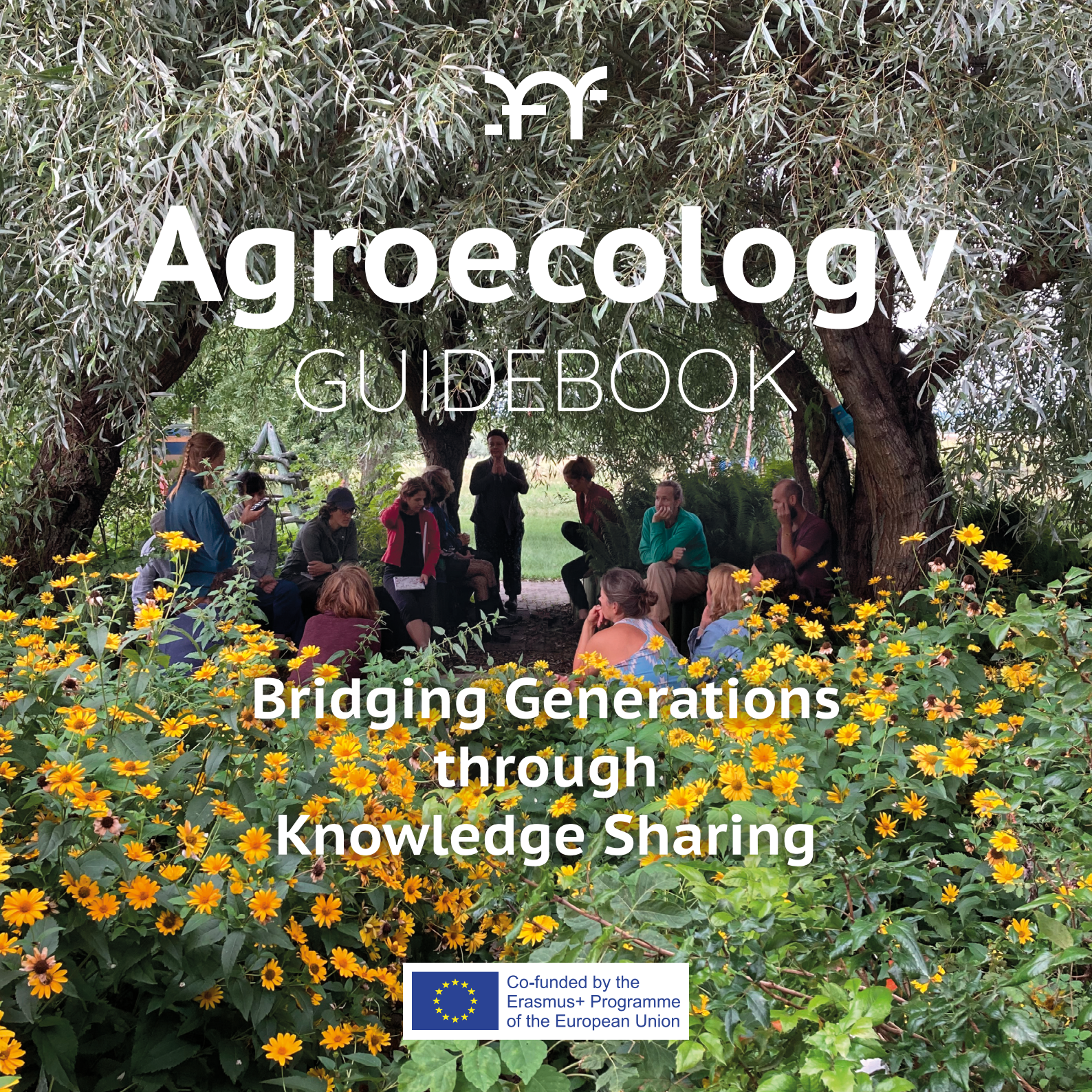


Agroecology
GUIDEBOOK

Bridging Generations through Knowledge Sharing

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

LET'S MEET

This publication is the result of the cooperation
of partners active in the field of agroecology, implementing training,
and other kinds of knowledge transfer activities
in the framework of the Erasmus+
Bridging Generations in Agroecology (BAG) Project.
This consortium gathers 6 organizations from Poland, Germany, France,
Netherlands, Italy and Switzerland.



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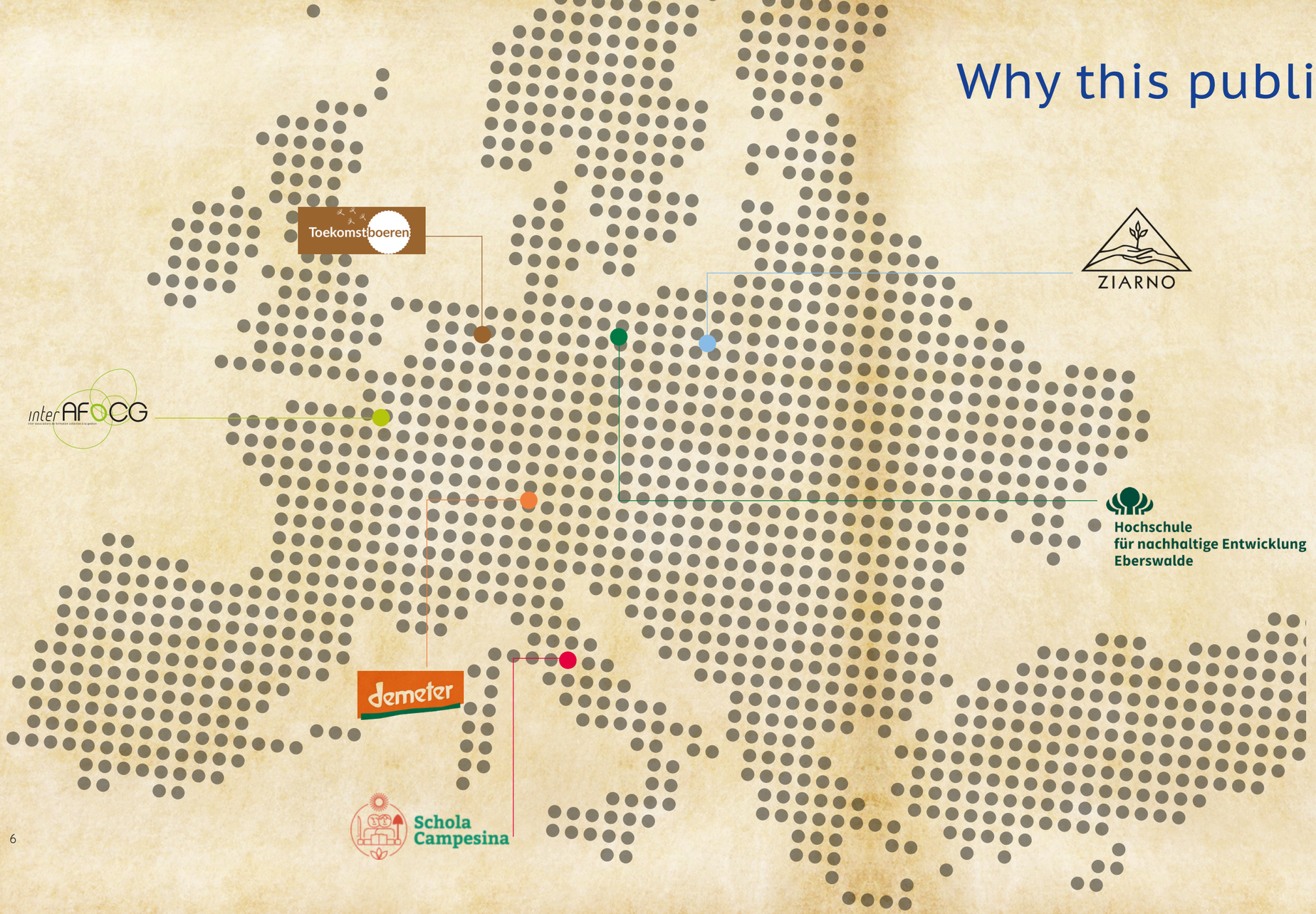


Exercise on interconnectedness BAG meeting at Ziarno, Poland 2021.



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Why this publication?



This publication is the result of the cooperation of partners active in the field of agroecology and implementing training and other kinds of knowledge transfer activities in the framework of the Erasmus+ project Bridging Generations in Agroecology (BAG).

This consortium gathers six organizations from Poland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Italy and Switzerland:

- **ZIARNO Ecological-Cultural Association (EUL)** working in the field of education for sustainability (Poland),
- **HNEE University for Sustainable Development in Eberswalde** (Germany),
- **Toekomstboeren Association** of aspiring, new and established farmers working towards agroecology (Netherlands),
- **InterAfocg** Network by and for farmers, aiming at their decision-making autonomy (France),
- **Schola Campesina Aps** International agroecology school (Italy),
- **Verein für biologisch-dynamische Landwirtschaft** School of Biodynamic Agriculture (Switzerland)

All partners conduct activities of adult education for agroecology and decided to partner together and share their experiences to improve their activities in terms of content and method as well as to raise awareness on the issue of knowledge dissemination in agroecology.

General introduction

The BAG project is an answer to the current challenges affecting rural areas in Europe, specifically the difficulties surrounding the sharing and co-creation of knowledge. In particular, this publication seeks to highlight the importance of knowledge transmission for agroecology in Europe.
The guidebook is divided into three parts:

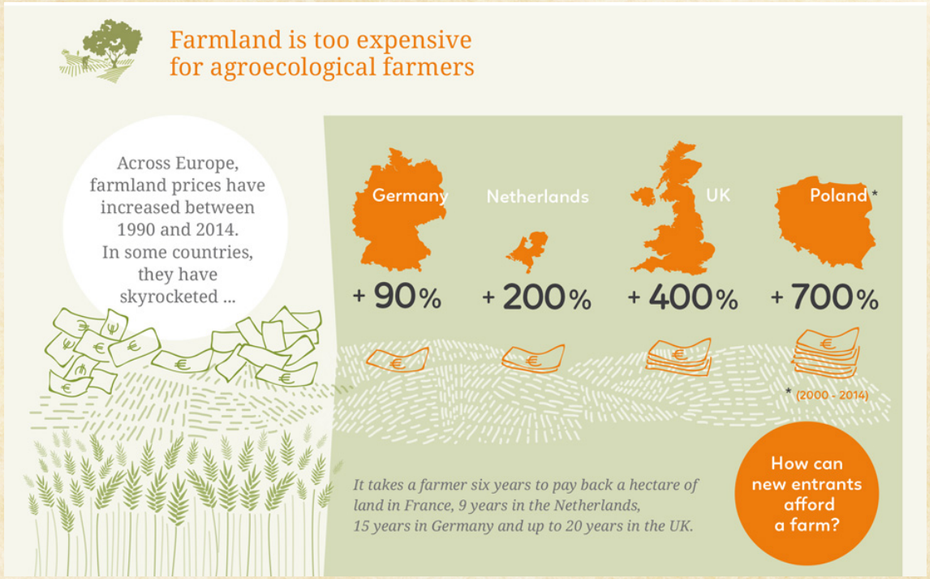
PART 1 **The concept of agroecology**
An overview of the main definitions and approaches to agroecology.

PART 2 **Knowledge sharing in agroecology**
An overview of practices and needed innovations in this field.

PART 3 **Policy measures to facilitate knowledge sharing for agroecology**
How knowledge transfer in agroecology can be enabled through policy measures.

This guidebook is directed to civil society organizations active in the field of agroecology to support them in their transfer of knowledge activities; to academics who wish to explore the topic providing them with content from the ground; to policy makers who want to know better the reality and needs of small-scale food producers in Europe.

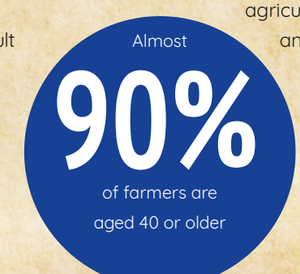
In addition to this publication, the Erasmus+ BAG project is offering curricula, short videos and podcasts.



Source – SAFER, Infographics by Access To land – www.accesstoland.eu – March 2017 – Creative Commons, Graphic design – Camille Lucas

Why is this important?

Agriculture and food systems in Europe are facing various challenges, such as the decline in the number of farms or the ageing of the farming population. According to Eurostat (2021), almost 90% of farmers are aged 40 or older, while the number of farms in the EU decreased by about 4.1 million between 2005 and 2016, a decline of 28%. Most of this decline is due to small farms of less than 5 hectares disappearing. Added to this are the difficulties of starting a farm for young people and new entrants, which include particularly the difficult access to land (Ruralization, 2021) and the generally low profitability of the agricultural sector. The task for European farmers today is to adopt alternative ways of working and managing their territory to free themselves from the current system that is highly work demanding, poorly valued and remunerated and contributes to environmental damages. Public policies led by the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union (CAP), while slowly turning to support greener practices, still play a major role in maintaining market-orientated and large-scale agriculture. In this context, the BAG partner organizations defend a model of agriculture that is farmer-centred and stress the importance to adopt a holistic approach to the food system (food system approach).



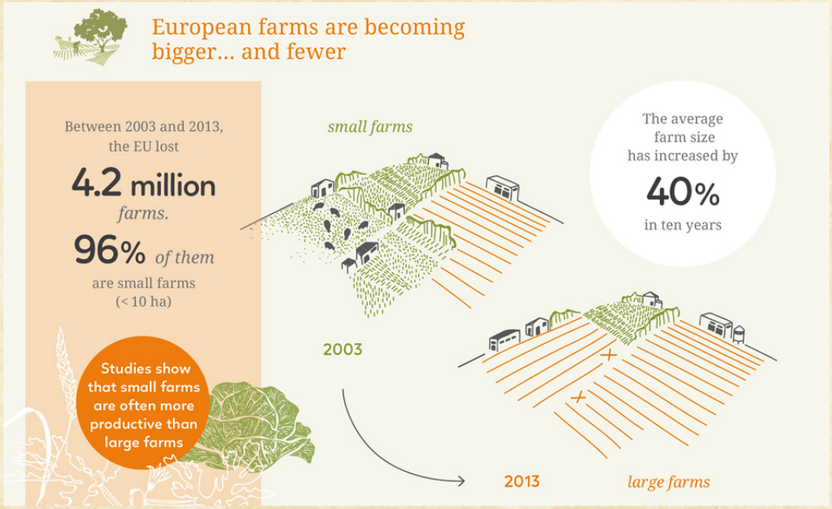
Why a food system approach

Agriculture and food are embedded in the complex interactions across sectors and actors that shape society. In Europe, as in many other places in the world, farmers' livelihoods and the environment are often seen as competing with each other, even though both elements are victims of the current agricultural model. Approaching the challenges of agriculture today implies integrating aspects that usually are considered separated: rural development, youth employment, a gender perspective, human health, climate change, environment, etc. The food system approach highlights the importance of the nexus between food, health, ecology and culture and allows to explore the sustainability of food systems as a holistic challenge where food producers have a central role to play (CSM, 2021; HLPE, 2020). The agroecology concept is capturing the interrelation between these dimensions which is so important to consider in current times. The food system approach brought by agroecology represents a major reason for the commitment of the BAG partners to agroecology.

Why agroecology?

Agroecology (the concept of which is introduced in Part 1) is increasingly seen as a response to the multiple crisis situations that societies face with increasing concern today (IAASTD, 2009; IPBES, 2019; IPCC, 2020; HLPE, 2019).
This response is rooted in the traditions of communities and continuously enriched with innovations in a Human Rights-based approach (Nyéléni, 2015). In Europe, the importance of rural areas has greatly diminished, as well as that of farmers, whose numbers are dramatically decreasing, and the complex social and cultural rules that characterised rural life (Tordjman, 2021).

Food Systems "are webs of actors, processes, and interactions involved in gathering, fishing, growing, processing, distributing, preparing (cooking, feeding, caring), consuming and disposing of foods [...]. A holistic food systems lense is concerned with how these processes interact with one another, and how the ecological, social, political and economic context constantly shape and re-shape food systems, whilst recognizing the particular role of power, gender and generational relationships." (CSM, 2021, P.4)



Source – Eurostat, Farm Structure Survey, Infographics by Access To land – www.accesstolandeu – March 2017 – Creative Commons; Graphic design – Camille Lucas

According to the Declaration of Nyéléni (2015), agroecology advocates an agricultural model

- **that respects farmers' rights and livelihoods,**
- **that aims to feed the surrounding population,**
- **that is based on local biodiversity, culture and knowledge, and**
- **that is managed at the local level.**

The BAG partners have a variety of entry points to agroecology and implement very different kinds of action, in different contexts. Nevertheless, when exchanging ideas together, they found that they all recognise themselves in the Nyéléni concept of agroecology. The diversity of topics, actions and methods expressed in it is a richness that can improve their own actions and which they want to share with this project.

Why knowledge?

Crucial to have farmers in the future

In an agroecological approach, with a wide range of key actors, food producers are at the centre. It is therefore essential to recover, preserve and develop the knowledge that is useful for their activities and autonomy in order to secure the future of food producers. This is also crucial for new farmers and young people who want to farm in close connection with the ecosystem and their immediate environment. Without knowledge and skills appropriate to local needs (how to grow food on small plots, how to plan and build the appropriate equipment, how to prepare food for storage and marketing, how to find new ways of marketing, etc.) farmers fall into dangerous dependency, e.g. on industrial seed producers.

Co-creation and access to knowledge is a real issue

This knowledge – despite being of high importance – is not easily available and accessible. A great deal of useful knowledge has been lost throughout Europe. What remains from the past, as well as the valuable innovations that have recently been developed – or are still to be developed – are poorly disseminated. Means of transmission, sharing and co-creation of knowledge amongst peers, between generations, and amongst different kinds of actors such as academia (dialogue of knowledge) do exist but greatly remain in the informal sphere, poorly supported by public authorities. The lack of circulation of knowledge for agroecology, specifically between generations and for the benefit of youth, is the element that named this project Bridging Generations in Agroecology.

This guidebook, along with the videos, podcasts and curricula, has been developed to share our experiences and knowledge and to co-create tools to facilitate these processes. The co-creation processes are enriched by the variety of the project partners.

It's threatened by the digital economy

In a world where knowledge and data are increasingly seen as an economic value in themselves; local knowledge should be well protected from corporate use (to prevent patenting as it already happened widely in the seed sector). Digitalization of food systems that – under full control of the local community, can potentially be a useful tool for local development purposes – is currently mainly used to facilitate data collection for corporate control and interest.
At the same time, the adoption of new techno-logies in agriculture – instead of supporting – is currently mainly supplanting food producers. In this context, it is key to protect local knowledge (by adequate regulation) and keep control of the data generated by local food systems (Schola Campesina, 2021).



Taste of organic carrots show the quality of the soil, Reto Ingold (VBDL) and Mirosław Rojek, organic farmer, BAG visit in Poland.

It's time to make formal and informal knowledge dialogue

In Europe and many parts of the world, local knowledge and practices are under-valued by the farming communities themselves as well as by the general society giving more credibility and legitimacy to formal research centres and certified experts. Knowledge is acknowledged as a matter of power where specific profiles coming from the formal education system (and from developed countries) are given high credibility at the expense of other profiles, including informal education systems, farmers' knowledge and knowledge coming from the farming experiences. For this reason, the HLPE (2019) calls for a reconfiguration of knowledge systems and voices are heard in academia calling for a demo-cratisation of knowledge and recognition of the value of informal knowledge systems (Pimbert, 2018).

"Agroecology is also based on a radical conceptualization of knowledge systems, whereby work on cognitive justice, epistemic justice, Indigeneity, and decoloniality is upending the dominance of Western, scientific, Eurocentric, and patriarchal worldviews as the basis for the future of food and agriculture" (Pimbert et al., 2021).

Photos: Anka Wiklińska, Isabelle Hagel



Aggrozouk: pedal-powered tool holders with electric assistance. Self-built equipment by Boris Canal, vegetable farmer, with l'Atelier Paysan. BAG visit in France, 2021.

"A recurring theme throughout this report (HLPE report on Agroecology and other innovative approaches, 2019) has been the need to change the relationship between formal research and academic outcomes and the local knowledge and experience of farmers, rural and urban communities and other actors along food value chains, many of whom are in the private sector" (HLPE 2019, p.106).

The BAG project highlights different experiences that articulate formal and informal spheres of education for agroecology showing the mutual respect and recognition ongoing among worlds that are still very separated. It reminds us that agroecology cannot be advanced by experts and academia alone, but will be advanced by food producers and their organizations in close collaboration with other actors collaborating in trust for the sustainability of the whole society.

This project shows that the formal and non-formal systems of agroecological adult education can work together and improve their respective activities.
It is also an opportunity to give visibility to important activities of non-formal knowledge transfer on agroecology in the participating countries and to point out the need for better recognition of these initiatives by formal education systems and public authorities.

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Photo: Anka Wiklińska

The concept of agroecology

An overview of the main definitions and approaches to agroecology.

Agroecology is nowadays a well-spread concept. This first section provides an overview of the various recent efforts to define agroecology. This introductory part is also an opportunity for the partners in the BAG project to explain why their understanding of agroecology is based on the Nyéléni Declaration.

A clear frame of reference is indeed indispensable in a context where the idea of agroecology is highly appropriated. Today, many initiatives, led by industry and powerful private actors, explicitly claim to support agroecology while promoting apparent solutions and capturing public attention, funding and programmes for interest-driven actions that are far from grassroots agency, traditional food production, farmers' autonomy and human rights.

Although the relevant practices have existed for millennia, the concept of agroecology is a product of the 21st century. The variety of ecological practices developed by local food producers in strong connection with their specific territories is, along with social and cultural practices, well spread around the world. It's only in very recent times that these practices are acknowledged as part of agroecology in international debates (at the local level the concept is still often not known). In modern times, agroecology has become a social movement to reclaim the rights of people to grow food based on their own culture and ecosystems, to access natural resources, protect their land and territories, while centring people's agency



Photo: Caroline Ledant

and knowledge (Pimbert et al., 2021). Only recently have international debates begun to include the social and governance dimensions of agroecology.

The efforts of defining agroecology and developing different sets of agroecological principles have been occurring in various contexts by different actors with different perspectives (HLPE, 2019, pp. 31-43). In this section, we shall present three important initiatives to conceptually define agroecology developed by actors of different natures:

- The 11 pillars of the Nyéléni Declaration (Nyéléni, 2015) by social movements
- The 10 Elements of Agroecology by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2018a)
- The 13 principles by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE, 2019)

The Nyéléni Declaration

Grassroots process

The Nyéléni Declaration was drafted during the International Forum on Agroecology, organized at the Nyéléni Center in Mali, from the 24th to the 27th of February 2015. It was convened by food producers' organizations in the framework of the work of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty and was planned by the following organisations: Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali (CNOP Mali) as chair; La Via Campesina (LVC), Movimiento Agroecológico de América Latina y el Caribe (MAELA), Réseau des organisations paysannes et de producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA), World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF), World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples (WAMIP), More and Better (MaB). It's based on the first international forum of Nyéléni which has led to the Food Sovereignty Declaration, in 2007.

The organizations of small-scale food producers and consumers present in the Nyéléni forum that have contributed to identifying the the 11 pillars represented diverse populations including: peasants, indigenous peoples, communities, hunters and gatherers, family farmers, rural workers, herders and pastoralists, fisherfolk, and urban people (Nyéléni, 2015).

The nature of this kind of actor is fundamentally different from other stakeholders like international organizations, public institutions, NGOs or philanthropic organizations which seek to improve the quality of life of the very same kind of population. The Nyéléni Declaration Declaration was drafted by the representatives of the usual beneficiaries of development programmes and government actions to fight poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition.

"Together, the diverse constituencies our organizations represent produce some 70% of the food consumed by humanity. They are the primary global investors in agriculture, as well as the primary providers of jobs and livelihoods in the world."

(First paragraph of the Nyéléni Declaration)

Common principles out of a variety of contexts

The international Nyéléni Forum brought together for the first time different population groups or constituencies who, for the first time, exchanged their views and in the end agreed on a common understanding of agroecology. From the exchange or dialogue of their respective knowledge and wisdom, they have developed a set of common principles, the 11 pillars.

During the forum in Nyéléni, they expressed and shared what agroecology means for their living environment, their reality and their specificities.



The insights that emerged from their diversity and the common principles they shared beyond these diversities made it possible to see the pillars of agroecology that connect local practices around the world across different constituencies and realities.

Content

The Nyéléni Declaration, thanks to this unique gathering of diverse communities, developed the power and capacity to go beyond the usual three dimensions of sustainability "economic/social/ecological" as well as beyond mere ecological techniques of food production, and to highlight those features that they have in common in their local food systems or that they have identified as essential for sustaining their communities.

These characteristics are, for instance, **people's agency** in the food systems as well as the immaterial connections of communities to their territories and to nature, which find expression in the **care** by food producers for their land. It is in this sense (caring relationship between Humans and Nature) that **territory** and **local culture** are understood in the Nyéléni Declaration. Another important element is the recognition of the existing dimension of **power** in food systems and the necessity of transforming structures of power in society as part of the effort to progress towards agroecology.

The banners have been created by Łukasz Nowak for Nyeleni Polska and Living Earth Coalition.

THE 11 PILLARS OF AGROECOLOGY IN THE NYÉLÉNI DECLARATION ARE:



1. Agroecology is a way of life and the language of Nature, that we learn as her children. It is not a mere set of technologies or production practices. It cannot be implemented the same way in all territories. Rather it is based on principles that, while they may be similar across the diversity of our territories, can and are practised in many different ways, with each sector contributing their own colours of their local reality and culture, while always respecting Mother Earth and our common, shared values



2. The production practices of agroecology (such as intercropping, traditional fishing and mobile pastoralism, integrating crops, trees, livestock and fish, manuring, compost, local seeds and animal breeds, etc.) **are based on ecological principles** like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity and energy conservation at all scales. Agroecology drastically reduces our use of externally-purchased inputs that must be bought from the industry. There is no use of agro toxins, artificial hormones, GMOs or other dangerous new technologies in agroecology.



3. Territories are a fundamental pillar of agroecology. Peoples and communities have the right to maintain their own spiritual and material relationships with their lands. They are entitled to secure, develop, control, and reconstruct their customary social structures and to administer their lands and territories, including fishing grounds, both politically and socially. This implies the full recognition of their laws, traditions, customs, tenure systems, and institutions, and constitutes the recognition of the self-determination and autonomy of peoples.



4. Collective rights and access to the commons are fundamental pillars of agroecology. We share access to territories that are the home to many different peer groups, and we have sophisticated customary systems for regulating access and avoiding conflicts that we want to preserve and strengthen.



5. The diverse knowledge and ways of knowing of our peoples are fundamental to agroecology. We develop our ways of knowing through dialogue among them (diálogo de saberes). Our learning processes are horizontal and peer-to-peer, based on popular education. They take place in our own training centres and territories (farmers teach farmers, fishers teach fishers, etc.), and are also intergenerational, with exchange of knowledge between youth and elders. Agroecology is developed through our own innovation, research, and crop and livestock selection and breeding



6. The core of our cosmovision is the necessary equilibrium between nature, the cosmos and human beings. We recognize that as humans we are but a part of nature and the cosmos. We share a spiritual connection with our lands and with the web of life. We love our lands and our peoples, and without that, we cannot defend our agroecology, fight for our rights, or feed the world. We reject the commodification of all forms of life.



7. Families, communities, collectives, organizations and movements are the fertile soil in which agroecology flourishes. Collective self-organization and action are what make it possible to scale-up agroecology, build local food systems, and challenge corporate control of our food system. Solidarity between peoples, between rural and urban populations, is a critical ingredient.



8. The autonomy of agroecology displaces the control of global markets and generates self-governance by communities. It means we minimize the use of purchased inputs that come from outside. It requires the re-shaping of markets so that they are based on the principles of solidarity economy and the ethics of responsible production and consumption. It promotes direct and fair short distribution chains. It implies a transparent relationship between producers and consumers, and is based on the solidarity of shared risks and benefits



9. Agroecology is political; it requires us to challenge and transform structures of power in society. We need to put the control of seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, waters, knowledge, culture and the commons in the hands of the peoples who feed the world.



10. Women and their knowledge, values, vision and leadership are critical for moving forward. Migration and globalization mean that women's work is increasing, yet women have far less access to resources than men. All too often, their work is neither recognized nor valued. For agroecology to achieve its full potential, there must be equal distribution of power, tasks, decision-making and remuneration.



11. Youth, together with women, provide one of the two principal social bases for the evolution of agroecology. Agroecology can provide a radical space for young people to contribute to the social and ecological transformation that is underway in many of our societies. Youth bear the responsibility to carry forward the collective knowledge learned from their parents, elders and ancestors into the future. They are the stewards of agroecology for future generations. Agroecology must create a territorial and social dynamic that creates opportunities for rural youth and values women's leadership.

The full text of the Nyéléni Declaration is available via the link in the reference list.



The 10 Elements of Agroecology by the FAO (2018).

From 2014 to 2018, the FAO held international and regional consultative seminars on agroecology. The regional meetings allowed to identify different understandings of the concept and, at the end of this process, agroecology has been defined through 10 elements.

The 10 elements include 5 elements more related to the production side of agroecology (diversity, resilience, synergies, efficiency, recycling); and 5 others more related to the social and governance environment (co-creation and sharing of knowledge, circular and solidarity economy, culture and food traditions, human and social values, responsible governance).



Diversity: diversification is key to agroecological transitions to ensure food security and nutrition while conserving, protecting and enhancing natural resources.



Co-creation and sharing of knowledge: agricultural innovations respond better to local challenges when they are co-created through participatory processes.



Synergies: building synergies enhances key functions across food systems, supporting production and multiple ecosystem services.



Efficiency: innovative agroecological practices produce more using less external resources.



Recycling: more recycling means agricultural production with lower economic and environmental costs.



Resilience: enhanced resilience of people, communities and ecosystems is key to sustainable food and agricultural systems.

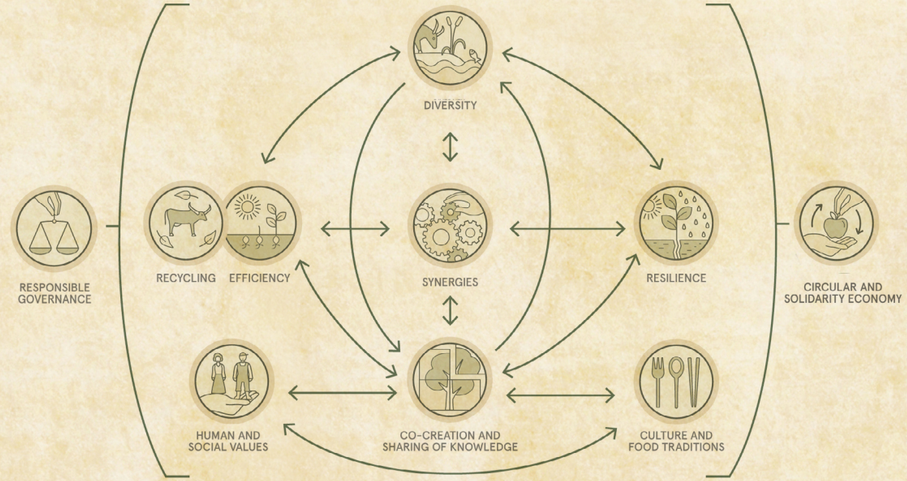


Human and social values: protecting and improving rural livelihoods, equity and social well-being is essential for sustainable food and agricultural systems.



Culture and food traditions: by supporting healthy, diversified and culturally appropriate diets, agroecology contributes to food security and nutrition while maintaining the health of ecosystems.

Source: https://www.fao.org/agroecology/overview/overview10elements/en/





Responsible governance: sustainable food and agriculture requires responsible and effective governance mechanisms at different scales – from local to national to global.



Circular and solidarity economy: circular and solidarity economies that reconnect producers and consumers provide innovative solutions for living within our planetary boundaries while ensuring the social foundation for inclusive and sustainable development.

Source: https://www.fao.org/agroecology/overview/overview10elements/en/

"Fortunately, thousands of small traditional farms still exist in most rural landscapes of the third world. The productivity and sustainability of such agroecosystems can be optimized with agroecological approaches and thus they can form the basis of food sovereignty, defined as the right of each nation or region to maintain and develop their capacity to produce basic food crops with the corresponding productive and cultural diversity."

(Altieri, 2009)

Since the identification and adoption of the 10 elements by the FAO Council of Agriculture in 2019, agroecology has been recognized – among other approaches – as relevant to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In parallel, the Scaling up Agroecology initiative (FAO, 2018b) has been launched on the occasion of the Second International Symposium on Agroecology in 2018. Putting in relation to different dimensions such as food production, culture and governance; this framework – internationally adopted – represents an important step for approaching today's challenges, according to FAO.

After this significant progress toward the recognition of agroecology as a valid process to address the Sustainable Development Goals; civil society groups and academia have observed a decreasing interest from FAO to agroecology in recent years and more specifically at the arrival of the new Directorate-General in 2019. More specifically, the social and political dimensions of agroecology are left aside and the concept is reduced to its environmental dimension related to production practices.
Nevertheless, the work achieved so far within FAO and particularly the identification of the 10 elements of agroecology is of high importance. Indeed, it represents a unique tool, agreed upon by governments, that recognizes the legitimacy and credibility of agroecology, largely implemented by small-scale food producers around the world (Altieri, 2009).

The 13 principles by the HLPE (2019)

The High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) is a group of experts that produces scientific reports after extensive consultation processes to provide a scientific basis for the discussions and negotiations of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). At its annual meeting, the CFS adopts the HLPE report which is then considered an international reference. In 2019, the HLPE published a report called "Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition" (HLPE, 2019), in which it presented 13 principles. These 13 principles have been identified from 3 main sources: FAO 10 elements, rearrangement of the Nyéléni Declaration for communication purposes by CIDSE (Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité, 2018) and past work from academia (Nicholls, Altieri and Vazquez, 2016).

The HLPE report highlights the importance of the agency of people as a pillar of food security and nutrition, along with the other commonly recognised pillars: availability (of food), access (to food), utilization (of food) and stability (in time of the previous pillars). Human rights as well as people's skills, power and control are seen in this scientific report as key to achieving food security and nutrition for all.

Improve resource efficiency	1.	**Recycling.** Preferentially use local renewable resources and close as far as possible resource cycles of nutrients and biomass.
	2.	**Input reduction.** Reduce or eliminate dependency on purchased inputs and increase self-sufficiency
Strengthen resilience	3.	**Soil health.** Secure and enhance soil health and functioning for improved plant growth, particularly by managing organic matter and enhancing soil biological activity.
	4.	**Animal health.** Ensure animal health and welfare.
	5.	**Biodiversity.** Maintain and enhance the diversity of species, functional diversity and genetic resources and thereby maintain overall agroecosystem biodiversity in time and space at field, farm and landscape scales.
	6.	**Synergy.** Enhance positive ecological interaction, synergy, integration and complementarity among the elements of agroecosystems (animals, crops, trees, soil and water).
	7.	**Economic diversification.** Diversify on-farm incomes by ensuring that small-scale farmers have greater financial independence and value addition opportunities while enabling them to respond to demand from consumers.
Secure social equity/ responsibility	8.	**Co-creation of knowledge.** Enhance co-creation and horizontal sharing of knowledge including local and scientific innovation, especially through a farmer-to-farmer exchange.
	9.	**Social values and diets.** Build food systems based on the culture, identity, tradition, social and gender equity of local communities that provide healthy, diversified, seasonally and culturally appropriate diets.
	10.	**Fairness.** Support dignified and robust livelihoods for all actors engaged in food systems, especially small-scale food producers, based on fair trade, fair employment and fair treatment of intellectual property rights.
	11.	**Connectivity.** Ensure proximity and confidence between producers and consumers through promotion of fair and short distribution networks and by re-embedding food systems into local economies.
	12.	**Land and natural resource governance.** Strengthen institutional arrangements to improve, including the recognition and support of family farmers, smallholders and peasant food producers as sustainable managers of natural and genetic resources.
	13.	**Participation.** Encourage social organization and greater participation in decision-making by food producers and consumers to support decentralized governance and local adaptive management of agricultural and food systems.

The 13 HLPE principles (adapted from HLPE, 2019)

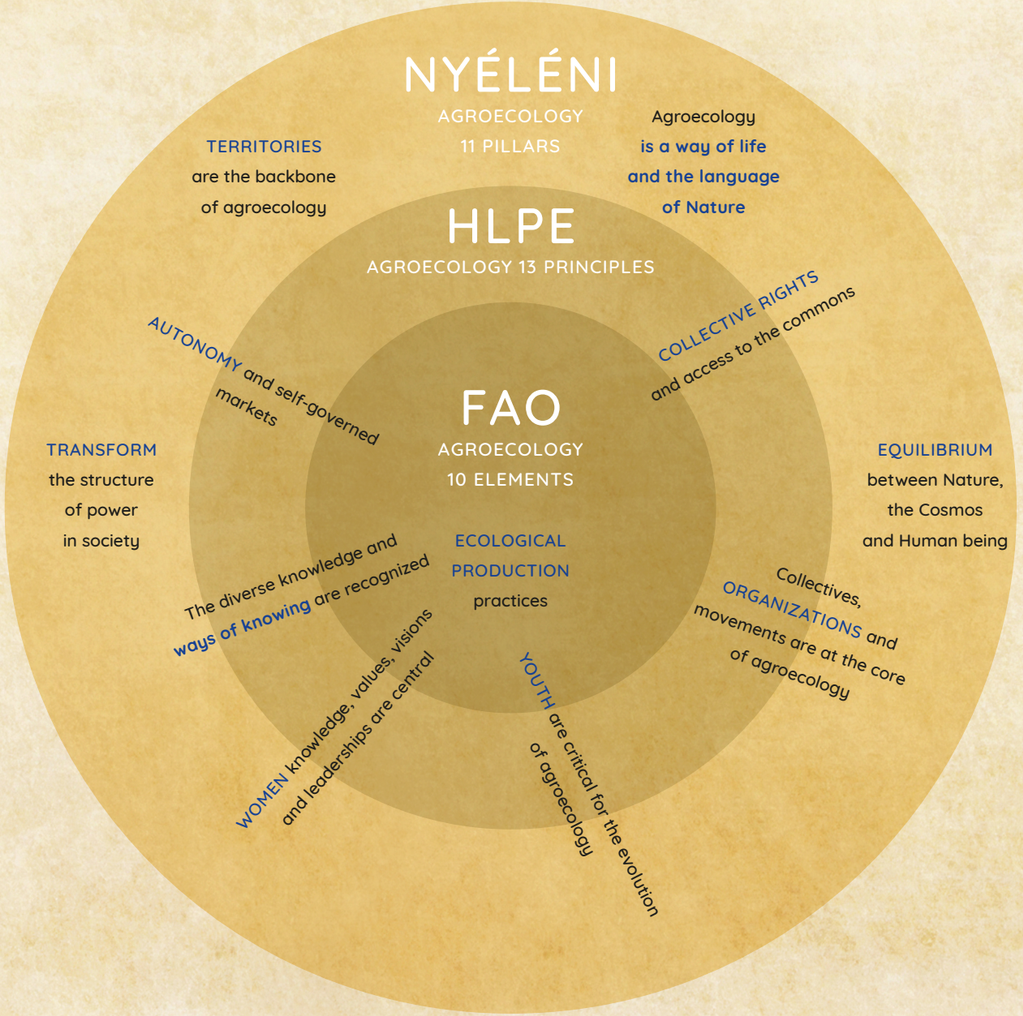
The main differences between the conceptual frameworks

The Nyéléni definition of agro-ecology was shaped by the different aspects that characterise territorial **food systems operated by communities** around the world. These aspects were reported by grassroots organisations. It is a **bottom-up** process aimed at defending **human rights** in the face of unequal power relations that threaten communities' lifestyles, livelihoods and territories.

The definitions from FAO and HLPE, based on extensive consultations, are institutional processes that aim to capture the key elements of **food system sustainability**. It is a process, led by international institutions and experts with the general idea of overcoming the existing climate, environmental and social crisis.

The different nature of these processes naturally leads to differences in the content of the definitions. These differences can be summarized as follows:

- In general, the FAO and HLPE definitions refer more to the ecological character of the production system, while the Nyéléni Declaration focuses more on culture, social, rights and governance issues. In fact, 5 of the 10 FAO elements (1, 3, 4, 5, 6) concern the production side at farm level, while this is only the case for the second pillar "Ecological Principles" of the Nyeleni Declaration.
- The relation of food producers with Mother Nature and the **feelings** and **care** aspects of farming (Pillar 1: Way of life and language of Nature and 6: Equilibrium and cosmovision), and often expressed through the concept of territory, are absent from FAO elements and HLPE principles.
- The agency of the populations is fundamental in the Nyéléni definition of agroecology and is poorly represented in HLPE and FAO definitions.
- The need to transform the food system, with an approach that names the existing power relations is also only addressed in Nyéléni´s definition. Responsible governance (FAO) and Participation (HLPE) are the respective responses of these institutional processes to address inequalities and poor involvement of rural communities in decision-making processes.
- FAO and HLPE processes don't recognize the central role of **organizations and collectives** to make progress toward agroecology.



This graph shows how the conceptual framework provided by the Nyéléni Declaration is more inclusive.



2 Knowledge sharing in agroecology

photo: AW

In the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, the European Union has emphasised the importance of acquiring theoretical knowledge, practical and technical skills, and social competences, where the ability to work with others will be crucial. It also defines how these terms are to be understood.

> **knowledge** *means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual;*

> **skills** *means the ability to apply knowledge and use the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);*

> **competence** *means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.*

We could also describe this definition as “learning with heart, hand and mind”, whereby successful learning is only achieved when none of these components is lacking. In this publication, we are using the term “knowledge” to embrace each of the above-described dimensions.

The agroecological understanding of agriculture and farm work is characterised by autonomous and self--determined farmers who have the knowledge, skills and social competences to run their farms successfully and sustainably.

In the last decades, in parallel of losing economic viability, many European farmers have been led to forego autonomous decision-making capacity and relying on the partial knowledge of official experts. The erosion of locally held autonomy and knowledge as well as the increasing role of companies and extension services in agriculture is part of the general trend bringing the entire food system towards more concentration and less resilience. When farmers delegate their knowledge of appropriate seed selection to seed companies, their knowledge of soil improvement and nutrition to extension services, or their knowledge of sustainable use of natural resources and biodiversity to external actors who may not even know their region; knowledge, in its three components,

is getting depleted. If farmers have sufficient knowledge, skills and competencies, they are more likely to be focused on preserving and protecting the natural environment of the farms and the social relations in the region. Local knowledge goes hand in hand with a food system model centred on sustainability.

The valorization and the sharing of local knowledge are currently still far from being mainstream. Nevertheless, in our countries, local processing methods, local seeds, participatory design of tools and equipment, knowledge about on-farm fodder production, cheese and bread making, etc. are – at different stages – being preserved, recovered or created. This knowledge is not yet sufficiently shared and passed on, specifically to the younger generations.

In this section, we will make visible some initiatives that support or carry out knowledge exchange for agroecology in our respective national settings in very different ways. This is a selection and not an exhaustive list.
And then we will then present some topics that, in our view, are in urgent need of knowledge exchange.

Description of our contexts and activities

In general, the training of farmers in European countries is characterised by the following:

- **An obligation to complete vocational training is compulsory – among other obligations – in order to obtain the formal status of farmer/entrepreneur and the possible benefits and subsidies associated with it. Note that this is not the case in the Netherlands, where no training is compulsory.**
- **Agroecology is poorly present in formal training processes. When agroecology is present, it is limited to the agricultural techniques of production.**
- **Alternative or civil society initiatives for training and knowledge exchange in agroecology are evolving, but are not yet well recognised.**

Our organizations and networks create knowledge transmission processes in a variety of ways and focus on different and complementary challenging elements. We are, each of us in its specificity, promoting different aspects of agroecology in our learning activities and methods.

IN POLAND, EUL supports new entrants by offering a 2-year training course on organic farming with a strong focus on learning by doing. The curricullum of the course contains also workshops on local traditions and local seeds and breeds. The Good Harvest seminar organized yearly by ZIARNO is a good example of peer exchange of experience between organic farmers but also provides opportunities for knowledge transfer from more experienced farmers or experts to new farmers. These meeting opportunities allow also the exchange of experience between producers and consumers, particularly since the last few seminars were attended by young activists involved in food cooperatives and Community Supported Agriculture initiatives.

IN THE NETHERLANDS, Toekomstboeren is an organization created by new entrants in agriculture to support farmers to start agroecological farming. They organise joint meetings to discuss challenges and difficulties, as well as resources, seeds, etc. in a horizontal exchange. Bringing farmers together is also a way to develop new practices, defend their way of farming and demand better access to land – the biggest challenge for young farmers in the NL.

IN ITALY, the teaching activities of Schola Campesina Aps are more focused on governance aspects of the food systems. Schola Campesina has identified a lack of training on the global gov-ernance of food and agriculture and organises the sharing of knowledge on this specific topic and on agroecology in general.

Organisations of food producers are brought together to further educate themselves through horizontal learning processes. These involve knowledge dialogues between different actors (academics, practitioners and activists meet and exchange without hierarchy). Schola Campesina also facilitates the development of networks of organisations, especially in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

IN GERMANY, the University for Sustainable Development (HNEE) combines formal education with non-formal and informal education. The so-called Project Workshops are social, ecological, self-initiated by students, self-regulated, interdisciplinary-integrative and cooperative. In the module Study Partner Eco--Farm, students practise problem-based learning on actual challenges faced by farmers.

In the Innoforum network, knowledge transfer between farmers and scientists takes place on an equal footing.

IN FRANCE, Training sessions organised by the AFOCG network help farmers understand, control and analyse their finances and manage their accountability. These training sessions aim to im-prove farmers' decision-making autonomy and make farming a more manageable operation. Autonomy is also a goal of many other initiatives for knowledge transfer and sharing.

IN SWITZERLAND, the School of Biodynamic Agriculture offers vocational training that includes techniques and production processes essential for growing food organically and efficiently.

National contexts

The situation in Poland

In order to acquire the formal status of a farmer in Poland, one must obtain “agricultural qualifications”. The status of a farmer is necessary to become a successor of a farm, as well as to buy agricultural land or a farm. The status is indispensable to obtain different types of subsidies, e.g. for young farmers, modernisation of a farm, restructuring of small farms or organic farming.

There are different ways to get into the profession of a farmer including different levels of formal education.

- **The main way is through vocational and technical schools supervised by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development** and offering professions and specialisations, such as farmer, gardener, landscape architect, beekeeper, cattle breeder and similar.
- **University studies** (bachelor’s and master’s degrees) can also provide professional qualifications to become a farmer.
- **A wide range of postgraduate agricultural courses are offered by universities** and are divided into areas such as agriculture, organic farming, agribusiness, horticulture, rural development, integrated agricultural production and many others. Most of them guarantee the acquisition of agricultural qualifications.
- Those who have not completed training in agriculture at any of these levels have the option of taking a **vocational examination for which a fee is charged, which is conducted by the state examination boards.** Some vocational schools that provide training in agricultural professions offer courses to prepare for this examination.

It is important to emphasise that so far there is no state-recognised profession of organic farmer. There is only a rather meagre official system for training in organic farming and organising knowledge transfer. Teaching organic farming is included in the curricula of some vocational schools, for example in the agricultural school in Goladkowo (Zespół Szkół Rolniczych im. Jadwigi Dziubińskiej, www.zsgoladkowo.eu). Only one university – the Warsaw University of Agriculture (Szkoła Główna Gospodarstwa Wiejskiego) – offers a three-year bachelor’s degree programme in organic farming and food production, and a few universities offer one-year postgraduate programmes.

The existing gap is filled to some extent by Agricultural Extension Centres (Ośrodki Doradztwa Rolniczego – ODR), whose 16 regional centres are funded by the state. The ODR play an important role in identifying farmers’ needs and problems thanks to direct contacts and cooperation. They provide training, conferences and workshops to promote good organic farming prac-tices. In particular, the ODR in Radom offers a series of conferences on the subject and conducts demonstration workshops on organic food processing on the farm.

ORGANIC FARMING IN POLAND

In Poland, in the last decade, the number of farms has dropped by almost 13%, but their average size has increased by around 13%. The area and the number of organic farms have increased in the last few years after the recession in 2014-2018. The number of employed persons in agriculture in 2020 was 2 318 300 and it has been on a similar level since 2010[1].

The organic farming movement started in the late 80-ties of the XX century due to the enthusiastic involvement of the pioneers like Julian Osetek, Mieczysław Górny, Mieczysław Babalski and others. A big impact on this development was provided also by the substantial support of Swiss and German biodynamic and organic farmers as well as different NGOs. In the beginning, the development was relatively slow until Poland entered the EU in 2004.

The exponential growth, caused by the system of subventions in agro-environmental programmes started in 2004: from 1797 farms in 2001 to 3760 farms in 2004 up to 27 093 farms in 2013, stopped in 2014. Since 2014 there was a decrease of 5-6% every year until a few years ago the number of certified organic farms slowly started to grow again. In 2021, there were 21 795 organic farmers, farming on 550 000 ha.

The largest area of organic farmland was occupied by cereal crops[2].

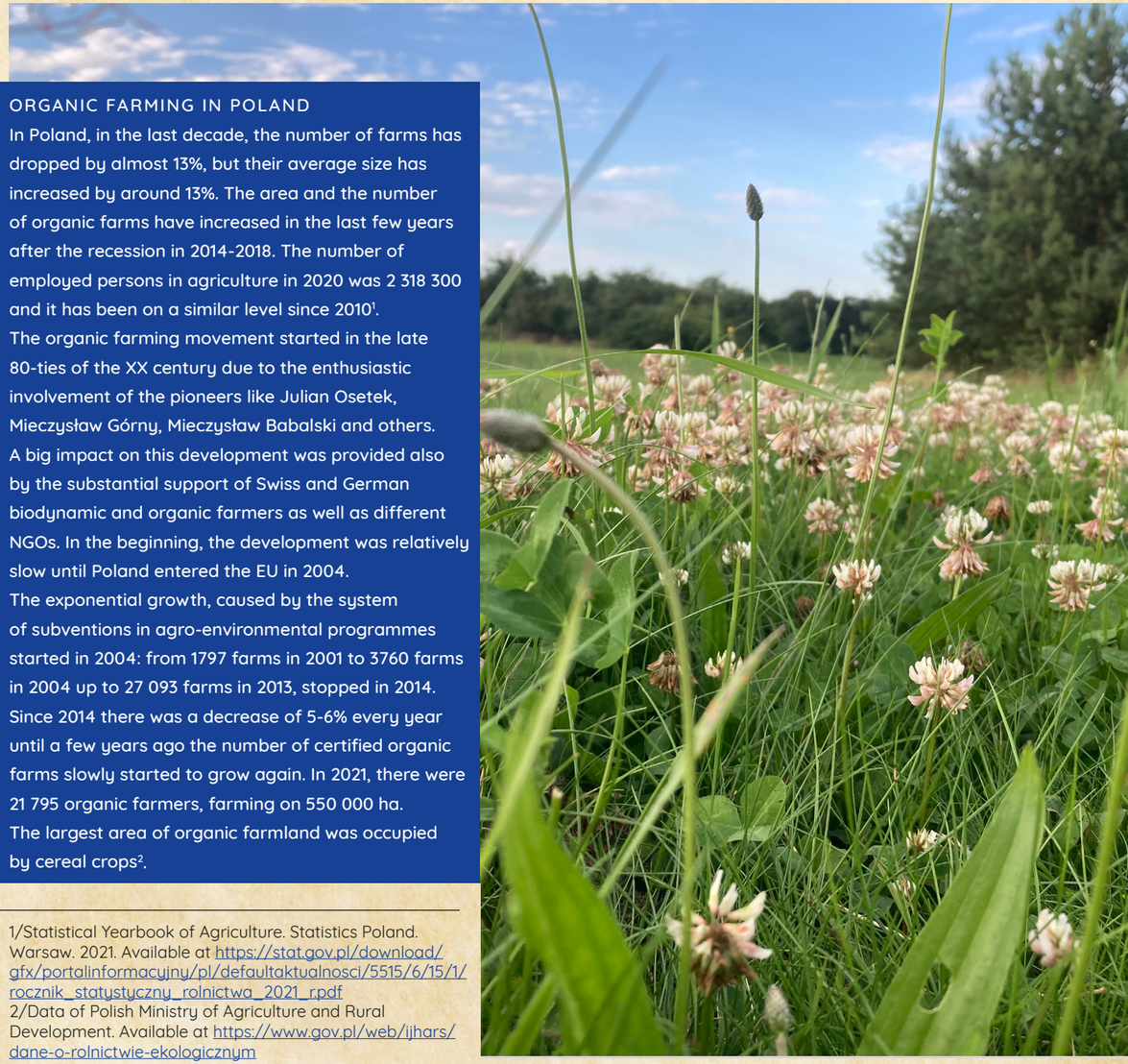


photo: AW

1/Statistical Yearbook of Agriculture. Statistics Poland. Warsaw. 2021. Available at https://stat.gov.pl/download/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5515/6/15/1/rocznik_statystyczny_rolnictwa_2021_r.pdf

2/Data of Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Available at https://www.gov.pl/web/ijhars/dane-o-rolnictwie-ekologicznym


Good Harvest Seminar – cooperation between organic farmers and activists. Seminar has been organised since 2004.


Annual Festival in ZIARNO, St Michael's Day.


Good Harvest Seminar, 2019.

As a unique alternative in Poland, the non-governmental organisations ZIARNO Association and Ecological Folk High School (EUL) have developed a curriculum for a two-year course on organic farming, which is described below.

Polish initiatives: ZIARNO Good Harvest seminar and Ecological Folk High School (EUL) courses on organic farming

Both initiatives are based on an organic farm in Grzybów, which was started in 1989.

The ZIARNO association was founded in 1995 and from the beginning has been involved in educational work for various target groups, from young children and students to adults and senior citizens. Agroecology has always been a guiding theme in these educational activities. Usually up to 3000 participants visit the centre every year for one-day or multi-day workshops. Ziarno's most important public action is the seminar "Good Harvest – Cooperation in Organic Farming". It has taken place every year since 2004.
In 2022, more than 100 participants came together: Officials, farmers, students and scientists, also from other European countries.

The Ecological Folk Highschool (EUL) was established in 2015. It is mainly focused on the education of adults in organic farming including the aspect of agroecology. It offers two-year courses in organic farming and shorter courses in permaculture, food processing, cheese making, and bakery.

SEMINAR "GOOD HARVEST – COOPERATION IN ORGANIC FARMING"

Objective

The main objective of the seminar is to provide a platform for the peer-to-peer exchange of knowledge and skills between the organic farmers in Poland (and sometimes from other European countries). The seminar also aims to inspire farmers to keep going despite the various problems and difficulties they may encounter in their daily work. Ziarno offers the opportunity to create a self-support group and basics for stronger cooperation between organic farmers. Sometimes also lecturers from other sectors are invited, like scientists, representatives of con-sumer organisations, food cooperatives, and ecological NGOs to broaden the farmers' perspective on other important topics related to agriculture, like climate change, loss of biodiversity or new forms of short food chains (like CSA or farm shops).

Target group

The main target group consists of organic farmers from all over Poland, those who are well experienced and those who are beginners and need more support. For the last few years, young people from food cooperatives and ecological NGOs joined the seminars, bringing new energy and inspiration from the point of view of consumers and activists.

Content

The content is related to organic farming with the emphasis on good practices, cooperation, knowledge and skills exchange. The presentations are mostly given by farmers, some of whom are speaking to the public for the first time in their lives sharing their unique experiences. Also speaking there are scientists, representatives or activists of NGOs working in sectors related to organic, regenerative or sustainable farming. In 2021, the Seminar was co-organised with Living Earth Coalition (Koalicja Żywa Ziemia), a network of Polish organizations working in the field of agroecology, agricultural policies and sustainable food system.

Method

The seminar lasts two days and includes presentations, lectures, group work in more specialised fields, like plant production or husbandry and integrational circles, where participants can share their experiences, problems or troubles connected with farm life.

FOLK HIGH SCHOOL COURSES ON ORGANIC FARMING

Objective

The main objective of the courses is to provide education for future organic farmers, using folk high school pedagogy, which means learning by doing, holistic approach, teamwork and learning of cooperation.

Target group

The target group consists of adults interested in starting organic farms or other initiatives connected with organic/regenerative/sustainable agriculture. Each course is attended by 15 to 20 people aged 19 to 60, often with a university degree and having worked in big companies, who want to change their lives and do something meaningful in the field of sustainability.

Photo: ZIARNO





Students of organic farming course – lesson on soil led by Peter Stratenwerth.

Content

One course lasts two years. The curriculum was developed within the Erasmus + project "Building Key Competences Folk High School Pedagogy in XXI Europe", where EUL could learn from Swiss, German and Danish partners better experienced in dual education in agri-culture. The content is based also on Polish require-ments for the core curriculum in the profession of the farmer. Thus graduates can approach a state exam for the farming profession. The course includes 14 months of practical training in leading Polish organic farms, 80 days of learning at the boarding school in Grzybów and 20 days of study trips to about 20 different farms or initiatives in the field of organic farming.

There are 4 main modules in the curriculum, which are related to the vocational professional topics and which make up two-thirds of all teaching units during lessons at EUL in Grzybów: 1. soil, land and earth (in Polish there is the word "Ziemia" for this, which refers to these three different concepts), 2. plants, 3. animals, 4. humans. One-third of the learning units in Grzybów are dedicated to general topics such as communi-cation and teamwork, self-learning skills, art and music, security and safety, "big questions" (topics connected with global questions, like climate change, food sovereignty, genetically modified organisms GMO





Practical lesson on soil (left) and plant diversity (above) with professor Barbara Sudnik, Organic Farming Course.

etc.), and "genius loci", which refers to the uniqueness of an organic farm, connected with certain landscape, soil con-ditions, as well as specifics of the cultural and social background as well as the farmer's interests or passions.

Method

The method was inspired by the Danish Folk High School pedagogy and the experience of the Swiss Biodynamic School. The vocational training course is strongly influenced by Grundtvigian pedagogy, which means that big emphasis is put on practice, teamwork, and a holistic approach, also including art, craft and music in the teaching process. Of particular value to the course is the 14-month internship, where newcomers can learn from experienced organic farmers from everyday practice.

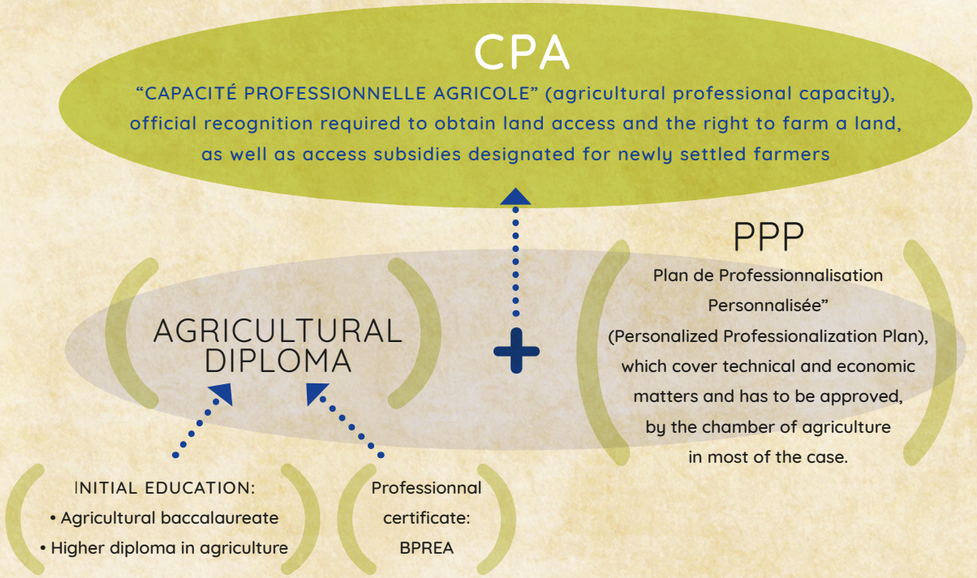
The majority of the graduates of the first three courses found their jobs in organic farming or in educational initiatives dealing with sustainable agriculture. All those who took the state examination for the profession of farmer passed it successfully.

Among the other initiatives in Poland are NGOs that promote and implement permaculture courses. The broad presentation of permaculture initiatives and learning opportunities are described on the website www.permaculture.edu.

Farm visit during AFOCG national meeting in France.

The situation in France

In France, a large part of the public funds dedicated to agricultural development is allocated to chambers of agriculture and to agricultural technical institutes (86 million euros in 2021, 68% of the overall budget). Technical institutes are in charge of developing technical solutions for the agricultural sector. The chambers of agriculture are in charge of supporting new entrants and settled farmers, in particular through public policy programs, whose budget is largely allocated to these organizations. **Many other actors in agricultural development (associations, cooperatives, etc.) carry out training and support actions, but remain poorly recognized and supported by the Ministry of Agriculture.**



The administrative process to set up a farm and the access to public funds are governed by many regulations and mechanisms that can be discouraging. Besides the difficult administrative and training path, the learning content of formal education for farmers includes very few agroecological dimensions[3].

The overall journey necessary to start a farm is seen as limiting for some new entrants, who do not find themselves represented by the productivist-centred approach to agriculture that these institutionalized courses and certificates were mainly founded on. More and more new entrants are not coming from farming families. They have a rich background in other areas and are pursuing a new life project that is closer to nature. Their training needs are different from the offer usually proposed by the agricultural chambers. Some new entrants will choose to follow the steps necessary to get their CPA, but do so as a means to an end (obtain subsidies for new farmers, and have the right to sell their products) and not because they believe in the learning process. **They find alternative ways to acquire the knowledge they need to run their farm in the way they want.**

In addition to the institutional pathway for farmers to start their businesses, various less institutionalised actors offer training for newcomers and long-established farmers and promote knowledge sharing (see InPACT network box).

3/ In 2017 the Minister of Agriculture, Stephane Le Foll, revamped all agricultural diplomas to include agroecology in the curriculum, but teachers are still very reluctant to implement it.

InPACT members develop various tools to share knowledge, beyond collective training and organized meetings, such as a digital resources platform (The Directory of Farmers' Know-How by FADEAR, The Resource Center by Terre de Liens, open source plan and tutorial for agricultural equipment by l'Atelier Paysan). They participate in studies and projects with different kinds of actors (researchers, technical experts, municipalities...). The platform Passerelles Paysannes (in English: "Peasant Bridges"), born from the collaboration of different organisations, proposes a map of different actors involved in the support of new entrants.

Besides the InPACT network, new training actors, whether or not from the agricultural sector, are developing training programs more or less recognized **-> Hectar** (large agricultural campus mostly funded by private companies), Ver de Terre Production (in English: "worms production") (training and resources on agroecological practices), etc.

In addition, public subsidies can encourage farmers to join forces to share knowledge or equipment and to organise themselves in a region in order to increase economic and environmental performance, e.g. under the GIEE programme. (economic and environmental interest group).

InPACT network (Initiatives for Citizen and Territ-rial Agriculture) is constituted of ten organizations working on farmers' autonomy, social links within a region, and for agriculture respectful of the environment and the human being. InPACT carries out studies, training, experiences and information sharing. InPACT members adopt diverse and complementary approaches that cover the complexity of the fields of agricultural and territorial development. InPACT members are:

InterAFOCG (Inter Associations of Collective Management Learning): National network of 28 associa-tions (AFOCG) organizing collective training sessions, mainly in economics and social sciences, for approximately 4500 farmers, in order to develop their decision-making autonomy. (8th pillar of the Nyéléni declaration).

Terre de Liens works on access to land through citizens' savings (pillar 4 of Nyeleni declaration about collective rights and access to the commons)

L'Atelier Paysan gives the capacity to build, fix and adapt farming equipment and tools, through collective workshops lasting several days (pillar 8 about the autonomy of agroecology)

MIRAMAP represents the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) network in France (pillar 8 about the autonomy of agroecology and pillar 3 about territories)

CIVAM Network gathers farmer groups on agricultural practices, such as efficient and self-sufficient grazing systems (pillar 2 about production practices), and has developed a programme to empower women farmers (pillar 10 about women's knowledge, value, vision and leadership).

FADEAR delivers training for new entrants who want to settle with the principle of peasant agriculture (pillar 2 about production practices,

Accueil Paysan gathers a network of farmers with agroecological practices who open their farms to the public, following the principles of fair and sustainable tourism.

Solidarité Paysans works with farmers in trouble, through human and legal support, and claims that agroecological practices are recovery leverage for weakened farms.

MRJC is a youth movement for the enhancement of rural areas. For example, they organise an agricultural tour through France to get to know different farms with sustainable models (pillar 11 about youth).

SOL supports local alternatives and contributes to the autonomy of farming communities, mainly in India, Senegal and France.

French initiatives: Training on farmers' autonomy by the InterAFOCG network

InterAFOCG is the head of the AFOCG network, created and managed by farmers. AFOCGs provide collective training to farmers all along their careers, mainly in the fields of economics (accounting, management, strategy) and social sciences (relationships, work organization, etc.). InterAFOCG is a member of the InPACT network.

The fundamental principle of AFOCG is to promote the decision-making autonomy of farmers for all areas concerned with the management of their farm: technical, organizational, commercial, financial, legal, etc. The AFOCG approach allows knowledge to be shared in a trusting setting where different experiences are exchanged without judgement. This gives participating farmers the opportunity to **make their own decisions** to run their farms and lives in the way that makes the most sense for them and to be able to **justify those decisions.** The training in-cludes more formal sessions as well as informal exchanges (convivial time linked to associative life) where the sharing continues.

Often, it's most important to share questions rather than answers. Formulating your problem in front of others is an important step in reflecting and getting perspective.

(AFOCG's member testimony; Network history booklet, InterAFOCG, p. 129).



Farm visit during AFOCG national meeting in France.



Daniel Fillon harvesting his apples.



During AFOCG national meeting.

The principle of decision-making autonomy also forms the underlying basis of the various AFOCG training courses, be it in relation to start a farm, handing over the farm, sales strategy, analysis of economic results, etc.

AFOCGs work with different kinds of actors to gather and articulate various knowledge during their training sessions, in addition to the knowledge shared by the participants (Dialogue of knowledge 5th Nyéléni pillar), including partners from the InPACT network (ADEAR on the "start-ing a farm journey", CIVAM on herbs breeding system, for instance), technical agents (conversion to organic system, homeopathy), researchers (climate change).

Phot : InterAFOCG Archive

Exchanges between 2 participants during the training,

Michel in dairy farming and Hélène vegetable farmer :

Global approach of AFOCG is centred on the person and taking into account their environment

– If I understood correctly, your problem is to find a balance between professional life and personal life, to slow down but keep a viable economic situation.
What weighs on you the most?





–The markets to sell my products in the surrounding villages, 3 times per week. It takes a lot of my time and energy. It is important for me to keep direct links with the consumers, but with these conditions, finally I don't even have the energy to talk to customers in the market.

Collective approach of AFOCG brings together farmers who carry out various projects with various approachs

Exchanges between farmers allow them to identify and formulate what will guide their choices

– Which market do you like the most, the one that gives you enthusiasm when you wake up in the morning? and which one makes the most money?

[…] But if I reduce to one market per week, how do I sell the rest of my products?

Do you have links with neighbouring farmers who also sell their products in the markets? You could perhaps organize yourselves for the joint sale of your products.

AFOCG's associative life and collective training forge new links in the territory, through **constructive exchanges in a trustful climate**

And about you? your problem is the lack of control over selling prices and production volumes. The conditions are set by the cooperative that buys your milk. But on the production system and organization of your farm, what leeway do you identify?

AFOCG's members share the same objective of being autonomous in their decision-making.

The challenge is to produce at a lower cost, to reduce my need for inputs. I would like to develop a grazing system to reduce my food purchases, but I don't know how to do. And the problem moreover is that I have fragmented plots, which represents a limit for developing a grazing system, with plots inaccessible to the herd. And it also costs me a lot of fuel to move from one to another plot.

Through questioning and different points of view within the group, farmers are encouraged to specify the issues they encounter, within their own reality, and to open up to new hypotheses brought forward by others.

Framework of non-judgment of the practices of others, and respect for the choices of each.

In my place, I heard about farmers who have the same problem and made a grouping of plots at the territorial level. Perhaps you could consult your neighbours about a land consolidation ?
And about grazing systems, do you know other breeders who have implemented this practice or who are interested in it?

An example of such training is the course “Settled-in for less than 5 years: when management reinforces the project”. This training, organized by AFOCG du Quercy, is directed at recently settled farmers. It aims to develop their knowledge of the administrative and economic functioning of the farm. This training allows them to be more confident in the processing of accounting operations and administrative documents, and more generally in the overall management of their farm.

PRESENTATION OF THE TRAINING “SETTLED-IN FOR LESS THAN 5 YEARS: WHEN MANAGEMENT REINFORCES THE PROJECT”

This training takes place over 6.5 days within a period of 7 months, with participants sometimes being required to work between training days.

Although most of the topics in this training are related to the administrative and accounting aspects of the farm, space is also given to **stepping back and thinking strategically.** To do this, the facilitator-trainer relies on educational tools and exchanges between participants. The tool “5 points to say”, with areas of shadow and light, allows participants to get an overview of their situation, present their journey from the beginning of their farm activity and share their past and current concerns.

After the participants have described their situation and concerns,, the group selects one or two problems commonly encountered. The participants collectively identify the causes and consequences of the problems shared in the group (“I am tired”, “I have too much to do”), through “the tree of causes”. And then, they propose solutions to the problem (improve production tools, ask for help, or reduce as much as possible the daily to-do list...).



Animation tool designed by AFOCG du Loiret.

The tool “5 points to say” also permits to value the paths taken by the participants and the assets of the farms. This tool is proposed on the 3rd day, after the basic administrative and accounting aspects (administrative documents management, recording of the current operations).

The next days include other accounting and tax aspects: special accounting operations, establishing cash flow monitoring, accounting closure, VAT declaration, and taxation.

The last half-day focuses on **analysing the economic situation of the farm,** strengths and weaknesses, as well as threats and opportunities. Based on all the elements that emerged from the training (motivations, concerns, solutions, farm’s assets, economic results...), the farmers establish an action plan, which leads to revisiting and sometimes reorienting the initial project, according to what is important for them and the results achieved.

OTHER TRAINING EXAMPLES

For AFOCG **training on the theme of transmission,** most of the topics refer to administrative, fiscal, and financial valuation issues of the farm according to various approaches: the classic approach with the heritage value of the farm, or for example the sustainability of farm takeover cost according to the profitability potential for a project holder. However, here again, an important place is given to the human dimension and to exchanges between participants: the economic, family, and emotional reality of the farmers who leave, what matters to them in the transfer, their projects after the transfer and their needs (money, dwelling house, other criteria for the transmission, time limit...).

Regarding training on sales strategies, beyond cost and selling price calculations, AFOCGs help farmers identify what will arouse enthusiasm in them, and seriously consider the organization of work to promote the sustainability of the projects implemented.





Farm visit during AFOCG national meeting in France.

Phot : InterAFOCG Archive

The situation in Switzerland

In Switzerland, the profession of a farmer is not officially protected. Anyone can call themselves a farmer. Only the state-recognised job titles in agriculture that are based on training recognised by the federal government are protected job titles. Such training includes basic vocational training, which ends with the Federal Certificate of Proficiency (EFZ), or higher vocational training, which is usually accessible after completing an apprenticeship (EFZ) and several years of professional practice and can be completed with the Professional Examination (BP). The profession is only recognised by the state if it has an additional designation such as EFZ. In Switzerland, more than 70% of practising farmers have an EFZ qualification. For farms with more than 30 hectares of agricultural land, the figure is as high as 90%.

Anyone who wants to receive subsidies in agriculture needs a recognized professional qualification and farm recognition. These payments account for a significant proportion of farmers' income. As a result, it is virtually impossible to run a farm without direct payments. Another consequence is that professional qualification becomes significant when the farm is to be recognized for direct payments.



Open plant shop at the courtyard of Biodynamic Gardening School in Hünibach, where local endemic plants are grown annually.

Photo: AW

All cantons of Switzerland offer training to farmers for little cost, independent of whether it is to obtain a degree or not. Agroecology is officially part of the curriculum of state schools based on the federal law of agriculture and education. In practice, however, agroecology is still hampered in its actual development:

- **Organic farmers had to fight for the recognition of their profession,** 15 years ago a compromise was reached, accepting Organic agriculture as an official deepening field for all interested learning farmers. Within the normal courses, candidates can choose from a number of subjects concerning organic agriculture. Often the state schools do not really support the participants to choose these courses because they do not have enough participants for their main courses.
- **Traditional curricula have the dominant role and agroecology is brought in only by teachers who are interested in the subject**

Only one in ten agricultural trainees comes from an organic farm in Switzerland, but the number of young farmers interested in organic agriculture is growing.

Swiss agricultural trainees or students interested in organic farming can be divided into 2 different profiles:

- **Conversion from the conventional farming system:** Interested farmers are likely to seek out the agricultural school in their canton where their family members also went to school. Surveys have shown that young

agricultural students from traditional farms prefer to expand their regional network at cantonal school rather than join a study group for innovative and committed organic farming that is far away from their everyday life (BIO SUISSE startet neue Ausbildung für den Biolandbau https://orgprints.org/id/eprint/8978/1/schaedeli-BiolehrgangProspekt.pdf). The average age in cantonal schools is close to the lowest possible level (16-18 years). In recent years, more and more farmers' sons and have found their way into biodynamic training, even through the strict network of traditional or regional barriers.

● **Non-farming background:** Students who come from cities and do not have a farming background are more likely to be attracted by the special offer of the innovative and dedicated biodynamic agricultural school in Rheinau, where there are other students from cities and even from other countries. Most of them are looking for like-minded people in a similar situation (moving away from the city for a life as a farmer in the countryside without friends nearby). There are more women in the biodynamic school than in the cantonal school.

Swiss initiatives: The four-year training programme on biodynamic agriculture in Rheinau, by the association for Biodynamic agriculture in Switzerland VBDL

The field of vocational and informal courses in the green sector is quite broad in Switzerland. The Swiss occupational database lists around 25 specialisations in agriculture, horticulture, agroecology and the environment or similar occupational profiles.

In 2000, the Swiss Ministry of Education approved the vocational qualification "Specialists in Biodynamic Agriculture", organised by the VBDL, which offers organic farmers the opportunity to learn biodynamic agriculture in separate classes and incorporate the basic organic courses (Organic Farmer EFZ). This biodynamic course is valid nationwide and is located in Rheinau, in the canton of Zurich.

BIODYNAMIC TRAINING SWITZERLAND

The four-year training to become a specialist in biodynamic agriculture offers intensive and concrete training in perception and a systematic increase in attentiveness towards nature as a basis for a biodynamic professional activity.

Technical training requires a high level of motivation and personal activity; it corresponds to independent adult education and requires one to have a leaving examination degree from a school or already a finished professional degree (EFZ). The course does not yet include the basic school parts of general language, communication and social competences that only state schools can offer in Switzerland but includes the basic training as an EFZ farmer with a focus on organic farming, which is offered under a performance contract from Canton Zürich/Strickhof.

The Association for Biodynamic Agriculture in Switzerland (VBDL) was founded in 1937 and stands for high-quality sustainable and organic agriculture working with the biodynamic method. The board of the association consists of food producers. Members are composed of producers (active members) and interested parties (passive members).

The tasks of the association include:

- **To impart knowledge and skills on biodynamic agriculture**
- **To set production standards, their control and certification**
- **To promote research, plant and animal breeding programs on biodynamic agriculture**
- **To organize introductory courses, workshops, and working groups as well as training and further education.** For example, in the case of a farm conversion, a four-day introductory course must be attended, as well as further training on biodynamic agriculture for the farm managers as well as for the division managers.
- **To coordinate the biodynamic vocational training** at the tertiary level leading to the EFZ and BP qualifications, which includes the 4-year biodynamic training in Rheinau described below.



Rheinau with the vineyard of Biodynamic School.

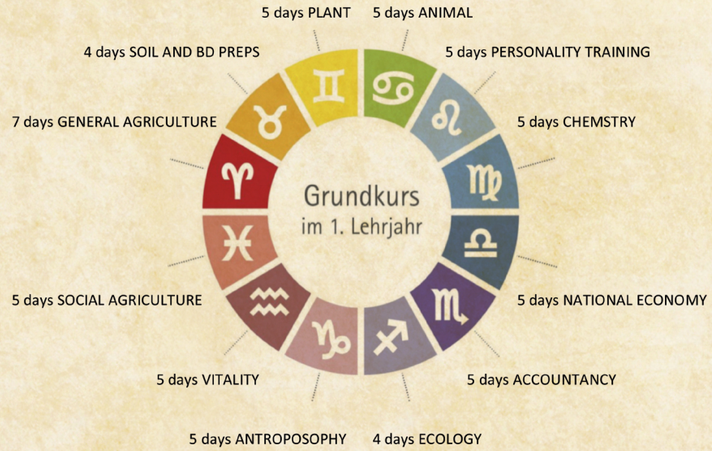
Photo: Reto Ingold





Herd of cows, with various breeds. Farm of the Rheinau Biodynamic School.

photos: AW, Isabelle Hagel



• Curricula of the 1. year of Swiss biodynamic course

In addition to the technical and practical skills for practising as an organic farmer, knowledge of the biodynamic method is imparted and extensive opportunities for personality development are given to support the participants during observations. The primary aim of the course is to develop a modern, holistic training programme based on ethical, experiential, ecological and technical principles. It is intended to set standards in training for organic agriculture as a whole and to radiate beyond national and sectoral borders.

In addition, the training offered in Rheinau is intended to improve the currently demanding **succession situation** in the approximately 350 Swiss Demeter enterprises and to provide them with young farm managers equipped with a high level of professional and social competence. As many Demeter enterprises are relatively complex and multifaceted businesses, often run by institutions and at the same time providing professional, social and ecological services on behalf of the public, they are also open to committed people from **non-agricultural backgrounds.** For this very reason, a lot of emphasis is placed on acquiring practical experience, networked thinking and an open, attentive mind during training. The great interest of learners from non-agricultural backgrounds shows that this opportunity and its ideal orientation also appeal to motivated young people of urban and consumer backgrounds. They are thus given the opportunity to participate in the rather closed farming community, which is shaped by the peasant land law, and thus to pursue a profession that is close to life and fulfilling.

The target group of the training are people over the age of 19 who have completed their initial education or have a Matura (university entrance qualification), and who wish to become a farmer with a Federal Certificate (EFZ) with a focus on organic farming as well as a specialist in biodynamic agriculture (BP certificate). During the rest of the time (about 190 days per year) students work as trainees on a Biodynamic/Demeter farm.

The four-year course can be completed in its entirety or, depending on the participant's educational background and inclinations, in separate years. It comprises a basic year, the two-year basic training to become an organic farmer (EFZ) and a year of expert training to become a specialist in biodynamic agriculture (BP).

Training Method

The vocational training places great emphasis on practice, teamwork, and a holistic approach and also incorporates art, craft and music into the teaching process. The great value of the courses also lies in the course-accompanying internship, which runs over the entire four years and in which newcomers can learn from experienced organic farmers in practice.

At the moment VBDL is running the fortieth course for 16 participants. The majority of graduates of the courses found their work in the organic farming sector or educational initiatives related to sustainable agriculture. All those who took the state examination for the profession of farmer passed it with success.



Campus of the University for Sustainable Development in Eberswalde.



A farmer teaches students in the field.

The situation in Germany

“Farmer” is one out of 14 state-approved vocations within the Green sector. These vocations are defined by law and decrees, of which one includes a general description of the profession and a general training plan with directions regarding content and time structure for the teaching of the skills, knowledge and competences an apprentice needs to acquire.

The system of vocational education and training in Germany is called “Dual System” because it consists of two learning locations. During this practice-oriented training, an agricultural apprentice is usually on a farm four days a week to learn vocational skills in practice, with the farmer as their teacher. One day per week, the apprentice is in vocational school to acquire theoretical knowledge. An apprenticeship lasts three years and enables graduates to work in a self-organized and qualified manner. An examination ends this basic vocational education. It could be extended after two years of further work experience by a master or technician course of one to two years in specialized agricultural schools. This advanced vocational education qualifies to take on responsibility as a farm owner, including the ability to practically train apprentices on-farm.

It is also possible to study agriculture at universities. In agriculture, this higher education pathway leads to qualifications for the management of larger farms, agricultural administration, research or agribusiness, and agricultural extension.

Photos: Copyright HNE Eberswalde

Agroecology can be part of the training

Since in the dual training system a large part of the training takes place on a self-selected farm, by choosing an agroecological-oriented farm, trainees have the opportunity to focus on this area when learning knowledge and skills and to learn first-hand from the farmer and through practical experience.

The agricultural vocational schools, where the theoretical part of the training takes place, now offer a focus on organic farming in many federal states. While agroecological farming practices play a significant role within this training, agroecology as a social movement plays only a very minor role, if any.
In higher education, there are now separate courses of study on organic agriculture at various universities. Agroecology is primarily regarded as an academic discipline in Germany and as such is part of the various degree programmes. Agroecology as a social movement can be the subject and content of individual courses within agricultural science degree programmes.

In vocational training for organic farming away from universities, agroecological aspects are only rudimentary. Those who explicitly want to acquire agroecological knowledge and skills are more likely to rely on the expertise and practical experience of other agroecological farmers (friends, neighbours, practitioners), complemented by the input of non-agricultural actors (persons or organisations) from the field of food sovereignty (e.g. consumers, food processors).

German initiatives: InnoForum and Cropping School by the Hochschule für nachhaltige Entwicklung Eberswalde/University for Sustainable Development (HNEE)



Exchange between a HNEE professor and farmers.

Education and knowledge transfer are essential for HNEE's work as a university of applied sciences.

The work of the HNEE's Department of Landscape Management and Nature Conservation is guided by the principle "With nature for people".

HNEE knows that a sustainable quality of life can only be achieved by safeguarding all the foundations of life and using resources carefully and effectively. HNEE, therefore, trains experts who take responsibility for society and put these requirements into practice in a scientifically, economically, socially and ethically justified manner. For agriculture, this means that at HNEE only organic farming is taught. The topics of agroecology and agroforestry form an important part of the curriculum of the various degree programmes. A separate subject area "Agroecology and Sustainable Cultivation Systems" is also dedicated to this topic. In addition, agroecological principles are an important guideline, e.g. in the exchange of knowledge with practitioners or the teaching-learning concepts of courses and further training for external participants.

INNOFORUM: KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND COMMUNICATION ON A LEVEL FOOTING

The InnoForum (Innovation Forum for Organic Farming in Brandenburg/InnoForum Ökolandbau Brandenburg) is a regional network of partners that creates an open platform for actors from the regional organic food sector (mostly farmers) and science to exchange ideas, find and test new solutions. The network is operated by the HNEE. Communication on a level footing is particularly important here. Because only together a fruitful basis for the transfer of ideas and ex-perience as well as constructive cooperation can be created. And only together space can be created for necessary innovation and adaptation processes in Brandenburg's organic agriculture along the entire value chain.

The InnoForum now consists of more than 30 partners from agricultural practice. The knowledge transfer within the Innoforum is mutual and has an impact not only on research but also on teaching at the HNEE. Hence, this regional partnership enabled the HNEE to develop an innovative teaching/learning course: "Study Partner Organic Farm". The course takes place quite at the beginning of the study programme, in the second semester. In this course, the students have to work in small collaborative groups on concrete issues and actual challenges presented by organic farms. The course is thus a good example of the problem--based learning method. The students work independently on a complex topic, facilitated by the farmer and a teacher of the university. This process of working and learning is triggered by the actual problem and is just as important as the respective result.

During one semester the students stay one day per week on the farm to work on their problems in small groups.

photos: HNEE/ Ulrich Wessollek



Students, farmer and teacher of the course Study Partner Organic Farming.



Students present their project results to the farmer.

The background of the farmers is diverse. They are, for example, start-ups, crop farmers, dairy farmers, or direct marketers. For example, recently presented issues were as follows:

- A crop farmer intends to cultivate white lupin. His farm is located in the north of Brandenburg in a landscape with hilly terrain and has no animals. He wants to learn more about the specifics of white lupin and how he could obtain good and stable yields with its cultivation.
- Another farmer cultivates berries and rears sheep. She needs support in the conversion of a side tipper for the pending grain harvest.
- A dairy farmer works according to the production standards of biodynamic agriculture. Therefore his cows have horns. In the future, he would like to use a milking robot. He would like to know what he has to consider when selecting the best-suited equipment. The students should gather the practical experience of other farmers and help him plan the next steps.

In addition to their project-related work, the students

are involved in other activities which occur during their stay on the farm. Hence they can learn more about different branches of farming, operational processes on an organic farm and the diversity of life concepts in organic farming.

CROPPING SCHOOL: FARMER-TO-FARMER EXTENSION

On-farm research led by farmers and farmer-to-farmer exchange with or without help from an advisor or scientist is one way to adopt new methods to build farm resilience. Successful meth ods such as the Farmer Field[4] School or the Stable School[5] are adopted and further developed by the HNEE in its work. One such example is the Cropping School.

4/ The Farmer Field School approach is a form of adult education where farmers learn optimally in groups from field observation and experimentation. It was developed in 1989 by specialists from the FAO to help small farmers in developing countries improve their Integrated Pest Management practice. It rapidly expanded and today the approach is successfully conducted worldwide. At Farmer Field Schools groups of neighbouring farmers meet regularly (often weekly) to observe and discuss the dynamics of their crop's ecosystem.
5/ The Stable School approach was developed in Denmark in 2004-2005 by a group of organic dairy farmers from the same farmers' association with the common goal of eliminating antibiotics from their herds. The main approach was to develop individual farm and herd strategies in a participatory process where small learning groups (5-6 farmers per group) consulted and learned from each other. The farmers were supervised by a process facilitator. The groups met monthly on the farm of one of the group members. The Stable School concept creates an open space with an informal atmosphere where farmers can share their knowledge and thus learn from each other.



Scientists, farmers and students meet in a potato field.



Farmer-to-farmer exchange.

Photos: HNEE

In 2018 the HNEE developed the concept "Cropping School". The intention was to create a common learning environment, where farmers come together to exchange experience and knowledge, thus learning from one another and being empowered to take action in improving their cropping systems. At the same time, it should represent a practice-based approach – run by farmers themselves – as an alternative to advisory services. During the process of creating an appropriate concept for this idea, the HNEE took the Stable School approach and adapted it to arable farming systems under German conditions. The idea is to bring together farmers from the same regional setting – sharing the same natural and various physical conditions, as well as similar regional challenges and current issues. In regular meetings, farmers discuss these and try to find a way to improve their cropping systems. The topic or problem to be solved is identified by the farmers themselves at the beginning of each cultivation year and may vary from crop rotational system to fertilizer management. The meetings take place on the farm of one of the group members and a facilitator assists the host farmer in setting the agenda for the meeting, moderates the meeting and assures documentation of the meeting for the whole group.

In contrast to Stable Schools, meetings could be supported by a specialized advisor or scientist. This participatory collaboration aims to find specific solutions for farm-related problems. The meetings create an open space for experience exchange and learning from each other. In addition to the regular meetings, some topics are also conducted as on-farm trials attended by the farmers themselves or by researchers. Every farm should host a meeting at least once each year or every second year, to follow up on changes made and impacts achieved in a participatory manner and thereby providing learning opportunities for all group members – not only the farmer who took the action.

OTHER INITIATIVES IN GERMANY

There are various non-governmental organisations and territorially-based initiatives that promote the introduction and transfer of agroecological practices. This can be done through campaigns, information events, courses, further vocational training or farmer-to-farmer exchanges. Below is a small selection of some of these initiatives:

- **The campaign "Meine Landwirtschaft – unsere Wahl" (engl. "My agriculture – Our choice")**

The campaign „Meine Landwirtschaft – unsere Wahl" is being carried out by 50 organizations and initiatives from different societal fields, which deal with agriculture, nutrition, environment, nature conservation, animal protection, consumer protection, health and regional and international development. They want to encourage the debate and develop claims, which they are enforcing together. The best-known activity is a big demonstration under the motto "We are fed up" with about 50,000 participants every year. As a campaign, they do not directly offer courses, but support courses organised by others.

- **The network "Solidarische Landwirtschaft" (Community Supported Agriculture, CSA)**

The CSA network in Germany is an association of people with an agricultural background and consumers who are committed to spreading CSA. It sees itself as a movement, grassroots organisation and association in equal measure. Under the umbrella of the network, there are also beginners' courses and

self-organised vegetable gardening training. The participants are motivated by practical experience to shape their training together in a self-determined way. In self-organised seminars on different farms, they deal with the theory and practice of organic vegetable farming, the socio-political issues surrounding sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty, with different CSA concepts, as well as specific requirements for CSA farms. They work on vegetable farms that they have sought out themselves and bear responsibility for vegetable production in different models and to different extents.

- **Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft / Working Group for Peasant Agriculture (AbL)**

The AbL is an interest group that represents conventional and organic farmers working together for the preservation of rural farming. It stands for sustainable socially and environmentally compatible agriculture. They are convinced that there are no industrial answers to the challenges of the future, but that small-scale, regionally adapted economic methods are necessary. AbL is part of the international movement of small farmers – La Via Campesina. They rarely organise their own courses, but many different types of events, campaigns, and protest actions. This also includes arranging contacts and exchanges between young entrants and experienced practitioners.

- **Bündnis Junge Landwirtschaft Brandenburg / Young Farmers Alliance in Brandenburg**

Particularly in the eastern German states, the existing large-scale farm structures mean that for many well-educated founders, starting their own farm is an insurmountable hurdle. However, more young people are needed in agriculture. In the Berlin-Brandenburg region, the Alliance for Young Farmers is committed to this. The association consists of young farmers, students, craftsmen, traders, brewers, beekeepers, cooks, milkers, and politicians. They come from all parts of Brandenburg and Berlin and campaign for the interests of young founders in agriculture. An important part of the work is the excursions to the member farms and the exchange of experiences among each other. In addition, interesting projects are launched that serve the knowledge transfer of their members, such as “Sustainable: Young farmers in video portraits”, “Digital Advisory Café for Sustainable Agriculture” or a mentoring programme for young farmers.

- **Regenerativ.org – networking platform for regenerative agriculture**

The number of farms and interest groups active in regenerative agriculture is growing steadily. The networking platform Regenerativ.org is a digital space for exchange and knowledge transfer and encourages practitioners to network. There is currently a directory of regenerative farms, a job exchange and a calendar of events with courses on the topic. Information on advisory services and funding opportunities will also follow in order to enable the greatest possible synergy effects for the farms.



The situation in the Netherlands

There are no formal requirements for a person to be considered a farmer in the Netherlands. However, when a farmer earns a certain amount of money or wishes to apply for subsidies, there are certain requirements. When a farmer earns more than about 8000 euros per year, she or he must be registered at the Chamber of Commerce.

When a farmer wishes to apply for subsidies granted by the government, such as those related to the Common Agricultural Policy, farmers need to register for “gecombineerde opgave”. There is no requirement in terms of education to get registered but it requires farmers to declare, among other things, all the products



Bodemzicht farm. The garden is led with “no dig” method.

they make, how much area they dedicate for each product, the number of inputs used for each unit of land and each product, and the amount of their income. This is a large bureaucratic hurdle for diversified, agroecological farmers. As a result many of the smaller, more diversified agroecological farms do not register for gecom-bineerde opgave and do not receive any subsidies.

Dutch initiative: The Boerenvuur (Peasant Fire) of Toekomstboeren

Toekomstboeren is an association of agroecological farmers that organises informaleducation and knowledge-sharing activities in the Netherlands. Other organisations in the Netherlands, such as the Warmonderhof, offer educational programmes that give students an ecological base in sustainable farming. Toekomstboeren supports farmers in further advancing their ecological as well as territorial and political knowledge of agroecology.

Agroecological knowledge is of great importance to maintain and improve the position of the farmers that Toekomstboeren works with. This concerns knowledge of farming practices that are sustainable and that have the potential to strengthen the livelihoods and autonomy of farmers, including agroforestry, no-dig and small--scale machinery. It also concerns knowledge of territorial systems, such as local markets and seeds, in which these practices are embedded. Finally, it concerns knowledge of the wider institutional/policy environment, such as policies on land, that affect and can potentially strengthen agroecology. Toekomstboeren develops activities related to these 3 levels, in a co-creation process with farmers, researchers, citizens, civil society organisations and policy makers.

THE "BOERENVUUR"

The Boerenvuur is one of the central activities of Toekomstboeren. The objective of the Boerenvuur is to explore and address newly emerging problems and solutions in ways that strengthen the livelihoods of agroecological farmers and fosters agroecological transformation.

Content

The topics of the Boerenvuur vary and depend on issues faced by farmers at that moment. This often involves challenges and approaches that are not yet documented or receive little attention elsewhere. It prioritises farmers' own innovations and experiences. Each Boerenvuur focuses on one particular topic.

Phot : Toekomstboeren Archive



Mystica at the Toekomstboeren General Assembly 2022 in Ubbergen.



Toekomstboeren's first Boerenvuur on Land at Tuinderij Crooy in 2015.

THE BOERENVUUR is primarily directed at farmers. These include people that are in the process of becoming farmers, first-generation farmers and people that have been farmers for multiple generations. To have a safe space, all farmers must share the same vision of farming and food systems: Agroecology. The Boerenvuur also invites allied researchers, as well as grassroots and civil society organisations to foster dialogue amongst this diversity of actors. The number of partici-pants varies from 7 to 100 participants.

The programme consists of a mystica (described below), a practi-cal part, a reflection and an informal cultural part (more details about this in the next section).

Some examples of Boerenvuur topics in past:

- **Land tenure:** an exploration of problems farmers faced in securing access to land, particularly concerning Dutch tenure legislation.
- **Small-scale technologies:** demonstration of small--scale machinery and reflection on the potential of technologies to improve labour conditions.
- **No-dig:** workshop on the no-dig methodology and reflection on its potential to improve labour conditions.
- **Labour conditions:** reflection on labour conditions that farmers face
- **Commons:** presentation of various commons initiatives and reflection of commons as a way to acquire land security.

The Boerenvuur is often the first step, leading to follow-up activities. At the Boerenvuur participants collectively reflect on a particular problem or solution. It also gives a space to reflect on institutional barriers or conditions that hamper agroecology or the lives of peasants. Activities that follow from a Boerenvuur tackle these problems or seek to spread solutions. Such activities may include practical experiments, training sessions on how to implement a certain practice, political action or a policy brief.

During a Boerevuur on land in 2020, participants started to explore ways of acquiring land. Many farmers felt insecure as they only had 1-year tenure contracts. The land was too expensive to buy individually but collective purchases with citizens offered opportunities. Interested farmers formed a working group, which explored existing examples in the Netherlands and abroad, looking specifically at how to set up a crowdfunding scheme, organise a community around land and create a legal entity for the acquired land. They also began to elaborate plans for their own commons and wrote a project proposal to support their implementation. Currently, some farmers have succeeded in moving to the commons, including Tuinderij de Veldhof and Erve--Kiekebos. This year the group has also published a handbook with lessons on how to be-come a commons farmer.

Methodology

The Boerenvuur is based on the pedagogy developed by Paulo Freire and the peasant-to-peasant methodology by La Via Campesina. The experiences, concerns and aspirations of farmers are put at the centre. Researchers and people from grassroots and civil society organisations play a supporting role.

The Boerenvuur commonly consists of the following parts:

- **Mystica:** The Boerenvuur begins with a mystica, a performance focusing on deeper motivations. Often, the mystica emphasizes not the cognitive but emotive, visual or bodily. E.g. a musical performance, theatre.
- **Introduction of place, host and participants:** The Boerenvuur often takes place on a farm that has a strong relation to the theme. After the mystica, we move to a story by the farmer, an excursion on the farm and an introduction of the participants. This is i-portant to set the scene and to understand what motivated everyone to be there.
- **Practical part:** The practical part can take various forms. It can be a workshop on a particular technique (e.g. no-dig), a demonstration (e.g. of a certain machine) or an explanation of a particular initiative (e.g. a commons initiative). Important is that this part is directly connected to the practice of farmers and that has the potential to improve it.
- **Reflexive part:** The reflexive part focuses on the challenges and problems related to the practice. This reflection looks not only at the immediate barriers (e.g. how do I obtain materials to do a certain practice) but also at the more systemic ones (e.g. policies or attitudes that hamper the use of these practices). Important here is to create a collective sense of awareness of the root causes of these problems.
- **Informal part:** The Boerenvuur ends with an informal part. Often it includes drinks, local foods and sitting by a campfire.



Boerenvuur in greenhouse at Roggebotsaete in 2020.

The Boerenvuur activities are mostly self-funded and self-organized and sometimes supported by local or European projects.

OTHER INITIATIVES IN THE NETHERLANDS

As a farmer, you can follow official training but also get knowledge and skills through farmer exchanges, courses, on-farm internships or apprenticeships, as well as online resources.

- **The Warmonderhof** is a practically oriented educational institution (MBO) focused on the basics of biodynamic farming. It offers three programmes: crop farming, livestock farming or urban farming – which can be followed full-time in 4 years. The school also offers a 2-year, part-time programme for people that have already completed a study in the past. The training programmes consist of courses, practicals and internships.
- Several **small courses** on agroecology are offered by individual farmers, or educational and research institutes. Many of these give an introduction to or a deepening of a particular topic. Examples of courses include agroecological transformation, making traditional goats cheese and keeping pigs in the forest, commons, composting and fermenting rest streams and agroecology and food sovereignty. Offered by **Toekomstboeren, Agroecology Network Netherlands, De Ommuurde Tuin, Doetie's Geiten, Varkens in het Bos** and others.
- **Internships/apprentices** There are several internships and apprenticeships based on arrangements between a supervising farm and a student farmer. Internships and apprenticeships consist of doing day-to-day work on the farm under the supervision of an experienced farmer. Most supervising farmers take time to explain and demonstrate things. Some also offer an opportunity to live in a room or a caravan on their property in exchange for the work you do. Arrangements are mostly informal. Coordinated by **Land Gilde, Warmonderhof, Boerengroep, Toekomstboeren.**

The situation in Italy

The profession of “farmer” is not juridically recognized. The only legal reference talks about agricultural entrepreneurs, comparing all persons owning a farming activity without distinguishing between cultivated or property extensions, income, and crops. The current legislation does not consider the objectives and problems of different types of farmers.

After the approval of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (2018), an international definition of “farmer” was established followed by all the countries under the UN, including Italy. Following this Declaration, in May 2021, a new law was proposed to protect and enhance farming and promote agroecology, as well as agricultural diversity and highlight the farmer as an agent in the protection of the environment and the fight against climate change (PdI 1825-1968-2905-A/2021).

To start a business and become an agricultural entrepreneur, it is necessary to have specific agricultural professional knowledge, either through a diploma or degree, have been farming for at least three years, or have attended specific regional training. Despite this basic training required to set up and run a farm, farmers have expressed concern that they are insufficiently informed about the legal tools available to them to access the many opportunities and supports that are useful for improving



Photo: Avv. Isabelle Hoop

BioBagnolese multifunctional livestock farm in Orte, in the Biodistrict of Via Amerina e Delle Forre, Viterbo province, Italy



Agroecological poultry farm (“Azienda Cupidi”) in Gallese in the Biodistrict of Via Amerina e Delle Forre, Viterbo province, Italy

and promoting their activity. The difficulty in understanding and following the intricate bureaucracy to manage these legal tools often represents a limit to farmers (Morresi F. 2021. Com’è essere un giovane agricoltore nell’Italia del 2021. https://www.fruitgourmet.it/2021/06/come-essere-un-giovane-agricoltore-nellitalia-del-2021/)

To become an agricultural entrepreneur only formal training is recognized. To be able to provide state--recognized (and funded) training, an organization needs to be registered in the official national system. Official training does not consider farmers’ knowledge as a credible source of knowledge and represent important costs for the government. The lack of



International training of Global governance of food and agriculture, organized by Schola Campesina in BioBagnolese farm (2017).



BAG meeting at BioBagnolese farm, Italy (2022).

adequate training for agroecological farmers is a major challenge in the country. As a new entrant, you will have to struggle to gain access to knowledge, skills and competences, and you will find it best informally among your neighbours, friends and relatives.

Italian initiatives: Training on the global governance of food and agriculture by Schola Campesina

What is Schola Campesina?

Schola Campesina is an international agroecology school, based in Italy, which develops activities to facilitate knowledge sharing amongst small-scale food producers' organizations (peer-to-peer training, online platform, Community of Practice on agroecology). The organized training is often dedicated to the global governance of food and agriculture, but is also dedicated to agroecology in general to raise awareness on the value of field practices and the potential of agroecology to defend and promote farmers' rights, and sometimes is dedicated to a specific topic such as seed saving, always put in relation with the broader picture of farmers' rights and international instruments.

Here below is a description of **THE COURSE ON THE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE,** which has been held in autumn 2017 and represents a base for all our future training courses.

Photo: Schola Campesiena, Isabelle Hagel

Target group

The training is inspired by the experiences of the agroecology schools of La Via Campesina where **popular education and horizontal exchanges are leading the process of learning.** The training is directed to organizations only and does not seek to attract individuals. The organiza-tions are the backbone of agroecology and these training courses are a tool to enhance and skill collective action. Based in Italy, the training welcomes participating organizations from many different countries, with higher attention put on youth and women participation.

Horizontal learning method:

The training can be considered as an international meeting of peasant organization members to promote and share the knowledge of food producers where each participant is expected to share knowledge and experiences in a peer-to-peer perspective as well as learn from other participants and invited speakers. The invited speakers – acknowledged for their specific expertise – are expected to learn from the participants and inversely in a horizontal dialogue. During the training, the participants are the ones that introduce the topics and report from the discus-sions, they are never assessed on their capacity but are fully recognized as knowledge-holder.

The dialogue of knowledge (Dialogo de saberes) is also of great importance in the activities that give a place to academia, researchers and activists. The diverse kind of knowledge meet and dialogue for enhanced understanding of the food systems and related actions for agroecology. Thanks to the close distance between the farms where the training is held and Rome (where UN bodies related to food and agriculture are based), the participating organizations can benefit from the specific knowledge of international activists (coming to Rome for international meetings and events).

Cinema, music, popular dancing, collective cooking, poetry and literature are also included to express the feelings related to agroecology.

Content:

The training is structured in 5 modules that cover the 11 pillars of agroecology (Nyéléni Declaration):
Module 1 Get to know each other, build a trustfull relation with every participant (interpreters and other people dedicated to the logistic part of the training are fully considered as a participant too) and presentation of the training process, framework and methodology.
Module 2 Socio-economy of food systems. This module focus on global governance and decision--making processes related to food and agriculture at the global level. It also deals with how food policies are set up at regional and sub-regional levels. The module wants to highlight the structure, the logics and the power relations that characterize the current food system.
Module 3 Agriculture, agroecological production and processing. This module deals with agroecolo-



Crops from the own farm are the best animal feeding. BAG meeting at BioBagnolese, Italy, (2022).

gical practices including biodiversity, the link of farms with the ecosystems, life cycle, composting, multi-cropping and agroforestry, agroecological management of natural resources, seeds and forgotten varieties, and raw product transformation. **Module 4 Territories and Communities.** This important module focuses on peasants' knowledge and collective identity as well as community autonomy. The module focuses on ways of dissem-inating agroecology and present among others the "campesino a campesino" method and the Italian system of Biodistretto and the role of the territory. The importance of women in our organizations and agricultural activities is also part of this module. **Module 5 Peasant's empowerment.** The module set up tools for knowledge sharing after the training and to bring the knowledge shared during the training to the local organizations.

OTHER INITIATIVES IN ITALY

- The master of Agroecology and Food sovereignty of the University of Gastronomic Sciences of Pollenzo is a study programme opened in 2020 that brings students to rural communities and farms while promoting a systemic and action-based approach.
- **Itinerant Experimental School of Organic agriculture** (province of Padova) suggest a **1-year training** – opened in 2006 – **for future organic multifunctional small-scale farmers.** The course is mainly taught by established farmers.
- Sant'Anna School of Advanced Study of Pisa offers a 4-years PhD **Programme in Agrobiodiversity** to improve sustainability and biodiversity conservation in agriculture.
- The "Participatory AgroEcology School System – PASS" **of the University of Bologna** suggests a **Summer School of AgroEcology,** in cooperation with other universities.
- Scuola diffusa della Terra Emilio Sereni aims to provide tomorrow's farmers with the basis for putting into practice an agricultural model based on the reduction of the ecological footprint, the closure of production cycles and the develop-ment of local and sustainable supply chains.
- Comitato Fa' la Cosa Giusta! Sicilia organizes **courses to increase the knowledge and practices of Agroecology.**
- Practical school of Agroecology "Valdibella" in Sicily
- Genuino Clandestino: A network that forms a participatory guaranteed system (PGS) of small holders farmers.

Photo: AW

Conclusions

- **Agroecology training programmes in the formal education system (state-recognized) are inexistent or very limited in most the countries**
- **The ones existing do not address agroecology in all its dimensions but are mainly dedicated to the ecological production of food. Adequate training in agroecology covers very different dimensions of food systems, starting from Human Rights to the importance of collective action, territorial autonomy with self-governed markets, the relation with land and Nature, and the transformation of the society for more equity; while recognizing the central role of women and youth in the food systems.**
- **Agroecology recognizes the central importance of farmers' knowledge and promotes the horizontal dialogue with other kinds of knowledge such as academia. Existing formal education rarely takes into account the knowledge of farmers. The examples of HNEE and Rheinau above described are exceptions in their country.**

The gaps in the formal education system are addressed – at the level of their means – by different initiatives emerging in Europe (some of which are described above). The following section presents pathways to further address these gaps.

Social innovations and knowledge sharing in key areas for agroecology

Having presented the different dimensions of Agroecology in Part 1 of this guidebook (Nyéléni 11 pillars); then, having presented existing initiatives to make knowledge – on these variety of dimensions – circulate; this section is highlighting some thematic areas that we believe are worth to get more attention, more knowledge development, more innovations and more exchanges.

These areas of work have been identified for one or more of the following reasons: they represent URGENT concerns due to the environmental and climate degradation, the social crisis (migration, indecent jobs,..), the economic crisis (energy cost increase, job degradation, unsustainable speculation on food products,...) AND/ OR they represent issues, where knowledge and skills are today, particularly LACKING AND/ OR they represent extraordinary LEVERAGE to advance agroecology.

The Students' and Farmers' perspectives from the Ecological Folk High School (Poland) *See full testimonies in Annex 1*

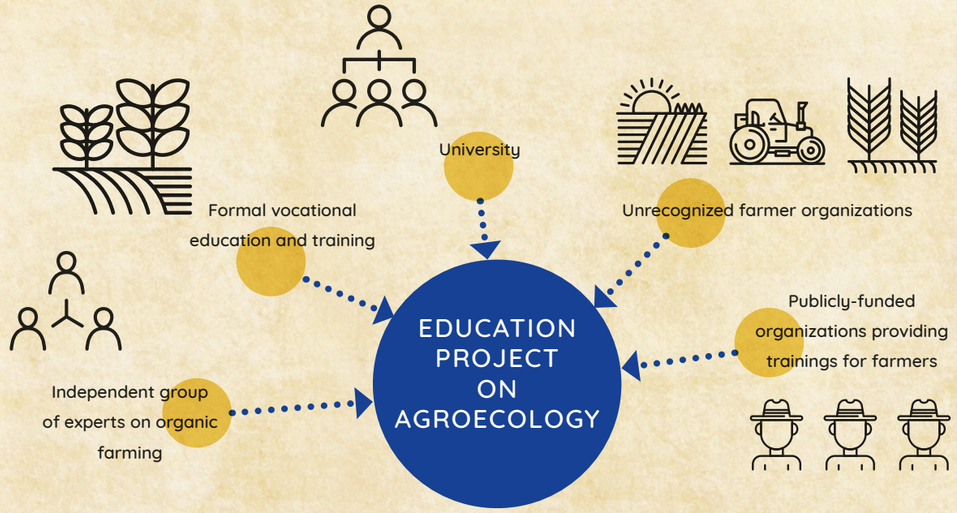
« **Jola:** Our teachers share their knowledge with us because they want to share it, it is their passion and a way of life. Teachers are open to discussion, and also – to criticism. There is no place for hierarchical relations between "a professor" and "a student". I have a feeling that we form a community and together with teachers we create a teaching program.

Nina: For me, it is important that we can cocreate our school and programme of consecutive meetings. I don't feel like a student, I feel that I am a partner for our teachers in mutual learning.

Mateusz: Folk High School has a unique character, it does not restrict its students by imposing an education program. (...)Teachers inspire us to experience and improve knowledge independently. This approach helps me to develop myself freely.

Joanna B.: We also get some space where we can share our experiences. Emphasis on internships and direct contact with teachers-practitioners was a lacking element in my former educational experiences. Now I see that it gives me the possibility to choose my own, individual path, and many possibilities to learn cooperation. »

The approach underlying each of the following topics is the sharing of knowledge and the co-creation of innovations, which includes a horizontal pedagogy fundamentally different from the predominant vertical pedagogy in the existing formal training as described above and in Annex 1 with the testimony collected by the Ecological Folk High School in Poland. Agroecology is intrinsically linked to horizontal learning processes. Learners are actively participating and exchanging amongst themselves and with "teachers".



Images used for the graphs: stas111, ylivdesign – stock.adobe.com

• Collaboration between different knowledge hubs.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT KIND OF EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

The initiatives presented in this guidebook benefit from diverse levels of recognition by governments, ministries of education or agricultural authorities. Some of our initiatives are not recognized at all and progress in the informal sphere, others benefit from public funding while being excluded from the formal training process to become a farmer, and others – like the Swiss master in Biodynamic agriculture in Rheinau *(see Swiss initiatives, p.48)* – benefit from a recognition (after many years of request) and are part of the formal education system (even though they need to struggle continuously to maintain it).

The collaboration between different kinds of educational initiatives – including those that are still not institutionalized nor recognized – is critical to move toward a more adequate and accessible education system for agroecology. Unrecognized – or not fully recognized – initiatives have gained valuable experience and knowledge on different critical topics where formal education is very weak: farmer's autonomy in accountancy, farmer's voice in governance processes, local policies for local food systems, solidarity markets and community supported agriculture, participatory action research based on farmers' challenges, nature observation, strategies to face the difficult access to land, etc. The collaboration of these initiatives with

the formal education system could greatly enrich the education of farmers; both in their vocational education as well as in their lifelong education.



• Interactions between scientist and farmers.

MULTIPLYING AND IMPROVING INTERACTIONS BETWEEN SCIENTISTS AND FARMERS

An essential aspect is also to strengthen the relationship between the academic world and the world of farming. More understanding, collaboration and dialogue are needed, recognizing the central role of farmers' knowledge in sustainable food systems. Local challenges and needs related to food production and reported by food producers should be addressed with the expertise that scientists can provide. Too few collaborations of this kind exist in Europe.

In earlier years, science saw itself as autonomous and took care to maintain strict separation from society or practitioners. It was mainstream that the transfer of knowledge generated by science was done through extension workers to farmers. In recent years, this understanding of science has changed more and more. Today, there is a greater focus on the application context of knowledge, listening more to the needs of practitioners or involving them directly in the creation of new knowledge. Communication and transfer of knowledge are no longer a one-way street but take place in both directions.

The research approach behind this is called action research or participatory action research. In this approach, social actors participate in the research process as co-researchers and at the same time experience individual and collective empowerment (von Unger, 2014). Participatory action research -where farmers' knowledge is central- represents important leverage for devel-oping the needed innovations to bring sustainability to our food systems.

There are many examples of this approach today, not only from agriculture.

In Germany, the HNE Eberswalde conducts many research projects using this approach (*see "German initiatives", p. 54*). For example, from 2018 to 2022, it was involved in an action research process with the "Regionales Biogemüse aus Brandenburg" (Regional organic vegetables from Brandenburg) project, which supported and researched the learning process in an emerging agri-food value chain in the Berlin--Brandenburg region in eastern Germany.

There is a great demand for local and organic food in the region around the city of Berlin. However, the structure of the agri-food system prevents local actors from exploiting the potential for local value



Peer-to-peer counselling on organic vegetable cultivation on a producer's farm.

Photo: Stephan Bögel

creation associated with this demand, especially in the organic vegetable sector.

The project formed a learning network to bring together a group of actors from the agri-food system – farmers, food processors and traders – supported by a facilitation team consisting of academic researchers and staff from a local advocacy group for organic agriculture. The members of the learning network wanted to gain a better understanding of these problems and develop a sustainable agri-food value chain that benefits all stakeholders equally.

Since the establishment of the learning network, the process has led to a number of improvements in production and logistics, as well as the formation of partnerships and joint ventures in the organic vegetable sector in the region. The network's experience can serve as an example of how organisational learning can be promoted between actors in local agricultural and food systems.

Links and resources:

Website: https://www.biogemuese-brandenburg.de/

Charis Linda Braun, Vera Bitsch & Anna Maria Häring (2022): Behind the scenes of a learning agri-food value chain: lessons from action research. Agric Hum Values 39, 119–134 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-021-10229-7

Charis Linda Braun, Vera Bitsch & Anna Maria Häring (2022): Developing agri-food value chains: learning networks between exploration and exploitation, The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension, DOI: 10.1080/1389224X.2022.2082499

Hella von Unger (2014). Partizipative Forschung. Einführung in die Forschungspraxis. Springer VS, Wiesbaden. DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-01290-8_1

COMMUNITIES-LED DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

Digitalization in agriculture (including precision agriculture, etc.) and food systems (including consumer habits, etc.) is increasingly developing. Mainly led by corporations, digital agriculture is shown as the solution to greener conventional farming and is currently not adequate for strengthening small-scale agriculture and agroecology and, even more, is contributing to the decrease in the numbers of farmers.

« Corporate-controlled digital agriculture – implemented by large information and communications technology (ICT), financial technology, and agriculture corporations – leads a form of digitalization that is biased to benefit these corporations; to assimilate producers into markets and supply chains, creating an environment that is compatible with the products these corporations sell ». See more on Food systems and digitalization from a food sovereignty approach (Schola Campesina, 2021)

When using digital tools, actors of local food systems often use existing classical tools Facebook groups, WhatsApp groups, and Google forms...), where data is grabbed and contribute to the economic concentration of big data players. Others switch to more open--source tools. Developing proper digital tools adequate for agroecology represents an important challenge that can be overcome only when combining different knowledge (IT skills, knowledge of farmers and other members of the community). Note that the same occurs for developing adequate equipment for agroecology taken up by l'Atelier paysan in France or Farm Hack (worldwide).

„Digitalization is a tool that can support different objectives. For now, it is supporting the development of the food system that it is derived from and designed for. Bottom-up digitalization, therefore, exists as an alternate way forward for the tool of digitalization in contrast to the corporate model. As part of bottom-up digitalization, food producers must have control of data collection and analysis to ensure that digitalization acts as a positive force in the food system, working for producers and civil society. Horizontally, digitalization can support alliances between different knowledge bases in the food system, strengthening connections between producers to enhance a food system centred on the right to food".

See more on Food systems and digitalization from a food sovereignty approach (Schola Campesina, 2021)

In Italy, Schola Campesina (member of the BAG project) and Jengalab (organisation for community-led digital tools), together with a network of organisations in the countries of the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia, are supporting the development of a digital platform for sharing knowledge in a trusted and secure online space. Bilim platform has been launched in the sec-ond half of 2022 for the benefit of communities and their organizations. Community--led digital tools are rare but promising tools for knowledge sharing in agroecology. Sharing these initiatives is well needed today.

«Bilim is the first interregional and multilingual digital platform focused entirely on agroecology, bridging the gap between traditional knowledge and technological tools for sharing it. It is made by the community of agroecology schools and small-scale farmers' organisations from Europe and Central Asia (ECA). The ECA agroecology network supports coordinated advocacy work for agroecology, the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Right of Peasants and Other People working in rural ares (UNDROP) and the pursuit of food sovereignty.
Built on 11 Pillars of the Nyéléni Declaration on Agroecology, Bilim promotes co-learning, horizontal knowledge sharing and political capacity building at the national and regional level to solve local problems caused by the agro-industrial food model and to foster change towards a fairer society. »

www.bilim.network

SHARE KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION TO SELL THE PRODUCTS FAIRLY

Direct sales, regional markets, farmers' shops, cooperatives, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), etc. and other models of local and viable markets are rapidly developing in Europe and experimented an extraordinary increase during the Covid pandemic when people were looking for resilient food provision (Urgenci, 2021). New entrants in agriculture are often looking for more sustainable economic models, better and closer relationships with consumers and more autonomy in terms of external services (e.g. accounting, extension services, etc.). Long food chains and export-oriented agriculture are becoming less attractive, partly because of the lack of control over selling prices and the lack of autonomy in terms of knowledge and skills. Social innovation, a return to earlier models such as regional markets and the



StreekWaar Wageningen – Dutch exsample of fair trade, local community market.

Photo: Isabelle Hagel

Solidarity short food chains in France

Most of the CSAs that exist in France are called AMAP, which means association for the preservation of small-scale agriculture. They are based on trust and risk sharing between consumers and farmers thanks to a two-way contract: consumers buy part of the total annual production by committing to pay for a certain share of that production each month. This system ensures farmers a stable and adequate income, regardless of climatic or seasonal variations, and allows them to sell everything without having to manage waste or unsold products. These two advantages allow them to take risks or otherwise invest in their agricultural activity: to initiate a conversion to make the farm more independent in terms of seeds or inputs, to build infrastructure to receive consumers or tourists, etc. On the other hand, consumers can support agroecological farms concretely and financially by eating organic, locally produced food and buying these products directly from farmers who respect ethical guidelines.

Useful resources on Community Supported Agriculture are available on Urgenci website https://hub.urgenci.net/houses/csa-house/

sharing of experiences in this area are clearly needed. The creation of local and solidarity markets – where local authorities play an important role through public procurement – is nowadays a lever for the autonomy, resilience and sustainability of regions. This implies new ways of working, communicating and organising that are worth sharing to inspire others.

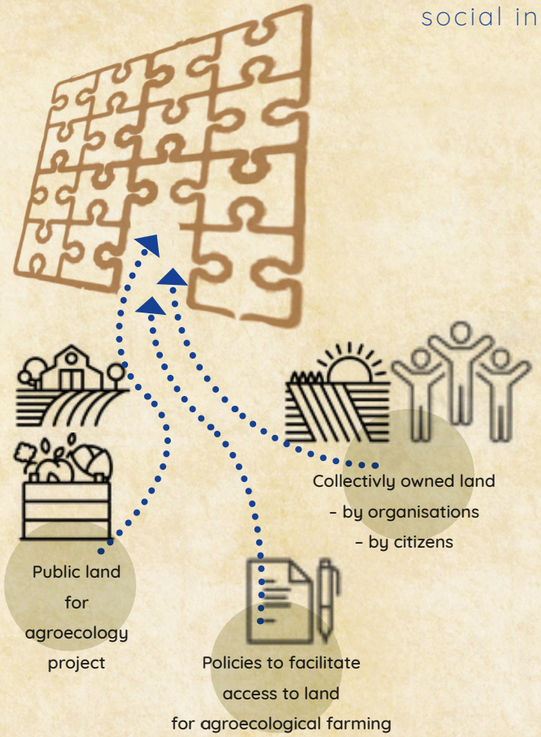
Wioletta's interview "Agriculture needs co-responsibility" *See full interview in Annex 3*

„My first choice was food co-operatives. I initiated one in Częstochowa. I felt that Community Supported Agriculture was such an innovative model and it was so different from a co-op or shopping in a supermarket, shop or market that I decided to initially talk about CSA in the co-op so that people would get used to the fact that there was such a thing. We could experience together that the farm does not belong only to the farmer and that the co-responsibility for the farm, this co-creation, should belong to the whole community, but not on a supportive basis. Maybe I don't know the exact etymology of the word 'support'. In English it has a slightly different connotation. Agriculture does not need any support. Agriculture needs cooperation, co-responsibility.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO LAND FOR AGROECOLOGY

Access to land is a challenge faced by many new farmers in Europe, but also for long-established farmers who do not own land but rent it. Although the number of farms in Europe is decreasing, most of the land does not become available to new farmers but concentrates in the hands of farms that are becoming larger and larger. The land is often too expensive for new farmers, with competing sectors such as tourism and solar parks driving up the price of land and with public policies supporting scale enlargement, etc. In many countries renting land is also difficult because national legislation does not protect the rights of tenants. In the Netherlands for example tenure legislation only gives the farmer the guarantee that they can stay on the land for one year (see story below). Secure access to land is important for agroecology. It not only provides farmers with a stable livelihood but also enables them to make long-term and sustainable investments, such as improving the soil or planting trees.

Toekomstboeren (*see p. 60 "Dutch initiatives"*) and allies seek to reverse the unequal dis-tribution of and create new models for access to land. An example in France is **Terre de Liens** (and the sister organization in Belgium **Terre-en-Vue**), an association of citizens and farmers that buys land and makes it available to new farmers, mainly through citizens' savings. Another example is **Kulturland,** an orga-nization in Germany financed by citizens who purchase land and secure it for sustainable agriculture. Kulturland exists for 10 years and has invested about 10 million euros to buy 391 hectares on which 26 farms are established. In the Netherlands, there are many smaller initiatives, often driven by individual farmers. Together with citizens these farmers buy land and bring it under a collective property. Citizens become shareholders of the farm or the land is brought under a foundation.



• Access to land

There are many other land initiatives around the world from which there is a lot to learn.

Toekomstboeren has systematized land initiatives in the Netherlands and created a handbook on them. The handbook guides farmers in setting up their own commons initiative. While land initiatives have also been documented for Europe (such as the excellent publication "Your Land, My Land, Our Land" by Nyeleni) they are descriptive. A more systematized analysis, characterizing, and describing the advan-tages, as well as the disadvantages of different land models in Europe is still lacking. Similarly, a systematization of national land governance arrangements in different EU countries is also lacking: what land rights do farmers have in different countries? What efforts and strategies exist that help us move towards land governance that is more supportive of agroecology?

Links and resources:

Commons handbook Toekomstboeren (in Dutch) https://toekomstboeren.nl/commons/

Nyeleni handbook "Your Land, My Land, Our Land" https://www.foodsovereignty.org/your-land-my-land-our-land-nyeleni-handbook/

ACCESSTOLAND

Useful resources are available on the website of Access to land network https://www.accesstoland.eu/

Story of Maria van Maanen (member of Toekomstboeren, the Netherlands)

This story illustrates some of the land challenges that farmers face. Maria is a first-generation farmer. After studying at a farm school she started a small horticultural farm about 15 years ago in the village of Lunteren. Her landlord did not offer her a contract but only a verbal agreement for the land. He was afraid that a contract would tie him to obligations. Although it took some effort to build it up, the farm became quite successful. She grew diverse vegetables which were sold through different channels including restaurants and organic shops. However, after a few years, the landlord had other plans with the land and Maria had to move. Maria found land in the nearby village of Scherpenzeel, where she was offered a 1-year contract. After 3 years she had to leave again. Maria was becoming tired of moving: "Every time I had to take my family with me and my chil-dren had to change schools. This was no good. We always draw the shortest straw when it comes to negotiating land contracts." Maria is now on her fourth piece of land, where together with her business partner Klarien Klingen she has started the community-supported farm "De Wilde Peen". The farm produces exclusively for its approximately 150 members, who have a subscription to harvest all year round. Although they have a five-year contract and a good rela-tionship with the land owner, Maria is aware that they remain in a vulnerable position and is critical about the way land is governed: "Land has become a commodity but should be common property. Not an object of speculation but ownership by people that have a close relation with it". Together with members of the Wilde Peen Maria and Klarien are exploring ways to buy land collectively.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION TO IMPROVE FARM SUCCESSION FOR AGROECOLOGY

Closely linked to the challenge of access to land for young farmers the process of farm succession is crucial to foster agroecological transition. Farms in Europe are disappearing at a rapid pace and farm succession is often guided by elements out of the control of farmers.

The unequal perceptionsbetween the farmer wishing to retire and the new farmer in terms of farm size, production, type of markets, organic or not organic, more or less diversified farm, etc. can be an insurmoun-table barrier and lead to the expansion of a neighbo-uring farm. The land is therefore more likely to be part of the agro-industrial system.

There is an urgent need to recognise that the process of farm succession can be an opportunity for change (in farm management, type of production, etc.). This recognition would help the farm to follow the path of agroecology instead of disappearing into a larger neighbouring farm. The exchange of knowledge between the older and the new farmers, as well as with other local actors, is an important lever to ensure the succession of the farm.

The key knowledge to be imparted includes steps and key issues of the farm succession process, knowledge related to the farm and the territory surrounding it. The French member organisa-tions of the AFOCG network organise training sessions for retiring farmers on the various aspects of farm handover, while ADEAR organises free meetings to facilitate encounters between new and older farmers and training on farm restructuring to make it easier for a new farmer to take over. These people-to-people meetings – supported by a facilitator who accompanies the hu-man dimension of farm succession – allow farmers to express their concerns more freely and to exchange ideas with others. These kinds of knowledge-sharing initiatives for farm succession are crucial to overcoming obstacles and moving farms towards agroecology.



Organized exchanges between Giancarlo and his grandchild Saverio (farmers of BioBagnolese farm) on the challenges of knowledge transmission and farm succession during the BAG partners' visit (2022).

Photo: Isabelle Hagel

"We told ourselves that it was not feasible given the size of the farm and the constraints for moving animals (road, railway). Bertrand felt that there was no point in looking for a successor."

Monique, from Mayenne (France).

The central role of the retiring farmer and continuous communication with the new farmer taking over the farm are important to maintain the farm in the long term beyond the succession phase.

"The human, psychological factor is very important beyond the knowledge of the place and the farming system. The accompaniment on the relationship side is fundamental. Everyone has an idea in their head. It is important to move forward together and not keep a finished idea in your head. On the handover side, you have to give things away, that's the right word, you have to let go."

Laurence, from Loiret (France)

Links and resources:

Rapport de préconisations d'InPACT, Accompagner la transition agricole en favorisant le renou-vellement des actifs, InPACT, 2019 (France)

Des idées pour transmettre: les dynamiques territoriales qui soutiennent les transmissions, In-PACT, 2019 (France)

Des idées pour transmettre: et si on restructurait des fermes ?, InPACT, 2019 (France)

Useful information in the booklet Tools and methods to promote a successful farm succession available on https://www.interafocg.org/images/imagesFCK/file/thematiques/installaiontransmission/farm_succesion_brochure.pdf

Story of Piotr Hillar (Poland) The challenge of farm succession and how to continue enjoying life

See the full testimony in Annex 2

"The original plan was that we would run our business until we died, perhaps delegating some tasks to younger people. We assumed that we would be fit. But things turned out differently. In the summer of 2019, I suddenly fell ill and ended up in hospital. The prospect of continuing the business even remotely proved impossible. It was then that my wife and I made the decision to sell all our assets and move to the city. Selling everything to a stranger was a pretty sad prospect. We wanted our possessions to be given to a family member. We found a willing, enthusiastic nephew of mine. We rejoiced and sold everything to him on favourable terms, convinced that my wife and I would work with him and that he would be grateful for our gesture for the rest of his life. But life has confirmed this optimism. One year has passed since the sale and I can already draw some conclusions. My first conclusion is that we cannot assume that we will be as fit as we were a decade before. (...) I see that it is not worthwhile to hold on to your farm or business and work intensively until death. (...) In my opinion, succession is even necessary at a certain stage of life. (...) I have also found that we do not need to pass on our property to family members. In fact, we don't get anything out of it. The successors, whether family members or strangers, will act in their own way."

SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION TO MAKE BETTER USE OF SCARCE RESOURCES SUCH AS WATER AND ENERGY

After three years of summer drought in Western Europe and during the war in Ukraine, when Russia has almost stopped gas supplies to Europe, this guide cannot avoid the issue of water and energy. The long food chains are clearly affected and food prices are rising, as is the vulnerability of the population. Local food systems – even if more resilient – are also affected.

Food producers and their organisations urgently need to develop new models of water saving, reduced consumption and energy production, identification of appropriate crops, cooperation and solidarity in times of scarcity, and energy production for collective self-consumption. Innovations are made all over Europe but are poorly shared. More than ever this knowledge has to circulate, and new knowledge and innovations need to be created. Collaboration between scientists, farmers and local authorities is crucial to strengthen the adaptation and resilience of local food systems and territories.

In Italy, the Biodistrict of Via Amerina e delle Forre is part of a Community of Renewable Energy (Comunità Energetiche Rinnovabili) where renewable energy is produced and consumed at the level of a territory. In France, the Centrales villageoises are another example of very citizen-led local renewable energy production and consumption, in close collaboration with the municipality (in Vallée de Quint (Drôme) local electricity production is distributed to 38 households).

SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION TO WELCOME DISPLACED POPULATIONS

Rural areas with a high number of farmers represent a hot spot of resilience where – among other elements of sustainability – food is more likely to remain available in times of crisis. Agroecology, with territorial food systems based on farmers' knowledge and local biodiversity, represents an extraordinary way forward to enable territories in welcoming displaced people.

How do we get organised to build resilient territories able to welcome new people? While some people and organisations are already experiencing this challenge (we have examples of our partners in Poland, Ukraine, Moldova, and Turkey), others are just beginning to think about this challenge. Rural and farmers' organizations, together with scientists and facilitators, should progress in reflecting and exchanging experiences on this emerging challenge.

Agroecology and Displaced Peoples

Conflicts, pandemics and climate change are displacing people who seek asylum, a better future, more robust food systems, as well as safer places with more stable access to resources. Bişar's story with Ekoloji Derneği – a Turkish organization – highlights the immense capacity agroecology has to provide a space for healing and for traditional agricultural practices to be maintained, shared and passed on to those in greatest need.

"In August 2014, thousands of Yazidis had crossed the border from Iraq to Turkey. With the organisation of regional municipalities and people around the town of Diyarbakir, the first welcome was given to the Yazidis crossing the border and they were transferred to provinces and districts in the region. The Şengal Camp was established, and a Yazidi assembly helped organise camp coordination as well as the welcoming of incoming delegations, press statements, demonstrations, commemorations and festivals. Initially, the food was distributed from the food factory, but due to the differences in the food culture of the Yazidis, upon their own request – and thanks to this assembly – the food distribution system was changed.



During a regional workshop on agroecology in May 2022, organised by Ekoloji Dernegi, Turkey.

Photo: Ekoloji Derneği

Since most of the people – especially women – suffered psychosocial traumas both before and during migration; and were facing difficult living conditions in the camps,

including obstacles arising from cultural differences, and feelings of guilt due to their socio-economic inactivity; many studies and activities took place to see how these issues could be minimised in line with the views of the Yazidi people in the camp. As a result of the interviews, it has been determined that most of the Yazidis living in the camp, especially women, were engaged in agricultural activities in their own lands, albeit on a small scale. For this reason, Ekoloji Derneği began to encourage and support small-scale agroecological production throughout the camp.



Schola Campesina met Ekoloji Derneği in Turkey in May 2022 during a regional workshop on agroecology for the community of practice in agroecology of the Central Asia countries and Turkey, coordinated by ADI (Kyrgyzstan), Schola Campesina (Itlay) and Cifti-Sen (Turkey).

Firstly, seeds obtained using traditional methods were collected from the villages. Small-scale orchards were established in suitable places with fertile soil behind and around the tents in the camp. Later, these gardens were expanded by obtaining animal manure and seeds were produced and production areas were created wherever possible, even in pots. Pests and diseases were prevented from areas where agriculture was carried out with traditional, natural medicines. Seedlings were grown from the seeds and offered for free distribution and exchange.

These activities were expanded when positive results were obtained in terms of the adaptation of the Yazidi people. 125 gardens were created in the camp. Tomatoes, peppers, melons and greens were grown. Hundreds of small poultry were bought and poultry houses were built in the camp. An adobe house was built together with the youth in the camp and used as a seed distribution centre. Active involvement in these activities – especially women and young people – was seen as an important field of activity as it would enable them not to think about what they were going through.

It has been observed that the socio-economic dimension, which has become the biggest problem of migration and refugee, can be overcome by ensuring their active participation in agriculture. Reducing the feeling of being away from their own land and contributing to the country where they are seeking asylum, while transferring their knowledge and experience; enabled psychologically positive developments of displaced women farmers."

Bişar İçli, Ekoloji Derneği Diyarbakır

Photo: Ekoloji Derneği, AW

Policy measures to facilitate knowledge sharing for agroecology

Alessio Cupidi shows chicken food – how spices like cinnamon regulate their digestion. Lucas Worsdell on the right.



Tuinderij de ES – a farm and community of hundred of co-owners – has it's own meeting hall and the shop.



Biodynamic Gardening school Hünibach. Director Marianna Serena speaks of the gardening methods.

The following proposals for policy measures emerged from this project and were identified in our different contexts as appropriate levers to promote knowledge sharing for agroecology.

A Better recognition by the respective countries and their support of existing agroecology initiatives for co-creation and sharing of knowledge and the actors behind these initiatives.

● Policies should recognise existing informal initiatives – organised by non-institutional ac-tors with valuable experience in training farmers in agroecology – as knowledge institutions. The actors behind these initiatives should also be recognized and supported for the work accomplished so far in designing and providing adequate training for resilient and sustainable food systems through agroecology, with horizontal and peer-to-peer education and learning systems.

● Policy interventions can facilitate access to basic, grassroots, community-based and diversified education, training and capacity-building initiatives specifically for youth. They promote participatory and inclusive engagement and empowerment.

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B The inclusion of agroecology in its entirety in the formal education system, both within vocational training and further education.

● Existing courses in the formal education system do not address agroecology in all its dimensions, but are mainly dedicated to organic food production. Appropriate training in agroecology, on the other hand, should cover very different dimensions of food systems, from human rights to the importance of collective action, territorial autonomy with self-managed markets, the relationship with land and nature, the transformation of society towards more justice that also recognises the central role of women and youth in food systems. A food systems approach is needed to address the increasing and worrying challenges.

(See p.18, Nyéléni Declaration –11 pillars of Agroecology.)

C Advances in pedagogy, from top-down to horizontal learning processes where the knowledge of food producers is recognised as central and where youth are given the chance to actively shape change.

● Policies should recognise the centrality of small-scale food producers in co-creating knowledge and encourage horizontal dialogue with other types of knowledge such as academic knowledge. Farmer training should be based on concrete examples from practice and the experiences of older farmers and rural communities in order to share the existing experiences of the local economy. That would lead to multiplying and improving interactions between scientists and farmers *(See pp.70-82, about Social innovations and knowledge sharing in key areas for agroecology)*.

● Policies should focus on the role and priorities of youth in education. Public research and education should be reoriented to strengthen the capacity to act ("capacity to be agent") of youth and respond to their training needs to qualify them to transform food systems towards greater sustainability.

● Public policies should promote participatory research, as small-scale food producers play a key role in research and development. The current imbalance in investment and research leadership between the public and private sectors should be addressed by promoting participatory, public-led research where farmers can set their priorities.

D Promote, organise and finance cooperation between the existing, but so far poorly recognised, grassroots and diversified education and the formal education system. *See Collaboration between formal and informal educational initiatives, p. 71*

E Create new spaces for knowledge sharing specifically between different generations, for displaced peoples, and young farmers.

● The creation of spaces for intercultural and interge-nerational knowledge sharing between farmers, especially in rural spaces is fundamental to addressing the complex challenges of climate change, rural depopulation and loss of ecological knowledge. The policy should be strongly dedicated to supporting initiatives, such as agroecological schools, to ensure the resilience of our food systems.

● The policy should look to nature agroecological practices and organisations that support refugees and displaced peoples both in camps, and in migrant communities. Enjoying traditional foods, saving seeds, and having access to land and resources can improve conditions and wellbeing as well as celebrate culture, heritage and intergenerational knowledge exchanges between peoples.

F Provide a dedicated fund for lifelong learning for food producers.

The art of knowledge exchange from the perspective of students and farmers at the Ecological Folk High School in Grzybów (Poland)

The knowledge transfer in agroecology seems a real art. Nowadays some people are convinced you can learn anything from online courses, they say: everything is on the internet. But certain topics like agroecology, have so much to do with real life, that they never can be taught just in front of the computer. We need to touch the soil, sense the smell of flowers and ...manure, and listen to the sound of roots growing deep below... But most of all we need other people, those who have spent their lives caring for the piece of land they had been bestowed upon – the farm. The farmers, masters, and „artists" have learned how to paint the rural landscape, and how to care for the living soil, so it feeds millions of mi-croorganisms, plants and animals, but also the farmer, their family and the customers. Below you can find a wide range of quotations from the students and farmers-educators from our Ecological Folk High School in Grzybow, where we teach agroecology during two years of organic agriculture courses, with 14 months of internship on different organic farms.The quotations have been gathered by our student Agnieszka Makowska (who later became a tutor of the third group of our students and nowadays runs a small farm herself) and external evaluators.
A summary was written by Peter Stratenwerth, who has been working in agroecology for the last 40 years.

The perspective of the students

Specifics of folk high school knowledge transfer

Agnieszka: When I decided to start education at the Ecological Folk High School, I did not know what a folk high school is. For me, it was just a form of nonformal education and a place where I could acquire knowledge about agriculture.
In the beginning, I didn't even pay too much attention to the fact that I would need to devote most of my time to working on a farm somewhere in Poland. And yet I knew that it would require my time and engagement, so I faced the fact that I would need to quit my current job. Anyway, I chose the school in Grzybów mai nly because that was the only one that offered a course in organic agriculture and I hoped to fulfil my dreams of studying it.
Already at the first meeting, I understood that it is a totally different place, compared to those that I had known before. (...) Becoming a student once again at the age of 40, I discovered that learning is one of the most important and wonderful experiences in life. Grzybów gave me a place and a community, fostering my will to study and learn from one another.

The teacher-student relationship

Ola: The most important thing in our folk high school is the teacher--student relationship. I can learn from people who have my respect and I see a great value in the ideas they pass on. Nobody is controlling me, there are no exams. I learn the way that best suits me. The EUL School offers a completely different system compared to what I knew from my former education.
Sebastian: The most important issue is the possibility to learn from teachers. When we began education in the folk high school, we actually had no idea what we wanted to know, and now we can learn from teachers, we can listen to them not only during lectures, but we can also work with them and live under one roof during meetings and internships.
Jola: Our teachers share their knowledge with us because they want to share it, it is their passion and a way of life. Teachers are open to discussion, and also – to criticism. There is no place for ex-cathedra statements nor hierarchical relations between "a professor" and "a student". I have a feeling that we form a community and together with teachers we create a teaching program. For instance, additional classes on permaculture were organised at our request, even though initially they were not included in the program.
Nina: For me being able to shape our school and the programme of successive meetings together is important. I don't feel like a student, I feel that I am a partner for our teachers in mutual learning.
Maciej: At other schools the knowledge is passed on directly, just to memorize it, pass the exams and get the diploma. In EUL, we have more independent work on the topic. Teachers do not push us to choose one specific theory or area of knowledge, we have to work on it by ourselves, but it gives us more chances for personal growth. The partnership between teachers and students
Joanna B.: The thing that differentiates folk high school is its cognitive process. First, we get vivid information which inspires us to do research in different areas and look for the answers to many questions: e.g. what really interests us. We also get some space where we can share our experiences. Emphasis on internships and direct contact with teachers-practitioners was a lacking element in my former educational experiences. Now I see that it gives me the possibility to choose my own, individual path, and many possibilities to learn cooperation.
Ewa: For me, a folk high school is a place to learn about building community, relationships and cooperation in a group. I began to rediscover long-forgotten questions, to engage in discussions not only about agriculture but often also about fundamental human issues, to realise myself in artistic projects. Suddenly I started to pick herbs and wild fruits, felting, carpentry or vegetable and fruit fermentation. And I don't have to be perfect at it. I try, make mistakes, but what's important – I let myself do this.

In farming, you have to learn all your life

Agnieszka: I sowed, planted, weeded, harvested. I processed,

packed, and sold. I fed, led to the pasture, and milked. But of course, I know that the EUL won't transform me into a real farmer in two years. All the farmers and practitioners whom I have met in the folk high school repeat that agriculture is a very specific field. You acquire the knowledge you need your whole life, all the time learning something new. All the time you have to cooperate with nature, and it does not always respond according to our plans. It has its own rhythm which we should learn to read and humbly defer. Very often we got irritated that there are no simple answers and formulas for working in the field, with plants and animals. We would like to get unambiguous formulas and solutions for agricultural success. And every time we required it from our teachers, we received the same answer: in agriculture, unambiguous answers do not exist.

Bartek: In my opinion, our course is based on basic issues and I will still need to learn a lot from my own mistakes. On the other hand, if I hadn't gotten to the EUL, I would not know where to start. Here I get a possibility to look more widely at agriculture, and see different farms, specializing in different crops or farm animals. And this enables me at least for now to be sure of what I don't want to do.

Kasia: In my case, I feel that EUL School prepares me for work on a farm. I came here with a plan: I want to work with goat husbandry and food processing. I have a farm which has already started to work. In EULI have a possibility to check what I want to do and to get practical skills.

Mateusz: I treat Ecological Folk High School as a seed that has been sowed. Now it is all up to me how I will take care of this. I think it is a very good method – I got the most important guidelines, and from now I will look for more by myself. In the folk high school we got the courage to act and start farming

Agnieszka P.: There are no two identical pieces of ground and no two identical places. Agriculture is a very specific field. We could travel 10 years more to different farms, and then get a piece of land and suddenly it would turn out that we need to learn everything anew. Therefore, the Ecological Folk High School is a place that encourages me to be open to different possibilities rather than specifically preparing me to become a farmer. I used to live in the countryside where I had a few hectares of land and several possibilities to make use of them. Still, I didn't know how to work on it. At the moment I have enough courage to experiment and start working.

Jola: From EUL School we got the courage to act. We hadn't had in-depth knowledge but we decided to till, sow and harvest on our farm. If we had been all alone, we would have never taken such a challenge right at the beginning.

Sebastian: For me, Ecological Folk High School is an incredible idea because what counts here is not only organic agriculture, but broadly understood ecology. And it is not bad if any of us won't have our own farm in the future. We can act for ecology also in a different way, by raising awareness amongst people, even in our closest neighbourhood. Constant dripping wears the stone, and thanks to us and through us, the knowledge can spread over the world.

The discovery of relationship with Nature

Agnieszka: In Ecological Folk High School I have found an important place and people who will have huge impact on my life. Those people and this place inspire me to act, help to look at myself from a different perspective. I discovered an almost spiritual relationship with the world of animals. I love taking care, touching and talking to cows, goats, and hens. A wonderful discovery was for me the awareness of connections within the world of nature, that a handful of soil contains a million creatures!

Agnieszka R.: The thing that had the biggest influence on me during the first year at EUL School is the approach to the soil. Our classes about the soil and almost metaphysical approach of our teachers to the ground opened my mind to totally new things. This new view on nature, the structure of plants, their functions, and seeing the unity within the world of nature were shocking experiences for me. It is also crucial that I have a place and people to talk about it.

Mateusz: EUL School has really changed my perception of what agriculture is. I have a totally different outlook on my life in the countryside now. I look at it more humbly, but I also cannot imagine a different way of life for me anymore. My life is often full of chaos, and here I learn to be more systematic and scrupulous. The family and the animals on the farm, all this requires responsibility every day.

Emilia: At the moment there is one valuable thing that I can name given to me by EUL School. It is a place and community which gave me the possibility to follow my passion. For a long time, organic agriculture was very important to me, but I didn't know how I could make it real. Even though I travelled to many places where I got to know schools of biodynamical agriculture, I still lacked land where I could sow my seed so that it could grow and sprout. Like dandelion seeds spread by the wind to different places. I waited several years and finally, in EUL School I got such a ground, I have people, schedule, knowledge, specific place where I can make my dreams come true.

Passion, enjoyment and community

Daniel: The farmer who hosted me during my internship, shared, his extremely valuable, knowledge, experience and passion for organic farming with me for free, in the morning, at noon and in the evening after supper. After two days I realised that I cannot leave even one day unrecorded (the apprenticeship journal of EUL Students we were given in Grzybów would not suffice for even 20% of that what I note down). So I write, sketch and draw on different pieces of paper and staple them all together later. From the very beginning, Marek threw me in at the deep end: light harrowing, weeder harrowing, working with combined cultivator or planting potatoes with a planter, are some of the jobs I was doing on my own.

I get a briefing as to what and how to do, I am "supervised" for a moment, and then Marek says: "you're doing well" and I am left alone on the field. That probably really testifies to the great trust that is placed in me every day as an agricultural novice. It was only here, during this apprenticeship, that I realised how much responsibility it is to breed and keep the animals, as they have to be cared for every day, practically from morning to night. Feeding, changing of bedding, repeatedly putting animals out to pasture and rounding them up, or even help and assistance with injuries or illnesses.
You cannot go on vacation or take sick leave, there are no holidays or "long weekends". Animals need our work and the time we devote to them every day. Growing plants is the same. The pace of a farmer's life is determined by the series of various processes and tasks that come one after another and they dictate when he/she will have some rest. When work piles up so that there is no breathing space for weeks, one has to learn to live with being tired when falling asleep and waking up, with no right to have even one day off "on request". The most inspiring thing which makes it possible to somehow bear all this daily toil and moil is the harmony that seems to exist between the organic farm and the environment, the nature. "Sometimes you have to share your crop with the wild nature" – Marek keeps telling me and I see the deep sense in his words.

Sebastian: Our conventions, classes and internships – all this sowed a seed in me and now I know that when the right moment comes, it will sprout. All the information and skills acquired here are valuable to me. I mostly enjoy simple things, e.g. I learned to milk goats and mow with a scythe. Maybe in the future, I will harvest my land in a more archaic way, without maximisation of profit, saving as much sustainability as possible. For that reason I'm glad we had all classes on crafts, felting, and candle making, it is what will be needed in my simple life.

Ola: Finally I'm doing what I like. It gives me a lot of enjoyment. Everything started to fit in the best way, just like jigsaw puzzles, creating something like a path which I know I should follow. I acquired a lot of courage and self-confidence, a lot of acceptance. I noticed a lot of possibilities that I want to use and implement. Fear that I had miraculously disappeared and I am confident that I will get everything I want to have. Because the only limitations are that inside of me, and I can fight with them.

Krzysztof: For me, people are the most important. EUL School gave me a possibility to get to know people with a similar worldview, and approach to life and nature.

The perspective of the farmers

• Why did you agree to get involved in Ecological Folk High School as teaching farmers?

Bogdan: I grew up on a traditional farm and I learned agriculture from my parents. For 35 years I have managed the farm inherited from them, I have constantly invested in it and develop it, which ensures me that I am a good farmer and I can and should transfer my skills to my heirs and also other people who want to acquire the knowledge needed to manage a traditional and organic farm.

Joanna: Together with my husband we graduated from agricultural schools in Switzerland, Frank from vocational school and me from biodynamical agriculture school. In Switzerland, there is a very long tradition of practice-based learning, when an apprentice, while working, learns from a master. When we heard that there was an idea in Poland to set up such a school for farmers, we naturally wanted to participate in the project. Especially in Poland there is no other possibility to learn agriculture through practice. And it is impossible to learn how to plough or sow by sitting at a desk. Simultaneously we think that after several decades of practising agriculture and many years of managing the farm, we can transfer our knowledge to others.

• What does it mean to teach new farmers?

Joanna: During the internship, we can show what we do ourselves, how our farm functions, and also the trial and error method that we have developed. We can teach to observe nature because it is crucial in a farmer's life. We can give students the possibility to experience the everyday life of the farm – sometimes chaos, sometimes order, improvisation, stress, and getting over your limits. In the work on a farm, you can expect everything and you have to be able to cope with that. And it is impossible to learn it theoretically, you have to experience it.

Bogdan: The student of EUL usually gets to the farm full of enthusiasm. Our role is to cool it down a bit and help to find the talent for agriculture because not everybody has it. Beside the talent, you need to like this kind of work, have a theoretical and practical background and also have money to set up your own farm. The capacity to participate in all works on a farm is necessary if you seriously want to work in the area of agriculture.

• Did you have any vision for this internship? Did any of your own experiences in education help you during the internship?

Bogdan: It quickly turned out that it is impossible to stick to one vision or regulations initially elaborated with EUL School. Each student is different and requires a different approach, as each work on the farm and each day in the field is different. Sometimes there is a lot of work, the other time – there is not enough work, sometimes there is time for theoretical classes, and sometimes there is no power and willingness even for those. That is why flexibility during the internships is needed: students decide by themselves about the rhythm of the work and rest. I think it was quite a good idea because without the pressure of time they engage in work more willingly, and in total, they work more and therefore get more experience.
I still value conversations with my parents a lot. Since my childhood I have had the possibility to participate in many agricultural works, helping them. It was for me practical learning of agriculture.
I try to transfer my knowledge and skills to my students in a similar way. When we start new work,

I explain and show what and how it should be done. After that, I leave them alone with the machines, but of course, I stay nearby in case they need me. Theoretical classes in the evening planned in the internship programme should only complement it.

Frank: We have seen a great value in it because we as adult people took a similar educational path. It enables us to understand the situation of the intern and our role during the internship. We weren't born in the countryside, we had to learn agriculture, just like any other field of knowledge. We experienced first-hand how huge this knowledge is, and how much time and possibility to acquire practical skills are needed. My master would repeat that the minimum time to learn anything is seven years. The students from EUL School have only two years, that's why they need to decide quickly what they are looking for.

And this is not easy, especially for people from the cities, who until now had no deeper experience in agriculture.

• Is the programme proposed by EUL a good form of learning for adult people who come already with quite a big experience, both privately and professionally?

Bogdan: In my opinion, it is the best form of education for such people. I would also like children of farmers to get such a school if they are preparing for taking over a farm. Contact with experienced farmers and work on good farms can bring only good results. The interns become a part of the farm, they try to help with everyday work. Sometimes it works well, sometimes it does not. Interns change a bit the rhythm on the farm, which can be hard to accept by the hosts.

The hardest is working with animals, but I think it is the crucial part because the traditional farm cannot work without animals. The intern who doesn't like working with animals, or is afraid of them, should think if he or she really wants to become a farmer.

Joanna: If someone wants to become a farmer, in my opinion, has no other possibility but to learn through practice. You can study agriculture for years to no avail if you don't acquire practical skills. It is not possible to replace it with anything else. You have to experience it, work through the whole cycle, see how different farms function, and EUL School gives that possibility.

Frank: As educators, we of course need to take into account that adult people have their limitations. There is a great challenge ahead of us and interns – living together under one roof for a few months. Not everybody feels good about that. Sometimes some of the work on the farms seem to be useless to the interns, for example chopping wood – what can an intern learn from that? But in our opinion, all the works that the intern is able to do on the farm is valuable for him or her and we are trying to show it. It is important to find a golden mean, and accommodate the rhythm of the farm with the one left to the interns so that they could accommodate the whole spectrum of works on the farm and time for theoretical studies.

• What was the greatest challenge for you connected with the arrival of the interns from Ecological Folk High School to your farm?

Frank: We feared most that strangers would come to our home. After all, we didn't know who would it be, if we manage to communicate, or what they would expect from us. It is a very complicated situation for both sides if somebody who comes to acquire knowledge and experience doesn't know exactly what he or she expects. We didn't know also how to plan work on our farm, we couldn't foresee in advance how much students would engage in the rhythm of the farm and in the everyday work. We had to create conditions which enabled all of us to keep our privacy, to have a chance to be left alone, a place to which one can withdraw.

• Have you learned something yourself during the time you shared the knowledge with the students?

Frank: Internships are not only an experience in agriculture but also an everyday challenge. It is hard to separate agriculture from your private life. You are not a clerk who closes the door to the office at a specific hour. That is why I think that the internship is a very holistic experience, just like agriculture. You experience everyday duties connected with farm management, but you can also experience for example being in a family. An internship is not only work in the field but also evening talks at the dinner table.

Bogdan: I had a chance to remind myself a lot from my knowledge. Normally we act routinely, and here we got the possibility to organize all that we know anew. Also, in a sense, this experience made me more sensitive to the problems of other people and we realised that some professions and skills are getting forgotten and we have a moral duty to save as much as we can through transferring our knowledge and skills to others.

Peter: I'm a farmer and I'm a lifelong learner. I think, I can judge quite accurately what I know, what I can do and what I can't do. Farming, and certainly organic farming, is an ongoing series of challenges. On the one hand, I have dreams, plans and ambitions for next year, and on the other, the toil and hardship required of me by the living and dead nature I have to deal with every day.

Before I set up my own farm, I spent a good few years working for other farmers. Although more than 30 years have passed since my apprenticeship (some of these farmers have passed away and others are living to a ripe old age), they still accompany me in my thoughts. They are examples to me of prudence and perseverance, conscientiousness and honesty, and also towards themselves. They were good stewards, but they also made mistakes. I learned from their mistakes, just as I learn from my own mistakes.

Many of my experiences are difficult for me to translate onto paper. This is especially true when it comes to the care, and the relationship with the animals (goats, cattle, a horse). I feel a bond with them. I understand them better and better. I know this is my strength and I sometimes worry that today there are few people who are interested in raising



Peter Stratenwerth during Organic Agriculture EUL course.

animals on organic farms. This is very different from the treatment of animals in industrial agriculture, which makes it impossible to establish a human-animal relationship.
Sometimes I feel powerless when a new student, a practitioner or a volunteer, expects me to pass on more knowledge. But I also notice changes in those students who persevere with us longer. I get the impression that they appreciate me and my work more as time goes by. They begin to see how many things I have to keep in mind at the same time. How many decisions do I have to make every day, how flexible do I have to be, because nothing is permanent: the seasons change, and when I finish one job, dozens of others appear. No year is a repeat of the previous one.
Nevertheless, there are times when I sit down at the table with a student and try to pass on knowledge: what do I have to bear in mind when planning a planting of a dozen plots? How do I look after the welfare of the soil? What are the advantages and disadvantages of early and late haying? What conclusions can I draw from weed infestation? What do I have to bear in mind when feeding animals in winter? And what about when working with the tractor and agricultural machinery? It seems to me that the most difficult thing is to assess my own strength. I've been farming for several decades now and that's still the biggest challenge for me: to assess honestly and sincerely what's within my strengths and capabilities so that I don't have to regret the sleepless nights or the chaos, disorder and wastefulness spreading around.
Cultivation of the land and animal husbandry cannot be taught only theoretically. It requires a few good years of practice, preferably alongside an experienced farmer. In the process, I can learn a lot about human beings and about myself. This is something that makes the farming profession a really interesting occupation.

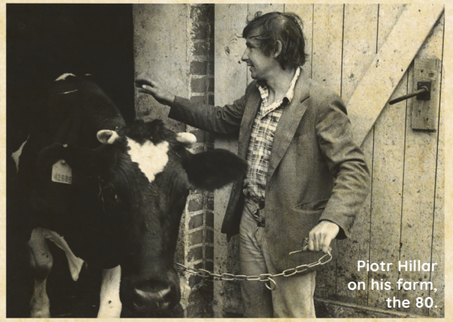
Story of Piotr Hillar (Poland) The challenge of farm succession and how to keep enjoying life

IT IS BETTER TO WEAR OUT THAN TO RUST – Piotr Hillar

My name is Piotr Hillar, I ran an organic farm for 20 years, I produced organic flour in a water mill, sourced and sold electricity from a small hydroelectric power station. I also ran an agro-tourism business with my wife. Now, having a lot of experience, I can serve all those who want to live organically and beautifully, no matter how old they are. I am in the business of promoting deep ecology in a broad way, without getting into politics. I take joy in the gifts of nature without plundering its resources. I do my job, I live life to the full.

A bit of history

After finishing secondary school, I ran a sawmill, sawed timber as a service, and then I took up organic farming in 1983. A year later I got married and since then my wife has accompanied me in all my endeavours.



Piotr Hillar on his farm, the 80.

I was a farmer and an organic pioneer. I sowed cereals and raised dairy and beef cattle. I raised chickens for eggs and meat. I did it in a very different way than everyone else was doing it at the time because I was going eco. Then, quite naturally, I started grinding grain for wholemeal flour and that is how the first organic mill in Poland was created. In the meantime, guests were coming to visit us and that's how we became an agro-tourism farm on the initiative of my wife.

I never followed existing trends. I paved the way for the new in agriculture. On my way, I met many teachers and friends who thought and acted like me. The first teacher was undoubtedly Julian Osetek. He influenced my thinking and acting. I could go on to name many people who left an indelible mark on me. There were not only Poles, but also Germans, Swiss, French and Lithuanians. Each of them has brought values into my life that will stay with me forever.

How was organic farming born in Poland?

Initially, attempts were made to reduce organic farming in Poland to allotments. Those who started to do it in the '80s on farms were seen, to say the least, as freaks, "wreckers" or utopians. Back then food was



scarce and it was widely believed that only the chemisation of agriculture would ensure high yields. When I started, the demand for healthy food in Poland was virtually non-existent. Yields were lower, farm profitability was not high. There was a lack of interest in our crops.

Then the first customers visited our farm, but they were very rare and most of what I produced – cereals, potatoes, milk – went to the conventional market. The organic market was only emerging, and as a pioneer, I was its co-founder. We were looking for markets, so we started to bring our products to Warsaw, where a fair was organised at the Ochota Club on Grójecka Street. It was an unforgettable experience. I learnt the ins and outs of the trade, but above all, I met many wonderful people who paved the way toward green thinking. Looking at the reality around us, one can say that this process is still ongoing. I think the world needs a lot of people who take a holistic view of life on our planet, who see it as a great miracle that is given to us, one that we have to take care of.

Our range was growing, we had not only cereals, potatoes or milk on sale, but vegetables, dairy products and wholemeal flours as well. It was the early 1990s and we were in Warsaw every week with our products. Then we also delivered them to Olsztyn. Shops were slowly set up and a wholesale market was gradually established with such names as Piotr Metera, Zbigniew Nawrot, "Provita" Jan Miodoński, and the big company "Sante". I cooperated with all of them. We took part in various fairs, training, trips and numerous organic events.

Succession

However, time is passing and the final stage of life has to be planned. The original, initial plans were that we would run our business until we died, well, maybe we would delegate some duties to younger people. We assumed that we would be fit. It turned out differently. In the summer of 2019, I suddenly fell ill and ended up in the hospital.

The prospect of running the company, even to some extent, proved impossible. At that time, my wife and I decided to sell all our assets and move out to the city. Selling everything to a stranger was a rather sad prospect. We wanted our possessions to be handed over to a family member.

We found a willing, enthusiastic nephew of mine. We were pleased and sold everything to him on favourable terms, with the conviction that my wife and I would work with him and he would be grateful for our gesture for the rest of his life. However, life verifies such optimism.

Lessons learnt from the asset transfer

A year has passed since the sale and I can already draw some conclusions. My first conclusion is that we cannot assume that we will be as fit as we were a decade earlier. Senior age needs to be planned, and preferably planned in detail, after all, we deserve to have a happy last phase of life and to pass on our experiences, not just our assets, to the younger generation.

I can see that it is not worth holding on to one's farm or business and working intensively until death. As we get older, fitness declines and the reality around us is constantly changing. Our efforts may have been very good at one time, but to make things work, we have to constantly correct our approach, and as we get older, it becomes more difficult to master this. In my opinion, at a certain stage of life, succession is, in fact, necessary. This is the most difficult stage because it will influence our entire senior life. It is worth going through it stepwise because the buyer's positive emotions – expressed before signing the contract or the notarial deed – do not matter later on.

I have also found that our possessions do not have to be handed over to family members. In fact, we get nothing out of it. The successors, whether family members or strangers, will act in their own way. We are merely history to them. We will be annoyed that the young ones are running the farm different than we were.

It is worth preparing for your property transfer in a matter-of-fact way by taking advice from those who have experience in this area. The help of a lawyer, independent expert, notary, accountant or trusted persons is crucial. We are not always aware of how much our assets are worth. We may even be very surprised by the independent expert's valuation. This is the first step, the second step is the market. An asset is worth as much as someone is willing to give. At this stage, it is up to us to decide to whom we sell the property or movables and for how much. It is not good to sign a contract hastily.

An important issue is the donation of certain movables. The purchaser may either acquire them with the real estate by notarial deed, provided that this is stated in the deed, or the donee may receive them after valuation and pays donation tax on them, and only then does the donee become the owner of the movables. Failure to address these matters can result in more than just a legal dispute, which can be difficult to resolve.

And for the record, sometimes we think we can sell or donate our life's possessions to our loved ones for little or no money – "let the young ones cash in on it, I don't need much anymore, they will look after me". Maybe it works in some cases, but such idylls are extremely rare in real life. Both young and old people, to be able to live a decent life, need money. It may sound harsh, but the truth is that pensions, especially agricultural pensions, are low and are enough to just keep us vegetating. We shouldn't rely on our family when we need to get our teeth replaced, buy a hearing aid, or pay for an expensive operation. It is better to have our own means, enabling us to live a normal life. State health care is often inadequate and money for private health care is needed. And if we want to go not only to a sanatorium, but also, for example, to a tropical country, and our pension is not sufficient, it is unlikely that the family or others who have received our assets will step in and finance the trip for us, because we have given the assets to them.

The life of a pensioner

Healthy food has always been my priority. I have had access to it and was convinced it would guarantee my longevity. In 2019, it turned out that this was not enough. Suddenly, my health took a downturn.

However, I overcame the illness, sold my assets and started a new life. I had a choice – to vegetate or pursue my dreams because I finally had the time. One of my dreams was to build an organic house – not an easy task. The project required knowledge, good organisation, money, support from loved ones, construction management and overcoming a lot of stress. I made a lot of mistakes at all these stages, but the house stands and I live in it. A lot of work still needs to be done, but it will be a pure pleasure.

Finally, I would like to share my favourite quote with you:

Life is amazing.
And then it's awful.
And then it's amazing again.
And in between the amazing and the awful, it's ordinary and mundane and routine.
Breathe in the amazing, hold on through the awful, and relax and exhale during the ordinary.
That's just living.
Heartbreaking, soul-healing, amazing, awful, ordinary life.
And it's breathtakingly beautiful.

Motto from Mel Robbins' book
"The 5 Second Rule"

Agriculture Needs Co-responsibility

"When I was working on setting up my CSA, I was aware that this was a model that was very good for agriculture, for consumers, for the environment," says Wioletta Olejarczyk, a farmer leading the CSA business in the Częstochowa area in 2020-21 and co-founder of Jurajska Kooperatywa Spożywcza (Jurajska Food Cooperative) – Interview by Anka Wiklińska, in May 2022.

Anka Wiklińska: Wioletta, how did it start with you? How did you start running the farm? I would like to know your story, at least briefly.
Wioletta Olejarczyk: I was born on a farm, I grew up there and I worked there for the first 18 years of my life; it was the 1980s-1990s in Poland. There was a different system then, different supply chains. Then I had a break from farming, and six years ago I bought a farm. I did it out of my inner need and out of my passion. I had no business plan, no idea where I would market what I would grow. Once the harvest time came, it turned out that I hadn't thought enough about how to sell. And then I realised that the market had completely changed and the supply chains had changed over the time I had not been farming. I was interested in ecology and I met people connected with the Folk High School before. I came to an intergenerational farmers' convention and that's when I met people who run co-operatives. I started going to different symposiums and confer-ences related to sustainable farming models, I got to know new methods and gained experi-ence. In Poland, we are still in the period of learning about such models as food co-operatives and Community Supported



WIOLETTA OLEJARCZYK, farmer working with Mother Earth and food communities, agroecological educator, phytotherapist herbalist, Funder of a community supported agriculture in Poland.

Agriculture (CSA), but I built on the experience of countries where such forms of consumer-producer relations are already very deeply rooted in the social fabric.

AW: So did you first encounter the CSA model and food co-operatives abroad?

WO: No, my first encounter was in Grzybów, at an intergenerational farmers' convention. I met people who knew these practices, and since then I have been learning about different methods. It's an ongoing process. I saw various places in Europe – on a slightly different scale, in a different model, because every farmer and every community creates its own model. The specifics of a particular environment or country quite strongly influence the type of cooperation between farmers and consumers. And out of the models that I saw, I chose two that suited me best in terms of matching my farm, my values and my ability to interact with consumers. My first choice was food cooperatives. I initiated one in Częstochowa. I felt that CSA was such an innovative model and it was so different from a co-op or shopping in a supermarket, shop or market that I decided to initially talk about CSA in the co-op so that people would get used to the fact that there was such a thing. We could experience together that the farm does not belong only to the farmer and that the co-responsibility for the farm, this co-creation, should belong to the whole com-munity, but not on a supportive basis. Maybe I don't know the exact etymology of the word 'support'. In English, it has a slightly different connotation. Agriculture does not need any sup-ort. Agriculture needs cooperation and co-responsibility.

AW: What you are saying is very important.

WO: That is how I feel about it. It is not about support for the farmer, but about cooperation. It's work that we can all do to have something to eat. And I felt that I just didn't want to shock people or throw them in at the deep end. Running the co-op for two years, I would occasionally talk about it, and give out some leaflets, to create a group of people acquainted with the model who then, of their own free will, would want to experiment with me. I planned that we would introduce CSA to our region (this model did not work in our area), and we would take on the role of pioneers, which means probably also making mistakes, but also telling people about it. So we found a group of co-op members who were both in the co-op and the CSA.

AW: Great! So you did it in a two-step manner.

WO: Yes, in a two-step manner, because I realise that if it's the first time someone hears about it, it might seem...

AW: ... exotic?

WO: Perhaps exotic, difficult or extremely different. Upon reflection and understanding, it seems very logical. For example, payment in advance, or the fact that someone doesn't decide from week to week what to buy to eat. It is, quite simply, so different from what people are used to that I was careful so that people who joined CSA would be unhappy, that it wasn't for them. It's better to slowly get used to innovation and to have time to adapt. So that they know they have to experiment in the kitchen and that they have to cook a lot.

AW: Well, that's right, of course. And that they'll get a portion of vegetables once a week and have to plan how they're going to use it up so it doesn't go bad. A seemingly trivial thing...

WO: ...and for me, it's obvious, because I've lived most of my life in the countryside and this skill is acquired automatically. On the other hand, I have also lived in the city and I know this perspective as well. I also talked to people who had been in CSAs. I wanted to understand how they felt so that there was neither frustration on their part, nor a waste of food or a reaction like, "I've had enough of this spinach already". There are many possibilities in this type of coop-eration, but what is fundamental is that "we eat what we have, not what we want".

AW: So that builds a different model for satisfying hunger, right?

WO: Yes, yes. Having experienced it for a while – if people really take the time to cook, pay attention to how they feel after eating that way, and are in open communication with others to get inspiration on what they can cook from the contents of their package – then no vegetable gets boring anymore. We can enrich the menu, for example, we can bake cakes out of beetroots, there are plenty of recipes, so even if we get beetroot every week, we can prepare it in many ways. But it takes time, willingness and, above all, awareness.

AW: And a completely different attitude.

WO: Right, completely, completely different.

AW: I'm wondering, what was the most difficult part of the process of setting up your CSA business?

WO: I knew that this was a model that was very good for both sides, in terms of the people who make up the group. From my experience and that of the farmers I spoke to, the basic difficulty was to have enough courage. When I set up a group, I commit, and I'm ready to fulfil the obligations of the agreement. I'm aware of that, however, there is also the fear that there could be some adverse conditions: how will people react to them, will it really be as we agreed at the beginning? Something could go wrong, not my fault, for example, there is a tomato blight and we don't have any and people have paid for them – this is anxiety-inducing. Of course, I want to deliver the kind of packages that were agreed upon, but it's not up to me alone. And the straddle! One thing is explaining an unfamiliar model to people, the uncertainty of whether they really understand it. That's the tricky part. And another one – the question of whether I'm skilled enough to plan the crop so that I can be sure I'm going to fulfil the obligations and at the same time not have a lot of surpluses...

AW: ... for example, a pile of pumpkins that are left...

WO: ... and a second CSA could form – you have to balance that. I know this is the experience of many. I was aware that this is a model that is very good for agriculture, and for consumers. It is an ideal model.

AW: So, organising your sales network, starting with a co-op, you knew intuitively that it was easier to adapt, to begin with?

WO: To begin with, yes. I'm building this community that I can cooperate with, and at the same time I have contact with farmers from whom I can learn.

A: More people are used to cooperative, it's easier to become a part of it.
WO: And it's easier for the farmers, too, because today they can deliver to the co-op and in a week they can say "bye-bye".
AW: As cooperatives are more made up of people living in the city, to put it briefly?
WO: Yes, but they can also come and go from day to day. There is no contract. That's why a com-mitment for a whole season is not easy to digest in a CSA.
AW: Tell us what qualities of your character have proved most important. You've already talked about courage, but what other qualities did you discover in yourself in the process?
WO: I guess first of all it was that I was authentic, and people trusted me that it was safe. They accepted that we were doing things experimentally because we were the first, so the first years would also be an adjustment to our needs and to the farm's capacity. But there was trust be-tween us and we talked openly. They believed that this was some kind of revolutionary model but they also believed in my experience, that I had been somewhere, seen something, that I was carrying the message and that made them interested. I guess also the understanding that we do this not only for our physiological needs but also for our values. The awareness that food sovereignty is about making a difference – through your life – to your community and doing what you believe in, e.g. caring about biodiversity, looking after the community, and working together. It's not just about food, it's about more than that.

AW: Building a whole new system of connections, building trust within the group?
WO: Yes, and I've learnt that from other communities, from similar experiences, and that's what attracted them. I think a helpful feature is also that I like to discover new flavours, and new varieties. This proved attractive to our group members. Thanks to my cooking experiments, they were getting different preserves that were not available elsewhere.
AW: As part of the weekly deliveries?
WO: Yes, such as vinegar made from pale wood violets.
A: You were providing extra treats, a bonus!
WO: In the CSA business, you have access to the kind of products that you wouldn't buy in any shop. Even the common parsley – in most shops you cannot buy parsley from a field 20 kilometres away, picked an hour before. Products of this kind are very rarely available to Polish consumers. Or, for example, pickled common dandelion stems or pale wood violets vinegar. What I do is driven by my passions and it has turned out to be very attractive to our group members. It helped me to know that we were also working together on an idea and the possibility of problems did not make me afraid. And I didn't project those fears onto the group, e.g. that nothing would grow for us, that something would go wrong.
AW: So you had that certainty after all.
WO: Yes, I did. I believed that however it would go, even if it didn't work out for us, we would have this experience and it would be uplifting. The need for experience sharing to develop the CSA model.

AW: Did you have any sources of help? Did you use any existing resources to help you through this process? Did you use courses abroad? Or was it a testing ground and you had to work everything out? Did you read up on how it works, for example? Did you have a standard form of a contract or did you work everything out during the process of setting up the group?
WO: In the three years since I had come across this model of agriculture and attended various meetings, conventions, symposiums. I was assimilating how it works in different places. I be-came friends with a few people from Poland and Europe co-facilitating CSAs, we were honest with each other because there are a lot of shadows and challenges in CSA, so it's important to have someone openly talking about it. There needs to be a deeper relationship and trust.
I knew there had to be challenges, but I had to "feel" them myself, transfer the experiences of others and anticipate what problems and concerns might come my way. So for three years, I explored and dwelled on the subject. And once I felt secure with the knowledge and the idea of how to fit it into my farm – as there is no "copy-paste" – it has to fit in – I found an under-standing, trusted collaborative community and then it clicked! I benefited from all that others had developed over decades. There is a website dedicated to CSAs in Poland, there are some sources available for free with a standard form of a contract, with step-by-step descriptions, and we used that.
AW: Is it sufficient, in your opinion?
WO: This website helps because you can get a 'base', but it does not give you what a meeting of practitioners or people who want to co-found CSAs gives. This community is very small in Poland, there is little transfer of "farmer to farmer" knowledge. We don't have generally available tools in Polish for farmers to help them plan their crops. At the moment I see that there are a lot of people in the cities who want to create CSAs and they cannot find farmers, and farmers do not come in it because they do not know where to get the knowledge, how to learn how to run such a model. As I've mentioned, there is a lack of tools on how to plan crops so that there is something to put in the box every week. For example, if I sow ten acres of beetroot, how many pieces or kilos will that give me in the end? And when to sow so that there is something to put in every week? There are English, payable tools and with their help, crop planning is much easier. That's the challenge for the CSA farmer – to feed 'x' number of people every week, so you have to plan the garden completely differently. And that's different from what most farmers do daily.
(...)
So for the development of CSA to take place there has to be an advisory base. Now we have a few, a dozen or so CSAs in Poland and the people know each other. You can call someone, and get advice because there are always challenges. Yet, it is informal. There needs to be a formal structure, with professionals prepared to help with many aspects of this agriculture model. We have the aspect of growing food or being an



Wioletta working on her farm.

expert in a specific form. We can think of year-round CSAs, so setting up storage facilities, processing, etc. Essential is the aspect of creating community – how to build trust, and how to communicate well.
How to resolve conflicts that, sooner or later, will arise? How to create such stable communities? A CSA where different people come every year will not be stable, and may even be a burden on the farm because there will be no educational or participatory value. I've seen CSAs that say, "OK, we're going to partic-ipate in a common project for at least ten years, so this year we can plan to pay more and build greenhouses together on the farm, and it will pay us back in ten years".
A stable group can think long-term. In agriculture, the 'from season to season' perspective doesn't work, because then it's harder to build a healthy ecosystem, also safe for farmers to work in peace. So, there are several layers there, many of which I've probably not mentioned, and each of these layers is equally important. In Norway, where there are a lot of CSAs, even though people have fairly easy access to local and organic food in other, less obliging ways, there are advisors who sup-port the creation of CSAs. (https://www.andelslandbruk.no/). There is a department in the Ministry of Agriculture that deals only with CSAs and this shows the level of official recognition of CSAs, of taking them seriously and not, as is now sometimes the case in Poland, treating them as a hipster 'newfangled' thing.
(...)
WO: And another important thing: if young people who are about to choose a profession learn that farming is okay, that you can have an interesting, well-paid job, that you can have a decent life, which we don't have at the moment (and in well-developed CSAs it is possible), then we will have a new generation of farmers. I see more and more that many people don't know what profession to take up or which one to choose because there are no widely available professions that are ethical, interesting and suitable for a dignified life. And in CSAs it is possible to achieve all this.

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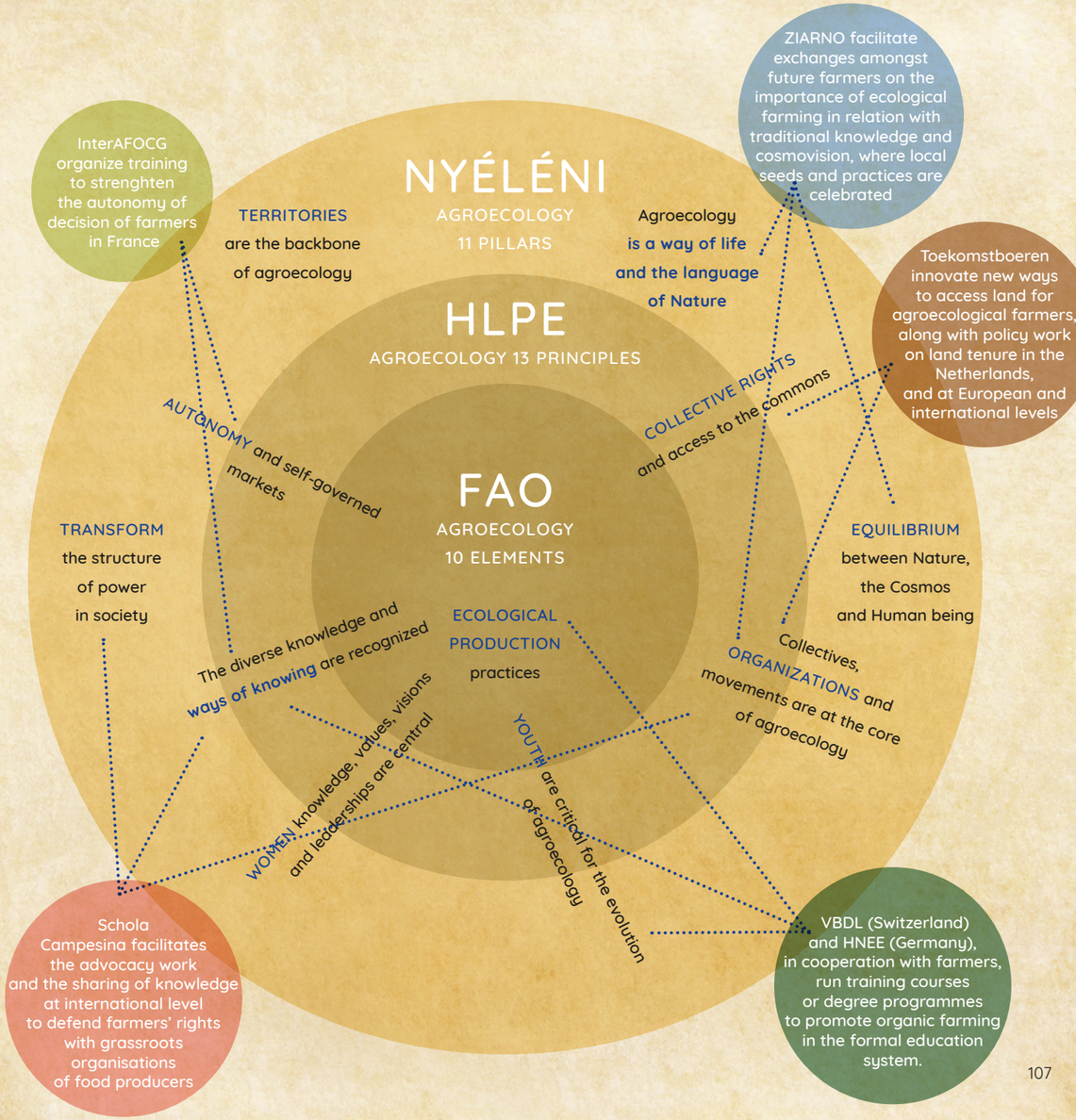
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