



FEEDING OURSELVES 2019

COMMUNITY REVITALISATION THROUGH
COOPERATIVE APPROACHES TO FARMING AND FOOD

23 March 2019
Cloughjordan Ecovillage, Co Tipperary

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Organised by [Cultivate, Agricultural and Rural Convention \(ARC2020\)](#) and [Cloughjordan Community Farm](#), in partnership with [National Organic Training Skillnet \(NOTS\)](#), [University College Cork's Centre for Co-operative Studies](#), [GROW Observatory](#), the Night Orchard, [Food Sovereignty Ireland](#), [Irish Seed Savers](#), [Community Gardens Ireland](#) and [Community Supported Agriculture Network Ireland](#).



Editorial

Feeding Ourselves is an annual conference exploring how cooperative approaches strengthen and build more resilient and sustainable food systems, while at the same time supporting our communities and local economies.

This year's Feeding Ourselves was an especially focused one, with a great set of people from all over Ireland and from a number of organisations. As well as those mentioned above, there was a strong representation from Talamh Beo, a new Irish landworkers organisation, which itself formed as a result from meetings held at earlier Feeding Ourselves gatherings.

There is now strong momentum for ongoing collaboration following the inspiration provided by [Hannes Lorenzen](#) during our Rural Dialogue. There is a real interest in the concept of Rural Parliaments, both in supporting the idea in Ireland and joining in [European Rural Parliaments](#).

The evening event at Feeding Ourselves was a SpeakEATsy - local meal, music, poetry and conversation combo - and facilitated the first public discussions between Extinction Rebellion Ireland and Talamh Beo. This was a really fruitful exchange, where climate activists showed the urgency of the situation, agroecological farmers and growers showed how they are not only responding to the climate crisis, but actively engaged in regenerative practices. It was a real unpacking of complex issues around practices, tactics and action.

We are energised by the momentum Feeding Ourselves has generated. We are engaging with [ECOLISE](#) - the European network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability - and [Forum Synergies](#) to start networking with a pan-European focus.

The outcome of Feeding Ourselves 2019 is a commitment to enable representation for the farms and community gardens, the organizations and initiatives, and most of all the people who are living, working and acting in rural Ireland without adequate representation.

Our communities and our living world demand it!

[Davie Philip](#) (Cultivate) and [Oliver Moore](#) (ARC2020)

Discussion Streams at Feeding Ourselves 2019

Agroecology: **Biological Regenerative Agriculture** Soil, seeds, agroecology, mixed farming

AgTech: **Digitisation Opportunities and Threats** Farm Hack, Farm OS, sensing data, open platforms

Aggregate: **Distribution/Market/Adding Value** Community Supported Agriculture, food hubs, food coops, Ooby Stores, community production kitchens, digital platforms, platform cooperatives



Agroecology

There is a grassroots movement of ecologically minded farming emerging - the regenerative agriculture movement. We focus from root-cause analysis and work up to the food chain.

Context

- » The need to progress transition to agroecology in Ireland by 2050
- » What are the elements of an agroecological farm?
- » AgroEcology/ Biological/ Regenerative Agriculture Practices, Soil, Seeds
- » Agroecology is multifunctional - feeding the soil, pollinators, employing greater numbers rurally, feeling people well.

What are the Opportunities?

- » Change is coming regarding how greenhouse gas emissions are counted (land use, land-use change, and forestry ([LULUCF](#)) - this could work to the benefit of agroforestry and other similar approaches.
- » Regenerative farming can sequester carbon
- » Better supports are possible for the public good provided by organic farmers
- » We are part of nature - we can heal ourselves and the land
- » Consumers are changing: there is an opportunity to capitalise on their desire to know their local farmers
- » From soil microbiology to street feasts there are ways to connect

What are the Threats?

- » Little government support - token finance for organic
- » Industrial organic gives the rest of agroecology a bad name
- » Lack of access to land for people who want to farm it
- » There is a disconnect from the land
- » Poor economic returns
- » Soil organic carbon/matter is hard to accurately measure
- » Seed security is under threat from biocide companies owning them
- » Slurry covering (all) the land

Identify Good Practice

- » Smaller units, less costly technology, less to go wrong
- » Ability to test nutrition value of vegetables
- » Localisation - consumers like to support this
- » Health value of sustainable farming
- » Plant based nutrition
- » Various ways farmers can be rewarded for biodiversity (volunteering land, EIP schemes etc) where farmers are rewarded for volunteering land
- » Evaluate the farm as an ecosystem
- » Focus on building soil organic matter first and foremost
- » Diversification - mimic natural systems
- » Lead with each of our on-farm practices
- » Each farmer could create small natural havens on their farms that then connect to make wildlife corridors. See the "[We are the Ark](#)" movement
- » Example of [HomeTree](#) as offsetting carbon from companies
- » Cover crops that sequester carbon
- » Mob grazing
- » [DANU research project](#) on biological farming practices.
- » Using indigenous microbes for land preparations
- » Biodigesters



Agtech

Centralisation and privatisation of data exist in agriculture but there are high and low tech open source solutions to this enclosure.

- » Threats of closed data - [AgTechTakeBack](#) provides a comprehensive overview.
- » Positive examples in Agriculture - Farm Hack, Farm OS, sensing data, open platforms, collaborative solidarity economy mapping,
- » WeCreate in Cloughjordan Ecovillage (living lab incl Fab Lab, GROW Observatory/soil sensors, NGOs, shared heating, land, farm etc)

Standout statement: the emergence of testing of food quality using spectrometer with handheld devices. ([Dan Kittredge](#))

Five examples of technology engaging with agriculture best practice

- » [Farm OS](#). Open source farm management software.
- » Map Knitter. [Knits drone](#) high quality pics on to google map of farm. Can map beds to regions.
- » [ARDUINO](#) open source micro computing platform
- » [Jean-Martin Fortier](#) a farmer, educator and award-winning author of best-seller “The Market Gardener.” A recognized authority on small-scale, organic vegetable production, he has inspired hundreds of thousands to embrace a vision of agriculture that is human-scale, ecological and profitable.
- » [Regen.network](#) blockchain for agri and carbon sequestration
- » [L’Altelier Paysan](#) a collective of small-scale farmers, agricultural employees and agricultural development organizations, a farmer-driven technologies group
- » [Farm Hack](#) come together share together appropriate tech adapted for small mixed agroecological farms.

What are the Opportunities?

- » Open source and community owned.
- » Ability to gain and share knowledge /experiences cheap/free without costly courses or paywalls
- » Labour and time savings
- » Input efficiencies/accuracy
- » Recording and improving information and records for schemes (organic etc)
- » Traceability of origin and quality of seeds
- » Design out waste

- » Partnerships with [Fab Labs](#) or equivalent
- » Basic labour done by machines, freeing up people to do other work.
- » Replicable open-source plans shared (e.g. [beehives](#) - one sheet of PL-1; Farm OS)
- » Agroecology is knowledge intensive.
- » Sharing economy for affordable tech (Farm Hack)

What are the Threats?

- » Control of technology and software by large corporate interests
- » Failure of technology and power if we are over dependent.
- » Cost of introducing and maintaining technology (path dependency)
- » Reduced learning and experimenting experience
- » Loss of the expertise with the loss of hand-on experience.
- » Removes us from direct contact with the land and animals in food production
- » Reliance on industrial use of fossil fuels
- » Debt (path dependency)
- » Loss of ownership/concentration of power
- » Tech seeds are a biodiversity risk
- » Lose of expertise (and reliance on tech)
- » Less creative knowledge
- » Precision Ag as a silver bullet
- » Distance from land - physical
- » Dependence and disconnection
- » Hydroponic food = missing the magic of life (and turnips)

Identify good practice

- » Open source seeds
- » 2020 label for organic seeds
- » [Raspberry Pi](#) camera to snap leaves and diseases
- » Biomimicry
- » [Dingle Hub](#) - working with UCC also doing good work with open source
- » Internet mesh systems useful to reduce reliance on big internet providers
- » [Airtable](#) - open access database - allows sharing of info re crops - recent development
- » [Regen Network](#) is a global platform for Earth's ecosystem assets, services, and data - monitors ecological states of land





Aggregate

Our modern food supply chain can be long and troublesome - from the primary producers through the cultural economy of secondary producers, marketing and distribution, crossing time zones and borders until food and food “products” finally reach the consumer. What if we were to shorten that chain, develop relationships with our farmers and empower consumers with information and skills?

Key Message: building **social infrastructure** - consumer to farmer, neighbour to neighbour, member to member, finding new places and ways to cook together - are vital to the success of collaborative food initiatives.

What are the Opportunities?

- » Cooperatives/working cooperatively
- » Apps/digital platforms - these are growing in importance as tools for connecting/managing
- » Sharing - skills, space, facilities, equipment, etc. Food prep/meal exchange.
- » Barter/trade/share
- » Approaching churches/community centres to use/rent kitchen facilities
- » Cooking together - save €, save time, learn new skills, relationship building
- » CSAs could find members/deliver food to industrial estates where there are many workers
- » Biodigester as distribution of waste
- » To encourage farmers to use some land for other ways of food production (Brexit and climate change context)
- » Skills and tasks needed to run the CSA don't have to be managed by the farmer.

What are the threats?

- » Access for those with lower income (time, money, knowledge, equipment)
- » Changing food lifestyle can take a large effort in a precarious economy
- » Habit, rules and procedures on plastic packaging, hygiene and food waste
- » Urban access to farmers/produce
- » Minimising the risk to farmers and to consumers
- » Community gardens under threat, misuse of vacant properties by owners/local authorities
- » Lack of rural diversification/too many monocultures

Identify Good Practice

- » [CSA Network Ireland](#)
- » [Derrybeg Farm - CSA serving Maynooth/Celbridge/Leixlip/Lucan](#)
- » [OurTable](#)
- » [Neighbourfood](#) disruptive digital distribution initiative - Cork
- » [Michigan Urban Farm Initiative](#)

Stories from the Field

Short presentations from...

Seed Sovereignty - Wayne Frankham

[Irish Seed Savers](#), Seed Sovereignty Programme, Ireland & UK

GROW Places/ Community Gardens - Dee Sewell

[GROW](#), [Community Gardens Ireland Network](#)

Talamh Beo - Thomas O'Connor

[Talamh Beo](#) is a grassroots organisation of farmers, growers and land based workers

Farm Based Seed Saving - Kevin Dudley

Screening of a new [Cloughjordan Community Farm film](#) and an introduction to the why of open pollinated seed saving

CSA Network Ireland - Róisín Nic Cóil

About the [Community Supported Agriculture Network Ireland](#)







Rural Revitalisation: A European Perspective

With Hannes Lorenzen, ARC2020

Hannes Lorenzen is senior adviser to the [Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development](#) of the European Parliament, where he led the recent organic regulation changes. He is involved in numerous initiatives and organizations focused on agroecology, rural Europe and beyond. These include co-founder of [Grain](#) (Genetic Resources Action International), European Rural Development Network [Forum Synergies](#), independent agri-food and rural policy NGO [ARC2020](#) and US based Institute of Agriculture and Trade Policy ([IATP](#)).

Hannes' key points focused on multiple levels - people, communities, organisations, policy makers - all of whom play a part. The good news is that while organic farmers were laughed at 30+ years ago when he first entered the parliament, this is not the case now. Now they are at the table. So we are making progress, but there are issues with big organic too.

More broadly, rural Europe sees increasing monocultures and fewer farmers. We need to respect natural cycles and limits. Less but better makes sense in meat, and the farmer must be paid for this.

We also need to generate real rural dialogues and partnerships. [CAP's Pillar Two](#) is being cut disproportionately, with its resources being put into insurance schemes to keep unsustainable agri practices running. How will this impact community led local development projects? He also emphasised that there may be a renationalisation of CAP coming - this is not good news on a number of fronts - which could lead to a race to the bottom in standards and less of a collective focus. "We are already starting to organise ourselves - we need more than this. We need farmers and citizens side by side, building a critical mass."



Rural Dialogues

The conversation notes

Hannes Lorenzen - [ARC2020](#)

Clifford Guest - [LIT Tipperary](#)

Eileen Branagan - [Cloughjordan Community Farm](#)

Pippa Hackett - [Green Party Ireland](#)

Focus areas:

The knock-on impacts of the dairy boom in Ireland.

Is this sustainable and how is it impacting on the beef sector - what are the limits? It can be easier to see sometimes on an island like Lorenzen's home of Pellworm or Ireland itself - there are limits, from pollution to fodder to soil. Last year's drought brought this home strongly. Limits lead us to a focus on quality.

Policy maker awareness of better, more integrated approaches such as CSA.

EU is proposing re-nationalisation of CAP, which isn't a strong reply. Ireland is now a net contributor, paying into the EU - our citizens need to start demanding public goods such as better supports for more environmentally sound farming. Farmers need these sorts of choices. Interestingly, there is a move of people into rural areas now (eg in Poland). We need to work together to offer solutions.

One suggestion put forward was the rural parliaments. These started in Sweden, and happen every two years. They are now in many countries and politicians do not dare to miss them. New member states and the western Balkans are especially engaging with them.

These can be part of a bottom-up way to positively hassle politicians. Similarly with Food Policy Councils. Let's bring people in via these approaches - people who don't normally get to speak.



Next Steps

- » Form a loose network or community of practice from the organisations involved in Feeding Ourselves each year (send this report to email list of attendees as a first step)
- » Kickstart and support the Irish Rural Parliament initiative
- » Participate in the European parliament (working w/ Forum Synergies scholarships for this)
- » Get involved in putting on more events via NOTS
- » Engage with biological farm walks and related events with NOTS
- » Engage in the ARC2020 rural dialogues launching in May



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Organisations

Cultivate

Based in WeCreate, the Green Enterprise Centre in Cloughjordan Ecovillage, Cultivate is a national NGO and Civil Society Organisation focused on education, communication and citizen engagement.

Cloughjordan Community Farm

Cloughjordan Community Farm is a community supported farm where, by farming according to the principle of bio-dynamics, we achieve our primary goal to provide nutritionally complete produce, grown in healthy, nutrient rich soil. Everything that comes off the land belongs to the members.

National Organic Training Skillnet (NOTS)

National Organic Training Skillnet (NOTS) provide high-quality, low-cost, part-funded training for the organic and agri-food sectors throughout the Republic of Ireland.

University College Cork's Centre for Co-operative Studies

The Centre was founded in 1980, by a small group of co-operatively minded academics who wished to explore and promote the co-operative concept through research and teaching. It is a strong focus of support for academics who are interested in co-operatives and it works closely with many national and international co-operative bodies.

Agricultural and Rural Convention (ARC2020)

ARC2020 is a platform for organisations working together for good food, good farming and better rural policies in the EU.

GROW Observatory

GROW Observatory (GROW) is a European-wide project engaging thousands of growers, scientists and others passionate about the land.

The Night Orchard

The Night Orchard is a Cloughjordan food enterprise focused on fresh, delicious food using local, seasonal produce.

Food Sovereignty Ireland

Food Sovereignty Ireland is a movement of citizens striving for democratic control of our food system. We believe in creating a new food system in which production and distribution protects the environment and the rights of all people to access resources such as land, seeds, and knowledge.

Irish Seed Savers

Cloughjordan Community Farm is a guardian for the Irish Seed Savers Association who conserve Ireland's special and threatened plant genetic resources.

Community Gardens Ireland

Community Gardens Ireland is a national organisation with the aim to support and promote community gardens in Ireland and Northern Ireland

Community Supported Agriculture Network Ireland

Community Supported Agriculture Network Ireland is the national network for CSA farms, and aims to support and promote the activities of CSAs in Ireland.

Talamh Beo

Talamh Beo is a grassroots organisation of farmers, growers and land based workers on the island of Ireland which aims to ensure a living landscape where people and ecosystems can thrive together.

With thanks to our photographer/videographer Eoin Campbell of [Just Multimedia](#).
Report editing and design, Devyn Olson-Sawyer, Cultivate

CULTIVATE & CLOUGHJORDAN COMMUNITY FARM PRESENT

FEEDING OURSELVES

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COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE | FOOD HUBS | SEED SAVING
REGENERATIVE SOIL PRACTICES | CLIMATE RESILIENCE
DIGITISATION: THREATS & OPPORTUNITIES

FARM FLICKS - SYMPHONY FOR THE SOIL

Friday 22nd March | WeCreate | 20.00 (Programme starts after the Train gets in)

An appreciation of the complex and dynamic nature of soil

FEEDING OURSELVES CONFERENCE

Saturday 23rd March | WeCreate | 10.30 - 17.00

The annual gathering exploring how we can strengthen and build more resilient and sustainable food systems, while at the same time supporting our communities and local economies.

SEEDING CHANGE

Talamh Beo Meets Extinction Rebellion

Saturday 23rd March | WeCreate | 19.00-22.00

A convivial evening farm meal, a new film from the Land-Workers Alliance (UK), music, poetry and a compelling conversation between Extinction Rebellion and Talamh Beo.

IT ALL BEGINS WITH SEEDS!

Sunday 24th March | Middle Country Coop Cafe | 12.00 - 16.00

If you have spare seeds, from various sources or saved from your own garden, bring them with you to share or swap

SUNDAY FARM WALK

Sunday 24th March | Cloughjordan Community Farm | 14.00

An insightful opportunity to learn from Cloughjordan Community Farm

BOOKING - <http://nots.ie/courses/feeding-ourselves/>

SATURDAY 23rd MARCH 2019 - with additional Friday evening and Sunday events
WeCreate Workspace | Cloughjordan Community Farm | Cloughjordan Ecovillage



BOOKING nots.ie
FURTHER INFORMATION
www.cultivate.ie