

MEET THE PEOPLE COOKING UP A BETTER FUTURE FOR OUR FOOD AND FARMING



**Friends of
the Earth
Europe**

Across Europe, small-scale farmers and food activists are pushing a transition towards a better way of producing and consuming food. One that respects nature and the climate, produces better food, and provides good livelihoods for those involved.

These testimonies showcase successful examples from countries where a transition towards agroecological farming and local distribution is already happening. They are but a handful of the huge, diverse movement that is growing across Europe.

How can we support them to grow and thrive?

Farmers need support to farm sustainably, and sell their produce locally. They shouldn't be squeezed out by ever-expanding industrial farms, and should be free from supermarkets who push prices ever-lower.

And as consumers, we should be able to purchase ecologically-produced food from local producers.

Governments - and the EU, through the Common Agricultural Policy - need to urgently make these happen if they are serious about making good use of public money to support a fairer, safer and more sustainable food and farming system.

DENMARK



LOCAL RESISTANCE: FACTORY FARMING AND SUSTAINABLE LAND USE

At Tuse Næs on Northern Sealand, Denmark, factory pig farming is being expanded extensively. This is happening despite it being a protected nature area, its proximity to the coast, the important local orchid species and the climate effects of factory farms.

When the locals realised these negative effects, they decided to gather and take action to work for sustainable farming and nature protection. The group is pushing for a very different system: much less animal production with better animal welfare and better quality meat, space for nature and a farming system that contributes locally instead of ruining communities.

ORGANIC VEGETABLE PRODUCTION AND SUPERMARKET CONTROL

Located on the island of Tåsinge, in Denmark, Skiftevær Økologi is one of the biggest vegetable farms in the country. Marie Eilersen is one of the owners, and has converted it to farm organically.

“Due to the climate-change-caused drought of summer 2018, some vegetables have been smaller than usual. The supermarket therefore sends loads of vegetable back to the farm. Why? Because they are too small. Not rotten, not ugly: just too small.”

Marie suggests that supermarkets sell ‘odd’ shaped vegetables more cheaply, but also that consumers need to change their understanding of how vegetables should look.

Marie Eilersen, one of the owners of an organic farm in Denmark, explains that supermarkets change the packaging for vegetable deliveries every year and so the farm cannot reuse the old ones.

This causes lots of plastic waste, but also a loss of money. Furthermore, supermarkets give almost no space for information about the producer on the packaging, making it more difficult for the consumers to trace their food and producers to promote their products.

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Marie Eilersen
(Skiftevær Økologi)



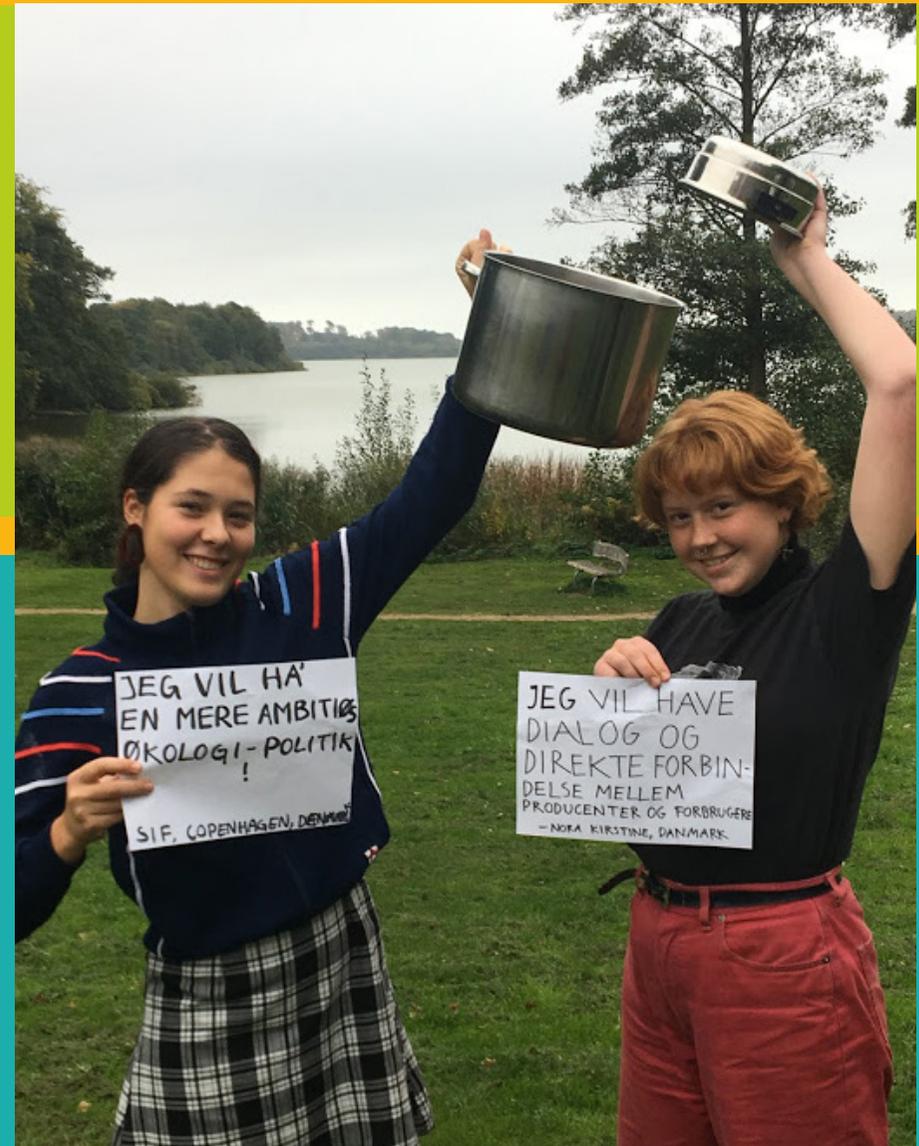


YOUTH FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

“The nicest and happiest youth environmental organization in Denmark” - Ungdom NOAH (Young Friends of the Earth Denmark) is working to establish more connections between farmers and urban youth and to raise the discussion on where and how our food is produced. Its members have visited farms all over Denmark, practice their own practical skills, and inform themselves about food sovereignty. Ungdom NOAH envisages a farming system that is based on holistic thinking, small-scale farming and permaculture principles. They call for more ambitious policies on organic production.

**“THE NICEST AND HAPPIEST
YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL
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Ungdom NOAH
(Young Friends of the Earth Denmark)



POLYÁN ASSOCIATION

'Once, a farmer from Hegyköz said there was no agriculture without animals. He was still thinking about a world where the Earth was not just a source of energy, but a living system that people have to cooperate with'. This is the mentality that Polyán puts into practice.

The main goal of the Polyán Association is to bring back methods which enable people to work with the living systems and not against them.

The most important program of the association is to put back cows in household farming, which includes the popularisation of keeping cattle and an animal placing project.

For the last decade, Miklós Rudolf has tried to help the new farmers find their way back to the Carpathian Braunvieh. He thinks even though more and more people choose to live on the land and be self-sufficient, most don't dare to breed cattle. The main reason for this? The close connection with the animals has been lost. Those planning on getting a few cows could easily get the necessary knowledge by watching some experienced farmers.

The essence of domestic animal keeping is to promote life by producing locally-grown healthy food as well as sustaining the natural environment. This is the motivation that keeps the Polyán association going.

MIKLÓS RUDOLF

ORMÁNSÁG FOUNDATION

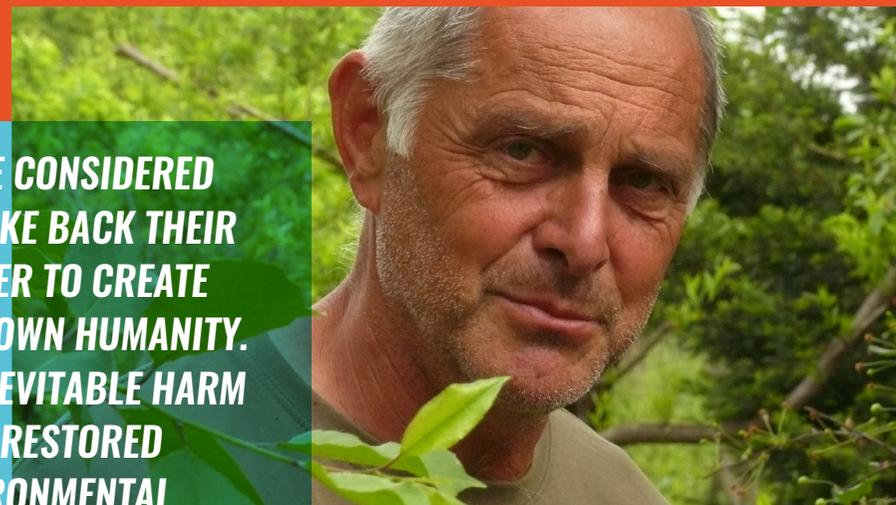
While centuries ago it was a wealthy region, Ormánság is now one of the poorest areas in Hungary. There, Tamás Lantos created a natural orchard of 300 landrace fruit on his five-hectare field, which both respects nature and is capable of large yields. Tamás now shares his knowledge through publications, lectures and practical workshops in his model garden.

'Local people, who were considered functionless, have to take back their tasks in the area in order to create the conditions of their own humanity. Agriculture is not an inevitable harm that always needs to be restored and balanced with environmental protection, instead it can be the care that enriches the land.'

“LOCAL PEOPLE, WHO WERE CONSIDERED FUNCTIONLESS, HAVE TO TAKE BACK THEIR TASKS IN THE AREA IN ORDER TO CREATE THE CONDITIONS OF THEIR OWN HUMANITY. AGRICULTURE IS NOT AN INEVITABLE HARM THAT ALWAYS NEEDS TO BE RESTORED AND BALANCED WITH ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, INSTEAD IT CAN BE THE CARE THAT ENRICHES THE LAND.”

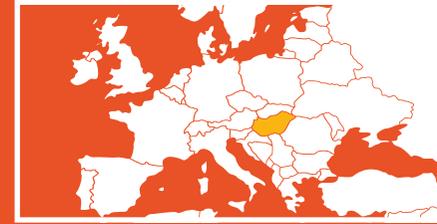
Tamás Lantos
(Ormánság Foundation)

HUNGARY





HUNGARY



MAINTAINING THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY IN THE VILLAGE OF GÖMÖRSZŐLŐS

Gömörszőlős was a small village in decline, leading to an loss of the region's organic culture. Attempts to fight against this tide seemed doomed to failure, yet Iván Gyulai, an expert on sustainability theory, persevered to try to save it.

Sustainable development is now taught here, and several thousand people have experienced how an organic farm with a permaculture garden works, using mulch, native animals and an ancient orchard.

"Our goal was to bring sustainability closer to people and show how it was possible to turn this beautiful idea to practice: to live today in such a way that there is something left for the future. Here in Gömörszőlős, people's minds resonate more easily with nature; this is an island of quiet, harmony and nature."

Besides being an expert on sustainability theory, Iván Gyulai is well-schooled in its practice, which is well demonstrated by his pioneering work in projects such as the Gömörszőlős 'sustainable village'.

"Our goal was to bring the notion of sustainability closer to people and show how it was possible to turn this beautiful idea to practice: to live today in such a way that there is something left for the future. Here in Gömörszőlős, people's minds resonate more easily with the natural world; this is an island of quiet, harmony and nature."

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Iván Gyulai
(Gömörszőlős)





STATE PLATFORM AGAINST INDUSTRIAL LIVESTOCK

The Loporzano Platform against Intensive Livestock (PLSGI) was born to defend the environment, public health, the rural world and the welfare of people and animals. It has become a movement that has created the State Platform to Stop Industrial Livestock, with the help of Friends of the Earth and Food & Water Europe.

“From one end of the country to another, we fight for the survival of our rural world, which is gravely threatened by the proliferation, disproportionate and uncontrolled, of a productive model that destroys employment and aggravates depopulation, expropriating our most precious asset: our land.” environment. This is the motivation that keeps the Polyán association going.

KABRIOLAS PROJECT

Five years ago, Rocío started her project as a sustainable shepherd with a few native Guadarrama goats. Her dream was to upgrade this project with the production of artisan cheeses and yoghurts - a dream she shared with Gemma and Amaranta.

“Once we have enough milk we want to start a cheese factory. We will be able to guarantee that the milk is natural, from animals that live in their environment with their natural rhythms, and which are treated with affection. This in turn allows us to favour cooperation among rural women, self-employment, artisanal production and local development.”

SPAIN



“WE WILL BE ABLE TO GUARANTEE THAT THE MILK IS NATURAL, FROM ANIMALS THAT LIVE IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT WITH THEIR NATURAL RHYTHMS, AND WHICH ARE TREATED WITH AFFECTION.”

Rocío
(Kabriolas Project)



ROCÍO, GEMMA AND AMARANTA



VACANEGRA

Marina is the most visible face of the Vacanegra project, a family, ecological and extensive livestock farming born in the 1980s. In 2000, she decided to go a step further and transform her father's business into an ecological project.

"We have optimised the obtaining of natural resources, finding a balanced system combining the traditional uses of the territory, the adaptation to technology and the most current fashion. In this way we close the circle, raise the calves, fatten them and market the meat directly through short marketing channels, specialised stores, consumer groups, our online store and our own small shop."

"The process consists of optimising the resources of the farm and buying as little as possible, to take advantage of the particularities of each season. This means using acorns or the branches of the oaks in autumn, conserving scrubland when the pastures are depleted, and collaborating with fire prevention, which is really important in our country. We also make sure to rotate pastures and meadows during the spring months to soil erosion and favour the diversity of species", says Marina, the most visible face of the Vacanegra cow farm - a family, ecological and extensive livestock farm, born in the 1980s.



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Marina
(Vacanegra)

CELBRIDGE, KILDARE

Nathan Jackson is not your average farmer. He uses his work to make a social and political statement. Nathan's farm is a 'Community Supported Agriculture' project (CSA): he works the land but his consumers are investor-members, who pay a fee that covers Nathan's wage and the running costs of the farm. In return, they receive food - usually a box of vegetables per week.

Nathan emphasises that the agriculture situation in Ireland cannot be solved by farmers only. "Farmers are too busy, too poor and too locked-in to inadequate farm schemes to shake things up." So who takes responsibility? Well, according to Nathan, everybody else. "We as society have to redraw our farm policies and schemes. It is all of us who will be eating the food, so why should not we all have a say?"

YFOEE (IRELAND)



***“WE AS SOCIETY
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Nathan Jackson
(Celbridge)



ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN THE CITY: IT CAN BE DONE

Joke de Moel works on urban agriculture in the Dutch city of Amersfoort. She has helped create a place for real farming in the city, where Amersfoort's residents can easily experience all aspects of farming - from tilling the soil to harvesting the crops.

Participants can become involved in many different ways, both financially as well as by doing real farm work. Anyone can become a member by paying an annual contribution. In exchange, participants receive a share of the harvest each week. In this way, participants and farmers share the risks.

Joke grows everything organically on the urban farm - no commercial fertilizers or chemical pesticides are used. Everyone is welcome there; it's important to have a place to meet, women, self-employment, artisanal production and local development."

NETHERLANDS



ROOSTERS AMONG THE HENS KEEP THE PEACE

In Voorthuizen, in the centre of the Netherlands, Chris and Marjanne run an organic poultry farm. Their mission differs from the large industrial farms, where the farmer is more manager than farmer. They do it with love and respect for nature.

"Our main concern is that the chickens live in a natural way. We converted our poultry barn in 2007, taking into account how chickens eat, drink, sleep and lay eggs. We've also paid attention to creating a sheltered, green outdoor space. And we keep a few roosters among the hens, because they provide a clear pecking order and that maintains peace in the barn."

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Chris & Marjanne Borren
(Voorthuizen)



JOKE DE MOEL



PROWLING INSECTS TO COMBAT FUNGUS AND BACTERIA

"We started out farming in the traditional way, mostly asparagus and chicory. But we wanted to transition to organic farming. This takes time - it's a process of gaining insight. The farmers in our area thought that you couldn't grow sweet peppers without pesticides, but that just motivated us more."

At the greenhouse farm, they use animal manure, which comes from a local organic goat farm. They also mix compost into the soil. Instead of chemical pesticides, they use ladybirds, wasps and green lacewing flies. These combat plant fungi, bacteria and insect pests. They breed the helpful insects themselves and put them to work in the greenhouses when needed.

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Mia & Adri
(Organic Greenhouse Farm)



YOUNG AGRICULTURE ENTHUSIAST

Growing food has become our passion. The journey started when my husband Michelangelo and I decided to have a go at growing broad beans. Years later we are growing a variety of organic fruits and vegetables for ourselves and our family, looking at the idea of growing food in a more holistic manner, making sustainability a top priority.

Through research and practice we have found that implementing a permaculture and a closed-loop system not only benefits the land but also ourselves, making growing food more sustainable.

We cannot understand the fascination some farmers have with having bare soil, as if the field looks clean... give nature some space! Being sustainable is about sustaining ourselves without depleting the land. It's about giving back to Mother Earth by providing a safe haven for plants and animals alike, creating a shared space, it's the least we can do.

Bare soil leads to faster rates of erosion, compaction due to rainfall and irradiation of vital microbial life in the topsoil. Instead, we encourage wild plants to grow. They act as sacrificial plants which divert pests, and attract pollinators too.

MICHELLE GALEA

SAMWEL GRIMA

In Malta, organic farming offers farmers an alternative route to securing a fair price.

Most organic farmers were conventional farmers dissatisfied with an unjust market situation. Switching to organic allowed them to adopt direct selling methods, since the very high demand for organic food guarantees a steady market. It thus offers hope for Maltese farmers who are frustrated with the bottom line.

They feel healthier, more responsible to themselves and to customers, more stable financially, and more in touch with their past.

URBAN FARMER

There is so much more to farming than just the production of food. It is a life that many have been born into and one that many others choose as their vocation, profession and purpose in this world.

When we talk about farming in 2019, we must use the word 'sustainable' attached to it with glue.

The word sustainable comes from something being "upheld or defended". To me, sustainable farming means upholding the importance of the farming community, the people of a nation, the soil, and all the flora and fauna that make up our bio-diversity and ultimately gives us a happy, healthy life.

MALTA



EMANUELA DE GIORGIO



SUSTAINABLE PIG BREEDER

My pigs are never sick. If you want to take care of your health, you have to eat good things. They eat crushed cereals, vegetables, I cook them potatoes...

Instead of buying cheap meat every day, it is better to save and eat good meat less often.

I raise my pigs for about eight months in large open spaces. They aren't fat, their stomachs do not touch the ground. The pig is a very playful and sociable animal.

They also enrich the soil. No need for a tractor for future crops!

Our problems are economic. For example, money for switching to organic is capped and isn't guaranteed. Meanwhile, the French state gives big handouts to factory farms.

OLIVIER CHEVALLIER

BIODYNAMIC WINE PRODUCER

I have been in farming since I was little, but I never felt like I was working. Some days it's not easy, but I'm happy.

I was introduced to biodynamics when I was 13 years old. I work with the rhythms of the earth, of the moon.

I let the earth, the soil express itself. You just have to listen. The vine is a peculiar plant. A bottle of wine is the trace of a whole year. Wine is above all pleasure, sharing.

We must be responsible in our relationship to the land and do conscious acts. We must cultivate rather than exploit.

FRANCE



“WE MUST BE RESPONSIBLE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND AND DO CONSCIOUS ACTS. WE MUST CULTIVATE RATHER THAN EXPLOIT.”

Alain Lahais
(Wine Producer)





SEED GROWERS

Karine and Yannick run a seed selection program that allows them to maintain and improve their varieties. It's very much a family affair.

Last year, Karine and Yannick produced 30 kg of tomato seeds - about 1 million seeds!

All their seeds are 100% organic, reproducible, and local.

These seed lovers advocate that natural varieties come out of the seed registration system. They are at the heart of life, against the certification of life.

Karine has always recovered the seeds with her father. It's natural for her. She does not see herself doing anything else and enjoys being outdoors.

Yannick's message is: "Do not get trapped in the hybrid seed cycle because you have to buy new seeds every year. Those who end up doing this don't know anything about it. May they come and put their hands in the ground!"

A photograph of Yannick, a man with a beard and curly hair, wearing a grey sweater, looking down at a group of piglets in a field. The background is a misty, green landscape.

**“DO NOT GET TRAPPED
IN THE HYBRID SEED
CYCLE BECAUSE YOU
HAVE TO BUY NEW
SEEDS EVERY YEAR.”**

Yannick
(Seed grower)



ZIVA FARMA - THE LIVING FARM

"It wasn't enough for me anymore to be an intellectual who buys fair trade coffee, goes to farmers markets and drinks tap water. I wanted more," explains Eva Kožnar Vítková, who left her city life to set up a farm in Southern Moravia with her husband, Libor.

Their decision has been so far more than successful - their Ziva farma (living farm) already supplies the community with their fruits and vegetables, and they plan to build a processing facility and a meeting point. But above all, they want to show that it can be done differently. "We want living soil and nature, but also a living community. We want to create and share values," says Libor. One of their core values is food justice - fair conditions in food production and trade.

LUKAVA ORGANIC FARM

"We started like a pioneers in the Wild West," says Jana Rosenbaumova of starting up of her organic farm.

She started by grazing sheep extensively on rented land, living in a caravan. They're pretty sure they had the only legal cheese processing facility on wheels in central Europe!

Soon they started to use horses. "They are much more environmentally friendly for the soil and land than machines," she says.

An important moment for the farm was building it into a community-supported agriculture project. "The motivation and joy from our work was back. We would like to build a place where people, animals and plants learn from each other."

CZECH REPUBLIC



"WE WOULD LIKE TO BUILD A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE, ANIMALS AND PLANTS LEARN FROM EACH OTHER."

Jana Rosenbaumova
(Organic Farm Owner)





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