

Workshop 14: Development of small scale agroecological entrepreneurship

Convenor: Vasileios Gkissakis (Agroecologiki SP, Greece)

Impulse talks:

- Katalin Rethy (Hungary) - "Food startups with an agroecological twist in Hungary"
- Cori Keene and Cristina Gil Ruiz (IAEAN) - "Consultancy of the International Agroecology Action Network"

The aim of this workshop was to provide information and stimulation on the development of small-scale entrepreneurship, private social/cooperative, apply and present the agroecology approach to entrepreneurship. A startup founder from Hungary and two co-founders of the International Agroecology Action Network were present and shared their experiences.

Katalin spoke about agroecology in Hungary where startups support small-scale, diversified agricultural systems, shorten food supply chains and address environmental/social issues. In Hungary, it is still largely a niche around Budapest and is not well represented in rural areas.

She gave the examples of three startups, the first ('Haziko') a bistro and catering company that began to source from nearby farms and implemented their own quality control. The second ('Magosvolgy Farm') a CSA style operation with a diversified production that contributes to local job creation. The third ('Szezon Kert') which is a small-scale vegetables, edible flowers and herbs farm. They deliver to homes work in close partnerships with chefs and restaurants who understand the trial and error of development. She discussed the significant economic potential of these initiatives and concluded by stating that it is perfectly acceptable to take ideas from other places but it always has to be applied in the context of one's own national reality.

Cori and Cristina presented the International Agroecology Action Network (IAEAN) which they helped co-found. Starting with a simple website, they received several requests for projects and created an online course for Colorado State University ('Agroecology for sustainable communities and community-based food systems'). They described how they had to work through the challenges of working remotely with people, how to do consulting as agroecologists, finding funding, appropriate legal status and time. They found opportunities in participatory engagement and capacity-building. The following discussion revolved around two main questions: First, how can small-scale agroecology entrepreneurship support global change and transition? Second, how can small-scale agroecology support global change and transitions?

The need to clarify what agroecological entrepreneurship means was discussed as well as the tendency for agroecology to only be linked to production while there is a need to include the food processors and consumers.

The three main problems for a farmer who wants to start a small scale farm are access to land, tools and markets. To this end incubators were mentioned as a potential way to access land and funds.

The question of how to find the latest opportunities if one cannot attend a conference like the Agroecology Forum was raised. Internet platforms could be an avenue to explore for this.

Combating isolation and creating networks were mentioned as key aspects of the transition, as well as demonstrating that there is another way, to grow and inspire, allowing others to see what it could be—sharing understanding and sowing awareness.