

Invitation to the In-person Rural Gathering for Action

## A rural bridge between sustainable agri and food policies in the EU

06 - 08 Nov. 2023

*Technologie- & Tagungszentrum, Marburg, Germany*

### Background

Throughout Europe, citizens and farmers are taking action to improve access to healthy, affordable and ecologically produced food. Local food councils, solidarity farming groups, food cooperatives as well as rural and urban municipalities have already established their own democratic, economic and social frameworks and rules to create a fair and sustainable food system. This is encouraging news, especially in times of growing concerns and crises.

However, we still need an integrated policy shift for sustainable farming practices and a resilient food system. The European Commission has announced a legislative proposal for a [Sustainable Food Systems law](#), and the expectations for a stronger implementation of the Farm to Fork Strategy remain very high. The German Federal Ministry for Agriculture and Food has also announced a new National Food Strategy, not to be established before 2025. Similarly, the French government is due to present a National Strategy for Food, Nutrition and Climate (SNANC). And still, many relevant regional, national and European policies dealing with farming, food, climate, environment and health are conflicting and inconsistent.

This European Action-Gathering for a Sustainable Food System does not want to wait anymore, and is offering a moment of learning and action for citizens, farmers, municipalities, food councils, platforms and politicians to take stock of good farming, good food action, and good policies in Germany, France and the wider Europe, to press for an integrated farming, rural, food, and public health policy (e.g. the [“unwritten regulation”](#)) and to envisage next steps for action.

The initiators and organisers of this gathering are, at European level, the “Agricultural and Rural Convention” (ARC2020); in Germany the “Arbeitsgemeinschaft Bäuerliche Landwirtschaft in Hessen e.V.” (AbL) and the Marburg “kollektiv von MORGEN e.V.” (KoMo), with the collaboration of “Ernährungsrat Marburg und Umgebung e.V.” (EMU, Marburg Local Food Council), the City of Marburg, the District of Marburg-Biedenkopf and the Municipality of Plessé (Loire-Atlantique, France).

*Organised by:*



*In collaboration with:*



The project “Rural Europe takes Action - Germany” is supported by the Robert Bosch Stiftung and Porticus

## Objectives

- Share and learn lessons from France and Germany on the ingredients of rural resilience in sustainable food systems to connect with other experiences and movements across Europe
- Participatorily assess food system policies from a multilevel governance and integrated agri-food-rural perspective, including the European SFS law and national strategies.
- Elaborate ideas for actions on the ground and policy changes for sustainable food systems, particularly in the city and district of Marburg-Biedenkopf, but also Germany, France, and beyond.

## Target groups

The event is inviting farmers, workers in the food systems, elected officials, administrations and members of civil society organisations interested in discussing how food system laws can be integrated with farming and rural development across multiple levels of governance.

## Working method and expected outcomes

We are designing the gathering as a co-creative space. Therefore, we want you as a participant - or co-creator - to bring your specific knowledge, experience and vision from your field/area to what we will create together in Marburg. This way, we hope to integrate experience and strategic thinking, knowledge and vision, reflection and action so that the outcome of the gathering can be more than the sum of its individual parts. More concretely, this gathering aims to achieve:

- Clear and coherent policy demands for sustainable food systems from an integrated agri-food-rural resilience perspective, including the upcoming EU proposal for a Sustainable Food System;
- Connections, lessons, and action points from existing experiences on the ground that can support the operationalisation of sustainable food systems, with a particular focus on Marburg;

## Language

German with English and French Translations – there will be professional interpreters and volunteer translators present. At certain points we ourselves will translate with the spoken languages we bring, our hearts and our hands for the people sitting around us (not to forget the quick and practical support of free translation apps).

### **PRACTICAL INFORMATION**

**Location:** Technologie- und Tagungszentrum Marburg, Software-Center 3, 35037 Marburg, Germany

**Registration link:** <https://form.jotform.com/232554417502047>

**Please note:** the number of participants is limited and, unfortunately, we may not be able to invite everyone who registers their interest. *The deadline for registration is October 5th and we will confirm registrations by October 10th. We will select participants with the aim of having a mix of food system actors from the various areas of action.*

**Please do not book accommodation or travel until you receive confirmation of registration.** We will send practical information, including a list of recommended accommodation options, when we confirm registration.

# AGENDA

(Modifications could be possible)

Monday, Nov. 6:

## GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

**5:00 PM** Registration and welcoming at [TTZ Marburg](#)

**6:00 PM** **Preparing the field**

Meet at TTZ Marburg for an opening ceremony to mark the beginning of the European Action Gathering. Over the next two days will explore the current state of food systems and the actions needed for a transformation to regional sustainability - from the local to the European level. The Mayors of Marburg and Plessé and the organisers of the Gathering will give a welcoming address that will set the tone for the co-creative process to come, highlighting the importance of a healthy, sustainable, and fair food system.

**7:00 PM** **Social Dinner**

*Opportunity for first encounters and exchanges.*

**8:00 PM** **Making earth fertile**

We will get to know each other, begin to cross the bridges between the European languages while exploring our individual and collective purpose for the Gathering. The program will be presented, outlining the different activities and focus areas of the next two days.

Monday, Nov. 6

Tuesday, Nov. 7:

## ON THE GROUND IN MARBURG, GERMANY

**Before we gather:** *Breakfast at the hotel or at home to fuel up for an exciting day ahead.*

**8:45 –** **Wake up Session**

**9:05 AM** *Meditation, Yoga or TaiJi for early birds.*

**9:15 AM** **Kicking off the day together**

Meet at TTZ Marburg and get fit for the day – waking up, touching base, defining the purpose of the day, getting organised for the field visits.

Tuesday, Nov. 7

## 9:45 AM **Discovering the Region. Field visits to actions on the ground**

In these field visits, the groups will explore real-life examples of farms and projects in the region that exemplify the challenges and possible solutions of sustainable food systems from an integrated agri-food-rural perspective. The excursions will lead to, among others:

- Farms that receive their arable land from soil cooperatives
- An urban gardening project that produces vegetables in the city, do educational work with kindergarten and school children, and bring neighbourhoods together
- A local bakery that practise ancient crafts and process regional grains
- Community Supported Agriculture projects and other common public partnerships, as well as processing businesses

## 1:00 PM **Lunch at gathering venue ([TTZ](#))**

## 2:30 PM **Sharing impressions from the visits and discuss findings**

## 3:15 PM **Workrooms on Resilient Food Systems**

A sustainable food system needs policies and actions stretching from - and beyond - the upcoming EU legislative framework, which may cover food product labelling, public procurement, governance and monitoring.

In the afternoon, we will meet in a series of co-creative workrooms that address different but interrelated themes and continue our journey to build integrated agri-food-rural systems, by addressing their challenges, driving factors, complementarities, and possible alternatives in Germany, France, and other contexts.

We will follow a holistic and multi-level approach, by linking our specific workrooms to wider and deeper understandings of problems and solutions. Aspects of rural wellbeing and intergenerational cooperation, such as quality of life, young people, social integration, and gender justice will be addressed as cross-cutting themes.

Example cases will provide us with creative impulses, so we will ground our discussions in real-life initiatives that can inspire the formulation of concrete proposals for local, regional, national, and European strategies, such as the EU Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas or the Farm-to-Fork strategy.

Participants can choose a selection of two workrooms to attend and contribute to.

The **Workrooms** will cover the following topics:

### 1. **Agri-food and rural governance on the ground**

We look at the role that municipalities can play in agri-food governance. We consider what we can learn from tools like the [Communal Agri-Food-Policy \(PAAC\)](#) in Plessé, the [Projet Alimentaire Territorial \(PAT\) \(Territorial Food Project\)](#) in France, or the [Ernährungsräte \(Food Policy Councils\)](#) in Germany, and identify next steps for local food politics.

## 2. Access to land and commons

All over Europe young farmers are finding it harder to get their hands on the land. We collect examples and ideas on models of ownership that can open up land to new entrants and the local, national and European policy solutions needed to support these actions.

## 3. Regional infrastructure for local food value chains

Closing the gaps in the value chains involves (re)connecting what has been separated. We discover how to save existing local infrastructure (mills, slaughterhouses, small processing plants) and what is necessary to encourage and build economic development in the local food system.

## 4. Committed partnerships and cooperations

As the saying goes, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much". Yet, the struggles of people committed to sustainable food systems, including food workers and paysan farmers remain disconnected and fragmented. How can committed partnerships and strong cooperation become agents of systemic and permanent change, and what can we learn to avoid that they unintentionally end up recreating a space where injustices and stress are perpetuated?

## 5. Re-defining sustainable markets and consumption

Sustainable food product labels and public procurement are badly needed, but to establish fair links between producers and consumers, food markets and consumption need deeper shifts.

## 6. Collective knowledge and capacity building

For food system transition we need the support of society itself. Therefore, we need to think of strategies and campaigns that spread the ideas of local and resilient food systems, and how education, advisory, and knowledge actors can be involved.

**6:30 PM Harvesting the essence of the Workrooms and sharing in the plenary**

**7:00 PM Dinner**

**8:00 PM "The long night of farmers films" with Antje Schiffers**  
An interactive, cinematic evening-walk through the rural regions of Europe.

Wednesday, Nov. 8:

## LET'S MAKE THE MOST OF OUR TIME AND FOOD!

Today's theme is *"How to create a sustainable and fair food system in an integrated European Rural, Agricultural and Food Policy."*

**Before we gather: Breakfast at the hotel or at home to be ready for the step from analysis to action points.**

**8:30 – 8:50 AM**    **Wake up Session: Meditation, Yoga or TaiJi for early birds**

**9:00 AM**    **Kicking off the day together**

Meet at TTZ Marburg, waking up, reconnecting, sharing overnight-insights, setting the tone for the day

**9:45 AM**    **Harvesting Action Points: Workrooms on resilient rural and european Food Systems:**

We continue the Workrooms as advocacy and action sessions for "Getting the Job Done". In these session, we focus on the elaboration of action points from the local, to regional, national and european level in order to define possible steps to implement these actions for the flourishing of sustainable and fair food systems.

**12:30**    **Lunch**

**2:00 PM**    **Collecting the seeds for the next season Sharing and Harvesting**

We collect the action points of the Workrooms and put them together in the "Marburg Vision and Action Plan for a rural resilient food system". This will be the basis for our concluding discussion.

**4:00 PM**    **"Food for Action"- Inclusive panel debate,**

following our co-creative approach, a selected group of guests will be invited to a moderated debate with participants about how to translate the lessons learned into follow-up actions for a sustainable, resilient, and fair food system.

The following guests will join the discussion:

- **High level representative of the European Commission** (DG AGRI/DG SANTE) (tbc)
- **Ms Silvia Bender**, German State Secretary of the Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture
- **Mr Oliver Conz**, State Secretary of the Hesse Ministry for the Environment, Climate Protection, Agriculture and Consumer Protection
- **Dr Thomas Spies**, The Mayor of the City of Marburg (tbc)
- **Mr Jens Womelsdorf**, The District Administrator of Marburg-Biedenkopf (tbc)
- **Ms Aurélie Mézière**, The Mayor of Plessé
- **Ms Claudia Smolka**, AbL Hessen, she is running a goat farm near Marburg
- **Ms Saskia Richartz**, The Network of Food Policy Councils in Germany
- **Mr Phillip Brändle**, The German Platform of NGOs on Farming, Food, Environment, and Animal Welfare.

**6:30 PM Dinner**

**8:00 PM** Finally, we end the day with a closing celebration at [Q](#), Pilgrimstein 26-28:

**THERE IS NO CULTURE  
WITHOUT AGRI-CULTURE!"**