



RECLAIM THE FIELDS

BULLETIN N°2
SEP 2010



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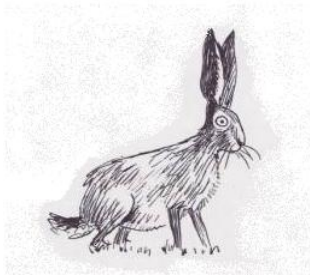
Editorial

This is the second RTF Bulletin. We hope you will enjoy it. It is more work to collect articles like this than just sending more information through a mailing list but the point is to share ideas, discuss, get to know each other and facilitate how we move ahead. And something more beautiful than an email will be more of a pleasure to read.

This time the bulletin is quite fat! We have divided the articles into three sections: *RTF news* that are important especially as we prepare for the various coming assemblies, actions and working groups; *experiences*, *opinion* and even *Fine Peasant Arts* which includes our first RTF song which was written in the cold streets of Copenhagen in December 2009.

We hope you also like the animals that escaped from the barn...

Miriam and Marie



Act One: RTF NEWS



Who we are

We are a group of young peasants, landless and prospective peasants, as well as people who are taking back control over food production.

We understand “peasants” as people who produce food on a small scale, for themselves or for the community, possibly selling a part of it. This also includes agricultural workers.

We support and encourage people to stay on the land and go back to the countryside. We promote food sovereignty (as defined in the [Nyéléni declaration](#)) and peasant agriculture, particularly among young people and urban dwellers, as well as alternative ways of life. In Europe, the concept ‘food sovereignty’ is not very common and could be clarified with ideas such as ‘food autonomy’ and control over food systems by inclusive communities, not only nations or states. We are determined to create alternatives to capitalism through cooperative, collective, autonomous, real-needs-oriented, small-scale production and initiatives. We are putting theory into practice and linking local practical action with global political struggles.

In order to achieve this, we participate in local actions through activist groups and cooperate with existing initiatives. This is why we choose not to be a homogeneous group, but to open up to the diversity of actors fighting the capitalist food production model. We address the issues of access to land, collective farming, seed rights and

seed exchange. We strengthen the impact of our work through cooperation with activists who focus on different tasks but who share the same vision.

Nevertheless, our openness has some limits. We are determined to take back control over our lives and refuse any form of authoritarianism and hierarchy. We respect nature and living beings, but will neither accept nor tolerate any form of discrimination, be it based on race, religion, gender, nationality, sexual orientation or social status. We refuse and will actively oppose every form of exploitation of other people. With the same force and energy, we act with kindness and conviviality, making solidarity a concrete practice of our daily life.

We support the struggles and visions of la Via Campesina, and work to strengthen them among young European people. We wish to share the knowledge and the experience from years of struggle and peasant life and enrich it with the perspectives and strength of those of us who are not peasants, or not yet peasants. We all suffer the consequences of the same policies, and are all part of the same fight.

Final version of RTF presentation as decided during Basta Assembly in May

Frankly my Dear, I don't give a Carrot!

After the camp in Cravirola (September 2009) Reclaim the Fields got bigger. From a handful of people organizing the camp, it became an emerging movement bringing together many young farmers, some who were just beginning to dream about farming, climate guerrillas, house-builders, city gardeners, shepherds, seed savers, land squatters... Suddenly, there are a lot of us. And that is definitely a good thing.

After Cravirola we were a big group of us in Copenhagen. There we got the chance to see how climate activists all over Europe came together to form a movement such as Climate Justice Action (CJA). All decisions there were taken in assemblies in which as many as 200 people participated. These took place every night in abandoned factory buildings in the north of the city. Despite being so many people, they had a clear agenda and a moderator made sure that they followed it in the few hours they had. Sometimes no decisions could be taken until discussion could go on the next day; at other times, before the big "Reclaim power" demonstration on the final day, a very complex action was organized in the assembly: The secret bicycle group was to join the blue group following an official route, later to be joined at a strategic point by a third group of people climbing trees and keeping the police busy...

We were impressed by how such a diverse group of people could come together to plan such a huge mobilization and also to have political discussions. But most importantly, this kind of organization was

not only for an action such as Copenhagen, but it was part of how movements such as CJA organized with people participating from all over Europe in order to keep a political process going when there were no actions.

During the first assembly of Reclaim the Fields in Barcelona, the people who participated thought to create a structure for Reclaim the Fields. There, they decided that Reclaim the Fields was a 'constellation' (see Bulletin 1: The constellation explained to the stars; and Minutes of the Basta Assembly for some details about this). It was decided that assemblies would take place twice a year in which important topics were to be discussed and decisions taken: what kinds of areas do we want to have common actions in? How do we move forward with the Farm Network? Do we organize another camp or forum and how? What is our political position on the topic of seeds?

RTF is a horizontal group, with no hierarchy and open to all people who identify with our goals. Who represents RTF? Each of us! However, we also needed a group who kept the process going in between assemblies. A group that would make sure that there will be an agenda for the next assembly and a farm that will host it; Who makes sure that we pay the internet bills; who can follow other processes that we might have a lot in common with—land squatters in Spain, European seed initiatives, other farmers' movements such as Via Campesina; etc.

In general, it was important to have a group who wanted to facilitate the general political and organizational process of Reclaim the Fields at a European level between the assemblies, to make sure things keep moving.

This is how the “carrots” were born... In Barcelona and Basta it was important to stress a few things about the carrots group: The carrots would not take any political decisions, but rather prepare them to be discussed at the coming assemblies. The carrots are an open and transparent group open for anyone to join. You just have to be present at one assembly and ask for being added to the list. People can join for some time and then leave the group. It should be a group that rotates and changes, where people learn from and also share their various experiences and where there are no ‘experts’ that feel they can never be replaced. We discussed this and think that this became clear in Basta.

However, now we have another ‘problem’... and this is that the carrots have fallen asleep! Nowadays emails go through the carrot lists, and it is like they fall into a small black hole... As peasants, it is clear that we spend more time on the fields than at the computer, but it is important that the people who want to be on the carrots mailing list really want to give energy and take the initiative and responsibility for it, and also communicate among each other.

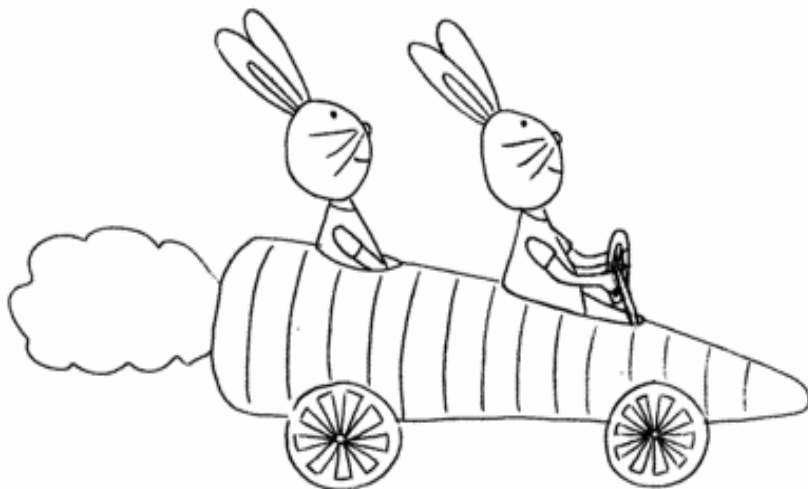
In order to make sure that the Carrots’ activities are transparent and known by everyone, a proposal would be to present them during the assemblies. That way, the carrots can say, “we have been contacted by this group, asked to participate in this meeting, we advanced so far for organizing this camp...” and decisions can be taken by the assembly.

-Miriam, Anna, Marie

Who is currently part of the “Carrots” mailing list:

[Carrots at lists.reclaimthefields.org](https://lists.reclaimthefields.org)

Joseph
Anna
Eric
Olle
Benji
Koude
Adam
Denys
Ed
fanny
fergal
Grischa
Paul
Mira
Miriam
Morgan
Nico
Satya
Marie
Tristan
Wieserhoisl



A Tour of Seeds

First step: technical context

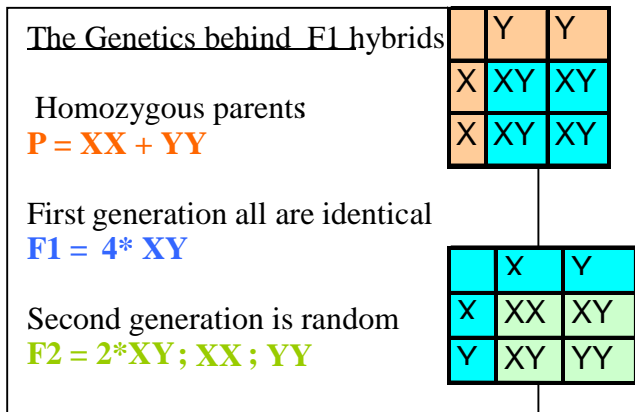
In the history of agriculture it was peasants who selected wild edible plants, adapted and improved their nutritional qualities. Or for thousands of years this is how we arrived at the huge heritage of cultivated plants that exist today.

Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 20th century these practices were slowly transferred to specialists, first to peasant- seed producers and eventually the biotechnology laboratories that we know today. Although in the beginning of the 1970s there were still thousands of small seed companies, today the 10 largest seed multinationals control 67% of commercial seeds. They even invented patents that control the entire chain, from the seed to the flour that is eventually made from the grains. Currently in Europe we are going even further with the prohibition of peasant varieties.

Since the 1930s hybrid seeds began to be produced in the United States, particularly F1 hybrids (first-generation hybrids). There are two kinds of hybrids. First of all those that result from crossing different species, such as triticale (wheat+ rye), which is a cereal with good yields (thanks to the wheat) and has good resistance against disease (thanks to the rye). It is used for animal feed and is usually sterile.

But **F1 hybrids** are the result of crossing different varieties of the same species. These crossings are so complex that they must be carried out in laboratories and cannot be carried out by peasant themselves. F1 hybrids can result in "better" characteristics than their parents, especially with regard to yield.

Loss of targeted qualities in second generation F1 hybrids



- But why waste so much energy using such overly complex breeding techniques such as those needed to produce F1 hybrids? It's because these characteristics are no longer present in the second iteration (see table) which means that it is necessary to re-buy the seeds each year from the seed companies.

-Moreover, good results are not obtained under all conditions. F-1 hybrids generally need sunny conditions and very good irrigation as well as high levels of chemical inputs. We can conclude that they are typically seeds that are destined for intensive agriculture, rely on external inputs in which create each year a dependency on the seed companies in order to buy them.

-this dependency is going even further with the development of **transgenic crops**. Here we are not only dependent on the companies in order to buy these seeds but even without having bought them we may have to end up paying royalties if the seed company discovers that a traces of their genes are growing in our fields. Because these genes are extremely mobile (especially through wind pollination) it is impossible to avoid contamination by GM crops. It is total dependency, a jackpot for seed companies who, thanks to their patents on certain genes will be able to collect royalties from all neighbouring farmers.

All commercial seeds are presented to us as a solution to a local "problem". Certain ones are resistant to soil salinity, others carry an insecticide, others resist certain kinds of herbicides... but the solutions do not convince us at all. What will we do in the presence of an insect that has become resistant to GM crops? How do we feel about using a systemic herbicide? Is this not opening the door to given more contamination of soils and our food?

Behind all of these goals is the primary goal of profit-making. Just a handful of companies have appropriated the cultural heritage of the majority of farmers. They are trying to achieve the economic dependency of farmers, now considered producers of a commodity and no longer artisans of the living.

Second steps: current seed policies in Europe

Under the influence of the large seed companies (the most important ones being Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer and Limagrain), the European Union promoted new legislation on conservation varieties of cereals and potatoes in 2008. This legislation governance "regional varieties", "ancient varieties threatened by extension", also most organic varieties, as well as farmers', and composite varieties. It facilitates the registration process of private varieties and threatens with prohibiting varieties that are not on national lists.

Three requirements are particularly absurd and entail enormous control:

- Proof of the significance of a particular variety for the conservation of plant genetic resources;
- The production and distribution of regional seeds are restricted to their areas of origin;
- Quantitative limitation of the variety's cultivation proportionally to commercial varieties

The interests of the European seed industry are represented on all confidence through the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV). If UPOV applied this legislation to other areas of the world it would become “prohibition legislation” for all local seeds which make up, in most of the world, all seeds. Many European seed legislations are later applied to other regions such as Latin America.

Moreover, the large seed companies demand an enforcement of their so-called rights, that is, intellectual property rights. They estimate that circa 40% of the seed market is still lost due to 'illegal' seed production by peasants (the use of seeds from peasant's own harvests) and through the cultivation of varieties that are not part of the seed catalogues. As part of current negotiations, the seed industry wants to introduce patents for all cultivated crops. They have made the following demands to the EU:

- The extension of patent law to all existing plant varieties thanks to an authorisation allowing the identification of all varieties in the field through molecular markers;
- A system which enables the seed industry itself to carry out the necessary controls prior to the registration of new varieties;
- The prohibition of peasant seed varieties and of their multiplication by farmers on the grounds of distortion of competition and sanitary hazards;
- The extension of the industry's monopoly rights on registered varieties from 25 to 30 years.

There not only exist patents for the protection of intellectual property rights on crops, but there also exist plant variety certificates and catalogues that limit farmers' from reaching markets. In order to register a seed variety in an official catalogue, it must be Distinct (differentiated from other seeds), Uniform (all the plants are similar) and Stable (plant characteristics do not to generate over succeeding generations). But it is impossible to comply with these rules without laboratory techniques which necessarily exclude farmers from seed markets.

Even imagining that it would be possible to register these varieties, to resign ourselves to these kinds of norms is to abandon the rights of peasants to reproduce, exchange and improve their varieties. It is important to keep the capacity to adapt in order to preserve seed diversity (even more so in the face of climate change). Moreover, following these policies that are lobbied for but the seed industry leads to the criminalization of farmers' seed networks and to the loss of farmers and gardeners knowledge about the reproduction of varieties.

The work of the seed industry and their politicians is linked to business. It has nothing to do with the quality of crops nor with developing sustainable solutions to the problems faced by peasant farmers. It is merely an attempt to control our seeds, and to get out as much money from the producers as possible.

Third Step: what do we do in the face of this? Of course: let's reclaim the seeds!!

Our political position as Reclaim the Fields should not be to take part in technical debates about seeds, that is, the highly technical aspects about plant genetics and seed laws. Although we ourselves want to better understand the issues in order to carry out actions and in order to be able to explain to people what our struggle is about, we do not want to waste time and energy in fighting about small technical details as a good part of current seed networks in Europe already do. We especially want to politicize seeds and for doing so, the basics are clear:

We simply refuse the privatization of seeds!

We consider that seeds are the shared heritage of humanity. We demand the 0% of GM seeds and 0% of patents on seeds. We demand liberty for all farmers to reproduce them, to exchange them and to sell them.

Our first action as RTSeeds: seed exchange and seed banks; days of action

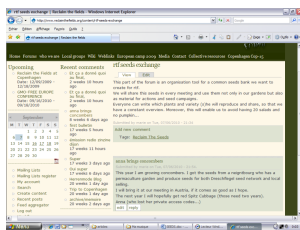
In order to facilitate the coordination of the seed issue we formed a working group called Reclaim the Seeds

We define the following areas of work:

- to make the large political issues known to the wider public
- to support and give visibility to peasant seed networks
- to learn how to reproduce our own seeds
- to exchange within RTF a maximum of seeds we need for our farms

During the meeting in Basta we thought about having a seed exchange at every meeting. The idea is to create a virtual seed bank which is constituted at each of our meetings, both at the local and European level.

It would be interesting to be able to offer larger quantities of seeds of a single variety. That means that we need a tool for internal coordination, because it would do us no good to bring 10 varieties of radishes to one meeting and a half not a single salad seed! What they're for created as the Internet form "reclaim the seeds" on our web site. Until today we can see that Anna will bring cucumber seeds to the assembly in Wieserhoisl.



→ Reclaim The Seeds Forum

The idea is that each of us could contribute seeds to our 'bank' at each of our meetings, both European and local. We would then be capable of permanently conserving and extending the varieties that we have and even giving some to other seed exchanges. The more that we create these types of exchanges the freer we are from the control of the seed industry.

At the meeting in Basta we also decided to do a **collective action** that we could carry out at a local level in order to denounce seed appropriation by companies, we thought of giving out seed packets in front of the large hardware markets and gardening stores or other places where commercial seeds are sold. We could also support **farmers' seed networks** that already exist in each region. If we contact them they may be interested in giving us seeds or publicity that we could distribute to people who are working on concrete alternatives. Another idea was to research **alternatives for farmers or vegetable producers** who need larger quantities of seeds.

We propose to carry out this action simultaneously in all the countries (March 21? April 17? And to repeat it the meeting of the Let's Liberate Diversity network (February of 2011)).

These ideas are propositions that we could discuss during the workshop on seeds at the Wisserhoisl assembly and that could be, more broadly, a direction to take within RTF during the coming years.

-Marie, Anna, Miriam



What if there were more of us?

During the meeting in Basta we had a first discussion about “collective farms” and “peasant cooperatives”. We realised that many of us in RTF are part of a collective farming project. We are seeing more and more collective farms, the sharing of agricultural work and peasant cooperatives being created all around us. More than being simply a current fad, this phenomenon is a real search for a kind of life-sense. Moreover, starting a collective farming project also makes it a bit easier to get land, to gain access to funds for financing it, and to actually start farming on a given territory. Joining a peasant cooperative improves cost efficiencies and enables us to share materials and infrastructures.

Living on a collective farm makes it possible to:

- share responsibilities and diversify activities (more complete or well-rounded farming projects)
- repopulate the countryside (we can calculate roughly that five peasants could replace one traditional farmer)
- be involved in activities other than agriculture (cultural activities, politics, children...).

Working group on collective agricultural projects

We decided to create a working group within RTF, in order to collectively analyse different aspects of our lives. We also want to offer our knowledge and experiences to people wanting to create collective projects. We could be considerably strengthened from the creation of a real, strong fabric of collective entities within our networks. The sense of our own existence depends to some extent on the existence of other places, on trying out of other things... On Basta, we already defined some steps we will take together. The progress of our work will depend on our individual possibilities, as it is not possible for everyone to participate in every meeting. These are the steps we want to follow:

1/ collect texts of people who want to share their interest for collective farming. In the best-case scenario this will happen by the next meeting in Wieserhoisl, where we will bring them all together (with translations at least into English).

2/ participate in a meeting that will take place on Wieserhoisl in September:

**Collective Farms: starting to farm and life –
Development of common strategies**

Themes: access to land – hierarchy – money – gender – mobility – children in collectives – motivation – a shared economy

Dates : 23 – 26 September 2010

Place : Wieserhoisl collective

3/ create a list of European collective farms. These could also form part of our farm network, as generally they also provide training centres for agricultural techniques, with political engaged members and often offer the possibility of hosting people.

At the same time, it will be necessary to give a clear definition to « collective farm », in order to avoid including any old eco-village or Buddhist centre to be included as a collective farm...

4/ create – on the middle term—a small publication by Reclaim the Fields Editions. This publication could collect some stories and reflections on the collective praxis. It will focus on exchanging experiences rather than attempting to become a “guide to collectives”. We could, for instance, include advices about legal matters and things to remember while creating a collective and could deepen on issues such as hierarchy and power relations. We could also insert a political arguments chapter, aimed at encouraging people to develop as many new structures as possible.

5/ In order to encourage the exchange of experiences, we could create a forum on our web site.

«Why did previous experiences mostly fail? What will enable us to succeed? We are not used to living collectively because we have grown up in an individualist society.»

« It will be necessary to confront our vision of a collective agriculture that cares about future generations and the real needs of the territories, against capitalist agriculture and also the collective agricultural models of the industrialised socialist States »

Benji

Proposal for an RTF Camp during Nyéléni European Forum 2011

Dear Reclaim the Fields,

A few weeks ago we had kind of an informal meeting in Basta. The reason is that some people from Ulenkrug (one of the European Longo-Mai cooperatives) were here, as was Heike, from Longo Mai in Austria. So I can give you an update about the idea of having a civic forum in Germany next year (see the minutes of Basta assembly in May).

Heike proposed is as Reclaim the Fields to become involved in the in part of the European Nyeleni process that will take place next year in Austria in the form of a forum. The idea is for Reclaim the Fields and Longo Mai to contribute to the forum with content and workshops. This would replace our original idea of having another large forum in Germany at the same time. This would allow us to have a bigger public and no logistics to organise. Moreover, the original idea of having a civic forum with us was, on the part of Longo Mai, more or a wish then a concrete plan - it was not even discussed collectively at Ulenkrug. So we all found it a better idea to follow Heike's proposal.

The forum will take place from 16th – 21st august 2011. It should have a participative Character and be embedded in the deepening of the food sovereignty movement in Europe.

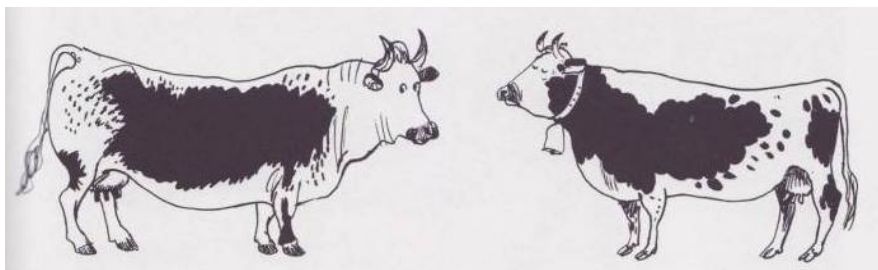
On one or two days it is planned to have time for peasant- and cultural activities. A more exact plan will be defined during a meeting for Austrian initiatives in September – another European meeting will take place in October (Mira will send dates of this meeting via the European List). Mira is involved in the organisation so she will be able to keep updated.

This is of course still a proposal and no decision, so please give your opinion. I think it is good to have it as a point of discussion in the next RTF Assembly. Maybe we could already what contents we think are important.

So, that was it. I go back to my milk activities....

Hope you are all fine, I really am :))))

Anna



Reclaim the Fields Gathering

28th of October – 2nd of November
Wieserhoisl, collective, Austria

When?

Arrive at the evening of the 28 October.
Departure at the morning of 2 November.

Arrive earlier for a little farm tour in the region (see below) and preparation of the meeting.

Or stay longer to clean up.

Workings Groups (ideas till now, contributions welcome)

*** Presentation of Reclaim the Fields for Newcomers (Marie) ***

*** Seeds Campaign / Action Planning Budapest February 2011 (Marie + X) ***

Access to Land/Concrete Strategies -Terre de liens in other countries e.g.
Austria/Germany

*** Gender issues and sexism in our collectives and (peasant) agriculture generally (Jan)
*

*** Internet Working Group (Grischa?) ***

-> *Your own workshops!* <-

Practicals

*** Collective Direct Action ***

*** Practicals at the collective (wood works, building action) ***

*** Movie evening open to the public with presentation of RTF ***

For those who arrive early:

*** Touring farms in the region asking them for their produce and making RTF visible in the region ***

Common Discussions

*** Round of Introductions. Our collectives, our projects, our struggles, our hopes. ***

*Nyeleni Conference in Austria 2011 (<http://www.nyeleni.org/>) / Position on Food
Sovereignty by RTF (Mira)

*** Reclaim the Fields Camp 2011 / During the Nyeleni Conference in Austria? ***

What can you do? What to bring?

*** Spread this information in Eastern European grassroots networks, as Austria is geographically well positioned! ***

*** Prepare a workshop / input! ***

*** Bring your own radical RTF-related movies for the movie night! ***

*** Bring your own liberated seeds and delicious products and food from your collectives / regions! ***

*** Bring warm clothes and a thick and a cosy sleeping bag and thermomat!

*** It can be quite cold in Austria by the end of October! ***

What the fuck is Wieserhoisl?

Wieserhoisl - our collective farm that is situated at the bottom of the Alps in Western Styria, Austria, has been around for almost four years. At the moment it is inhabited by eleven grown ups and three kids.

When we came here as a group of five peoples in 2006/07 the farm was abandoned and there was a lot of work to do to create living space for all of us. Due to the fact that there were only grasslands and we didn't have a lot of machines that could help us, it was a lot of work to make the farm arable.

Now we're growing a lot of vegetables, fruit trees, herbs, seeds and produce all the things that we can make out of this raw material. We exchange, give and sell our products with neighbours, on the local market, through a foodcoop in a nearby city and other self-organised structures. And we really love to cook regional vegan food for as many people as possible.

We also do a lot of cultural stuff on our farm. We have a summer cinema where we show critical films for children and grown ups from the region and our friends. We have an annual Juggling Convention and do street-theatre ourselves.

Some of us also work in the fields of ecology, politics and pedagogy together with other initiatives.

There are different fields of activities on the farm and beyond, some of which we earn money with, others with which we do not. By having a common economy we try to give the same value to all these different activities. We try to reflect our individualisms, our dependence on money, needs that sometimes contradict each other and to dig new paths every time we're trapped.

It was a very conscious decision to live collectively in a group. We are absolutely sure that we can support each other like this and live in solidarity with the variety of our different histories, abilities, experiences etc. Gender-related role models are questioned and lived in a different way.

Self-organisation, living outside of hierarchical structures, as little dependence from regular jobs as possible and self-conscious acting in everyday-life are central points of our living. Decisions are taken in a consensual way. This requires a lot of communication.

It's quite clear that we live/love in contradictions. We try to keep our creative ability and our laughing to handle all of them and to live in constructive resistance.

We see ourselves as a part of a network of people everywhere, other farms, collectives, initiatives and projects that fight for our other worlds.

Mira

How to reach us:

With public transport:

From Graz (yes, it's the second biggest town in Austria) with the GKB direction Wies Ebiswald (50 min), get off the train in Deutschlandsberg.

From there it is an hour walk following the trekking paths 12 or 506 (if you're lost ask for the way to the Wolfgangi –Kirche). Th trekking path guides you directly through our farm

Alternative: Give us a call and we take you from the station with the car.

With the bike/car:

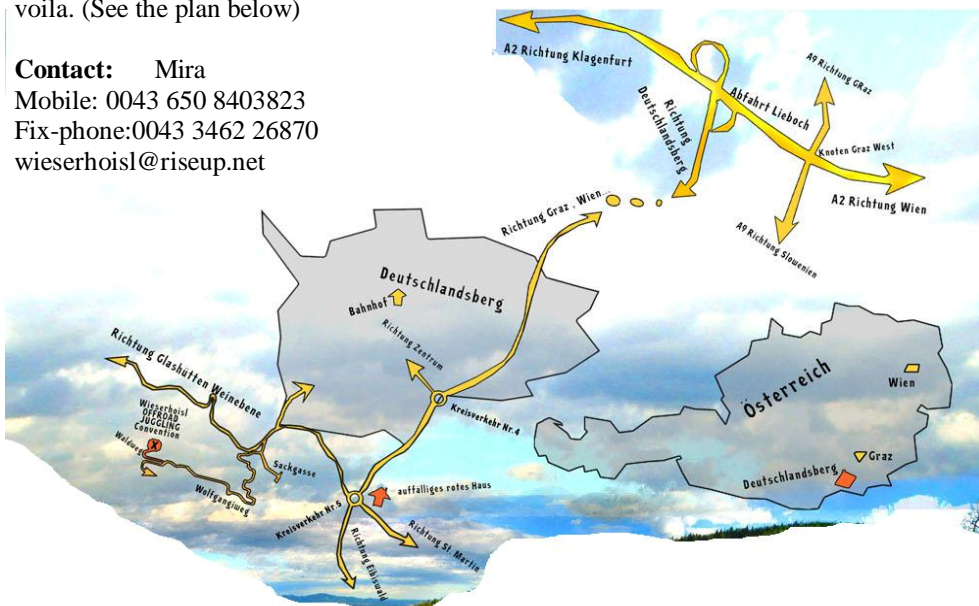
From Graz at the A2 direction Klagenfurt, exit Lieboch and further on the B67 direction Stainz/ Deutschlandsberg (ap. 22 km). At Deutschlandsberg you cross four roundabouts and leave the street at the fifth to your right – direction Glashütten Weinebene. Before the street gets really steep you turn left (2 km after roundabout number five). You follow the narrow street for 2 km hillonwards in direction Wolfgangikirche, Alpengasthof Gregorhansl. After this two km you turn right at the colourful sign Warnblickweg 32. Et voila. (See the plan below)

Contact: Mira

Mobile: 0043 650 8403823

Fix-phone:0043 3462 26870

wieserhoisl@riseup.net



Act Two: EXPERIENCES



FöldKelte (EarthRise) summer camp

14-18 July, 2010

Zirc, Akli farm, Hungary

In January 2010, FöldKelte decided to organize a summer camp for all those who think that only a radical change in our lifestyle can bring us out of the deep ecological, social and economic crisis of the present (more about FöldKelte in the previous bulletin). The aim of the camp was to bring together and inspire ourselves, acting as a meeting point where personal experiences could be shared. We didn't want another conference in which we listen to lectures and after the event everything goes on in the same old way. We wanted a camp in which participants could gain practical knowledge through workshops and where the question of „how to go on after the camp” was particularly emphasised. Our goal was to catalyse the energies ever more present in Hungary in order that the spirit of Reclaim the Fields and FöldKelte could be expressed in the dimension of real action.

The camp took place in a 300- year old farmstead founded by the Cistercians, near the town of Zirc in the Bakony Mountains. Surrounded by baroque buildings that have seen better days and in the company of local racka sheep, pot-bellied pigs, rasta puli dogs and ex-caged hens, an intimate space was soon born. A friendly atmosphere was created through giving our own names to spaces on the farm. The spirit of the place gave the campers a community over the four days.

More people turned up than we had expected. All in all, organizers and speakers, we were about 120 at the camp's

peak. Most people came from Budapest but some came from the countryside and even from abroad. Satya and Virginie, ancient-reclaimers strengthened the camp from Belgium. We had more reclaimers from Dijon, and guests from Italy and the United States.

The day started at half past six. From seven on we stretched with yoga and tai chi. At eight, Greg, the camp's official French raw-chef came, saw and conquered with his buckwheat squash. Morning sessions lasted until 1 pm and consisted of three large groups, each based on the main topics of the camp – community gardens, community farming and eco-villages. The groups worked on practical models with the help of experienced „midwives”: It turned out that forming smaller subgroups makes the work more fluent and effective. For example, the eco-village section formed a pragmatic subgroup made up of almost exclusively of engineers while in another subgroup people discussed the philosophical depths of community-building. After we finished with Greg and his team's nourishing biolunch and after a short rest, the afternoon block with practical workshops kicked off. With the assistance of experienced workshop leaders, participants got a taste of countless activities that are very useful in close-to-nature everyday life: bee-keeping, permaculture, wool felting, cheese-making, herb-studies and home-solar-panel making.

At the dinners various compositions of salads, rye bread from the Kiskunság region and cheese made at the camp's workshop filled the mess-tins, plates and glazed vessels. After the light dinner, re-filled with energy in the mild evening after the hot day, the call of the camp's shell horn gathered everyone in the granary, whose second floor served as dormitory for the „tentless” campers.

Every evening we heard different speakers. Zsolt Hetesi, physicist and researcher held a lecture on the resource crisis and sustainable land use, which demanded serious

brainwork on the part of the audience. In the lecture he highlighted the causes, logic and possible solutions of the global crisis with the precision of a surgeon.

Tamás Lantos, mayor of the village Markóc located in the Ormánság region and leader of a foundation for sustainable development spoke about the everyday difficulties of a tiny village on the periphery, and of possible local solutions to the crisis. Markóc's experience suggests that village-development based on local co-operation, the re-introduction of traditional forms of land use and adaptive fruit-farming based on house gardens and local varieties, are all good tools to help a minor town, in all respects peripheral, to find itself again.

On the second evening „pioneers” from ecovillages Visnyeszéplak, Nagyszékely

and Ilonamalom took the stage. They told about their personal experiences and what their weekdays look like after having cut the ties with urban lifestyle. They were bombarded with practical questions on livelihood, the achievable level of self-sufficiency and how much they follow the news. It turned out that the latter was no problem: As Péter Zaja remarked, he knows that the Spaniards won the football world cup. They all emphasized that even if they are organized based on a different system, they all live in communities held together by solidarity and mutual help.



On the third evening, we welcomed a founding father of the Hungarian green movement, painter and translator Gábor Karátson.

We learned about his life, stirring his kefir-fungi in his kitchen day after day until the end of the 1980s, when he was called to the activities around the Duna-movement. He told a parable about a woman, the roaring alarm system, the unknown neighbour and social apathy and quoted from I-Ching, a classic Chinese text he translated into Hungarian. It left a great impression in many of us when he recalled his memories from the 1956 Hungarian revolution: he emphasized that the most important but hardly ever quoted motto of the revolution was „neither communism nor capitalism”.

After the plenary evening sessions, campfire, live music, dancing and wine from Szent György-mountain awaited the campers. We welcomed Csaba Koncz 1956-émigré, 1968-hippie, musician, maker of musical instruments and proud caretaker of a 170-year-old pear tree. On the last evening folk musicians with violins and a double bass took care of dancing. The free, candle-and-torch atmosphere of the evening fun evoked the feeling of a company of old friends.

The last morning was dedicated completely to the issue of how to go on. We had brainstorming sessions in small groups about tasks ahead. These were then collected and concrete undertakings were born. The group of Földkelte took on the editing and publishing on our blog the written records of the morning sessions, to prepare a short video-clip on the camp, to organize a September-meeting in Akli on the occasion of opening a shop of local products there, and also to organize a FöldKelte weekend in autumn or winter in Budapest (possibly in a place called Tűzraktér). Other task-groups were brought to life with the aim of translating into

Hungarian a book on community building, entitled „Beyond you and me”; making Hungarian subtitles to the movie „On modern servitude”; starting a new community garden in Budapest or its close surroundings; helping to organize Reclaim the Fields’ international meetings and 2011 international summer camp; and finally of planning and organizing various local actions.

The effect of the camp – probably echoing the experience of many of us – was possibly summarized the most expressively by Zoli Somogyvári, camp waterman and translator: „The camp’s effect was so strong that I returned to the city as a complete stranger. People here in the city were not strangers to me, in fact, I rather felt empathy towards them (this I explain to myself as a spillover of the camp’s community-experience), but the city’s decoration, the billboards, the light-and noise-pollution was striking. This, of course, didn’t last for long, soon everything was back on the old track, but the seed of change remained in me. I’m waiting for it to come into leaf”.
Máté and Zoli



Rural Squat Meeting in Monars

The rural squatt meetings took place this year on the beginning of july in Monars, a village squatted for 28 years in the high Garrotxa, catalan Pyrenees, spanish side.

Every year it gathers about one hundred persons, mainly coming from rural squatts, around topics that are specific to squatting and rural life : collective organisation, material autonomy, « education », health, land struggles, etc. It goes with workshops, discussions and debates, that rythm the day, the subject of this meeting being mainly to see friends, to go further in relationships and to have fun together.

You could see on the advertising board :

- Friday : alternative / continuous workshop on electricity ; workshop discution debate « Questioning monogamia, and its alternatives »
- Saturday : discussion debate « Rural squatting, a movement(s), aims, do we project outside? ; chainsaw worshop, wood tables ; clowns workshop, the art of being yourself ; distillation workshop, Inipi (sweating tents from latin america's indians)
- Sunday : Squatting without car?, presentation and debate on the booklet « the jungle book, emergency book » (el libro de la selva, libreto de emergencias) ; presentation of the integral cooperative (a producer consumer cooperative aiming at getting out of the capitalism dependency, more or less)

There was also a collective work all along the meeting, to dig a pool to have water for an orchard.

All this complemented with a place for children and mothers, an infokiosk with many things, a free expression board, a total auto-organization of the everyday life (with a little help from the inhabitants from times to times, sure). And obviously no prices, just a collective pot for those who wanted and could afford to participate financially, everybody having brought what zhe could of food, material, etc.

All this was very great and interesting, so come to the next meetings, it worth it.

Next year it will be in the « Valle d'Arce », in the Pyrenees at the north of Pamplona, where many villages are squatted (Lakabe, Aritzuren, Rala, Aitzkurgi, Uli Alto and more).

I'd like to add some personal comments, but to say the truth I can't find the words to express the liberty, fullness, simple happiness feeling I experimented during this meeting. Maybe it's because the more I get close to the way of life I want tdo live, the more this feeling goes with me in my everyday life...

So if I've got to squatt to have land, if I have to screw the state and it's guardian dogs, if I've to steal to get concrete tools for autonomy, if I have to be a parasite in a society plagued with power abuses and

passive submissions, if I have to put myself apart of the World to create my own, I'll gladly do it, even if I make much more fun putting a tomato in earth or taking a beer with my friends.

After all, I believe that there will be no issue to the struggle as long as we don't live the life we want to fight for.

And so, the collective living, full and intense, based on sharing, solidarity, giving and empathy, with searching material and political autonomy as a basis, seems to me to be the best strategy to build strong basis

for a net of persons that will effectively be able to influence the way the world goes.

The political and ideological influences in reclaim the fields are diverse and make us strong, because if not the anarcho-rural ghettoisation would eat us within a second. I just hope that the example of those who choose to live their radicality not dreaming it but putting it in acts will help us to know what we want.

Love and Freedom
Tortuga

Feliz

Collective Farm with the Help of Terre de Liens

We want to become peasants. In order to feed ourselves, to learn to work the land, to learn from each other, to create a rural collective space to experience alternative ways of living, producing food and communicating.

Autonomy!

We asked Terre de liens for funds for buying a farm. After having found a place, we presented our project to the members of Terre de Liens (i.e. our motivations, histories, a detailed economic study about our development strategy – vegetables, bread and milk products to be sold in the neighbourhood). 3 months later, Terre de Liens accorded us its support. This partnership accredited us not only credit by professional organisations that control and administer access to land in France, but also by the banks we asked for credits to cover renovations and material expenses.

Moreover, Terre de Liens is a network where we can find support, advice, the possibility of rethinking our project (through yearly meeting on the farm), to have exchanges... And we know that what we will do on this farm will not end with us: Terre de Liens is engaged in preserving the integrity of the bought farms.

From our side, we took the following responsibilities:

- to fund-raise 25% of the farm's price. In order to collect those 70 000 euros, we will regularly organise information stands
- or host information meetings on Terre de Liens during the next months.
- to practice an environmental sustainable peasantry on the farm. This means that we will have to leave the farm if we stop producing, stop being "farmers" or use chemical products.

- to pay a rent.

Since September, our administrative hurdles are almost over. We're waiting for the previous farmer to retire and we'll get to work!!

-Marco

Gaec Radis&co, la Goronnière,
53240 MONTFLOURS



Terre de Liens, a Tool for Collective Access to Land

Terre de Liens is a French association, born in the end of the 1990s. At the beginning, it brought together some organic and biodynamic peasants, as well as RELIER, a popular education initiative. Terre de Liens was born from the recognition that:

- We need peasants to renew the classic agricultural model, inventing new ways of farming that are ecologically responsible and based on solidarity.
- For the most part, such peasants are not able to have access to land without becoming indebted for many generations. Therefore, it is necessary to find collective and fair ways to acquire land.
- Neither private actors (farmers, private owners, real estate agencies...), nor public actors (the state – represented in France by the SAFER –, public entity, natural parks, conservation agencies...) are successfully stopping or slowing down land speculation, soil degradation and the concentration of land ownership.

First goal of the association is to offer legal assistance to people who want to set up collective land projects. Many projects, like “Société civile immobilière” or “Groupement foncier agricole”, are supported. But such local initiatives have certain limits. They can

dissolve after a while and they lack flexibility and solidity. This can make it difficult to find replacement for the “share holders” who retire.

In 2006, Terre de Liens created a financial tool called « La Foncière ». Its function is to collect savings at the national scale to buy farms that are would otherwise be given up. Once bought, land and buildings are taken out from the speculative market and rented to incoming peasants – who will work in a local, diversified manner, respecting the environment. More than 12 million euros have been collected over the last 4 years: by the end of 2010 “La Foncière” will own 50 farms. At the same time, the association keeps on informing and advising groups about collective access to land.

Nowadays, Terre de Liens has over 1000 members, 4500 share holders and ca. 20 associations or local groups. It has contributed to giving media coverage to the land issue in France. Given its importance, the association starts to be recognized on the administrative level – certain municipal governments, for instance, have contacted Terre de Liens for advice on how to create natural areas and preserve water while creating organic farms. Terre de Liens allows integrating of various groups in the future of land that surrounds them and

generates encounters among peasants, consumers, public officials...

In September 2010 the foundation « Terre de Liens » will be created: It will be a new tool, that will enable collecting both farms and money.

« Terre de liens proposes to change the relationship towards land, agriculture, food and nature by developing the relationship towards land property.

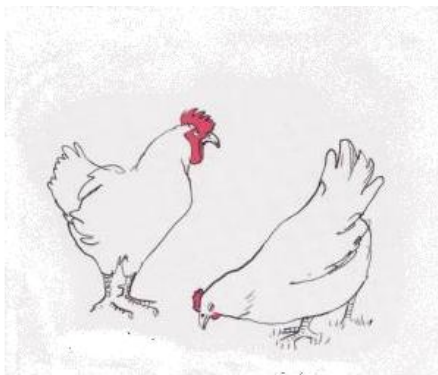
“We believe that land is a common good that cannot be managed and distributed according to market rules. We believe that land cannot be reduced to a tool for human activities and that territory is more than decoration for our lives. Land is directly related to our humanity. Land creates the possibility of weaving solidarity where identities and ties are formed and where the interdependencies with our environments are revealed. We are facing the crisis of how the world is

interpreted– of the church, parties, trade unions. Land/territory has become a central space in this mediation between individual and society. We believe that modernity lies in the quality of the relationships that we will manage to build among human groups and their territory – in terms of ecological balance, richness and resource distribution, identity and social connection.

« We are persuaded that each right goes with a duty. The “common and intergenerational” character of land implicates soil and property rights and duties that must be established and assumed collectively.

“ We believe in collective action, in the force of sharing our means and we believe that cooperation is a more trustable engine than competition.”

Marco



Overview of Projects in Geneva

This summer I've been visiting Irène, Alois and Naima who I met through RTF. It was a chance to discover their project in Geneva.. Marie

Cocagne gardens and Charrotons gardens

Cocagne Gardens were created in 1978 during a meeting between a group of customers and a market gardener. They decided together to form a legal cooperative entity and wrote a charter that included rights and duties of the contract. The first goal of the cooperative was the production of vegetables baskets, distributed each week to families. In exchange, the families that received the baskets took on the responsibility of supporting each phase of production and distribution. They committed to the project at least for a year and paid for the vegetables in advance. This means they accept variation, for instance if the harvest varies as a result of climate conditions that are not ideal. One of their rights and duties is to spend 4 half days of work in the garden. Thanks to this, customers have a better idea of problems and working methods of the gardeners, and doing so strengthens the links between them and the customer's trust in an organic agriculture that is not certified. For the gardeners, receiving a salary facilitates farming in a high-cost agricultural land area (+/- 50 000 Euro/ha) with good conditions. However, they are not owners of their land and therefore depend on the good health and functioning of the cooperative.

Today, Cocagne Gardens has 400 cooperators and about 10 employees. It works with the maximum number of persons that will still allow a maximum number of good human relations. Yet growing demand made it possible to start a new project in 2007: Charrotons Gardens. Today there are 140 families and 3 gardeners (one and three quarters of a full time salary which are divided among several people). The project is on 2 hectares, with a lease signed for 9 years. A third of the surface is covered by greenhouses and tunnels that had already been in place since the previous project that farmed the same land conventionally. They are equipped with facilities such as a cold room, but infrastructure is not ideal (for example, there is no water tank to recover water from the greenhouse roofs). The soil had suffered from conventional processing and is only slowly being recovered as organic soil. The main disadvantage of renting the land is that the lease ends in 2016 and costly investments in amelioration are not secured. In addition, they recently received bad news: the land has been redistricted and building permits have been granted. Geneva suburbs are constantly growing and few if any elected representatives are preoccupied about the future of farmers when it stands in conflict with urbanization. However, the cooperative is organizing a political campaign through a referendum which will be launched this autumn after the government vote. Many organizations (customers,

producers, environmentalists) as well as parties at both ends of the spectrum (communists, greens, but also agrarian rightist party) joined the referendum group and will organize a campaign. If enough signatures can be collected within 40 days, they will be able to determine the destiny of the 58 hectares threatened by urbanization. Hopes are not very high, given the powerful real estate lobby. But the essential question of saving agricultural land is now the subject of public debate.



The Artichokes

Another farming project was started in the city centre last year. It is a grass root network from by neighbourhood as well as professional gardeners producing both vegetables and seedlings. They are 6 young gardeners who were authorized by the city to use the old nursery that had been producing plants for parks and public places. Now, the garden is opened each evening, where all the neighbours can come to get vegetables, which they weigh and pay by themselves, with gardeners to help and answer any questions. Moreover, the gardeners use a heated greenhouse they produced 105,869 seedlings* for professional or amateur gardeners. It is a lot of hard work to have each block of soil, insert each seed in the centre of it, manage the heating, the daily watering and the light! Another greenhouse has been converted for getting the plants accustomed to UV-rays. The nursery plants are certified organic, offering a local alternative to multinational seeds and seedling companies.



Other projects are blooming in Geneva, such as a movement of young people leaving to the countryside to live as independent farmers, or squatters who have left after waves of repression in cities or people who leave be closer to nature. If these initiatives are still a minority, they are nevertheless growing and ideas and energies that come together make everything worthwhile.

By the way, if you are ever there, ask any of them to demonstrate the “Kata d’la Houe” for you... it is legendary!

Action against GMOs in Belgium

16th of September 2010

At the European GMO-free-Regions Conference
In front to the EU Parliament

First gathering of the Belgian "Faucheurs volontaires"

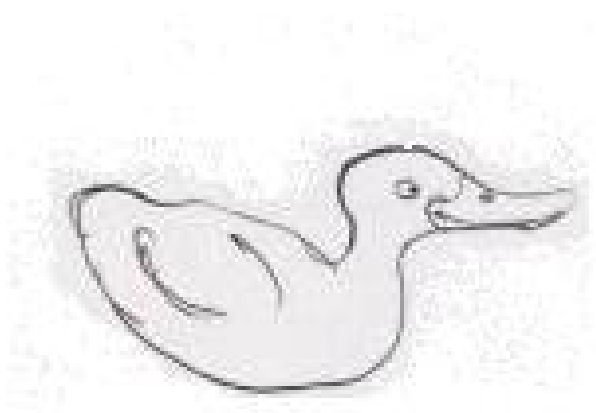


- Presentation of European GMO destruction initiatives
- Instructions and training for cutting corn



Among those present were quite a few from RTF and the Belgian green Environmental Minister, E : Huytebroek

Act Three: REFLECTIONS



Peasant struggles yesterday and today: some elements for understanding

It is wrong to think that the present peasants are completely isolated, unconnected to the history of European peasants. On the contrary, by studying this history we realize that its richness in struggles and creativity gives us lessons that are very relevant. Here are examples to start our reflection:

The village community

Peasants are not isolated workers disconnected from their society. They are part of the local society which could be defined as the village community. Although in Europe such communities hardly exist anymore, it is very useful for linking peasants, artisans and other actors within a common territory. It is not something replaceable, since it varies from one region to another, reflecting the regional particularities, both geographical and cultural.

The village community has always existed, but in France was described for the first time in France, in the Middle Ages. It is based on an extended family living in the same place, following the rhythm of the seasons and without suffering exploitation. This society practiced equality, in particular through collective land property (due to collective land rights, private use is limited), active solidarity, family ties and direct democracy through general assemblies.

«A tacit community refers to collective use of the lands and fair distribution of incomes among all members. Tacit communities did not differentiate between farming and craftwork, it lived as a closed economy. Except for the payment of taxes, tacit communities seemed to be

self-sufficient and gave an image of an agrarian society in which there was no misery. Extract from *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* I. Hartig and A. Soboul.

The basis of this collective organization is common property (forests, meadows, waste lands). Today we only know as land rights the property and the right to use (renting), but in this time there were many other rights called “poor’s rights”: gleaning, pasture on harvested or fallow lands... It offered the small property owners or the agricultural workers to survive by means other than selling their labour.

The concept of a collective farm can be traced to the end of the French revolution (G. Babeuf) and is an answer to the problem of private property, at the time of giving power from aristocracy to bourgeoisie. (If you want to read more about the history of private property, read Edgard Pisani *Utopie foncière* éd. du Linteau).

My goal is not to idealize a golden age, but to think of an ideal and to find ways to reinvent it today. We should keep in mind that “no state” does not mean a lack of domination (patriarchy) in a group formed for survival rather than by choice.

La Makhnovchtchina : a communist non authoritarian society

Makhnovchtchina is the name of the Ukrainian insurrectional army, named after the Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno in the 1920s.

In February of 1917, the Russian people were infuriated as a result of the endless war and famine. In less than one week, they destroyed the domination of the czar. They created a bourgeois government, but it was defeated a few months later for being unable to stop the war and solve political and economic problems. On the 25th of October, the Bolshevik party -with help from the soviet army (red army) took power, shouting such slogans as “Stop the war immediately! The land for the peasants! Factories to the workers!”. Then they started to implement the dictatorship of the proletariat and collectivize the production.

After signing the Brest-Litovsk treaty (March 3, 1918), giving Ukraine to the Germans, the Bolsheviks started to persecute “internal enemies”, who were an enemy to socialism. They attacked the social-revolutionaries, but also strongly the anarchists, who refused any form of organization, including collectivization. It was during this troubled period that the Makhnovichtchina movement was born. A few months later, Ukraine was given back to Russia, after the defeat of Germany in at the German defeat in November 1918.

Many of the Makhnovchtchina members were anarchists and played an important role in the movement. They defended other ideas than the Bolsheviks. They refused the dictatorship of the proletariat and claimed

the self-administration of workers in their communities. They refused state-organized production, defended an economic system based on equality and wanted independence that the Soviets be independent of any political party.

In Goulai Polié region, free communes were organized, based on material and moral mutual aid, on “non-authoritarianism” and equality. Despite a tense military situation, they managed to held 3 regional congresses between the 23rd January and the 10th April 1919. They sought to determine the economic and social objectives of peasant masses and coordinate to archive them quickly. The Makhnovchtchina did all it could to support this self-organization and allowed for a high level of self-organization and freedom of expression among socialist-revolutionaries and Bolsheviks, although the latter had already begun to persecute Russian Anarchists.

The movement suffered serious difficulties which made difficult the creation of a real anarchist social organization among Ukrainian peasants. First, the peasant's freedom was guaranteed by an under equipped army. Second, they were constantly persecuted by the Bolsheviks for being anarchists. The constant fight between the white and red armies damaged the implementation of a new sustainable social organization. In 1921, the red army defeated the insurrectional Makhnovchtchina movement and put an end to its libertarian experience.



Spontaneous agrarian collectives in Spain

In 1936 during the Spanish republic and without help from any political party or organization, agrarian communities were formed. This took place in big land properties, whom owners had abandoned while leaving to the areas that supported Franco or had been executed. In Aragon, the movement was supported by Durruti milicians and took place in almost every village. All together, half a million peasants were involved.

Land property certificates were burned on the village square. The peasants brought all their possessions to the communities: land parcels, work instruments, animals and others. Collectivizing allowed to modernize agricultural techniques and to avoid land parcelling. In some villages, they abolished money and replaced it by bonds. Those bonds were not a currency, they could only be used for buying products to be consumed, and only small quantities of these.

In contrast to the Soviet state model, entry in the communities was voluntary. Those who preferred to keep working on their family plots could continue to do so, but they could neither take advantage of the collective services, nor contract someone else's work. Both forms of production

existed side by side, but sometimes with conflicts such as in Cataluña where people who previously rented land became owners of their own plots. Putting land together allowed to avoid the problem of having very small plots and to allow the modernization of how they were farmed.

A few years earlier, agricultural workers had destroyed machines in protest against unemployment and income reduction. Now they gladly used them to facilitate their work. They started using fertilizers, developed aviculture, irrigation systems, pilot farms and improved the roads. The churches that had not been burned were converted into libraries, theatres or hospitals. The anarchists believed in education, so they implemented cultural centres even in the most remote villages.

The peasant general assembly elected an administration committee (often merged with municipal council), whose members received no material advantages. They worked in horizontal teams, without bosses. Generally the payments were given to a family, with money or bonds were money was abolished. The paradox was then to put those who were most oppressed in Spain—women—under complete dependence from men.

Today

Family farms continue to exist today, the struggle and are open to the world, there are farms that share land and tools, farms where people may not live as a communities, collectives (rescued from 68 or ones that are formed anew), agricultural squats taking further the struggle and the peasant heritage.

To understand today's struggle and prepare those of tomorrow, it is always good to look at history for previous initiatives, to study their context, achievements and mistakes. For practical and political training, we can also visit active peasants (farm apprentices) and read books that inspire us.

-Paul

An agricultural vision from within

Reclaim the Fields

During the last RTF gathering in April I offered a collective brainstorming on our agricultural vision(s). This article tries to capture the some thoughts that emerged from the workshop. It avoids the term "peasant agriculture" since I believe that the term is subject to debate for its conservative tendencies.

First of all, some general points: As concepts, we thought that "food autonomy" and / or "production autonomy" are quite useful. However it seemed obvious that a diversity of concepts is needed which in turn need to be pragmatically adjusted to the local conditions. They cannot be copied one by one. Lastly it was stressed that our vision is utterly dependent on collective access to land. And that vice versa, those who practice this vision should have access to land.

In short, our **agricultural practices** should ideally entail the following elements:

- * **Enriching soil fertility** as the very basis of our practice.
- * **Increasing bio-diversity** within various production- and cropping systems.
- * **Minimising external inputs** and creating circular flows of resources and nutrients which are decentrally available and accessible through low-tech means.
- * **Establishing seed autonomy** in cooperation with existing networks as well as our own.
- * **Decentred, local / regional** production and distribution.
- * **Furthering multifunctionality** in agriculture through social and cultural aspects.
- * **Creating craftsmanship and workshops** for local manufacturing incl. the processing of agricultural products.
- * **Using appropriate technology** which is easy to use, understand and repair. If desired and possible focus on human or animal-powered technology.
- * **Building energetic autonomy** through the intelligent use of excess biomass as truly renewable resources (wood, vegetable oil, biogas) and other renewable energy sources (sun, wind etc.).
- * Preserving, creating and sustainably using **wilderness areas**

An extended section of our brainstorming focussed on the **broader social and economic aspects** of our vision:

- * **Establishing non-market-based, autonomous structures** for production and distribution.
- * **Strengthening cooperation** against competition.
- * **Trusting and exchanging within our distribution networks** instead of relying on state-based organic certification schemes.
- * **Exchanging agricultural goods among collectives** in different regions via relations we create through tours and travelling.
- * Organising an **emancipative village economy**.

Two questions remained open:

- * Do we only want to engage in **subsistence and sell our surpluses** or rather engage in some sort of **division of labour** that makes real sense?
- * If we want to organise **non-commercial, needs-based production**: How do we regulate demand? How do we communicate what within the network?

As for **social and economic factors at the farm level** we noted:

- * **Collective farming** with working groups and decentralised, consensus-oriented decision-making.
- * **Intergenerational living** on our farms.
- * **Self-determination of "work" and "leisure"** avoiding the usual work treadmill on farms.
- * formulating a **critique of (self-) exploitative work, e.g. on family farms**, and finding new forms of organising "work".
- * **creating more motivation for becoming farmers** and finding fulfilling work in the countryside.
- * **Overcoming individualism and private property** through a re-establishment of common ownership in land, buildings and other means of production (also formally).
- * **Questioning gender roles and challenging the strong patriarchal and sexist conditions** in rural areas.
- * In order to do this: **Analyse critically the (pre-)agricultural history which avoids romanticising the "traditional peasant world"**.

- Jan

"Money makes the world go around..."

Many of us are in the process of starting to work the land, to cultivate on a small scale and consider seriously the link between our work and the consumers of our products. We try to produce with respect to nature and also respecting ourselves. We don't want to work hundreds of hectares from a huge tractor engine; we prefer to weed manually between vegetable rows rather than use poison with endless names ended by -ides...We wish to entertain a social life besides work and wish to have time to defend our ideals (political action).

But we need to live, and unless we were capable of manufacturing everything we needed, we have to receive a decent wage for the work we do.

In Basta, a debate took place precisely on this question:

How do we live from our farming work?

We will not be able to summarise the debate that we carried out in Basta (especially because we lost the notes)... Nevertheless, Marie and Jan wanted to give their personal opinion as a reflection of two different approaches.

Marie's opinion

Decrease our needs

For me it is clear that money is the central means of exchange because we live in a society in which we use it always. I am not questioning it, as I find it nearly impossible to pay for a hoe I need from the store with the pumpkins I have under my arm.

Nevertheless, some exchange can be done through barter, like labour in exchange for goods and donations can also take care of many costs. Recycled materials and friends' support can avoid some loans. Terre de Liens is one of the most motivating examples (see article).

Our real needs have to be redefined in this society where over-consumption is the rule (do we need a plasma screen to feel happy?). Access to land and living quarters is sometimes rendered impossible due to property speculation. Therefore trying to avoid this when it's possible could cut our money needs by about one half.

Unemployment Benefits

I want to live from agriculture, as a profession. Unemployment benefits or income support are social rights which protect us during crisis situation, but I don't want to conceive it as a salary and then cultivate vegetables on my free time. I agree that receiving this social

helps in some cases, like when we are just starting to farm, during a period of training, as a safety net at the end of contract or in case of health problems. But for me, it's a **part of my dignity make a living from my work**, and therefore to receive a decent wage to fulfil my needs. For the moment I receive unemployment benefits but this situation is becoming unbearable. I want to build a profitable farming project and this means that I would be able to make a living out of it, including contribution to the National Health Service, the social security and taxes that pay other people's unemployment benefit when they need it.

Let's dare talk about about profitability

I want us to speak about the profitability of farms and gardens. Often, in alternatives circles, I have the feeling that we totally refuse the idea of profit, probably because our loathing of the capitalist system. But if I decide to build a farm or an alternative garden, I have to at least survive and therefore I have to calculate the profitability. And more than survive, I actually expect a profit. I'm living in a caravan and try to spend as little as I can, but in the future, I'll probably need to send children to school or assure a pension for myself.

In agriculture, as in other areas, it's necessary to make a **business plan**. Without being too specialized, we have to «do things that work», or at least we need strong activities to support less profitable ones. Through WWOOF I met many farms with a business plan and by doing this they managed to have free time for doing other things than toiling non-stop (for example: politics!).

More than producing food, farms and gardens have a role to play in (re)educating farmers. Children's' activities, plants harvesting, rebuilding the relationship between food and the person that consumes this food... All these activities are necessary in the society and can be financially supported as well? If these and other farming activities can be done side-by-side, why not do it? But it doesn't solve the problem of farming profitability.

Prices of manufactured things: the IKEA syndrome

In Europe, people spend between 10% and 20% of their budget on food. This is two times less than 40 years ago and incomparable to poor countries where it is 80-90%. I think that **decreasing price of food is responsible for the near impossibility to earn a living by farming nowadays**. When milk farmers lose money in produce, but meanwhile we find milk for 42 cents/litre in supermarkets, is there anything to do? Modern agriculture problems are linked to money. It's almost impossible to earn a living by selling foodstuffs when you have to compete against the industrial agro-food chain. The problem is dumping prices. Supermarkets offer tomatoes at a very low price, even in winter. How do they do it? For instance, it is done through suppliers in Morocco, where the tomatoes are grown in huge greenhouses of 20 hectares each. They employ local farmers to work in the greenhouses who are paid next to nothing. These people are victims of this system because the greenhouses have sucked out all the water from the upper layers of the earth which they can no longer access with their wells. Dumping is not only an environmental (pollution) problem but a social one as well (Moroccan farmers have to work in these

greenhouses while European farmers lose their market). And we, we have to set our prices according to those huge production units of multinationals!? We either give up our ideals and start producing intensively, or we give up our work as farmers because we can't make a living out of it.

« Expensive prices are a form of elitism » I don't agree. To buy is a political act, fair trade and durable purchases should be a goal. When we set prices in the context I just described, I don't have a problem with selling my potatoes for 2 euros a kilo in the rich suburbs of Berlin if it can help keep a local vegetable producer in business. I used to exchange with this very vegetable producer, more of his vegetables in exchange for watering the plants when he is at the market—this is proof that money is not the ONLY solution. Instead of blaming small projects for their high prices, I would rather blame intensive farmers and discounters for their low prices, prices which allow dumping only.

European subsidies

Finally, the issue of European subsidies. This subject was controversial in Basta. First, you need to get a status as a producer; then the amount of subsidies is linked to your production size (in hectares, in livestock), a system that is geared to benefit larger-scale farmers. Via Capesina's demand is that these subsidies should be attributed to people actively farming. Ideally we would be able to get rid of this subsidy system, which is unfair for farmers outside of Europe. While this is true, for me the problem is rather between « small scale » and « large scale » farmers, here or elsewhere. The disappearance of small scale farmers is happening everywhere. The problem of open borders is not a European problem, where standard of living dissimilarities make us non competitive. In Peru, a few years ago, the president signed a free trade treaty with United States. Farmers began to mobilize against this because in the aftermath they could no longer sell for a decent price on local markets. When sales are dissociated from remunerative price, the only ones making a profit are the large companies that process and export the products, certainly not small producers. This is one more reason why I defend prices in relation with our needs and for local consumers.

European grants for agriculture are paid for by each European citizen. If I have the possibility, I'll ask for them. It would not be fair to refuse them and allow my customers pay higher prices, it would be for them like paying twice: once through the tax, and once through my high vegetable prices. However, I wouldn't like to use these grants as a salary but more like an extraordinary income (like for a savings account for my pension☺). The problem in case of using it as a salary is to be in a weak position if it should one day disappear.

To conclude, I think we have to start from our needs and based on them to set prices and give priority to social ties and mutual help. We produce the foodstuffs of the highest quality, we respect our ecosystems, and help in building social networks: This must worth something!!

Jan's opinion

Another way of valuing our work and goods

In the capitalist state of affairs, money is mistaken as the main form of value for our creation of good food and other produce. This leads to the conviction of many peasant farmers that "food is too cheap" and that they have to "earn more" in order to "live well". This conviction reproduces the capitalist ideology. It degrades our artisan produce to commodities and strengthens money as main form of valuing.

Instead we have to create non-commercial spaces: We have to find new ways of distributing value, new forms of satisfying our needs beyond capitalist mediation. For example, through gift networks in which everyone offers their skills and products, unconditionally, to all others within the network. A "good life" for all is only possible once we do away with capitalism and its mindset.

Sadly, until this radical transformation, we still need

- **Money to farm well** (in order to read more about what this could mean, see also "An agricultural vision from within Reclaim the Fields" in this bulletin).
- **Money to satisfy our needs.**

However, I claim that selling our produce (even directly to consumers) can be counter-productive to those these two points.

Alternatives to capitalism

Capitalism does not honour our idealism and hyper-ecological production. We stand in direct competition with Spanish tomatoes produced under minimal organic standards and the dreadful exploitation of undocumented migrants in Spain and Italy. Especially if we work low-budget, low-tech and "ineffectively" (in capitalist terms) and sell our stuff at reasonable prices, we also start exploiting ourselves and others. If not, we have found a niche were we sit in the office part time and do accounting and marketing to then sell our stuff for outraging prices to a white, middle-class elite that complains the market stalls: "Your carrots aren't straight enough!"

Some practical perspectives that lead out of this mess could be:

- **Spending less money** through voluntary simplicity, shoplifting, dumpster-diving, recycling, and hitch-hiking ... whatever!
- **Investing our money in appropriate means of production** that make us more independent from the capitalist system: good tools, low-tech machinery to for cleaning our own seeds, an oil mill to produce our own fuel ... and so on!

- If we want to make money from farming do it in **CSA / AMAP producer-consumer cooperatives** that are needs-oriented and give you freedom for creative eco-farming.
- **Organizing our money differently:** asking our rich friends or foundations for subsidies, money from the welfare state, applications to EU-funds, other jobs that you like and still pay more than farming ... whatever you like and doesn't constrain your freedom and desires.
- **Distributing your produce in non-commercial networks** of mutual aid and voluntary contribution.
- **Giving away appreciation:** Nice words, hugs, kisses, songs, poems ... whatever!
- **Organizing resistance!**

What is Non-Commercial Agriculture ?

Non-Commercial Agriculture is a concept that tries to abolish direct exchange and moves towards a gift economy. It rests upon the idea that we can establish networks in which everybody contributes their skills voluntarily, also their products etc... without the expectation of a direct return.

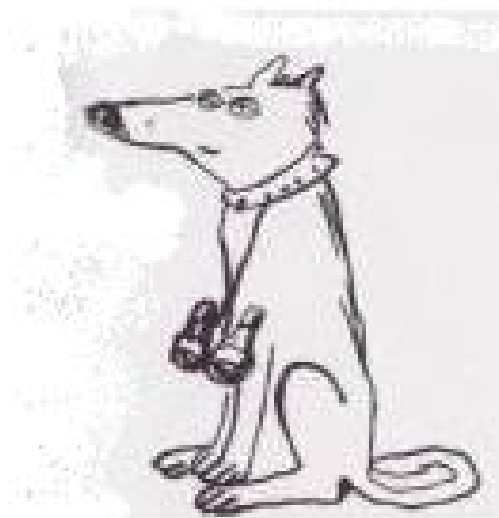
However, everybody in this community can access this common pool of skills and produce. Non-commercial production tries to overcome capitalist logics and has the goal of establishing a needs-based economy.

An example: the Karlshof Farm

Karlshof, situated north of Berlin, tries to establish such a network. It initiated this experiment by contributing their agricultural produce (potatoes, grains, peas and other legumes, sunflower oil etc.) to such a network. Over the years many questions have been raised, boundaries have appeared and new, more differentiated perspectives have been developed.

We haven't been socialized in this way of relating to each other. But we should keep on trying.

Act Four: the Fine Peasant Arts



Transhumance

The time had come to leave. For some time now, the mountains had been holding back the clouds which were packed tightly around the valleys and the cold, which had come to stay, besieged the crests awaiting the snow. We had taken the road one morning, leaving the spinning mill of Chantemerle for a transhumance which would last three weeks towards Provence. There were ten of us, a herd of six hundred sheep and two donkeys.

First impressions.

There is silence in the forests, put into disorder by the tintinnabulation of the bells and the stamping of six hundred animals, the paths on the flanks of the mountain assaulted by the moving mass of wool and the small inroads blocked by the advancing terror of empty stomachs. An incessant ballet of random automobiles are taken hostage by the crying and bleating tide, pushed out onto to the edges of country roads but also densely travelled ones. In the villages dogs suddenly begin to bark, villagers come out of their houses or merely observe from their windows above while groups of attentive children crowd behind the gates of the schools; once gone, the only memory left behind are the empty flower pots which limp exhausted, abandoned on the road like corpses after a lightning siege.

Against the direction of the world

A countdown in time and space

By walking two hundred kilometres we experience distance. These are no longer landscapes—like images that succeed one another, in rhythm, from behind the windows of the high-speed trains and air-conditioned cars—spaces are formed by the paths that cross them, the particular texture of the earth and stones that inhabit it, the types of vegetation and the colours at different times of day and night. You experience changes in climate, raw and uncertain. You take the time to re-discover the particular taste of fruits, fallen on the ground or plucked from a tree. On the rhythm of the march, all vastness is re-dimensioned by simply moving towards it, in a primordial way, rendering it human, far from the kilometric flux of the machinelike megalopolis.

Inhabited earth

Sometimes the elderly come out on their patio and tell about their times, sometimes people we meet accompany us for a leg of the journey, curious, while others scold us thoroughly with their thick voices, gesticulating wildly with their hands. In the evening, as we stop to camp around a bonfire, we are met by people most of whom we have met during previous transhumances. We share a conversation, a meal and the strangeness of an evening-long encounter. Each house has its own mood and colour, its sonority, its occupation (shepherds, teachers, farmers, post office workers, taxi drivers...), and its own culinary specialties (stew, goat cheese tarts, couscous, Italian dishes...). *Spaces*, places of

anonymous passing-by suddenly become *territories*, places where they are tied to a fundamental unity between life, the inhabited earth and a predisposition to meet.

Ten of us live a type of exile on a new land. There is a spirit that unites us, a common step leading us to discover the places which we cross through a common reality, through a unified movement. Of course, the atmosphere varies, but clouds come on a regular basis. But nothing takes away this moment of a common life, nomadic, at a time where the depression of individual isolation slowly prepares the iron trap of dense cities.

A counter current in the face of a tide.

A counter current that does not erase the bright light of Ikea in the depths of the valleys, the relay antennas perched on the mountaintops, or the outdoor enthusiasts on their four-wheel bikes on the paths of the forest.

A counter current that does not evade the standard tourist model and the village sight-seers, armed with their numeric camera lenses—a part of the modern body—in which the transhumance becomes folklore, a cliché to be consumed, at the same level as the panel of the “typical” images presented by the leisure industry, between the escape of the mountain and the exoticism of the country farm.

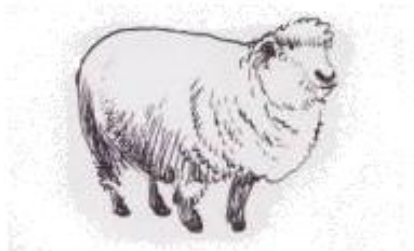
A counter current that does also does not erase the instinct of doggedly defending the borders as set forth by the private property of peasants. Nor the efficient flow of traffic. For a time, we slow down the flow of transports in which exaggerated crises of hysteria—a symptom of being late for something—, we also allow ourselves to give bring joy to the hygienic paranoia of cities, leaving behind us a road that is dotted with animal excrements. But the world, in the route it takes, is not really affected.

At the end

At the end, the transhumance is a practice which has its place in a reduced frame. It is only still tolerated because of its minimal impact on the flow of things. On the one hand, the increase of transhumances today would create a conflict of interests with the policies that govern land, where rapidity and good flows are indispensable. On the other, the prohibitive bureaucratic hurdles that govern and police spaces allow us to imagine the prohibition of transhumance in the future.

At the end, the transhumance does not reveal anything about a past age, nor an image of idealized peasant way of life, it is just practicing something that we want to live: to throw counter-currents out there, to multiply them, to let the unlikely encounters appear, the unexpected places, to create and to make events last which leave for all times an earth inhabited by deeper mysteries.

Mateo



English lyrics of THE song

Song written in COP 15 in three languages
On the melody of Bella Ciao

*All over Europe
We are young peasants
But we don't have, we don't have, we don't have the land
But we'll reclaim it, and we will get it, and we will struggle for our land.*

*In Copenhagen
Through carbon markets
They try to take, try to take, try to take our land
But we'll reclaim it and we will get it, and we will struggle for our land*

*They try to sell us
Their false solutions,
agrofuels, GMOs and sequestration
but we don't buy it, we will destroy it
and we will struggle for our land*

*Around the world
Peasants are struggling
But they unite, they cry out and they build up hope
With love and justice, for everybody
Come on and join us on the land*

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FINJA, Anna and Olli's little girl was born on the 12th of July in Berlin
She has already confirmed her presence at the Wieserhoisl assembly



French speaking RTF Gathering, Dijon

22 - 24 October 2010

More info and registration at : clem-ts@no-log.org

A gardening revolutionary tool; “sarcloir oscillant”

You wouldn't guess it, but it revolutionises the weeding hoe!
It goes really fast, forwards and backwards
No more back pain!
You can find it in any garden shop in Geneva, Switzerland
It costs about 25 euros

