



## Eating from the Farm:

the social, environmental,  
and economic benefits of  
local food systems



May 2016

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Photograph: Vanessa Malandrin

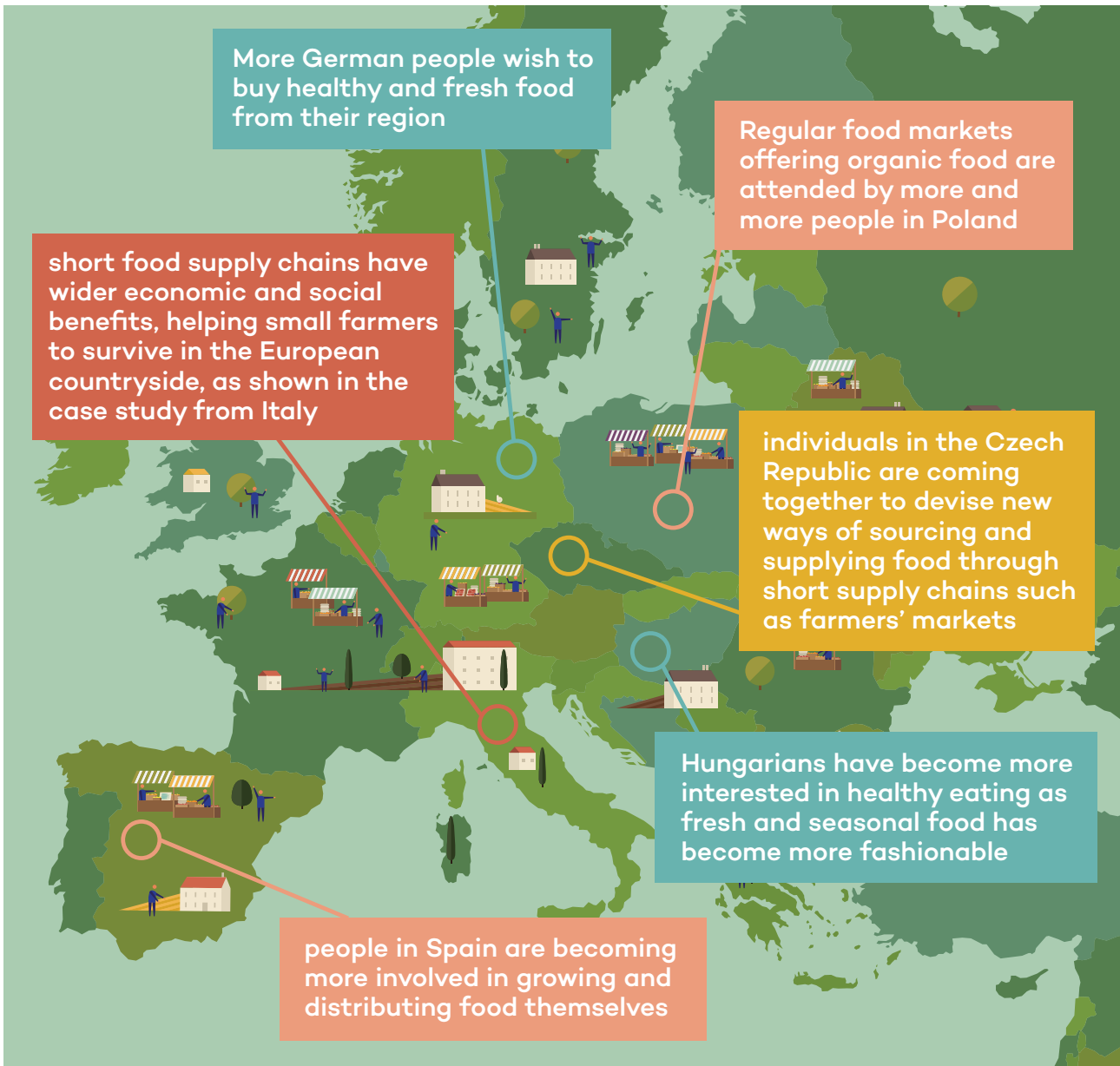
## Introduction

In 2007 our planet reached a remarkable milestone, with the world urban population overtaking the number of people living in the countryside. In Europe 68% of the population already live in urban areas. Scientists predict that as the world population increases (with estimates suggesting it is likely to reach 10 billion people by the year 2050), this process of urbanisation will accelerate. This growth will take place at the expense of peri-urban and rural areas, raising important questions about the future of agriculture, the conservation of essential natural resources (water, energy supplies, and fertile soils) and the protection of vital natural areas.<sup>1</sup> We will not only need to feed more people in a sustainable way, but we will also need to meet new and evolving societal needs.

This briefing explores some of the innovative and creative ways in which food producers and consumers have started to address this problem in different parts of Europe. It features five case studies which illustrate different ways in which communities are finding more sustainable ways to produce and consume food with benefits for all. The methods vary, but the outcomes are the same: control of the food system is being taken back by small-scale, sustainable farms and food enterprises from large-scale industrial businesses that dominate the market today putting profit ahead of wellbeing for people and planet.

These examples have not necessarily been devised as solutions to this global problem. Most are the result of individuals coming together because they want to know where their food has come from, because they want to support local sustainable farmers and producers, or re-invigorate local economies. Together these examples reflect a growing grassroots movement promoting short (i.e. local) food supply chains, supplying sustainably-farmed, small-scale food – also known as ‘agroecological’ farming.

# More Europeans demand sustainably produced local food



Avicultura Campesina



Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale Avicoltura



'Bazaars' in Warsaw



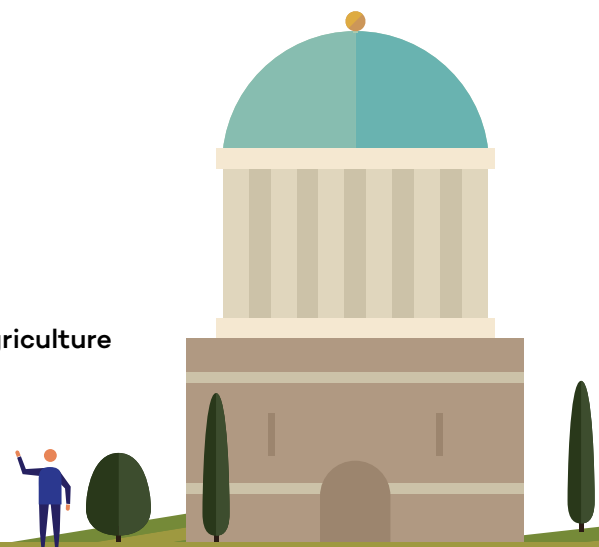
Farmers' markets in Prague




Self-harvest gardens and community supported agriculture



Public policies for sustainable local food





# The case for agroecological local food systems

## Eating is an agricultural act

“Eating is an agricultural act” as the American novelist, farmer and poet Wendell Berry stated in his 1989 essay ‘On the pleasures of eating’. But what does this actually mean? According to Berry: “Most people think of food as an agricultural product, but they do not think of themselves as participants in agriculture; they just think of themselves as ‘consumers’.”<sup>2</sup>

Right now, in Europe many people do not know what they are actually eating: supply chains are long, and complex, and produce is often traded in the international marketplace, leaving the average consumer with no idea about the provenance of his or her food.

This globalisation of food production has led to an industrial monopoly within the agricultural sector. A small number of companies now dominate the supply of seeds, agri-chemicals, processing, logistics and even food production. For example, in 2011 four retailers controlled 85% of the German national food market, and three retailers controlled 90% of the food market in Portugal. In 2009, just five retailers controlled 70% of the market in Spain.<sup>3</sup> This concentration of power can result in unfair trading practices,



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which undermine the livelihoods of small farmers and producers across the supply chain, and move those of us who do not farm ever-further away from the sources of the food we eat.<sup>4</sup>

Global food production and trading also implies a loss of traditional knowledge, skills, and culture among both farmers and consumers. For instance, how many Europeans are still aware of the deep

natural connections between plants, soil, animals, and the wider environment? And what about the links between the way our food is grown, processed and sold, and our health? Or its effect on local economies?

## What is ‘agroecology’ and how does it relate to local food systems?

Agroecology involves looking at the whole food system, including food production, distribution and consumption. For farmers, this means recognising the value of local knowledge and using agricultural practices which seek to imitate natural processes, reducing the need for external inputs. Agroecology gives a stronger emphasis on supporting local food economies, supporting and building local businesses and creating highly skilled jobs and craftsmanship. Importantly, agroecology involves active citizens and communities. People become involved in making decisions about what food is produced and consumed and how natural resources are managed in their region.

## Connecting local farms to cities

The globalised nature of food production creates both a physical and a psychological distance between the consumer and the farmer, between what we eat and where it comes from. This is particularly true for those living in urban areas, where the food supply is dominated by supermarkets. Food arrives packaged on supermarket shelves with little trace of its rural origins.

To counter this, there is a growing trend across Europe of farmers’ markets, on-farm shops, community supported agriculture (CSA) projects, and collective schemes set up to supply public institutions.<sup>5</sup>

Those forms of more direct food marketing provide a route from farms to urban dwellers, encouraging short supply chains, seasonal food and face-to-face contact with those who produce what city dwellers eat.

In contrast, it can be very difficult for small-scale local farms to supply supermarkets, with the obstacles they face well-documented.<sup>6</sup> By offering non-seasonal produce year-round and favouring large-scale agriculture, many supermarkets further sever the link between producers and consumers and perpetuate the worst aspects of Europe’s broken food system. With farmers’ markets and community supported agriculture already flourishing across Europe – see the case studies from the Czech Republic, France and Italy – getting local food into urban areas is a viable, beneficial and affordable alternative to

increasingly globalised and corporate-controlled food chains.



Photograph: Za Zemiata

## Community Supported Agriculture: a local activity, a European and global movement

Many of the grassroots agroecology initiatives involve Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), a vibrant and innovative collaboration between farmers and consumers. CSAs involve groups of citizens who pledge to support local peasant farms, committing to advance payment, thereby sharing the risks and benefits with local farmers. This enhances local, organic consumption, local economic development, and sustains the local food culture and builds community. Many CSAs include solidarity shares or sliding scales of payment that take people's needs and ability to pay into account.

These local CSA initiatives have grown together to become a European and global movement with shared values and objectives, based on food sovereignty and solidarity economy. At the moment there are more than 5000 different initiatives in Europe.

Network activities include the facilitation of peer-to-peer exchanges at European level and beyond. This helps to build the movement at all levels, including the Hungry for Rights project<sup>7</sup> that is developing Local Food Policy Councils to facilitate these alternative food systems and ground them in local policy.

At the global level, Urgenci, the international CSA network, now represents well over a million members through national member networks. The CSA movement has grown in an exponential manner. As well as intercontinental exchange and communication, the network also plays a key role in the global food sovereignty movement, working

on global food policy through the Civil Society Mechanism<sup>8</sup> of the Committee on World Food Security and Nutrition, participating in meetings such as Nyeleni meeting on Agroecology in Mali<sup>9</sup> and its outcome Declaration.

Inspiring moments, such as the international conference in China in November 2015- with over 500 Chinese CSA members, and over 60 participants representing CSAs from all over the world- have given an even greater dynamic to the movement<sup>10</sup>.

## Connecting local farms to consumers

Farmers and local producers are also seeking out ways to sell their goods directly to producers – through markets, farm shops, veg boxes and other schemes. The trend of direct sales to consumers has become a key part of rural development in several European Union member states. On average about one in six farms sell more than half of their produce directly to consumers.

The majority of the EU's 12 million farms are family farms. These farms contribute to the socio-economic and environmental sustainability of rural areas, and are often involved in short food supply chains (i.e. where the farmer sells to the consumer via fewer intermediaries). These and other small farms currently provide 70% of the world's food.

## Consumers want more local food

Consumers are also driving change. More and more people are starting to understand the multiple benefits of adopting responsible eating habits, and this is leading to the rise of a variety of different initiatives, designed to shorten food supply chains and create new alliances between producers and consumers.

According to the Natural Marketing Institute, 71% of French and 47% of Spanish and British consumers claim that it is important to buy local products.<sup>11</sup> A survey of consumer attitudes to local food in eight countries in Europe, carried out for Friends of the Earth Europe, found that half of all respondents regularly bought directly from the farmer.<sup>12</sup> This trend is also apparent outside of Europe. In the US the number of farmers' markets quadrupled from 1,755 to 7,175 between 1994 and 2011. In 1986 there were just two recognised community supported agriculture farms in the US; today, there are over 4,000.<sup>13</sup>

## When is local food also agroecological?

Shopping for locally-grown food can often have environmental benefits. This is the case when purchasing local products, in season, from producers who use ecologically sound production methods. Key indicators to measure the environmental impact of short food supply chains could be the amount of non-renewable resources used for processing, transport and storage, alongside production methods. Short food supply chains can use less packaging than supermarkets – so fewer non-renewable resources are used; less energy is used for storage (because produce is fresh and seasonal); and they rely on crops and products from animals which are adapted to the local environment and are integral to local ecosystems – helping to maintain biodiversity. The closer link between consumers and producers also means that very often consumers are informed about the production methods and expect higher environmental sustainability on the farm.



## small farms currently provide 70% of the world's food

Many of the case studies collected below started as an expression of a rising ecological awareness among consumers and farmers, leading to more environmentally friendly lifestyles based on ethical considerations and values.<sup>14</sup>



## The economic case: local food boosts local economies...

This growing interest in locally-sourced food is providing a boost to local economies. Research in the US has shown that local food supply chains generate 13 full time jobs in agriculture for every million dollars in sales, creating a total of 68,000 jobs in 2008. The large-scale agricultural sector by contrast generates just three per 1 million dollars of sales.<sup>15</sup>

A US Department of Agriculture study in 2010 comparing revenue from the sale of apples, blueberries, milk, beef and salad, found that in local supply chains almost all the gain is retained in the local economy, with producers receiving a 50% to 649% higher income than in the traditional chains.<sup>16</sup> Local food systems (where production, processing, trading and consumption of food take place across a relatively small geographical



area) have a beneficial effect on local economies.<sup>17</sup>

## local food purchases are twice as efficient in terms of keeping the local economy alive

In Europe, the New Economics Foundation, an independent think tank based in London, compared what happens when people buy produce at a supermarket compared to a local farmer's market or from a community supported agriculture programme. They found that twice as much money stayed in the community when people bought their food locally.



Photograph: Za Zemiata

“Local food purchases are twice as efficient in terms of keeping the local economy alive,” says David Boyle, one of the project researchers.<sup>18</sup>

Local food systems have also been described as an important source of employment opportunities, and positive multiplier effects have been associated with this. These employment opportunities may be directly attributed to production and sales.<sup>19</sup>

Another study in the US found that for every two jobs created in farmers' markets in Iowa, another one was indirectly created in the surrounding economy. In 2004 the multiplied benefits from farmers' markets resulted in the equivalent of 140 full-time jobs.<sup>20</sup>

## ...while industrial agriculture drains them

The local economy benefits of local food systems contrast sharply with the impact of large-scale agricultural production. A University of Illinois

study over a 17-year period found for example that industrial hog facilities hinder economic growth in rural communities.<sup>21</sup> One reason for this is that large-scale farms tend to source most of their inputs (such as feed, pharmaceuticals, etc.) from distant dealers rather than local suppliers.<sup>22</sup> They also employ fewer people, so less money is fed into the local economy from wages.<sup>23</sup>

Local food economies in contrast depend on local farmers feeding communities and demand for local and regional food has become a major driver in the farm economy, creating jobs and spurring economic growth.<sup>24</sup>

## The role of national governments

While consumers, producers and farmers may be driving the trend for shorter food supply chains, these initiatives do not exist in a policy vacuum. The case study from Hungary reveals the important role national and local governments can play in supporting local food supply chains – with knock-on benefits for local economies and communities.



**only a small amount of the CAP budget is used to support sustainable farming or to help local farmers with marketing**

## The role of the EU

The European Union (EU) provides support for farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which makes up around 40% of the total EU budget – around €58 billion a year – funded from European citizens' taxes. This money is supposed to fund farmers and activities in rural areas related to farming. Most of it, however, has been used to support industrial food and farming, with only a small amount (less than one third of the CAP budget), used to support sustainable farming or to help local farmers with marketing.

At the time of writing, the European Commission had adopted 27 (out of 118) national and regional Rural Development Programmes with the promise of €99.6 billion of EU funding until 2020.<sup>25</sup> While current estimates foresee 43% of this funding going to agri-environment and climate measures, organic farming, forestry

and Natura 2000 conservation areas, and other climate and environment-related support, the actual ways in which the funding will be used to deliver environmental benefits is not clear.

In order to ensure these benefits are realised, it will be important to see public money spent on supporting local farmers and food companies to



make sustainable, seasonal, fresh food available to local people

**large-scale agriculture employs fewer people, so less money is fed into the local economy from wages**

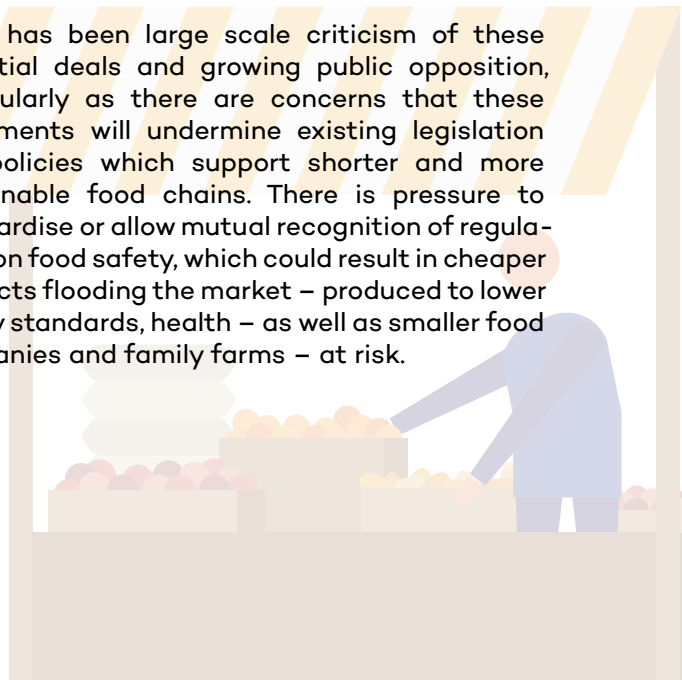
## Trading away locally-produced food



To date, both the CAP and EU trade policies have focused on finding new global markets for EU agricultural products, while doing less to support initiatives which give farmers who produce sustainably the opportunity to sell their products locally through farmers' markets, farm shops, or to schools and other public institutions, providing fresh, seasonal, sustainable food.

Current efforts to secure new transatlantic trade deals between the EU and the US (TTIP) and Canada (CETA) are exacerbating this situation. Designed to increase trade in agricultural products between North America and the EU, they represent an industry-led threat to small-scale producers on both sides of the Atlantic. Modelling has suggested the deals will lead to an increase in intensive farming, with damaging environmental and social impacts.<sup>26</sup>

There has been large scale criticism of these potential deals and growing public opposition, particularly as there are concerns that these agreements will undermine existing legislation and policies which support shorter and more sustainable food chains. There is pressure to standardise or allow mutual recognition of regulations on food safety, which could result in cheaper products flooding the market – produced to lower safety standards, health – as well as smaller food companies and family farms – at risk.





## How communities around Europe are fixing the food system

Citizen-led initiatives evolve quickly and many of these projects are no longer just about local food and direct selling. There are grassroots movements across Europe striving to create a whole new food system, not only able to feed citizens from both urban and rural areas, but also to provide innovative solutions to society's changing needs. They seek noticeable results in terms of more jobs, inclusion, added value, education and new cultural roles for both producers and consumers.

The examples collected here should inspire policymakers to recognise the multiple benefits of short food supply chains for people and the environment. Locally-produced and affordable agroecological food should be the backbone of a food system that increases our food sovereignty. The 'business-as-usual' model can no longer be considered an option for a well-functioning food system in the future.



# Community food solutions in the face of corporate profits



## Avicultura Campesina — Spain

Avicultura Campesina is an agroecological chicken cooperative in Palencia, in northern Spain, set up by three small-scale chicken farmers, Cristina, Arturo and Jeromo. Based in the villages of Amayuelas de Abajo and Castrillo de Villavega, the group have also formed a cooperative to buy their own slaughterhouse, so that they can guarantee the whole production process, from the farm to the consumer.



Photograph: Avicultura Campesina

Jeromo has been raising chickens for many years and is an expert in livestock breeding. Cristina and Arturo decided to move to the countryside more recently, setting up their farms in 2010 and 2012 respectively. They both also grow cereal which they use as chicken feed and also sell to local farmers. Both have faced challenges in establishing their farms (access to land, breeds, feed-stuffs, management, attacks from wild animals, etc.) but they have succeeded in producing high-quality organic chickens.

Jeromo explained: *“The project provides the partners (who are both individuals and consumer groups) a chance to eat chickens that have been produced locally on small farms. With no intermediaries, this project is a win-win for consumers and producers. The network is strengthened by the management of the cooperative and it is a useful example.”*

## How does it work?

The cooperative which they have set up to buy and operate the slaughterhouse has 31 members, including producers, users and consumers. It operates as an ‘assembly’, with each member having one vote. All the members have contributed to the cost of buying the building (€60,000), with a minimum contribution of €100. A further €25,000 is needed for renovation work. Cooperative members have the right to use the slaughterhouse, and also benefit from reduced prices on the chicken slaughtered there.



the network is strengthened by the management of the cooperative and it is a useful example for people who can join the cooperative or copy the initiative with another product



The cooperative sells directly to local families, restaurants and through food buying groups in the neighbouring towns and villages. Consequently, as well as being totally organic, distribution is local, reflecting the group's agroecological approach, aimed at ensuring food sovereignty.

## Challenges

Although the project has benefited from some public funding (a small amount of support was obtained for the slaughterhouse and some initial financial support was secured), it has been difficult to comply with policies which are generally designed to meet the needs of agro-industrial producers. For example, in order to meet the health authorities' new administrative requirements, the slaughterhouse had to make a significant investment, which was barely affordable for such a small plant. These small-scale organic producers have to observe the same obligations as large-scale industrial chicken farms, with no consideration for the special nature of what they are doing.

Under the current system that primarily rewards large-scale production directed at global markets, initiatives such as Avicultura Campesina face two main barriers: access to agricultural land and competition from large-scale organic producers. Even though some national and local governments claim in their speeches to support young people moving back to the countryside, little is actually done to help young people secure access to land.

The competition from the industrial "Goliaths" who comply with organic standards, but who otherwise operate with little regard for local communities or economies, poses a particular problem. These companies produce food at cheap prices and control the market.

In Spain, small-scale artisanal chicken farmers have to compete with the Galician company Coren, which slaughters 120 million chickens a year and sells its products in 42 countries. An "organic" Coren chicken is 50% cheaper than a chicken from the Palencia poultry farmers. Explaining the differences between the two to consumers is crucial if the artisanal small-scale producers are to survive.

## How does it add value?

The Avicultura Campesina project is just one of many agro-ecological projects that have been set up, to explore alternative models of production, marketing and trade for their own products.

These projects building alliances between producers and consumers have now been operating for several years. They have followed different models and have different forms, but as a result thousands of families have become involved in the management of their own food. The result is very positive both in terms of the amount of food produced, but also in terms of the efforts made to get so many people involved in new and different ways of providing access to food.

For more information on Avicultura Campesina:

• <http://amayuelas.es/>

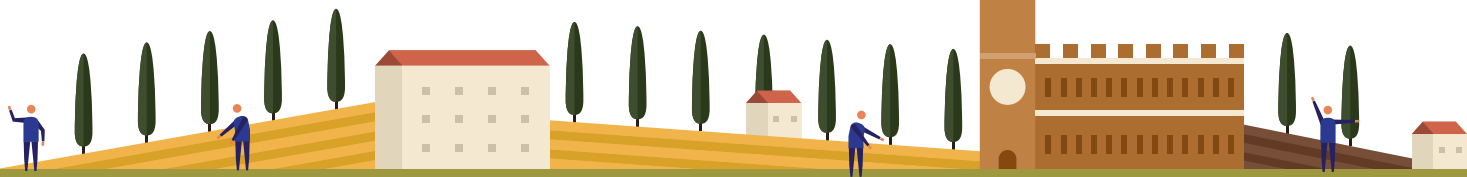
  
**with no  
intermediaries,  
this project is  
a win-win for  
consumers and  
producers**



10



# Bringing consumers together to keep local food in business



## Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale — Italy

Ethical purchasing groups, known as GAS (Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale, the Italian for Community Supported Agriculture) first appeared in Italy in the 1990s.

GAS are groups of consumers who purchase collectively and directly from producers who are chosen on the basis of sustainable production principles. GAS groups were born from the desire to build a healthy economy from the bottom up where ethics were worth more than the profit and quality was more important than quantity.

Adanella Rossi, a member of the Pisa GAS and a researcher at the University of Pisa, explained: *“The GAS represents an alternative to a system that we do not agree with. It allows us to translate our beliefs into everyday life, it helps us live our values. Neither the consumers nor the producers are on their own, and there is no self interest. Our consumption is not based on exploitation, of the land, of man or of animals. There is no surplus or waste. All the food has a purpose, and there are far fewer risks to health. All these factors are extremely important to the sustainability of local food systems.”*

GAS groups want to contribute to creating a society in which people can find the time to meet and establish relationships with others. As a result, a number of groups are involved in a range of other activities, such as promoting social economy networks and districts. Through civic engagement, they seek to change production, purchasing, and consumption attitudes and behaviour, reaching beyond agriculture and food.

Over the last 10 years (2004–2014) the number of GAS schemes in Italy has grown rapidly and it is estimated that there are now about 2,000 groups across the country, with a total turnover of €90 million annually. In Rome the average annual turnover of a group is €33,600 per year. This means that the 60 purchasing groups support local sustainable farms with an injection of €5 million each year.

## How does it work?

Groups select producers based on direct knowledge of the farms, and on farm visits. They also may follow up the suggestions from other groups.

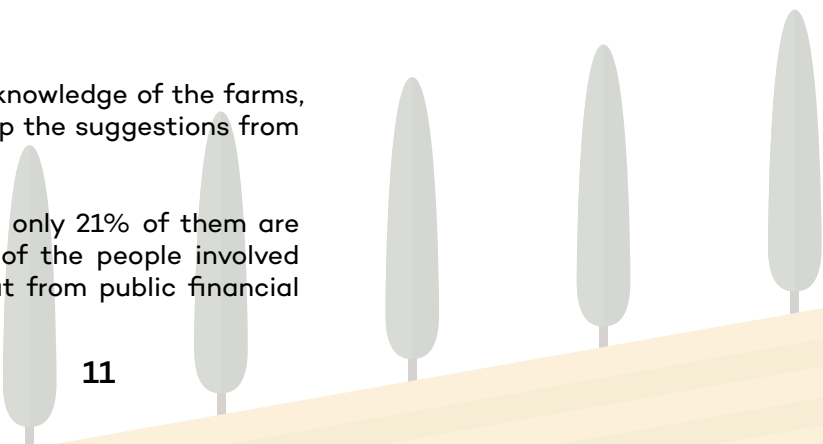
In most cases, the groups are informal – only 21% of them are registered as formal associations. Many of the people involved think that GAS groups should not benefit from public financial



Strumenti di sobrietà e buon uso del proprio tempo



it allows us to translate our beliefs into everyday life, it helps us live our values



support, in order to be able to maintain their autonomy and their spirit of collaboration. This distinguishes the Italian groups from the groups in France, where group coordinators are paid for their services. In Italy all of the groups' work is done voluntarily.

## Challenges

One of the main challenges that these organisations face is the fact that they tend to rely on just a few people to manage the logistics (collecting, transporting and distributing the orders). Another challenge is storage. Because the groups generally do not have premises, they need to find cool storage facilities to keep the goods fresh until they are delivered.

Products are generally delivered to people's homes or to social centres, or else they may be stored in people's garages. Most of the people involved are young (78% are between 26 and 40 years old).

A national network of GAS groups was set up, linking almost all the groups, to help support their rapid growth. This country-wide network has built a website which is available to all the local groups to help manage purchases and distribution.

Group members place their orders by e-mail and orders are most often made on a monthly basis (50%), although some groups make orders on a weekly basis (30% on average), or even twice a week (20%).

On average, most groups spend less than €2,000 each month (80% of groups), while 12% of them will spend up to €3,000, 6% spend up to €5,000 a month, and the remaining 2% can spend more than €10,000.

## How does GAS add value?

The rapid growth of the GAS groups has meant an increase in consumer power, which mainly benefits Italian small-scale farmers, who supply GAS groups with products based on their seasonality, as well as organic and local production methods.

By re-establishing a direct relationship between the consumer and the farmer, the shorter supply chains have created challenges, but also driven innovation in farming practices. Some farms have become involved in co-production with GAS group members. Others, keen to find alternatives to the conventional food supply system are sharing knowledge and work with other producers.

These new local market opportunities may require adjustments in the food safety and taxation rules, or even changes to the consumption patterns at the local level – not just in Italy but also in the rest of European Union.

For more information on Gruppo d'Acquisto Solidale:

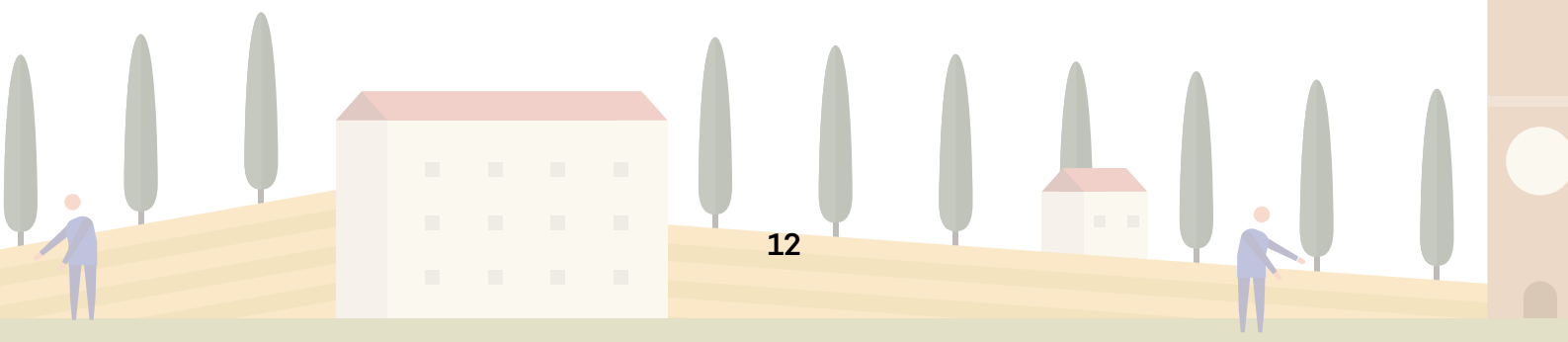
• <http://www.retegas.org/index.php>



Photograph: Vanessa Malandrin



**all the food has a purpose, and there are far fewer risks to health. All these factors are extremely important to the sustainability of local food systems**



# 'Bazaars' in Warsaw



## Organic 'bazaars' in Warsaw — Poland

Residents of Warsaw are the lucky beneficiaries of some less-than-conventional markets that have sprung up recently in the city. These 'bazaars' make shopping a social event rather than a mundane task. They combine unique locations, original organisational ideas and, most importantly direct contact with producers – of traditional and new tastes, from diverse methods of cultivation, and for diverse diets and recipes.

### BioBazar

For over four years, a former manufactured plate and metal elements factory, abandoned in 1982, reincarnates every Saturday morning and Wednesday afternoon into an organic market. In a post-industrial environment, and a building dating back over one-hundred-years, visitors can buy organic vegetables, fruit, dairy products, bread, cured meats, chickens, wine, tea and coffee, as well as ready-made traditional dishes like dumplings or regional delicacies like "piróg biłgorajski" (a cake with potatoes and buckwheat). The market is exclusively for organic growers, and certificates are checked – although uncertified produce is allowed in the absence of alternatives (for example fish from

The market is exclusively for organic growers, and certificates are checked



sustainable fisheries). Customers can drink Fair Trade coffee, take part in cooking workshops, and participate in innovative recycling schemes – exchanging used batteries and old computer hardware for spruce trees in flowerpots or flower seedlings. Around three thousand people visit the BioBazar every Saturday, and over 20,000 follow the market on Facebook. Producers pay fees and give in a percentage of their revenue; and feel there is no other place in Warsaw that enables them to earn so much in one day.

## The fortress market 'Forteca'

For four years now, every Wednesday, this mysterious 19th century fortress, surrounded by a moat, turns into a market offering fresh herbs, organic oyster mushrooms, vegetables, eggs, cheese, fresh pressed-juice, fish and honey. It is considerably smaller than the BioBazar; but compensates by creating another unique, cozy environment. The idea originated from the famous Polish chef - Agnieszka Kręglicka – a Slow Food advocate and food connoisseur.



The market is envisioned as a place for everyday shopping, mainly unprocessed produce, directly from farmers



Agnieszka Kręglicka said: *"It was important to me that vegetables are delivered to our restaurants by Piotr Rutkowski whom we call "Pan Ziółko" [Engl. „Mister Herb”], but he didn't want to supply many places in Warsaw due to traffic jams and difficult transport; however, he agreed to come to one destination – Forteca. Following a few deliveries he asked me whether he could also leave some packages for his individual clients who order via mail. I approved and this is how the stall came into existence, which immediately went viral on social media attracting a large number of customers."*

*"In the beginning, we served only seasonally except for the winter, now, however, we work all year round. We organise extra festive markets with producers from the whole country. Regular markets are attended by between 300-400 people in total. Those special ones are visited by 2000 guests or more."*

*"The market is envisioned as a place for everyday shopping, mainly unprocessed produce, directly from farmers. Personally I prefer those who cultivate and breed animals themselves. For example the carp producers Dorota and Włodek Orzechowscy from a fish breeding estate in Jastrzębie Kąty. They own the ponds, use their own cereal for feed and then sell the carp both raw and processed – smoked, in jelly, in vinegar, pâtés. The second criterion is an ecolabel. Still, it is not obligatory, there are manufacturers without certification, provided their production is small-scale and sustainable. There are a few importers, but I try to limit their number."*



# Bringing local food to the city



## Farmers' markets in Prague — Czech Republic

The first farmers' market (farmářský trh in Czech) in the Czech capital, Prague, was held in 2009 and since then demand for fresh locally-grown produce has continued to increase. Within two years, there were more than 13 farmers' markets in the capital.

Jana Spilková, an Assistant Professor of Social Geography and Regional Development at Prague's Charles University said: *"Farmers' markets are the first real example of alternative food networks... in the Czech Republic. They illustrate the start of a noticeably new consumer and producer culture, created as concerns about food consumption, ethics, social diversity, and urban renewal come together."*

### How do they operate?

A survey of farmers' markets in Prague in 2010 found that most were organised by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (8 out of 13); two were organised by the municipality (both on the outskirts of the capital); one was run by a professional agency on behalf of the municipality (the agency also organises two other markets in the city), and the other took place in, and was organised by a shopping mall.<sup>27</sup>

In April 2011 the Czech Ministry of Environment introduced a grant scheme to support the development of open air food markets, with a budget of more than €400,000 as seed money to organise farmers' markets across the Czech Republic.

The inspiration to hold seasonal farmers' markets in the Czech capital came in part from popular experiences abroad, such as Borough Market in London and the Greenmarkets in New York. There was also an awareness of the importance of markets for a city centre. Some of Prague's inhabitants and some civil society groups were worried that the city's historical heritage was disappearing after the last food market shut down in 2006.

Most of the markets are held from Mondays to Saturdays between March and October. Detailed information about the farmers, the location, timetables and available products, can be found online, along with information about related events, such as food festivals.

On weekdays there are often as many as 30 farmers' stalls in the city centre with a wide assortment of products. Some of the stalls also offer crèche services while the parents do their shopping or talk to farmers and acquaintances.



Photograph: Vanesse Malandrin

**farmers' markets  
are the first  
real example of  
alternative food  
networks... in the  
Czech Republic**



The markets held in the outskirts of Prague are generally smaller, with between 10 and 15 stalls and a more limited assortment of produce. All tend to be crowded, attracting families with children, young couples, middle-aged people, and pensioners, although the largest number of customers are aged between 26 and 40, followed by elderly people in their early 60s. Few people come from outside the city or from the suburbs to shop at the markets.



Photograph: Za Zemiata

## Challenges

One of the biggest challenges was to convince Prague's city authorities that a farmers' market would add to the city centre's appeal and be economically viable. But the farmers' markets have been found to have a certain charm, which helps attract many of the tourists who come to visit Prague. As well as selling seasonal fresh fruits and vegetables, many of the farmers' markets sell traditional local produce including smoked meats and fish, cheeses, homemade bread, and ciders.

## How do they add value?


Most people say they prefer to shop at farmers' markets because they believe that the food there is fresher and tastes better than the food from supermarkets and corner stores. They see the local origin of the food as important and think it is a more environmentally-friendly way to shop.

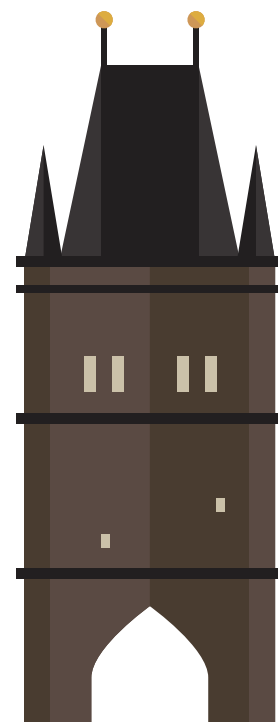
There is very little organic certified produce on sale at the markets, and this is not considered a priority by the market organisers. However 31% of the people questioned in a survey said they preferred to buy organic goods. This suggests there is a shift towards more informed, and conscious green consumption habits.

This appetite for organic produce means that Prague's farmers' markets may develop a more ethical approach in the future, but for the moment the focus is on access to local quality food.

It is clear that farmers' markets in the Czech Republic have the potential to further increase in number and to develop new approaches to food provision and consumption. The short food supply chains, which include different forms of business organisations such as farmers' markets have experienced a rapid expansion in the Czech Republic.

For more information on farmers' markets in Prague:  
• <http://www.farmarsketrziste.cz/en/>

  
the start of a noticeably new consumer and producer culture, created as concerns about food consumption, ethics, social diversity, and urban renewal come together



# Gardening for a single season



## Self-harvest gardens — Germany

At the boundaries of numerous German cities, smallholdings are being used to plant vegetables for a single season. In German, this system is known as self-harvest (Selbsternte), season gardens (Saisongarten) or rented gardens (Mietgarten). This system enables urbanites to grow their own organic produce and directly experience how food is grown. The idea developed in Austria during the 1980s and has been spreading through Germany since 1999.<sup>28</sup>



Foto: Max von Grafenstein



People on neighbouring beds get to know each other, exchange recipes and frequently organise harvest festivals

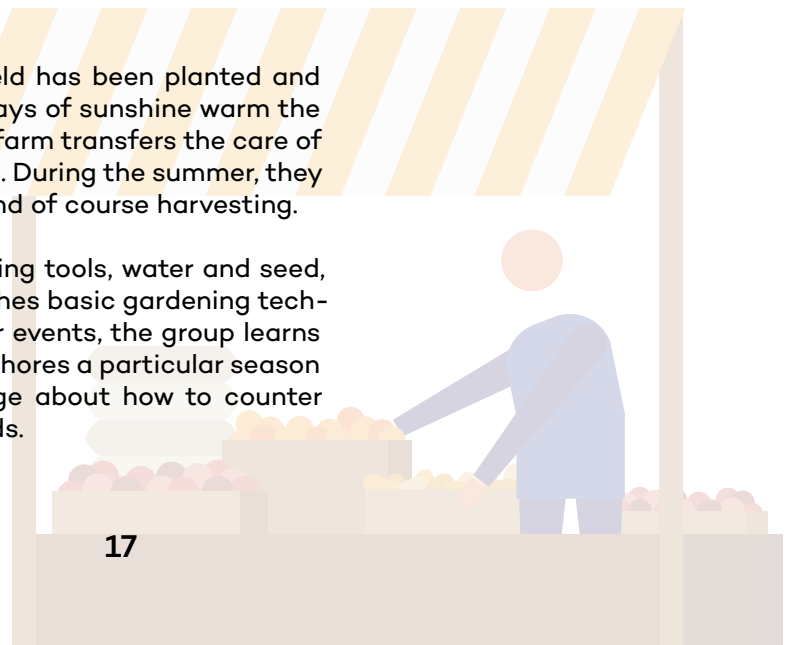


## The principles of self-harvest gardening

The basic principle is simple. A farm plants and sows a number of vegetables on a field and then divides the field into 40 to 80 square-metre beds. City dwellers can then rent these vegetable beds for a fixed sum for one season.

Gardening begins in spring, after the field has been planted and the plants begin to grow when the first rays of sunshine warm the field. The season starts in May, when the farm transfers the care of the prepared beds to its urban customers. During the summer, they take care of weeding, hoeing, watering and of course harvesting.

The farm provides the necessary gardening tools, water and seed, and, over the course of the summer, teaches basic gardening techniques and offers support. During regular events, the group learns how to cultivate the vegetables and the chores a particular season demands, while gaining useful knowledge about how to counter 'unwelcome guests' in their vegetable beds.



Over the course of the season, urbanites harvest salad, courgettes, potatoes and many other types of vegetables. They can replant beds that have been harvested with new vegetables. People on neighbouring beds get to know each other, exchange recipes and frequently organise harvest festivals.

At the end of summer, when the last vegetables have been harvested, the gardening season ends. The beds return to the farm, which prepares them for the coming spring.



Foto: Bauerngarten Berlin

Seasonal gardening offers city dwellers an opportunity to grow their own supply of fresh, high-quality produce

## The benefits of the concept

Seasonal gardening offers city dwellers an opportunity to grow their own supply of fresh, high-quality produce. They come to understand how plants grow and ripen, understand seasonality and learn the basic gardening chores.

For farms, this form of direct marketing provides greater security in cultivation planning, as well as a fixed income. The direct contact with city dwellers creates a strong link and raises awareness about regional agriculture.

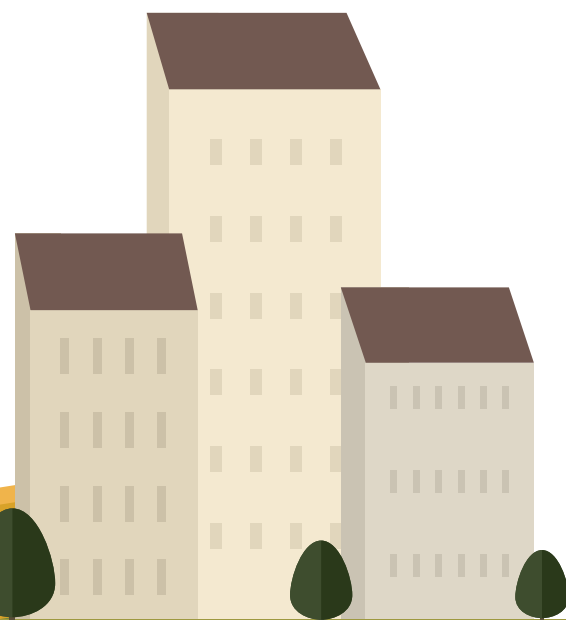
There are a number of these projects in Germany. Examples include (in German):

<http://www.bauerngarten.net>

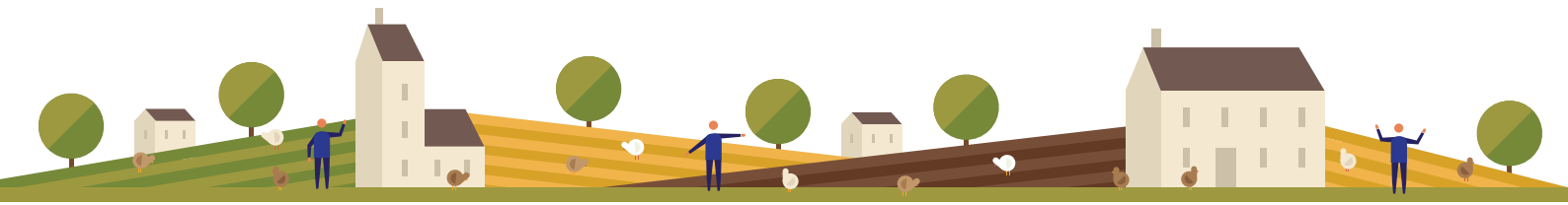
<http://www.meine-ernte.de>

<http://www.ackerhelden.de>

<http://www.gartenglueck.info>



# Community Supported Agriculture



## Germany

Many people want to consume healthy and fresh regional produce in Germany and they do it increasingly through Community supported agriculture (in German Solidarische Landwirtschaft or SoLaWi). In Germany there are already over 90 farms<sup>29</sup> organised along these lines.

## The CSA concept

CSA works in the following manner:<sup>30</sup> a group of consumers finance work on the farm. They sign a one-year contract and pay fixed membership dues. In exchange, the farm provides the members with food. Once a week, it delivers fruit, vegetables and occasionally animal products to distribution centres that are close by. The exact deliveries depend on the season. The members regularly help out on the farm and can take part in deciding on what to plant.



Community supported agriculture (CSA) enables people to buy their food directly from farms



Consumers interested in CSA can find farms close to them at the website [ernte-teilen.org](http://ernte-teilen.org). The site provides a list of these farms and a short profile of each project, describing how they work, which produce they offer and their delivery area.

## The benefits of the concept

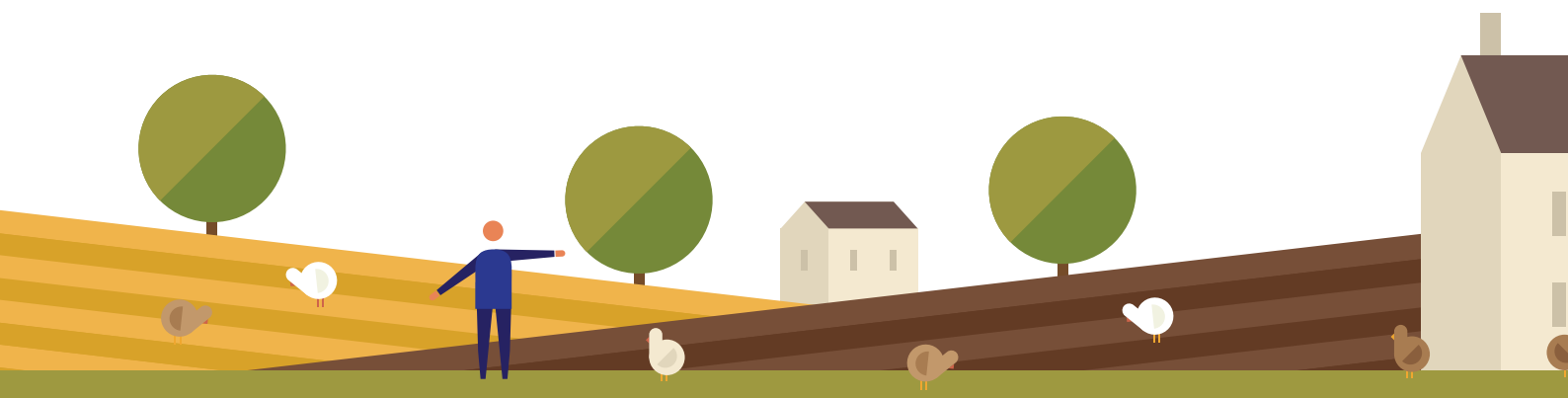
CSA provides seasonal food from the local region. It enables consumers to buy fresh produce directly from the farm. They also see how their food is produced and experience the rhythm of the agricultural seasons. By working on the farm, they come to understand how agricultural work is organised. Families with children can particularly benefit, as there is much to discover and learn. Contacts to new people evolve and this helps create a sense of community.

The members guarantee that they will buy the farm's produce and thereby provide the farm with a secure and predictable income. The farm becomes independent from the dominant marketing structures and from fluctuating prices. The group even shares the risk of crop failure for example due to bad weather conditions. Consequently, CSA contributes to the regional creation of value through diverse forms of smallholder farming.

For further information (in German) see:  
<http://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org>



**The members guarantee that they will buy the farm's produce and thereby provide the farm with a secure and predictable income**



# Public policies for sustainable local food



## Hungary

In the last few years Hungarians have become more interested in healthy eating, as fresh and seasonal food has become more fashionable thanks to the promotion of local farm products by civil society. This trend is demonstrated by the rising popularity of farmers' markets and food festivals, which have become more common in recent years. This change is the result of civil society's endeavours to improve the way the local food system works, going back to 2007. As a result Hungarian society is today seeing the benefits of these changes, and the results can be seen in the lives of ordinary people. They have healthier diets, and increasingly choose local ingredients and shop at farmers' markets.



Photograph: Za Zemiata



as an organic market garden, concentrating on small-scale production for local markets, the ecological footprint of our food is small, whilst the quality is very high, and the environmental and social benefits are great



## How did this happen?

Hungary has a strong tradition of small farms and local food chains, but since accession to the European Union, policies (including the CAP) have favoured larger producers.<sup>31</sup>

In 2007, food lovers and activists published a 'Culinary Charter'. The document was launched in Budapest and signed by the country's famous chefs and restaurant owners, as well as academics, writers and journalists. The charter became a point of reference for both producers and consumers. The authors called on the state and the Hungarian public to support agricultural producers, chefs and restaurateurs.

This growing interest in food and its provenance has also contributed to another developing trend, in which more and more young



people are moving from urban to rural areas to farm, going 'back to the land'. These 'new farmers', want to promote sustainable food consumption through the reinvention of culinary traditions, and to stimulate agriculture by building direct relationships between farmers and consumers. Community supported agriculture schemes, such as the Open Garden Foundation,<sup>32</sup> have been set up to grow local food.

Matthew Hayes, organic food gardener, member of Open Garden Foundation and researcher at Szent István University in Budapest says: *"As an organic market garden, concentrating on small-scale production for local markets, the ecological footprint of our food is small, whilst the quality is very high, and the environmental and social benefits are great"*.

Hungarian civil society has played the role of a broker, bringing farmers, consumers and others into alliances to try and strengthen the position of local small-scale food producers by establishing short food supply chains.

## Policies to encourage local food

Efforts to promote local food, backed by consumer demand, led to government action to make it easier for small farmers to sell directly to consumers, through farmers markets and direct farm sales.

In 2010, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development embraced the Culinary Charter and issued a decree on small-scale producers. At the local level, administrative support was provided to create local farmers' markets across the country. In 2012 the Ministry took legislative steps to make the procedures associated with opening a farmers' market less burdensome.

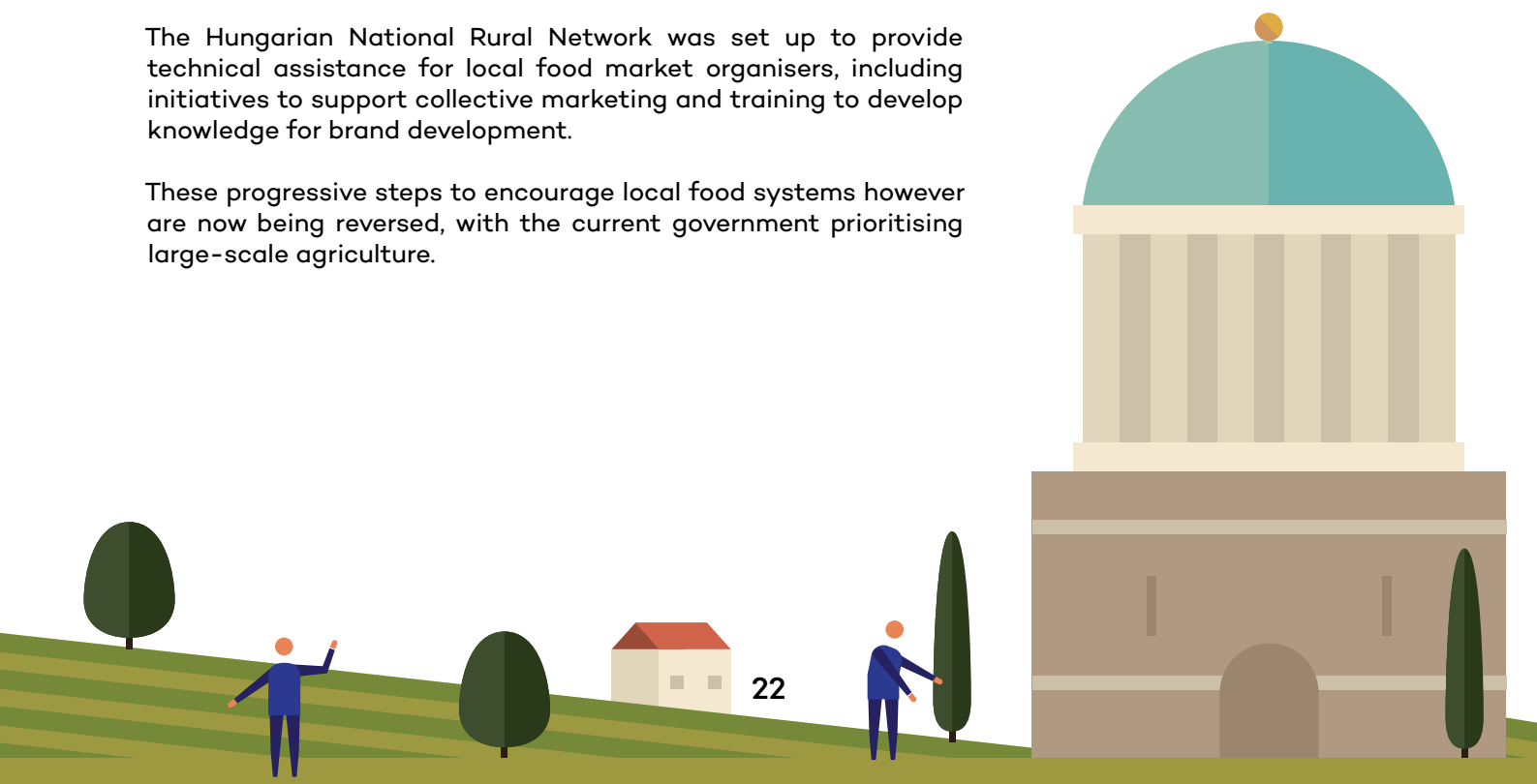
Regulations on production standards, hygiene, trade and certification were amended to recognise the special circumstances faced by small farms. The government's food strategy identified local food systems as being a primary tool of local economic development.<sup>33</sup> Farmers' markets were given legal definition under the Trade Act, and the Public Procurement Act (2011) supported local food.

The Hungarian National Rural Network was set up to provide technical assistance for local food market organisers, including initiatives to support collective marketing and training to develop knowledge for brand development.

These progressive steps to encourage local food systems however are now being reversed, with the current government prioritising large-scale agriculture.



Photograph: Za Zemiata



# Conclusions

## Eating is an agricultural act

The five cases featured here are only a few of the many examples found across Europe. They show how the wide-ranging social, environmental and economic benefits of local systems are offering answers to the shared economic and environmental crises. They show more and more people looking for locally-sourced sustainable food. Consumers are seeking ways to connect with farmers and producers so that they know where their food has come from – while farmers and small-scale producers are seeing the benefits of a local customer base.

Individuals are coming together to devise new ways of sourcing and supplying food through short supply chains, rediscovering the benefits of buying directly from the farmer at traditional markets, as with the farmers' markets in Prague, or finding new ways of distributing and supplying local food, using web-based technology as with the self-harvest gardens in Germany.

In some cases, individuals are becoming more involved in growing and distributing food themselves, as with the Spanish chicken farm cooperative, and the Italian Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale. These schemes reflect the wider economic and social benefits of short food supply chains, helping small farmers to survive in the European countryside.

A unifying feature of most of the case studies is a higher awareness among the people involved of the environmental impacts of food production and the search for agroecological solutions to industrially-produced food – by purchasing seasonal, sustainable, local food.

These cases also show the potential for creating profitable business models which create a new form of value within the economy. Direct farm gate sales, farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture in its many forms, solidarity purchasing groups and local co-op shops all show how value can be created by bringing consumers and producers together to create a viable market.

Creating successful local food schemes is not necessarily easy. Most of the schemes featured have faced challenges in getting established – whether as a result of regulations that are not adapted to the needs of small-scale farmers and producers, or as a result of limited human or financial resources.

Both the Hungarian and the Czech case studies show the importance of policy support at a national and local level. In Prague, the fate of

the farmers' markets depended on the willingness to the city's authorities to recognise that they added value. In Hungary, national and local governments started to play a major role in promoting and supporting local food.

Re-localising the way we produce, process, and distribute food as demonstrated in this publication can help shift our economy so that it addresses the problems of climate change and biodiversity collapse, as well as the rising levels of social and economic inequality.

Policymakers should recognise the value of agroecological approaches to the food system and support them in multiple policy areas – including health, environment, rural development, trade and agriculture – noting that they can deliver solutions to many cross-departmental policy challenges, especially at local and regional levels.

Friends of the Earth Europe believes that by shifting to agroecology, rediscovering and capturing local knowledge, and refocusing on local needs, our food systems can support local economies and the people using them to create a greener and fairer economy. Friends of the Earth Europe also wants to see public money spent on supporting local farmers and food companies to make sustainable, seasonal, fresh food available to local people. Dedicating substantial financial support through the CAP to short food supply chains should be a priority.





# Policy Demands

The European Commission, which coordinates overall EU policy on food and farming, needs to:

1. Lead the debate in the EU on the need to transform the food system to put local economies at its core.
2. Introduce a sustainable food policy to encourage citizens to have more sustainable diets, thereby reducing resource use and helping maintain healthy populations – eating more plants and fresh products, while wasting less food.
3. Change health and safety, food hygiene, environmental health, and labelling regulations so that they do not disproportionately affect smaller producers and enterprises.
4. Create stricter enforcement mechanisms fighting abusive practices in the EU's food supply chain and close the gap between producer prices and retail prices, since workers' conditions have degraded and smaller-scale farmers are finding themselves increasingly excluded from higher value markets.
5. Fund and support research, knowledge creation, business development skills and entrepreneurial training programmes to support food democracy, social equality, and protection of the environment within Europe.

National governments and Local Authorities where applicable need to:

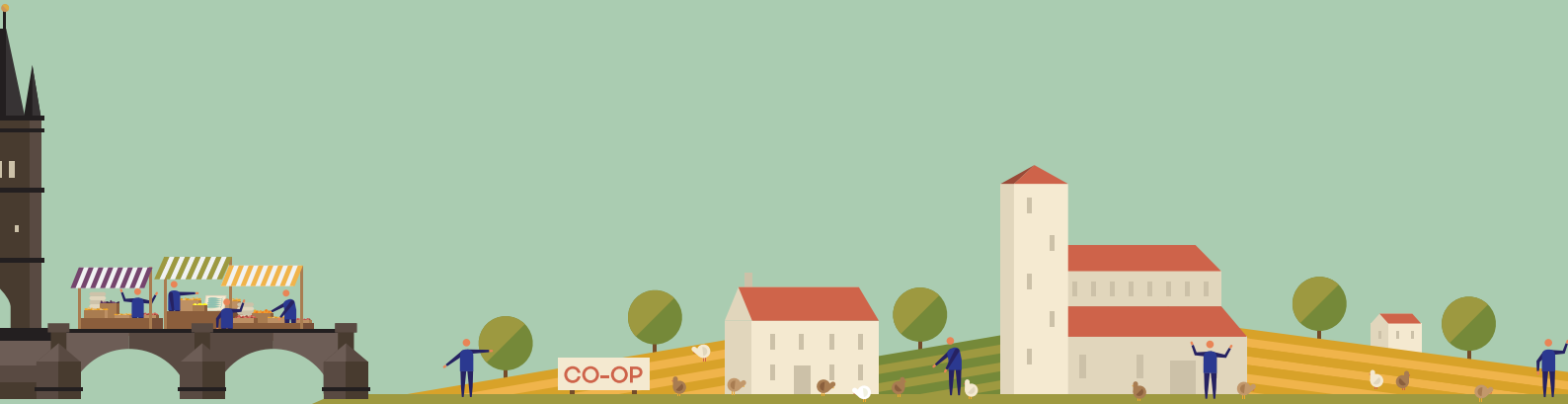
1. Make best use of their CAP budgets and spend them supporting local economies through both first and second pillar measures.
2. Shift money from the untargeted direct payments budget to targeted second pillar measures to support organic farming, quality schemes, cooperation and producers groups producing and marketing sustainable food, agri-environment-climate advisory services, and agroecological innovation, in a way that funds only farmers and food enterprises delivering for the environment and people.
3. Use public procurement as a tool to increase the demand for local sustainable food from small-scale food producers, in accordance with Directives 2014/24/EU and 2014/25/EU that can prioritise local procurement.
4. Support local and regional developments geared towards the establishment of local food hubs with facilities for collection, storage and processing accessible by both producers and consumers.
5. Promote the introduction of Local Food Policy Councils to encourage participatory governance of local food systems.
6. Implement the Committee of Food Security's Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, especially concerning spatial planning to protect agricultural land in peri-urban areas from speculative property development that is to the detriment of land for local food production, especially by small-scale producers.

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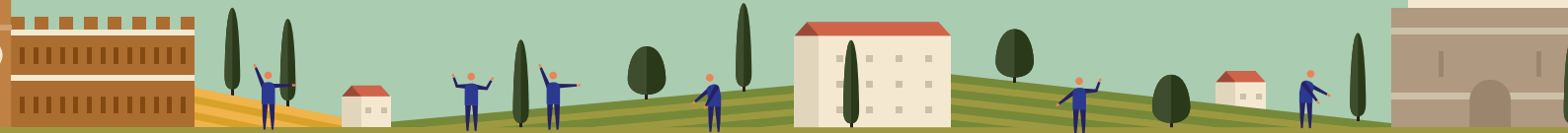


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