

Selling Agricultural Products through the Short Food Supply Chain: It is Becoming Increasingly Popular

Louis Delcart*

Board Member European Academy of the Regions & Visiting Lecturer Brussels Diplomatic Academy
V.U.B – Brussels, Belgium

***Corresponding Author:** Louis Delcart, Board Member European Academy of the Regions & Visiting Lecturer Brussels Diplomatic Academy V.U.B – Brussels, Belgium

ABSTRACT

The world market is pushing agriculture towards cheap production. Everyone wants cheap quality meat, quality grain and quality vegetables. On the other hand, we notice that it is mainly the intermediaries who force farmers to produce cheaply: the supermarkets impose the price and they are usually listed and therefore driven by the pursuit of profit.

There is a tendency among younger consumers to consume more seasonal fruit and vegetables that are produced at a much shorter distance from home. Alternative circuits are considered better because they are created by the producers themselves or organized by a cooperative that seeks a balance between a fair price for the producers and an affordable price for the consumers.

Such an approach stimulates the creativity of the agricultural sector and its will to collaborate with other sectors such as catering and hospitality enables profitability to be boosted again. And while also taking care of fundamental environmental standards, such as the diversification of agricultural products to prevent depletion of the land and nature by monoculture, the use of alternatives to insecticides, the use and processing of natural fertilizers, the drastic reduction of plastic packaging, not destroying too many agricultural products produced, etc. What we mainly advocate is that an agricultural sector can continue to exist in Western Europe and that we do not become dependent on producers in other continents with less ethical principles.

AGRICULTURE, SUSTAINABILITY AND PROFITABILITY: A DIFFICULT EXERCISE

One can hardly argue that agriculture is the ideal sector for a circular economy. Farmers till their land year after year, growing new seasonal crops or cultivating perennial bushes and trees harvesting them annually. In livestock farming, animals are raised for milk (cows, goats, sheep), for wool (sheep) or for slaughter (cattle, sheep, pigs). Horse breeding is a specialty for a specific trade.

Nevertheless, this aspect of agriculture already reveals elements of sustainability that are difficult to reconcile with profitability, but about which the minds have matured and the advancing insight is evolving in the right direction.

Fertilizers have to be used when growing crops and in the past there has been a shift from natural fertilizers to chemical fertilizers, especially when it comes to extensive farming.

The consequence of this was that the ground deteriorated and that the groundwater was polluted and that it also ended up in the creeks and rivers to end in the sea. Extensive farming is therefore increasingly regarded as a problem. A recent article in the Financial Times about cultivating hazelnuts in the same region in Italy at the request of chocolate spread producer Nutella appears to pose a problem of depletion and impoverishment of the available agricultural land. ¹Agriculture – and especially extensive farming – is a major consumer of land area (40 percent of the earth's land), water (70 percent of the total demand for freshwater), fertilizer (with harmful substances such as ammonia, nitrous oxide and nitrate) and the finite but essential

¹Romy de Weert, *Honger naar Nutella: hoe meer lokale productie zorgt voor monocultuur* (Craving for Nutella: how more local production attracts monoculture), in: Change Inc, 25-08-2021, <https://www.change.inc/agri-food/honger-naar-de-hazelnoot-hoe-de-monocultuur-plaats-moet-maken-voor-diversiteit-37026>

resource phosphate.² And then there is the spraying of crop protection products against insect pests. This too appears to be rather short-sighted and not future-oriented. Research by researcher Paul van Rijn of the Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Dynamics (IBED) at the University of Amsterdam and by associate professor Arne Janssen, also working at IBED, raises doubts about the usefulness of insecticides in agriculture. In addition to concerns about environmental damage and the resistance that pest species develop, which means that new toxins are constantly required, the new Amsterdam study questions the effectiveness of spraying. Studies show that on average the pests do not decrease after spraying, if natural enemies of the pests are present, because they too are killed.³ A complaint by the president of the French association Pollinis which acts to stop the extinction of bees and wild pollinators resumes it very well: “Conventional agriculture, implemented since the 1960s, is a steamroller for nature: monocultures, systematic use of pesticides, uprooting of hedges, artificialization of soils ... These practices kill insects and destroy their habitats and their sources of disease. This dizzying destruction, in just a few decades, of insects that have coevolved with flowering plants for 150 million years, raises fears of dramatic repercussions on biodiversity and agriculture.”⁴

²TeunSchröder, True price: de oplossing voor de te lage prijs van voeding,(True price: the solution for food prices that are too low) in: Change Inc, 2-07-2021, <https://www.change.inc/agri-food/true-price-oplossing-lage-prijs-voeding-36695>

³Onno Havermans, Landbouwgif is vaak overbodig, zolang er natuurlijke vijanden van de plaagsoort zijn (Agricultural poisons are often unnecessary, as long as there are natural enemies of the pest species), in Trouw, 27-06-2021, https://www.trouw.nl/duurzaamheid-natuur/landbouwgif-is-vaak-overbodig-zolang-er-natuurlijke-vijanden-van-de-plaagsoortzijn~b03fe482/?utm_source=TR&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=20210627%7Cdaily&utm_content=Landbouwgif%20is%20vaak%20overbodig%2C%20zolang%20er%20natuurlijke%20vijanden%20van%20de%20plaagsoort%20zijn&utm_term=174395&ctm_ctid=05fe42c1f7ae088fb078fe7a6472d8ae

⁴Nicolas Laarman, L'effet papillon de l'agriculture conventionnelle (The butterfly effect of conventional agriculture), in: Libération, 2-10-2021, https://www.liberation.fr/plus/leffet-papillon-de-lagriculture-conventionnelle-20211002_T4LD_SOWQ6NEKJOLWCNXQUEL2UI

Natural fertilizers are also a problem because they also end up in the groundwater. This poses a serious problem for the environment, especially when extensive livestock farming is carried out. The recent fierce riots surrounding the new Dutch fertilizer law applicable from 20-2-2021 has shown how sensitive this is in agricultural circles.⁵ Flanders, the northern region of Belgium, has 42 million chickens and 5.7 million pigs. The densely populated area has the largest livestock concentration in Europe. Yet farmers are building ever larger stables. After all, extensive livestock farming is still used because it is claimed that this is the only economically viable method.⁶ A chicken farmer testifies: “Anyone who is against mega-stables should ask themselves whether they choose the most expensive chicken in the supermarket. We produce what the consumer demands: cheap meat. I would like to keep fewer but more expensive chickens, which grow more slowly and have more space. But nobody wants to pay for that. Then it stops. Most people are not aware of what goes on behind the production of their food. It is the world market that pushes us towards cheap mass production. And we are all a part of that.”⁷

In addition to the problem of manure surpluses caused by extensive livestock farming, there is also the problem of methane emissions caused by farmed animals. Agriculture is now responsible for about 20 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions; two-thirds of this comes from livestock farming. Large-scale farms such as in France are looking for solutions by mixing what is called biomass (animal waste water, plant material and agro-food residues) in a fermentation tank, making it possible to

⁵<https://www.rvo.nl/onderwerpen/agrarisch-ondernemen/mest/gebruiken-en-uitrijden> Crops need fertilizer to grow. But too much manure on the soil is not good for surface water and groundwater. This is mainly due to the substances nitrogen and phosphate. Do you want to spread animal manure or other manure? Then you have to deal with rules. How much and when you are allowed to use and spread fertilizer depends on your soil type, soil use and fertilizer type.

⁶Ine Renson, De boer die niet vergroot, gaat dood. Waarom megastallen het Vlaamse platteland veroveren (The farmer who doesn't increase dies. Why mega stables are conquering the Flemish countryside), in: De Standaard, 28/10/2020, https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20201127_05006958

⁷Ine Renson, Die megastallen maken alles kapot wat ons dierbaar is (Those mega stables destroy everything we hold dear), in: De Standaard, 1-12-2020, https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20201130_05007015

recover biome thane, which can be used for heating, industrial use or even as fuel. The process is on the rise for French farmers: the amount of renewable gas injected into the networks amounted to 1,023 anaerobic digestion units at the end of 2020, of which 214 in injection. However, this solution is not enough to decarbonise agriculture.⁸ Extensive livestock farming in densely populated areas also causes nuisance in the community. The trailers that carry and transport chicks, feed, manure and chickens must cross the village centre. The catching crew comes to take the chickens out at night. They load the cages into the truck with a lot of noise. The community often suffers from stench. In addition, there is the particulate matter and nitrogen that comes from those stables. And water scarcity.⁹

Not All Agricultural Crops Are Geared to Food or Nutrition.

There are numerous crops grown for industrial purposes. Once again, extensive farming of those crops is being denounced as one of the most polluting products: cotton, for example, needs an enormous amount of water, causing water scarcity in other parts of the area through which a river flows. For example, cotton cultivation dried up the fourth largest lake in the world, the Aral Sea in Kazakhstan, into a small lake within decades.¹⁰

Yet it is Not All Doom and Gloom

There is hemp, which can also be used for textiles. It is a plant that grows at lightning speed, even without fertilizers and even on poor soils. Because it grows meters high so quickly, it also stores a relatively large amount of CO₂ in the short term. As a result, the same plant can first remediate polluted soils - this process is

known in science as phytoremediation - and then be processed to make sustainable insulation material or fashion accessories.¹¹ Elephant grass has the same property. The plant captures four times as much CO₂ as trees and can be used as a filler in all kinds of products. Paper and cardboard are still an important market for elephant grass fibres. But now it is also in (bio) plastic, and in concrete.¹² Both plants should not necessarily be planted on fertile farmland. Empty land of old industrial estates is also eligible.

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS MADE ON AN INDUSTRIAL BASIS CREATE PACKAGING

Extensive agriculture and vegetable cultivation and its sale through supermarkets have created a tidal wave of packaging, mostly plastic packaging. In Europe alone, 200 million tons of plastic are currently produced every year.¹³ When plastic ends up in the environment, it poses a danger to people and nature. And that's not even talking about the plastic that ends up in the sea afterwards.¹⁴ The goal should therefore

¹¹Pieter Van Maele, Halen planten binnenkort ook PFOS uit de grond?(Will plants soon also remove PFOS from the soil?), In: De Standaard, 31-07-2021 https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20210730_97690163?

¹²Marc Seijlhouwer, Olifantsgras slaat vier keer zoveel CO₂ op als een bos. Dit bedrijf wil het daarom op alle braakliggende stukken land planten (Elephant grass stores four times as much CO₂ as a forest. This company therefore wants to plant it on all fallow pieces of land), in: ChangeInc, 8-7-2021, <https://www.change.inc/circulaire-economie/olifantsgras-vier-keer-zoveel-co2-als-bos-36737>

¹³Hildegard Suntinger, we moeten nu toch echt een keer van dat plastic af (We really need to get rid of that plastic now), in: Change Inc, 16-07-2021, <https://www.change.inc/circulaire-economie/we-moeten-nu-toch-echt-eeen-keer-van-dat-plastic-af-36797>

¹⁴In the world's oceans, this represents a waste share of 80 to 85 percent. In 1999 the ratio between plastic and plankton was still 6:1. By 2009 this ratio had increased tenfold to 60:1. If we do not deal with plastic differently, according to the predictions, by 2050 there will be more plastic in the sea than fish. Plastics eventually break down into smaller and smaller fragments. However, the actual mass remains unchanged. These microplastics migrate to the bottom of the sea and eventually end up in the human body via food. Microplastics are already found in almost everyone's blood and urine. In: Change Inc, 16-07-2021, <https://www.change.inc/circulaire-economie/we-moeten-nu-toch-echt-eeen-keer-van-dat-plastic-af-36797>

⁸ Marine Godelier, La méthanisation ne suffira pas à décarboner l'agriculture (Methanization will not be enough to decarbonize agriculture), in : La Tribune 18-08-2021, <https://www.latribune.fr/entreprises-finance/transitions-ecologiques/la-methanisation-ne-suffira-pas-a-decarboner-l-agriculture-890780.html>

⁹Ine Renson, Die megastallen maken alles kapot wat ons dierbaar is (Those mega stables destroy every thing we hold dear), in: De Standaard, 1-12-2020, https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20201130_05007015

¹⁰ Eline Teunissen, Duurzaamheid in de kledingindustrie: 'Fast fashion is de grote burn-out' (Sustainability in the clothing industry: 'Fast fashion is the great burnout'), Change Inc, 14 juni 2021, <https://www.change.inc/retail/duurzaamheid-kledingindustrie-fast-fashion-burn-out-36537>

be to reduce the number of plastics. The smaller the range of plastics and also bioplastics, the easier recycling will be.

As a result, bulk stores¹⁵ have emerged. A bulk store is a retail store that differs from other stores in that the entire range is offered separately, i.e. without boxes and therefore without packaging. The focus of packaging-free stores is on offering unpackaged foods and products. You can fill these in any desired quantity in your own container. Usually, biodegradable packaging or reusable boxes are also offered for sale or deposited in the store. The aim is on the one hand to combat the overproduction of food and on the other hand to consistently avoid packaging and plastic waste. There is a demand for packaging-free shopping, especially in Western European countries; since about 2010, packaging-free stores have been opened in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Denmark, Norway, Spain, Portugal and the UK.¹⁶ In addition to shops, there are also: online packaging-free groceries, mobile packaging-free groceries, and even – apart from agricultural products – online DIY ingredients. However, that phenomenon is mainly established in the Netherlands and Belgium.

The same philosophy is applied in the farm shops. Sometimes there is no real store at all. For example, many farmers sell straight from their barn. Products such as apples, pears, potatoes... are offered from large bins in a corner of the sorting area.

THE SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN: ANOTHER WAY TO CONNECT THE CONSUMER AND THE FARM

It has already been said: the world market is pushing agriculture towards cheap production. Everyone wants cheap quality meat, quality grain and quality vegetables. On the other hand, we notice that it is mainly the intermediaries who force farmers to produce cheaply: the supermarkets impose the price and they are usually listed and therefore driven by the pursuit of profit.

So there are more and more options from the base to achieve this quality objective. A growing number of French inhabitants demand

local, natural, fresh, seasonal products, grown or handmade, as close to their home as possible. However, locavorism, a movement that advocates the consumption of food produced within 100 to 250 km of home, is nothing new. This is evident from the retail markets that are deeply rooted in the region. The change mainly comes from new supply channels. Farm sales and collective outlets, basket sales (with or without subscription) and mail order sales, the short food chain has become popular in France¹⁷, Belgium¹⁸, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Greece¹⁹. In France, the short food chain currently represents 8 to 10% of the food market. It also contributes to a sustainable and diversified diet of unprocessed products and to food sovereignty. Italy has the world's largest network of farmers' markets. Nowadays the EU is even giving incentives to producers wishing to involve themselves in local food systems – or as it is called: short food supply chains (SFSC) – they can benefit from several measures co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.²⁰

A farm shop is usually a sales area on the farm itself. It can be located on the farm, but in some cases also in the village centre. Usually, the farmer only sells his own products (primary or processed), sometimes he supplements his range with farm products from fellow farmers. The range in the short food chain is sometimes even more extensive than in the supermarket. You will find more exclusive vegetables, meat preparations, potato varieties...²¹ De Buurderij (Farm meets neighbours) is a specific and international phenomenon. It is an on-line platform where customers can order their vegetables, meat and dairy products, and where

¹⁵ Vivien Timmler, Es läuft noch nicht rund (It's not running smoothly yet), in: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 20/8/2021. <https://sz.de/1.5387806>

¹⁶ <https://www.hetzerowasteproject.nl/p/bulk-boodschappenadressen.html>

¹⁷ Conférence Good : Vous avez dit locavore ? (Conference Good: Did you say locavore?)- Le Progrès - 29-8-2021 - <https://www.Leprogres.fr/economie/2021/08/29/conference-good-vous-avez-dit-locavore>

¹⁸ Hubert Heyrendt, Les Artisans de Bossimé repensent le commerce de proximité (Les Artisans de Bossimé rethink local commerce), in La Libre Belgique, 11-02-21, <https://stories.lalibre.be/inspire/numero9/index.html>

¹⁹ EurActiv : Short food supply chains in Europe's South: Special report, 419-27/12/2018, <https://en.euractiv.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/special-report/EURACTIV-Special-Report-Short-food-supply-chains-in-Europe%E2%80%99s-south.pdf>

²⁰ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2016\)586650](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2016)586650)

²¹ <https://www.rechtvanbijdeboer.be/verkooppunten/hoevewinkel>

a truck brings them weekly to a meeting point in the village. At Boeren & Buren ("Farmers and neighbours"), the products in Belgium travel an average of 28 km to reach the consumer's plate. There are already about 140 Buurderijen in Belgium & the Netherlands. But the movement also has branches in France (La Ruche), Switzerland (Marktschwärmer, La Ruche), Italy (l'Alveare), Germany (Marktschwärmer), Spain (la Colmena)²². Even exotic fruits and vegetables are the subject of new European –and therefore less far away– production in Spain and Portugal and of direct sales to Northern-European consumers via internet sites and social media. In 2017, two Spanish farming brothers joined forces with another young Spanish farmers' couple to found [crowdfarming.com](https://www.crowdfarming.com) and share their sales channel with other farmers. Their aim was to remove intermediaries from the food supply chain. The direct sale of food between farmers and consumers requires certain services for it to take place: a platform to offer and sell products on, logistics to transport packages, customer service, and advertising tools to make themselves known. These are the four services they provide to farmers through their direct sales channel.²³ Their specialties in this case are mangos, lemons, pomegranates, persimmons, avocados, cherry plum tomatoes, clementines, but also various types of cheese.

The cooperative is often a form of cooperation in which several smaller players join forces to increase the offer and attractiveness or to jointly perform certain services for the benefit of all participants. In the southern Belgian province of Namur, for example, there is the producer and consumer cooperative Paysans-Artisans who organize their sales circuit together. Subsequently, a series of activities was added, in accordance with the demands and needs raised by the producers from the field, to form the Fabrique Circuit Court, a cluster of companies focused on the short chain in food. In a hangar of about 3,600 m², located in the industrial park of Suarlée-Namur, cooperative processing workshops, independent workshops and logistics areas are grouped together. All dedicated to the short chain. The objective is clear: "to give primary producers (horticulture, dairy products, livestock) that are part of an artisanal dynamic, specific and adapted processing tools", as opposed to those

developed for industrial production and where there is no place for small producers.²⁴

Some initiatives go even further. "L'atelier de Bossimé" is an online sales platform for local products. Here the bread is made with Hollange flour, the young pigeon from Domaine de Sohan in Pepinster is baked in hay, while the strawberries from La Bruyère are available as ice cream for dessert... The initiators want to offer something more than just sailing on the locavore wave. The producer must be able to earn a decent income. In addition, the initiators have also started horticultural production themselves. The idea of "Artisans de Bossimé" was created in 2019, when the initiator who runs a restaurant started working with a young gardener for his restaurant. He lent him a piece of land and bought the vegetables from him. This way the horticulturist did not have to waste time on marketing his products. He was able to concentrate on horticulture. Today a second gardener has joined this huge vegetable garden, which now extends over 6 ha. It is bordered by beehives that provide Bossimé honey, which you can find for dessert at "L'atelier".²⁵

Other forms of agriculture that belong to the short food chain are urban farming projects.²⁶ In the Ferme Abattoir city farm of Building Integrated Green Houses (BIGH) on the rooftop of the former Butchery of Anderlecht (Brussels), fish and plant cultivation are linked through a biological filter that continuously purifies the water of the fish. They produce eggplants, spicy peppers and all kinds of tomatoes. In 2019 it was about 10 to 15 tons. It also produces herbs and fish. This urban farm sells practically

²⁴ Valentine Van Vyve, La Fabrique Circuit Court, le chaînon manquant pour les petits producteurs (La Fabrique Circuit Court, the missing link for small producers), in: La Libre Belgique, 02-08-2021, <https://www.lalibre.be/planete/inspire/2021/08/02/la-fabrique-circuit-court-le-chainon-manquant-pour-les-petits-producteurs-VQGQHRUR75HJTPJKJMMID5JBUI/?fbclid=IwAR3mC2ETAq8VpcJKTheh-x2iqsl1QPsg18HVOdfDMYVXHpl6vEz7O7VwbHk>

²⁵ Hubert Heyrendt, Les Artisans de Bossimé repensent le commerce de proximité (Les Artisans de Bossimé rethink local commerce), in: La Libre Belgique, 11-02-21, <https://stories.lalibre.be/inspire/numero9/index.html>

²⁶ Amaury Michaux, "Stadslandbouw is belangrijk voor economisch herstel" (Urban agriculture is important for economic recovery), in: De Standaard, 11-05-2020 – https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20200510_04953363

²² <https://boerenenburen.nl/nl/>;
<https://boerenenburen.be/nl-BE>

²³ <https://www.crowdfarming.com/en/manifesto>

integrally to the catering sector downtown, which therefore always receives fresh products in bulk.

And it is not without reason that urban agriculture is growing in places like New York, Paris, Shanghai, Singapore and Tel Aviv. A 2018 study suggested that urban farming could reduce some environmental problems in cities by increasing vegetation cover, removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and providing a habitat for bees and other pollinators. It can also help increase food security and reduce food waste. Take Lufa Farms in Montreal, Canada, for example. Since it opened a commercial rooftop farm in 2011, the amount of food it produces has doubled every two years. It now grows about 50 varieties of vegetables in three rooftop hydroponic farms that produce "virtually zero waste." Lufa turned its greenhouses into high-tech living ecosystems that house dozens of insect species, including "good bugs" such as parasitic wasps, ladybugs and predatory mites to control pests.²⁷

NEW CHAINS OFFER SOLUTIONS FOR FOOD WASTE

Food waste is one of the major problems of our time. According to the German Federal Ministry of Food & Agriculture²⁸, around twelve million tons of food end up in the garbage every year in Germany alone. World wide, more than a third of all food produced is thrown away.

In France, a number of chains and platforms have emerged that offer an answer to distributing healthy food, offering farmers fair compensation and food waste. Names such as écomiam, ZéroGachis (Smartway) and Shopopop are until now less known than Carrefour, E.Leclerc or Système U but are visibly gaining notoriety. Smartway offers the super and hypermarkets solutions to reduce their unsold food products by offering them with

²⁷ Eduardo Garcia, Where's the Waste? A 'Circular' Food Economy Could Combat Climate Change, in: New York Times 23.09.2019 https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/21/climate/circular-food-economy-sustainable.html?referring_source=article_share

²⁸ https://www.bmel.de/EN/Home/home_node.html
Food and agriculture are issues that directly affect all citizens. A balanced, healthy diet, safe food, clear consumer information when buying food and a strong and sustainable agricultural, forestry and fisheries sector are among the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) most important goals.

discounts or giving them away to associations. For example, they recover 50,000 products per day that are not thrown away. Shopopop currently has 700,000 customers and shoppers in 95 French departments who supply and buy lunch boxes. Écomiam, on the other hand, is an ethical chain of frozen products that are 100% French and offer a fair remuneration to the producers at the same time with constant prices for the consumers.²⁹

A nowadays app that is popular in many Western European cities is the "Too Good To Go" app³⁰. This application of a Danish start-up connects people in major European cities with shops that provide unsold food. With the help of the app one can buy surplus fruit and vegetables, bread and cakes as well as leftover food from restaurants, bakeries, hotels, supermarkets and similar businesses at reduced prices. The app shows all participating shops in the area and lists them according to their distance from your own location.³¹

FINAL REMARKS

Agricultural organizations still proclaim that large farms or livestock farms are the only ones with a future in Western Europe. They see cheaper products coming onto the market through trade agreements with Mercosur and Canada (CETA) that will be used as bait by retail discounters. Like fast fashion, there is also fast food, not only prepared but also cynically promoted as "fresh" and "healthy".

As a counterweight we assist at the appearance, all over Europe, of innovative farmers who are already growing healthy food, without synthetic chemical inputs, with ever higher yields, while respecting pollinators and nature. This should go together with the willingness of citizens, who

²⁹ E&Y, Agroalimentaire. L'émergence de nouveaux distributeurs, Ouest France, 2/9/2021, <https://www.ouest-france.fr/economie/consommation/agroalimentaire-l-emergence-de-nouveaux-distributeur-7403049>

³⁰ <https://toogoodtogo.de/de>. Our mission is to inspire and move everyone to do something about food waste. In order to translate our words into action, we have big plans: to build a global movement against food waste. We can only really make a difference if we all work together to combat food waste. For this reason we have decided to work intensively on four pillars: budget, economy, education and politics.

³¹ dpa-Newskanal, App gegen Lebensmittelverschwendung (Food waste app), in: Süddeutsche Zeitung 26-07-2021 <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/dpa/dpa-dpa.urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-210723-99-489902>

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indirectly finance the current system with billions of euros (aid from the Common EU-Agricultural Policy, water pollution control, etc.), to switch this type of support to farmers who feed them towards this new, more resilient and sustainable agricultural model.³²

More and more consumers are also starting to revolt against discounter promotions for food products that everyone knows are being marketed at dumped prices in order to force cheaper prices from local producers. Once again, I regard this form of disruption as irresponsible and even criminal.

Farmers should not depend on the market and thus grow potatoes on all their lands when demand is high, or sunflowers for bioethanol because it provides a safe income. One also no longer can explain why we have to cut forests in Brazil to grow soy for Dutch or Belgian pigs whose meat goes to China.

Now this is considered the most economically efficient system, because many costs are not taken into account. On the other hand, there is a tendency among younger consumers to consume more seasonal fruit and vegetables that are produced at a much shorter distance from home. Some retailers are jumping on that bandwagon. But their offer still focuses on the possibility of creating as much margin as possible and thus forcing producers to reduce or even cancel their margins.

Alternative circuits are better because they are created by the producers themselves or organized by a cooperative that seeks a balance between a fair price for the producers and an affordable price for the consumers and therefore, not based on double digit EBITDAs.

Such an approach stimulates the creativity of the agricultural sector and its will to collaborate with other sectors such as catering and hospitality enables profitability to be boosted again. And while also taking care of fundamental environmental standards, such as the diversification of agricultural products to prevent depletion of the land and nature by monoculture, the use of alternatives to insecticides, the use and processing of natural fertilizers, the drastic reduction of plastic packaging, not destroying too many agricultural products produced, etc. What we mainly advocate is that an agricultural sector can continue to exist in Western Europe and that we do not become dependent on producers in other continents with less ethical principles. Louis Delcart, Member of the Board of Directors European Academy of the Regions, www.eaar-aer.eu

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³²Nicolas Laarman, L'effet papillon de l'agriculture conventionnelle (The butterfly effect of conventional agriculture), in : Libération, 2-10-2021, https://www.liberation.fr/plus/leffet-papillon-de-lagriculture-conventionnelle-20211002_T4LDSO WQ6N EKJOLWCNXQUEL2UI