

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

ir. Ruben Savels, prof. dr. ir. Joost Dessen, prof. dr. ir. Stijn Speelman

ASSESSING THE AGROECOLOGICAL PERFORMANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE FARMS IN FLANDERS, BELGIUM

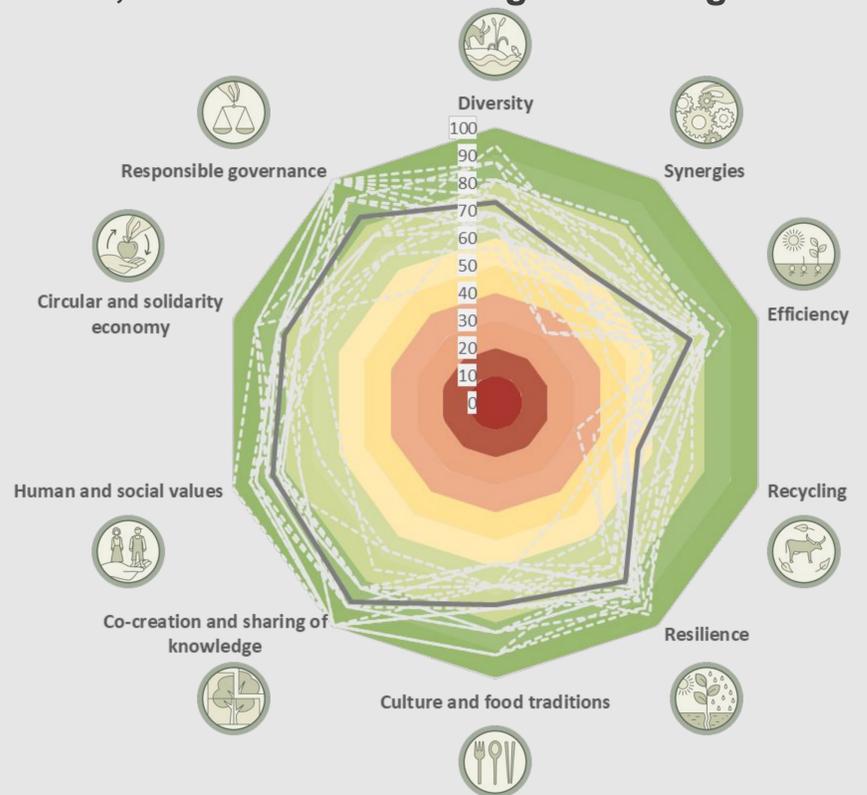
In our research, the agroecological performance and sustainability of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms was assessed, as this farming system explicitly aligns itself with agroecology and its principles and practices. To this end, the Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation (TAPE) was used on 24 Community Supported Agriculture farms in Flanders, the northernmost region of Belgium.

Community Supported Agriculture farms are very advanced in the agroecological transition... although there are significant differences between individual farms

In a first step, the **Characterization of the Agroecological Transition (CAET)** was performed using a questionnaire which involved three or four questions for each of the 10 Elements of Agroecology, after which a score was obtained for each element.

CSA farms scored, on average, *very high* on the elements 'resilience', 'co-creation and sharing of knowledge', 'human and social values', 'circular and solidarity economy' and 'responsible governance'. They scored, on average, *high* on the elements 'diversity', 'efficiency', and 'culture and food traditions' and *moderate* on the elements 'synergies' and 'recycling'. On average, they had no *low* or *very low* scores on any of the elements.

The majority of CSA farms (83%) could thus be considered as agroecological (CAET > 70), while some farms (13%) were in transition to agroecology (50 < CAET < 70) and 4% were not agroecological (CAET < 50).



Community Supported Agriculture farms additionally had high performances on many sustainability indicators... although here too the performance varied among farms

In the **environmental dimension**, the majority of farmers relied solely on ecological techniques for pest and disease management, while a good to very good soil health was observed. Moreover, a significant or even abundant presence of natural vegetation and pollinators and other beneficial animals was reported by the farmers.

In the **social dimension**, dietary diversity was high among farmers while expenditures for food for self-consumption was low, as farmers' diets were strongly based on the fruits, vegetables and other products they produced themselves. Farms were often no typical family farms, often being run by youth and women.

In the **economic dimension**, gross value of the agropastoral production and added value per hectare were about €34.000 and €25.000 on average respectively, while net revenue per employed family member was on average €50.000. Income was perceived to be stable and on an increasing trend for the large majority of farms.

Conclusions:

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms are highly advanced agroecological systems, with high to very high scores on many of the elements of agroecology. Moreover, they showcase high performances on many sustainability indicators in the environmental, social and economic dimensions.

Participating farmers highlighted the relevance of this framework to measure agroecology, and further research should be carried out to establish baseline measurements in other systems to enable comparisons and to study the potential of agroecology in the transition to more sustainable food systems.

Contact

Ruben.Savels@UGent.be

@RubenSavels

Ruben Savels

