

## Construction and Organization of Solidarity Agriculture (Solawi)

### Think globally, act locally

If you want to realize sustainable agriculture yourself, you can join a solidarity agriculture farm, (Solawi), or start one yourself:

The essence of this relationship is mutual agreement: the solidarity agriculture farm cares about the people and everyone shares the associated responsibility, risk, cost and reward. This is in line with good practice: for most of human history people have been connected to the land that fed them.

With this concept, agricultural food is no longer sold on the market, but flow into its own transparent, economic cycle, which is organized and financed by the participants.

Below you will find a small overview of how solidarity agriculture could be set up and organized.

### Initiated by the Consumers

#### 1. Core Group for the Project Start

Would you like to get your groceries from a company in solidarity? As a first step it is important to find a small group of interested people. This group can then consider how they imagine their solidarity-based operation and what they would like to be supplied with, (vegetables, bread, meat, dairy products etc). On the other hand, it is good to consider whether this group can take over tasks and responsibilities in order to relieve the people who grow food. Now you as a community can approach a company with this request or this offer and clarify whether the needs of both sides can be met in this way.

#### 2. Advertise Consumers

When it comes to attracting new customers, the “human multiplier” is particularly important. Word of mouth by consumers who are already participating is still the most successful means. It is also recommended to address existing (network) groups, for example, environmental groups, daycare centers, transition town groups etc.

Information events are recommended as the next step.

In order to make information events lively, it is worth inviting people from existing solidarity agriculture and letting them report on their experiences. We are happy to provide contacts. First of all, the concept and the idea are conveyed. Everyone communicates the concept individually and with their own focus, since everyone can best convey what he or she is convinced of. In this way, interested parties are also reached emotionally. If talks are held with the solidarity agriculture farm, sensory impressions and experiences can be linked to the information provided.

If there is then more concrete interest, neither organizational things are discussed. It should be clearly communicated what can be offered/performed and what cannot. The peculiarities of the agricultural profession should be highlighted.

There are farms where there is the possibility that those interested can get to know the solidarity agriculture farm, the people and the food on a trial basis, (sample box, trial month, trial period), before they then become members.

### **Who has Interest in Solidarity Agriculture?**

A wide variety of people often come together in solidarity agriculture farms. Old, young, politically committed or those more interested in pleasure and the community, families or shared flats. It is essential that people like to cook and are interested in the origins of their food. Ideally, everyone in the household will be a member, as everyone will usually eat the food anyway.

It is good if there are contact persons (patent) for new customers and/ or interesting persons in the existing group. It is important to ensure that good company is established with the solidarity agriculture farms and the producers.

### **3. Find Land, Farmers and Gardeners**

As a new solidarity agriculture initiative, the search for suitable land and the people who farm it is a central task. There are many ways to find them. Here are a few proven ideas...

How/where do we find farmers?

Yes, they are rare and valuable...

- At the weekly market
- In direct marketing brochures in the region
- Advertise the application in association magazines
- Advertisement at Hofsuchtbauer.de
- Get registered in the initiative list of the Solawi network site
- Request notification in the solidarity agriculture newsletter
- Request notification in regional and community newspapers

#### **Where/ How do we find land?**

Fertile earth, the basis of everything.

- There are many farms whose successor to the farm is still unclear and who are looking for successors to the farm: advertisement at hofsuchtbauer.de
- Ask about farms in the region, they usually know when something is for sale in the region
- Search ads in solidarity agriculture network site and newsletter
- Search ads in regional newspapers and real estate newspapers
- Search ads in (organic) association magazines
- Inquire municipalities about unused municipal areas

- Inquire about parishes (churches have a lot of land)
- Chambers of agriculture of the federal states (sometimes also service center of rural area)
- Contact farm successor

#### **4. Create Legal and Organizational structures**

There cannot be a uniform concept for solidarity agriculture since the needs and circumstances of each group and region are different. It is essential that the structures are developed in a joint process. Planning is important, but not everything can be planned. A lot comes from doing. It can often be helpful to return to the existing solidarity agriculture with specific questions and to learn from their experiences. We would be happy to put you in touch with suitable contacts.

The following points show how it can work.

#### **5. Communication/ Community**

The importance of the community is very high for the producers. The extent to which consumers` sense of community emerges and grows depends very much on the interest and commitment of consumers and producers.

As a rule the producers make the agricultural decisions and calculate the budget required. All other decisions regarding the Solawi can be made together. It is often a good idea for a small group to prepare the content beforehand and present it to the community. In internal communication, personal exchange usually predominates. Feedback from consumers and producers is very important and welcome. One of the things that makes a functioning community work is a clear distribution of tasks. Solidarity agriculture can get many ideas and strength for implementation from the core group, The function of the treasurer (finance and formalities) is for example not taken over by the producer.

Suggestions and ideas for internal communication from existing Solawis:

- Regular circulars/emails about current affairs from the solidarity-based farm and vegetables, create transparency with regard to the expected deliveries and harvest quantities. They give the opportunity to present connections from agricultural practice.

- Homepage/blog with internal area for reports and exchange
- Opportunities to meet producers and other consumers
- Delivery cafe (coffee, cake and nice get-together on the delivery day)
- Participation in the Solawi company (voluntary, obligatory, depending on the agreement or fixed working days)
- Company festivals such as thanksgiving, potato harvest and summer festivals etc.)
- Communication in the delivery depots:

- Notebook on site for mutual feedback and advice on delivery/ allocation
- Bulletin board in the delivery room for announcements
- Working groups for specific tasks (company party organization, consumer advertising, public relations, company development and education, etc.)
- Not only working together, but celebrating together is important!

## **6. Offers (Quantity, Cultivation, Harvest)**

We assume that in Germany an average of 2500m<sup>2</sup> of land is required to provide for one person. When it comes to vegetables, the rule of thumb is: 100 people per hectare. (Wakamiya, 2010)

In general, the possible production depends upon the working capacities, the natural conditions and amount of the membership fees.

For all solidarity agriculture the influence of seasonality upon supplies is relatively strong, especially for vegetables.

Good cultivation planning is therefore important. The planning bases are the experiences of the previous year and the numbers of consumers. Over time, experience will show how much of which culture is needed. In the first few years it is always a matter of experimenting and trying out what works well and what doesn't. The scope of the offer is usually expanded in the early days with the growth of the solidarity agriculture.

Ideally, there is a diverse range of foods, possibly also with processed food (cheese, bread, sauerkraut etc.) so that a full supply of all food needs of a person or at least the complete supply of individual foods (e.g., with vegetables) is possible.

However, due to natural conditions, it can make sense to concentrate on foods that can be grown particularly well at your own location and to cooperate with other farms that can produce other things better.

Solidarity agriculture has very different opinions on the extent to which self-harvesting of certain foods is required, desired or possible on request. They also deal very differently with the purchase of additional groceries, as well as with the sale of their own and bought-in groceries. There is experience that a lot of marketing as a (temporary) second mainstay makes the transition to a full solidarity agriculture rather difficult.

And not to forget: solidarity agriculture offers much more than just food: e.g., alternative practice, an open, solidarity agriculture farm as a place of learning for all generations, diverse agriculture, being socially involved...

## **7. Distribution (Places, Times, Quantities)**

The groceries are either picked up directly from the solidarity agriculture farm or they are delivered. Depending on the distances and the number of consumers

living close to each other, consumers can pick up the groceries for themselves or a group of consumers at the solidarity agriculture farm.

The delivery and distribution of food can also be used for personal exchange between producer and consumer or between consumers. Delivery notes provide information about the withdrawal quantity per person. If the food is sufficient customers can usually help themselves, whereby the preferences of individuals can usually balance each other out. It demands more awareness from the consumer than when shopping since the consideration of the needs of others is always included in the removal. If food is limited, information can be given about the quantities everyone is entitled to. However, you remain so flexible that you can still respond to individual likes and dislikes. If there is a lot of food or food has to be consumed urgently, this information is also passed onto the consumer. Delivery rhythm, removal system and dealing with surpluses can be negotiated together in each solidarity agriculture according to the producer and the consumer. In practice, a large number of models are being practiced.

For Example:

- Distribution by market stall
- Free withdrawal or clearly defined amounts per share
- Delivery to depots or collection from solidarity agriculture farms
- Short pick-up times where everyone meets or free access to the delivery room

Estimating the quantities when picking up the groceries is a challenge for new customers.

Support from experienced consumers helps them to find their way around this system.

## **8. (Solidarity) Financing/ Membership Fees**

Ideally, agriculture is financed entirely through membership fees. The amount of the annual budget i.e., the requirement for the following financial year is determined annually by the farmers and explained at the general assembly (transparency). Solidarity agriculture's annual budget covers the cost of agriculture, including wages, insurance, repairs, and necessary investments. It regulates the determination of the member fees differently. There is often a benchmark (total budget divided by the consumers) that consumers use to determine their contribution per person, but this can also be adjusted to suit individual circumstances so that no one is left out due to a lack of funds. The membership fee can be adjusted every year depending on the life situation and social compensation can take place.

The contributions can be paid monthly, quarterly or semi-annually. The membership contributions can also be paid by individuals through cooperation. It is essential that the sum of the membership fees covers the entire budget.

If the sum is not reached, a second round of bidding takes place, in which the bids can be increased until the required sum is covered at the end.

The binding basis is an annual contract.

At this point, some solidarity agricultures ask about the potential for participation i.e., what skills the consumers have and would also like to offer within the framework of the solidarity agriculture (for example IT, massage and cooking etc.). As a rule, the funds flow into an account from where they are either redistributed by the person responsible for the finances, or the responsible persons take what they need from there themselves.

On average, the membership fees, which vary from one solidarity agriculture to the next, range from about 50 to 100 euros per adult and month, depending on the range of products offered. If consumers were to buy the product of the appropriate quality in the grocery store, the amount would be considerably higher. With a solidarity agriculture there are no marketing, packaging or transport costs.

## **9. Activities on the Solidarity Agriculture Farm**

Then extent to which consumers are involved in practical work varies greatly. While some have weekly or monthly work assignments in the summer and there are permanent helpers, the consumers of other solidarity agricultures only sporadically participate in the work.

Spread over the year there are usually one or two joint festivals and activities.

Meetings at which financial solidarity agriculture's business events or its further developments for discussion take place monthly, every six months, yearly or additionally as required. Picking up the groceries is often an occasion for the regular solidarity agriculture farm visit.

Source: <https://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/Solawis-aufbauen/aufbau-einer-Solawi>

Translated by Alexander Page Nov/2022