



Farming and Climate

Common goals, common challenges

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The handbook was prepared by the Fundacja Kohezja in collaboration with WeMove Europe. While this handbook uses Poland as a case study to illustrate our points, Climate for Farming is in nature an international endeavor made possible thanks to the support and donations of a pan-European community of individual citizens. This community of action is called WeMove Europe (www.wemove.eu) and this is one of the many initiatives and campaigns our joint, transnational mobilization has made possible over the past years.

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1/Introduction

What is this publication and for whom?

Maybe you consider yourself an activist, or maybe you just want to know more about the planet on which you live.

Maybe you're already involved in initiatives to tackle the climate crisis, or maybe you're just getting started.

Either way, this brochure is for you. Happy reading.

We created this handbook for anyone who feels strongly about protecting the climate and biodiversity. We believe that the way in which we manage food production and distribution is one of the key factors fuelling the climate crisis. At the same time, it's an area with a huge potential for change.

As part of the Climate for Farming initiative, we want to create a space dedicated to exchanging knowledge. We are convinced that farming communities and activist groups can support one another and learn from each other. We are keen to see more people become engaged in fighting for a fair transformation of the agricultural sector, regardless of whether they are activists already or only just thinking about becoming involved. Modern agriculture has an enormous impact on the environment, and if we want to mitigate climate change we must start thinking about not only moving away from fossil fuels but also overhauling the agricultural sector. Unfortunately, as is obvious from every COP¹ in recent years, agriculture is still excluded from the main narrative about the climate crisis. We want that to change. We believe that food production is a matter that affects all of us and deserves as much media coverage as possible. Food production issues should take centre stage for activists who care about the fate of our planet. This is what our handbook is all about.

In the first part, we share knowledge about the main issues relating to agriculture and its impact on the environment. We then move on to our own experiences relating to activist work with farming communities in Poland as testing ground, and we describe how to talk to farmers and speak about them with respect.

2/ About us

Climate for Farming is a grassroots activist social initiative. We raise awareness about the agricultural aspects of the climate crisis, but above all we build relationships with farmers. We realise that both groups – farmers on the one hand and climate change activists on the other – have shared goals, which is why we strive to develop joint demands. We believe that we can fight to protect the climate together, focussing on what unites us rather than what divides us. We seek common goals, a shared language and joint approaches that will strengthen us. We are keen to inspire climate activists and farmers to work together and we want to support people involved in local communities.

We notice the powerful impact that the climate and agriculture have on each other. Conventional farming has an enormous effect on the environment due to greenhouse gas emissions, water extraction and deforestation. Meanwhile, alternatives such as carbon farming and agroforestry offer huge opportunities to improve the living conditions on our planet.



We must transform the agricultural sector and move away from conventional farming as soon as possible but in a way that is fair towards farmers. **We do not agree with saving the environment at the expense of people who work hard to ensure our food security. We want an overhaul of the agricultural sector, but one that takes farming communities into consideration and works with them rather than making decisions for them. They know best what they need.** We want to recognise the challenges that farming communities face and meet their needs. We want to join forces in solving problems that affect us all but hit people working with land and livestock the hardest. We want to build an effective social movement for farmers that will not only call for climate justice but also promote and help to introduce solutions based on environmentally friendly and climate-smart agriculture.

While this handbook uses Poland as a case study to illustrate our points, Climate for Farming is in nature an international endeavour made possible thanks to the support and donations of a pan-European community of individual citizens. This community of action is called WeMove Europe (www.wemove.eu) and this is one of the many initiatives and campaigns our joint, transnational mobilization has made possible over the past years.



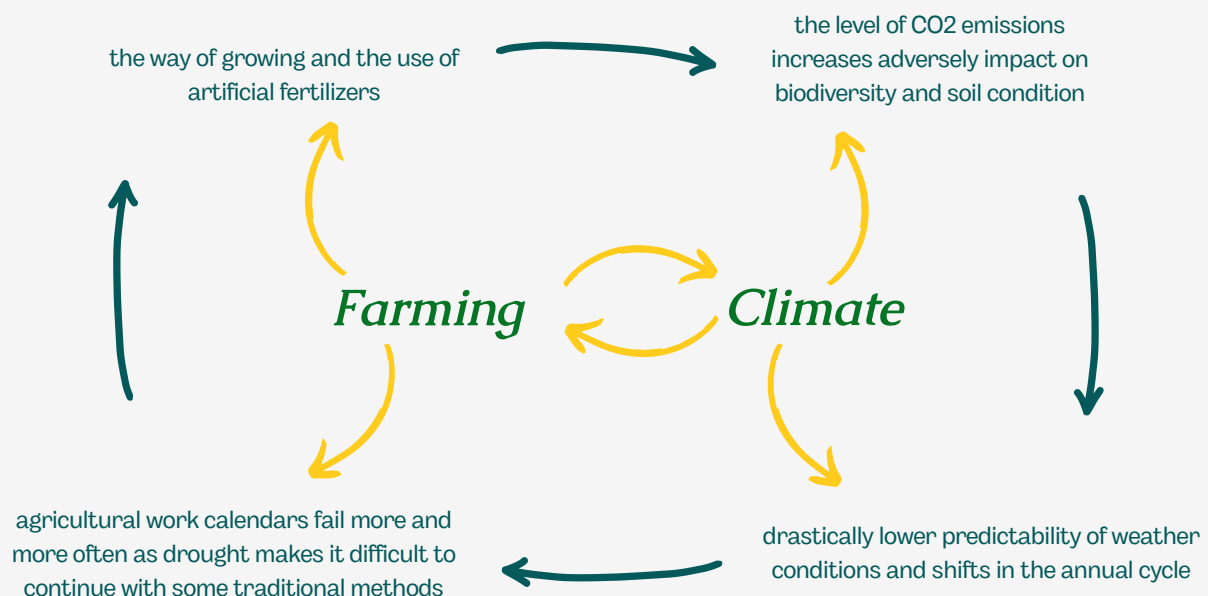
Knowledge

**Brief overview of modern agriculture.
Why is it so important?**

1/ Introduction to the relationship between the climate and farming

We know that farming affects the climate and vice versa.

The statement is simple enough, but it is worth unpacking. We're not talking about the vague idea that everything is connected but about tangible effects visible to the naked eye. The climate crisis manifests in different ways, including a drastically lower predictability of weather conditions and shifts in yearly cycles as a result of which farming calendars become disrupted increasingly often and droughts make it difficult to continue using some traditional methods. Meanwhile, farming methods determine emission levels and the impact on biodiversity and soil quality. Thus we come full circle. Let's have a closer look...



But first, let's take a step back. What is the climate crisis all about, anyway? When we talk about the climate crisis (or even the climate catastrophe), we are talking about a phenomenon that many people refer to as global warming. We find the more controversial wording, that is, climate crisis, to be more fitting to a situation that already greatly affects the living conditions on the planet we inhabit.

The agricultural sector is the third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Europe, right after energy and transport.² That equates to 10% of emissions, or around 32 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent³ (equivalent because the gases emitted include nitrous oxide used in fertilisers and methane from livestock farming). **To live up to the commitments made at climate conferences and significantly reduce emission levels, farming must take centre stage among both activists and decision-makers planning the direction that legislative changes will take.**

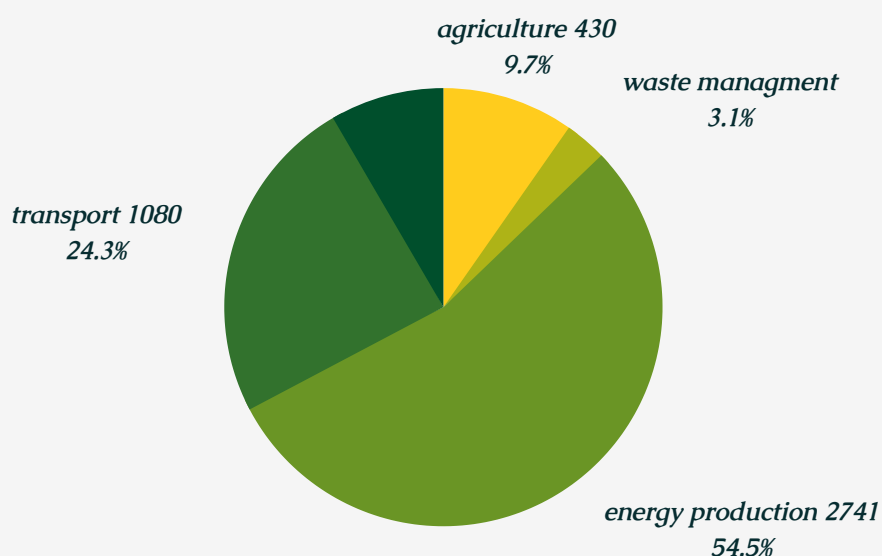
Yet emissions alone are not everything. The consequences of an industrial approach to agricultural production also include biodiversity losses and the ecosystem degradation that comes with it. The overall loss is so drastic that we call it the great extinction. Its consequences can also be felt in water management given that agriculture is responsible for $\frac{3}{4}$ of humanity's total freshwater consumption.⁴ Making changes to the way that we cultivate land is therefore our shared responsibility if we want to ensure the diversity of the species alive today and the survival of many others – including ours – in the future.

If we continue to manage the Earth and its resources the way we do it now, we can expect tragic consequences. Each new report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns against this danger. The most noticeable consequences include water shortages.

The consequences of an industrial food system are not limited to climate issues but can also be felt in social and economic relations. Farmers' lives, which are dependent on the cycles of nature and weather conditions, are subject to rules set by a market where profit is king. Competition combined with long supply

chains, clear advantages for large-scale farms, and complex regulations that go against sustainable solutions makes intensive farming the most financially viable choice. That's where we come in.

Our role is to promote alternatives that do not involve sacrifices or significant challenges but rather help take care of both the environment and people's well-being.



Share of economic sectors in total emissions of greenhouse gases in the EU, 2016, in million of tones of CO₂ - equivalent and percent.

Excludes changes in land use, which would increase agriculture's effect on climate change by up to one-third.

Source: agaratlas 2019 / EC

rising sea and lakes levels, more storms, floods,
warmer and drier summers, longer growing
season, more varied crops, increased diseases

more winter rain and flooding, rising
sea levels, warmer and drier summers,
higher yields, longer growing season



*Consequences anticipated from
climate change for agriculture
in the European Union*

Source: agaratlas 2019 / EC

2/ What is industrial farming: Characteristics, motivations and statistics

Let's move on to specifics. What are the features of industrial farming?

- At the heart of industrial farming lies economic efficiency: the main goal is as high crop yields as possible, regardless of quality
- The use of plant protection products and artificial fertilisers
- The need for fossil-fuel energy on a large scale
- Monoculture crops are often used
- Advanced farm mechanisation
- Monoculture crops are often used
- Little consideration for the welfare of farm animals.
- Often low-quality food (with a high content of substances harmful to health)

***Monoculture is an agricultural system
that involves planting a single crop
across a given area***

3/ Let's talk local. The current situation in Polish agriculture.

The climate crisis, much like the economic situation, is part of an interlinked system and does not occur in a particular place in isolation from the global perspective. Given that we are currently operating in Poland, we will zoom into the specific conditions – environmental, social and legal – that shape the reality of Polish agriculture, which are however similar or relevant for many other European countries.

In the past ten years, Polish farming has undergone huge changes. The factors that played the biggest part in transforming Polish agriculture include the introduction of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, changes in people's eating habits, shifts to alternative livestock farming methods, the search for new sources of energy, and increasingly noticeable climate change.

Between 2004 and 2017, Poland received 47 billion euros as part of the Common Agricultural Policy. The funds were intended for the agricultural and food sectors and for rural development. According to studies conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs (ISP),⁵ farmers have noticed changes to their environment. Many have benefited from subsidies and modernisation, but the support has been uneven.

Recent public opinion surveys reveal clear concerns for the future of employment. Land concentration seems to be especially worrying as the number of holdings drops and their average surface area increases. According to the Central Statistical Office (GUS),⁶ these changes are linked to, among others, the fact that the rural population is ageing and that there is a shortage of successors who will take the reins. Moreover, fewer and fewer people are taking up farming, while more and more are throwing in the towel due to farming being a low-income

profession and farmers struggle to invest in developing existing farms. On the flip side, farmers who still see their future in farming are expanding the area of their holdings and the scale of production to ensure that they generate enough income. This is linked to the fact that, according to the farmers surveyed, large-scale farms are supported systematically while small and medium-sized operators struggle more and more.

Deagrarianisation: Moving away from rural agriculture, a decline in the rural function of agricultural areas

Land abandonment: Excluding land from agricultural use

As a result, more and more farmers seek additional income from non-agricultural work. Only a third of households with an individual household user derives its main income from farming, while a third derives it from paid employment. The larger the farm, the higher the percentage of main income from farming.

The production structure is also changing. Between 2010 and 2020, the average surface area of farms involved in crop production (exclusively or alongside animal production) increased, while the surface area of farms involved in animal production alone decreased. Nevertheless, Poland is still one of the largest producers of meat and dairy in the EU. It is the fourth largest meat producer and the sixth largest dairy producer in the EU. According to Eurostat, in 2020 Poland produced almost 27,000 tonnes of poultry meat and is the largest poultry producer in the EU. According to Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Union, Poland is the fourth largest beef producer in the EU. In 2019, the country had the third largest population of dairy cows in the European Union, and in 2020 the total amount of milk produced in Poland was 14.4 billion litres. As regards fruit and vegetable production, Poland ranks third in the EU. It is also a major maize producer. Poland ranks fourth in the EU in terms of maize production.⁷

Farmers believe⁸ that their position on the market is heavily affected by the dominance of large – mainly foreign – companies. Such companies can introduce their own products on the Polish market and influence buying-in prices, thereby imposing working conditions and making it difficult for farmers to plan ahead. Under such conditions, suggesting changes that will not bring financial gain are unlikely to be met with enthusiasm. Farmers themselves say that developing sustainable farming is impossible without improving the situation of agricultural producers.

Recent studies⁹ on the attitudes of women living in rural areas give rise to valuable conclusions regarding the potential for introducing climate-friendly solutions. The women interviewed (a sample of 1,000 adult women) recognised that some environmental issues are a threat (such as littering, extreme weather events and fewer pollinators), but they often raised doubts about the human-driven causes of the climate crisis. They also believe that the current agricultural model does not have an adverse impact on the environment, with only 15% of respondents describing the impact as large or very large. Many of them feel reluctance towards the need to introduce changes that will protect the environment, such as changing our diets and decarbonising the economy. Such attitudes prevail among people with lower incomes, which should not come as a surprise when one of the examples of unwanted practices is the ban on heating homes with coal. Yet there is no doubt that being aware of this relationship highlights the need to consider the social and economic aspects of measures aimed at protecting the environment.

As part of our initiative Climate for Farming, we call for striving towards a fair transformation in the field of agriculture – a transformation that does not shift the responsibility onto the most vulnerable households and individuals, but instead focuses on supporting farmers and working together with them.



There are other ways.
Alternatives to industrial farming.

1/ Introduction to alternatives: return to tradition versus innovation and the ideological and scientific background: Agroecology

Before we move on to examples, we would like to **briefly look at concepts – developed by practitioners and theoreticians – of farming that take the needs of ecosystems and communities into account. The key concepts include agroecology and food sovereignty.** They are demands and visions of reality in which local communities shape their own food system based on principles of respect for the land.

Agroecology studies the interdependence of living organisms on farmland and how this interdependence is affected by changes to their habitats due to drainage and tillage works, industrial emissions and urban contamination. At the heart of agroecology is the idea that agroecosystems should mimic the biodiversity levels and functioning of natural ecosystems.¹⁰

The discipline focuses on the idea of a balance between plants and the environment as a way to obtain the highest and most valuable crop yield possible. How? By adapting crops and habitats to each other and by using rational methods to fertilise and protect plants using organisms that are beneficial to agroecosystems.

Agroecology is not just about production methods. Above all, it is an approach that places communities and their living environments at the heart of agricultural practices. Agroecology emphasises the ways in which knowledge is shared and promotes equal access to resources.

A similar but not identical concept to agroecology is **climate-smart agriculture (CSA)**. According to FAO, “CSA sustainably increases productivity, resilience (adaptation), reduces greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation), and enhances the achievement of national food security and development goals”. It is worth noting that CSA is sometimes criticised. Michel Pimbert, an expert in agroecology, points out that there is no clear definition of what CSA is and what it is not, which allows the concept to be co-opted by corporations, even those that are the world’s biggest contributors to climate change.¹¹

Food sovereignty, closely linked to agroecology, is a point of view that considers the social aspect of food production and distribution. It opposes treating food as a commodity and allows people (communities, ethnic groups, countries) the right to create food systems based on their needs, conditions and traditions in a way that does not harm others. It is not just about access to food (as with the food security principle) but also about the way that land is used. The food sovereignty movement is therefore a political movement that puts the well-being of farmers and consumers above the profits of markets and corporations that reap the benefits of the flow of goods.

The concept of food sovereignty was coined by a group called La Via Campesina, which deserves its own paragraph. La Via Campesina is an international grassroots farmers movement founded in response to the effects of capitalism on food manufacturers. Its members make up a support network and together fight for the rights of farmers. They fight against land grabbing, corporate monopolies, and international laws that favour large-scale farming and promote growing biofuels instead of food. They operate across social categories, paying attention to aspects such as specific experiences of women farmers or differences in experience depending on geopolitical conditions. They argue that supporting small-scale women farmers in their struggle not only improves their living conditions but also addresses the climate, water and food crises.

2/ *Alternative production methods*

If not large-scale monoculture, then what?

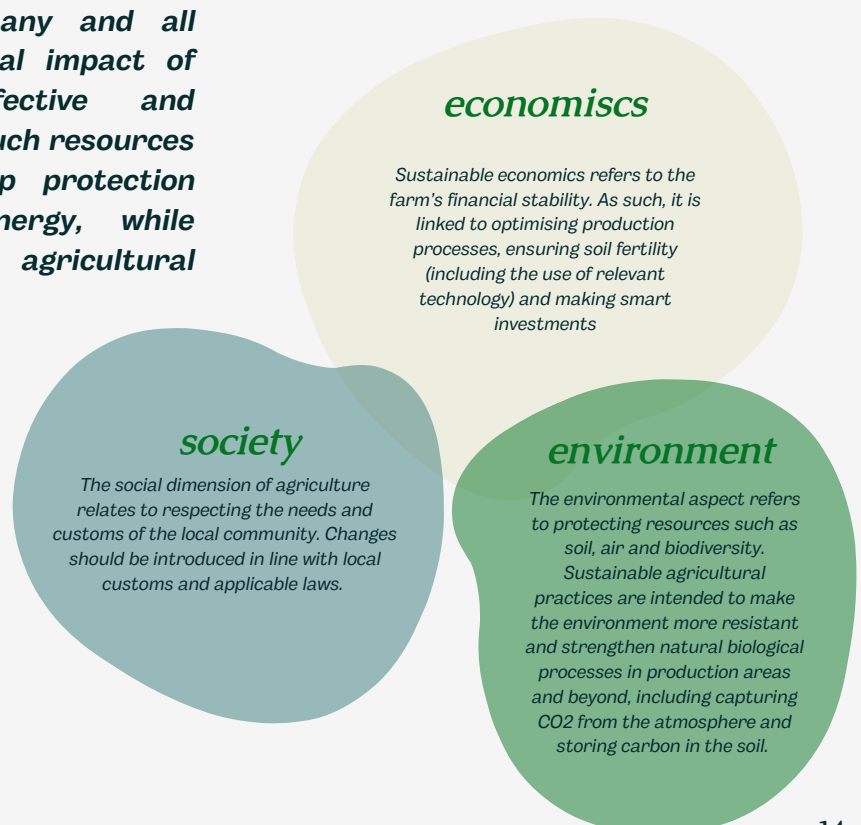
→ Sustainable agriculture

A detailed discussion of the alternatives to default, industrial farming would require a separate, extensive publication. Instead of reproducing such specialist content, we decided to present the rules guiding the various alternatives and related practices in the most digestible way possible. **Treat this information as guidelines. Reading this handbook will not tell you how to launch your own agricultural business in line with the trends described, but it could serve as the basis for discussions (for example with farmers) and your own research.**

„Sustainable agriculture refers to any and all activities that limit the environmental impact of farming, allowing a more effective and environmentally friendly utilisation of such resources as soil, land, water, machines, crop protection products, seeds, fertilisers or energy, while maintaining the profitability of agricultural production and its social acceptance.”

according to the Association of Sustainable Agriculture in Poland or ASAP

The goals of such an approach go beyond protecting nature, and sustainability applies to more than just economic practices. Sustainable agriculture is achieved in three dimensions, namely economics, the environment and society.¹²



Sustainable agriculture is the widest concept that we will discuss. We are using it as the starting point in order to, among others, clarify certain doubts regarding terminology. Despite the way that it can sometimes be presented, sustainable agriculture is not the same as organic farming. Its scope covers issues relating to not just nature but also the economy, society and culture.

Sustainability should combine several dimensions because agriculture is multifunctional by definition. Agriculture goes beyond food production. Rural areas should also provide “environmental goods” and “social goods”, i.e. help improve the well-being of society as a whole.

Environmental goods:

- Agricultural landscapes (rural landscapes of high nature value);
- Biological diversity of farmland (biodiversity);
- Quality of water resources ;
- Availability of water resources;
- Soil functionality;
- Climate stability – capture (storage) of carbon dioxide;
- Climate stability – greenhouse gas emissions;
- Air quality;
- Resistance to flooding and fires.

Social goods:

- Animal welfare;
- Viability of rural areas;
- Food security.

→ Organic farming

Organic farming is the most environmentally friendly agricultural production method. As an alternative to conventional farming, organic agriculture focuses on practices that benefit the local ecosystem, strengthen biodiversity, help better protect natural resources and promote animal welfare.

The EU regulation on organic production¹⁵ also mentions an additional (consumer) function of organic production. It is meant to meet the needs of consumers who prefer products produced using natural substances and processes. “The organic production method thus plays a dual societal role, where it on the one hand provides

for a specific market responding to a consumer demand for organic products, and on the other hand delivers public goods contributing to the protection of the environment and animal welfare, as well as to rural development”.¹⁴

Unlike conventional production methods, the goal of organic farming is not to increase productivity and reduce the costs of food production. What matters is improving the quality of the products and removing the risk of contamination by harmful substances.

The main difference between organic products and products derived from conventional farming is that organic farming does not involve plant protection products such as pesticides, herbicides and fungicides, whose harmful effects on health and life are indisputable. To become a certified organic farm, a farm that operates according to organic principles must undergo a certification process. **The process is complicated, time-consuming and requires a great deal of testing and documentation. It is therefore worth bearing digital and economic exclusion in mind because many farmers who operate according to the principles of organic farming abandon the idea of certification if it turns out to be too costly, too time-consuming or too unclear.**

→ Agroforestry, or farming that mimics the forest

Agroforestry is land cultivation and livestock farming that attempts to mimic nature, i.e. to reflect the forest floors. It is a farming method that involves integrating trees and bushes into every type of crop and animal husbandry and breeding in order to achieve a sustainable, efficient and cost-effective system that will also have a positive impact on the environment.

Barbara Baj-Wójtowicz, author of the article *Agroforestry: A way for a sustainable agricultural ecosystem*¹⁵ describes agroforestry as an innovative solution to the challenges faced by agriculture, in terms of both nature (climate change, consequences of drought, spring frosts, plant diseases and pests as well as weeds, and environmental pollution from fertilisers) and in terms of society and the economy (problems with knowledge transfer, low income for farms, shortage of organic and functional food, long supply chains, unfavourable regulations). These notions apply to other systems striving for sustainability, but it cannot be denied that agroforestry is becoming increasingly popular.

The key issues in agroforestry are questions such as:

- ***How to best integrate tree planting into farm production?***
- ***How to carry out agricultural production and protect the environment – at the same time and to the same extent – all the while taking steps to mitigate climate change?***
- ***How to design a sustainable agroforestry system for farms in a way that guarantees that the holding is successful and that the farmer's income increases?***

Agroforestry receives support from some governments (e.g. in the form of subsidies) and appears in programmes and resolutions relating to countering climate change (for example in the final agreement adopted at the COP24 climate change conference in Katowice).

It is worth adding that the forest ecosystem is not the only one that can be combined with agricultural production. Another example is paludiculture, or the productive use of wet peatlands.¹⁶ Farming on wet land is seen as a solution that can generate profits for people all the while preserving the ecological functions of wetlands. The main principle of paludiculture is to harvest plants in quantities that allow for peat to keep forming. This type of farming may also ultimately lead to re-wetting areas that have been drained.

→ Carbon farming

Carbon farming is a set of practices designed to rehabilitate soil and the environment. According to a report by the European Parliament Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety,¹⁷ carbon farming refers to farm management practices that aim to deliver climate mitigation in agriculture. This involves the management of both land and livestock, all pools of carbon in soils, materials, and vegetation, plus fluxes of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide. EU programmes such as the Fit for 55 package mention carbon farming, and the European Parliament Committee on the Environment even

Carbon farming is an umbrella term that can include various practices discussed in this section, including permaculture and agroforestry.

concluded that carbon farming also refers to the business model that aims to upscale climate mitigation by paying farmers to implement climate-friendly farm management practices.

→ Permaculture

Permaculture, although usually associated with layered beds, is not just a cultivation method but a wider design philosophy that takes into account the landscape, the established ecosystem and the social aspects of the area in order to create a farming system that is permanent and does not impoverish the environment.

Permaculture is also a philosophical stance and a social movement with political aspirations. The concrete methods it uses stem from a wide array of various agricultural and horticultural techniques. The choice of which ones will be used is based on observing the ecosystem in question. What's important is that they help restore soil and diversity. Permaculture is also sometimes applied to social relations that are harmonious, lasting, and based on respect for the environment.

The forerunners of this approach, Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, were inspired by the relationships found in nature and by indigenous farming techniques. Their goal was to design in such a way as to make farming resemble natural ecosystems – including human beings.

They use catch phrases such as “a problem is a solution”, which means that everything found in the garden can be used in a way so as to be beneficial

3/ *Alternative distribution methods*

From the point of view of ecosystems, we must strive for radical changes to production methods – in the directions that we have discussed so far. However, overhauling the current way of doing things must also apply to the way in which we store and distribute food products. This is important for reasons linked to the climate (emissions from transport, which are all the more severe given the scale of food waste) and to society and the economy. Direct relationships between producers and consumers are a win-win, with higher income for the former and health security for the latter. They also raise awareness among consumers and make communities more attached to local producers.

What are the benefits of shorter supply chains?

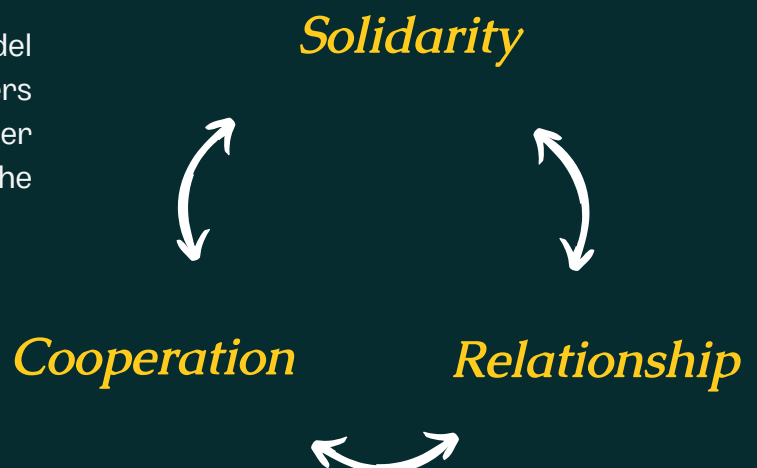
Let's start from the beginning. What are short supply chains all about? A supply chain is the journey made by a product – in this case food – from the production site to the final consumer. In the dominant model, supply chains include intermediaries, storage, and sales locations. Pro-environment and pro-social movements are calling for making supply chains shorter by cutting out some or all intermediaries. Doing so is meant to help achieve fair prices all the while fostering closer relationships between consumers and producers.

What do we gain from short supply chains?

- ***Higher profits for producers by eliminating profits for intermediaries,***
- ***Locality and therefore reduced emissions from transport,***
- ***Greater transparency: consumers know exactly what they are buying.***

→ **Community-supported agriculture**

Community-supported agriculture is a model based on partnerships between food producers and consumers. Small-scale farms work together with consumers so that everyone shares both the risks and the rewards.



How does it work?

A group of consumers and farmers together decides on the products supplied and the costs involved. On this basis, the consumers pay the farmers a set amount and commit to regular payments for a specified length of time. Meanwhile, the farmers look after the crops using their knowledge and skills. The process helps the farmers to assess resources and risks, leads to smart investments, and ensures that they are safe in the event of unforeseen circumstances. When unforeseen circumstances do occur, responsibility for them is shared and the consequences do not befall only the farmers who produce the food. When the crops are ready, the people who made the payments receive regular packages with produce. The quantity and quality of the food may vary. This is what shared responsibility is all about: in a fertile year the consumers can expect large quantities of high-quality vegetables, while in case of poorer conditions the consequences of crop failure will be felt equally by the whole group. The nature of the system means that farms can operate more safely (with a secured income), while consumers become more involved in the local economy and can help shape it consciously. They share the risks, but also enjoy the surplus when there is any.

1/ Planning season with partners

2/ Prepayment

3/ Cropping

4/ Harvest

5/ Food delivery

→ Co-operative

A co-operative, much like community-supported agriculture, is a model based on partnerships between people who produce food and those who consume it. The idea is also to communicate directly and shorten the supply chain. The way that the cooperation is organized is a little different, however.

Co-operatives are founded by groups of consumers, usually from cities, that get in touch with farms and offer to collect food from them regularly. Members of a co-operative regularly order vegetables and other products (after choosing these themselves) and the farmers deliver the produce. Deliveries are invoiced together, which helps significantly reduce the time spent on the handover of goods.

Co-operatives, more so than community-supported agriculture, resemble traditional sales, but the sales are based on special rules. The entire group, which brings together consumers and producers, makes decisions about orders, about expanding the product range or how involved members are. They take the well-being of people and of the land into consideration. This builds a community that shares responsibility and takes care of the natural environment and in which members look after one another.

→ Sales groups

Alternatives to supermarkets that do not require a long-term, community-based approach (as with community-supported agriculture and co-operatives) are becoming more and more in demand. We are talking about sales groups in the form of virtual spaces that increasingly often replace traditional marketplaces. Sales groups are an exchange platform used to organise the delivery and collection of products. Although sales groups involve commercial transactions that are usually devoid of a social and environmental angle, for farmers they can provide an alternative to imposed buying-in prices, and for consumers – an alternative to supermarkets. Such formats also challenge the existing food system.



Action

Activists and farmers for climate

1/ *What can non-farmers do?*

In the previous sections, we discussed what farming looks like today and what it could look like tomorrow. However, **we are not farmers ourselves. Our daily lives are not (yet!) quite so dependent on torrential rain or prolonged periods of drought. Neither do we claim to be agricultural experts or scientists. We do believe, however, that transforming agriculture is a matter that affects all of us and that depends on all of us. As such, we should all bear responsibility for it.**

It's not just about changing farming methods and the means used. The key is working together. We want a transformation that takes into account the needs of people who live in the countryside and work in agriculture. We are not encouraging anyone to name and shame. We need changes, here and now, to regulations that will allow for the

creation of supply chains based on an understanding between producers and consumers. **To achieve such cooperation, we need a genuine and informed dialogue with people who are directly involved in food production. We need a dialogue full of mutual respect, empathy, and awareness of the potential and the problems linked to farmers' daily lives.**

We have the right to talk about farming and we have an obligation to listen and observe those who are involved in farming on a daily basis.

The desire to hold such a dialogue is why our group has what we call Community Connectors. You don't need a licence to be a Connector. Community Connectors are activists who get in touch with farmers and suggest finding solutions together. Together is the key word here. Connecting communities is based on listening – with enthusiasm, but also with the humility of a non-expert. We want to find out about the daily lives of the people who ensure that we have vegetables for our soup. We want to get to know their daily lives, their concerns and their legal situation. Only then can we share sources of knowledge about possible solutions, support grassroots movements and, above all, strengthen the voice of our interlocutors. It is a practice that we want to explain in this chapter.

Instead of offering sociological generalisations about “who farmers are” or tips on “how to influence people”, in this section we share what we have learnt ourselves through the relationships we have forged as activists with farmers. The advice below is therefore based on our experience in the field. Use it as a starting point for setting up your own meetings and creating your own practices.

2/ What do Community Connectors do?

Community Connectors play a crucial role. Their work makes it possible for us to not only share knowledge but above all to learn about the point of view of farming communities.

What do Community Connectors do on a daily basis? Their main task is to have conversations – attentive conversations at the heart of which lies listening. It's how they build relationships with the potential to turn into long-term partnerships. Community Connectors get in touch with farmers in their local areas. They visit, they talk and they observe. They learn about daily lives, problems and needs. They make sure those problems and needs are named and passed on. They also facilitate net-working among groups and share sources of knowledge and support. They show that neither problems nor solutions are standalone matters – they are part of a system that can and should be changed.

“

I mainly listen and pass on. That's how I see my role.

A Community Connector

”

Does it always work? Of course not. Reactions vary, as do the lengths of relationships. But we have reason to believe that the methods we developed are worth sharing and that the rules we follow can help prevent certain obstacles.

First, a brief overview of the rules. How to tell a story without causing offence? It may seem obvious. Still, we would like to give you a list.

✓ **We want:**

- Learn about the problems faced by farming communities;
- Listen to farmers and make their voices heard;
- Talk like partners;
- Show how closely farming and the climate are linked;
- Speak out about the need for change and alternative farming methods;
- Identify sources of knowledge about relevant practices;
- Share information about subsidies and other forms of support;
- Connect people and introduce those who use sustainable technology to those who might need explanations.

✗ **We do not want to:**

- Act like saviours from the big city;
- Antagonise activist or farming communities;
- Judge and shame;
- Claim to be experts in everything;
- Scaremonger over the consequences of the climate crisis without pointing out rescue routes.

3/What works?

After some introductory catchphrases, it's time for specifics. How to talk and not lecture?

Below you will find a handful of tips from our Community Connectors. Bear in mind that when it comes to human relationships, there are no rigid rules that always work. Farmers, like all other social groups, come in all shapes and sizes. Treat these tips as guidelines that you can use as a starting point.

→ Establishing contact

Where to start? Some farms have a social media presence, which means that they're easy enough to contact. Others operate offline only and if you want to get to know the people working there, you have to meet them face to face. Showing up unexpectedly could backfire, however. You can't expect to show up from out of the blue and inspire interest in someone who's extremely busy, especially during working hours. It's worth finding out as much as you can about the place you want to go. If you want to work with a given farm, you could first speak to the local mayor. They should know who might be interested in a social initiative, who uses non-industrial techniques, and who looks at strangers with mistrust. This information doesn't have to rule out any interlocutors, but it can be a good indication of who to start with. It's worth noting that the position of mayors can vary from place to place, and a scheduled meeting could be seen as an imposition. Make sure that this form of contact doesn't end up being counter-productive and discouraging.

Who did you say you wanted to speak to?

→ Research above all

We have emphasised a few times now that we are not experts. That's true. We don't claim to know it all. But this doesn't mean that you can forego preparing for conversations. It's important to know how farming is subsidised, be familiar with fertiliser brands and recognise basic equipment.

- *What crops are subsidized?*
- *Research in fertilizers*
- *Recognition of basic agricultural machines*

This won't turn anyone into a farmer, but it can make the conversation smoother. To gain people's trust, you must first find a common language. You must know about the institutions and regulations that your interlocutors deal with every day.

→ Time



This is where you'll need to adapt. If you're used to a schedule and planning, you may need to step out of your comfort zone. Although there's no hard-and-fast rule, usually you won't arrange to meet "in a week at 5 pm". You're more likely to hear things like "I don't have time", "Come back tomorrow" and "Maybe in two hours". This is due to the nature of farming, which you should take into consideration when planning visit times. Sometimes you won't secure a meeting until next time.

→ What do we bring to the table?

Research about agricultural working conditions is one thing, but it can also be crucial to come prepared with a concrete "offer".

After all, using the "language of benefits" doesn't bring to mind an activist approach and resisting the capitalist need for expansion

Though it may sound utilitarian, in this case it could be key. We talk to people whose daily survival hinges on the possibility to sell their crops. We want to do more than share vague ideas about stopping a disaster. What we also bring to the table is knowledge about subsidies and training and help in bringing farmers together. It is a valuable resource that can serve as the basis for further cooperation.

→ Know the realities

Farmers are usually two months away from becoming homeless and two unpaid invoices away from bankruptcy

A Community Connector

This means that when daily life depends on weather and fluctuating prices, it's impossible to talk about stability and predictability.

→ Questions, not answers

Yes, we do our research. Yes, our goal is change. But that doesn't mean that you should rock up with ready-made solutions. We come, above all, with humility. Our main task is to hear what challenges farmers face every day. Which institutions offer support, and which create obstacles? How much are buying-in prices? The farmers who are most interested are likely to give the most reliable information.

→ Be careful with judgements

Farmers come in different shapes and sizes. It is bound to happen, however – like with any other social group – that you will meet people you staunchly disagree with, on agricultural matters or otherwise. We're not saying you should put up with offensive or hateful comments. Not at all.

But it is worth asking yourself where certain views come from.

Do farmers hate animals? Dogs are often chained up because they would chase the chickens otherwise, and many farmers can't afford a fence. Meanwhile, cows raised for meat usually have a name and are beloved.

A Community Connector

It's not like all farmers voted for the Law and Justice party. It's not like they all go to church. Society paints all farmers with the same brush, yet we're all different. Granted, this works both ways – farmers are also biased against people from the city. Farmers think that city dwellers are clueless, don't do much and have lots of cash.

An activist farmer

Studies by the Institute of Public Affairs, referred to in the section above, mention that people with the lowest incomes are the ones who resist sustainable solutions the most. It should come as no surprise that farmers are first and foremost interested in their own survival, and only once survival is secured, they become interested in how their actions affect the environment. When suggesting new methods, we must make sure that their needs will be met.

→ Watch your language

Complicated terminology puts people off, not only when it's difficult to understand. Farmers know their work inside out. They are also well aware of the class contempt with which their work is often met. Sometimes that contempt is veiled under the pretence of concern for nature. When people talk about climate change, it's easy to blame farmers when in actual fact the blame lies with a system that

offers no alternatives and expects maximum efficiency. It is no wonder, then, that certain words that might seem obvious to activists could discourage farmers. We've been told that the word "ecology" sometimes closes doors. It's also a good idea to be careful about using specialist terms linked to alternative farming methods. Instead of demonstrating your interest in the subject, they could be taken as an attempt to undermine the competence of the person you're speaking to. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't talk about the methods and values that are dear to your heart. Above all, we ask – as elsewhere in this handbook – that you be mindful and humble.

I noticed – and I now avoid it like the plague – that you can't use words such as ecology, organic or permaculture. They're like a red rag to a bull. The farmer might not know the word but it sounds strange and unfamiliar, and you're likely to be dismissed if you use it.

An activist farmer

→ We seek shared values, not differences

“

The farmers I know use sustainable solutions out of respect for their land. They don't think 'I'll be environmentally friendly because I have to' but 'I won't water the field with a roundup, that would be insane'.

A Community Connector

”

4/ What could a first meeting look like? Let's look at all this one step at a time.

① *Establishing contact*

- **Explore the area.** What do you know about the region, the soil, and the legal and political situation of the farmers who live here?
- **Contact the mayor.** Mayors can shed light on the local circumstances or advise who to talk to.
- **Get in touch with the farmer of your choice.** Depending on the nature of the farm, you can send them a message on social media or try to meet them in person.

② *The first conversation*

- **Ask questions and be open to new points of view.**
- **Introduce yourself and talk about what drives you and who you are affiliated with.** Your interlocutor is unlikely to trust you if they don't know why you've come or what your connections are.
- **Be upfront about your potential cooperation and about what you can offer. Don't make promises you can't keep.**
- **Opinions and points that you disagree with might come up during the conversation. Some will be difficult. Remember that you don't have to agree to everything and you have the right to voice your doubts. But before you do that, try to listen to the other person's arguments.**

③ *What next?*

- **Remember to decide how you will communicate with each other.** This is where it might be worth adapting to whatever is most comfortable for the other person.
- The easiest way to meet other farmers will be through contacts and networking as your interlocutor undoubtedly has friends and acquaintances **who might be interested in what you have to say. Recommendations can go a long way in expanding your network.**
- Once you have made contact with a few people, it's worth creating a platform on which you can all communicate together. It could even be just a WhatsApp group. **What matters is striving towards a situation in which communication is not one-sided.**

5/ The farmer's perspective

How do we want people to speak to us?

Look up prices

To learn about farmers' daily lives and their problems, you must be aware of their economic status. Price instability is one of the main obstacles to planning. Check how much fertiliser or feed costs. Your interlocutor could become discouraged if they realise you haven't done your homework.

Point out what your interlocutors can gain.

Is it worth it? Will crop yields be higher? If not, what other benefits are there to changing one's farming practices?

Ask about their needs

What do you need from us? How can we support you?

Farmers struggle to accept that someone else could be knowledgeable about agriculture. They want to have the monopoly on that knowledge.

An activist farmer

“

I use organic farming, but I don't talk about it at all. I have a no-till vegetable garden, so I just say that I don't dig and that's it. I don't even say 'compost', I just say that I'm making a foundation here on the heap and top it up with soil because it makes my crops grow better.

An activist farmer

”

Speak as simply as possible.

We don't give this advice because we look down on farmers or because we think they are ignorant. Farmers know what they're doing, but they often don't use scientific terminology, especially in relation to techniques that are new to them. Leave silvopastoralism and paludiculture in scientific literature – when you're standing on the edge of a field, talk about mulches, trees, and how to make soil retain more water.

”

Farmers have always felt connected with and loyal to one another, but they are suspicious towards changes introduced by people in power. That's why they are quicker to listen to other farmers than to do as someone who isn't involved in agriculture says. It has become an accepted belief among farmers that the people who have any kind of authority are the ones who are involved in farming and who speak based on their own experience. (...) That's also why they won't listen to activists.

Grzegorz Ciechomski from La Fuente Farm

”

This is an important comment and a common fear. However, we are convinced that farmers who are treated fairly and like partners will be happy to share their experience and be open to ours.

6/ *Your turn – worksheet*



It's your turn!

Maybe you've already reached out. Maybe you're just about to start. Maybe you live in the countryside, maybe you only visit sometimes from the city. Talk to farmers. Put emissions and biodiversity away. Ask about the bees and the rain. You'll hear stories about the daily tasks and struggles of agricultural work and you'll find out what the farming community needs. Say what you can bring to the table.

Remember that you don't have to do it alone. Get in touch with an environmental organisation or institution that you care about and find out what it can do for farmers. You can also join an existing group. If you have any questions, write to us to **info@wemove.eu**.

To finish off, we are giving you a sort of worksheet. You can use it as a "dry run" exercise book or notebook that you can take with you into the field – figuratively and literally. You can establish contact with farming communities in various ways. But if you don't know where to start, use these ready-made steps.

I/ Reconnaissance

If you don't have a predetermined location that you need to go to, start with what's closest to you, physically or emotionally. Is there a village where your friends or family live? Is there an area where you go on day trips? Either can be an excellent starting point. Write down what you already know about the place below. Start with what's in your head and then use the Internet to look up the rest.

Town, municipality or area:

Why do I want to go there specifically?

Once you have chosen a specific location:

Name of the town and municipality:

Number of inhabitants:

This is the practical part of your research. You will find out about what options the residents have, but you will also check how to get there!

Distance from the nearest town or city and availability of public transport:



Important landscape features: *e.g. river*

History of the place: who lived here in the past and who lives here now.

check whether the residents have lived here for generations or whether they recently moved from the city



Interesting articles about the area:

Sources of employment: what do people do for a living?

check whether there are any workplaces
within commuting distance

How big are the farms?

What is grown most often?

What animals are kept?

Potential contacts:

- Mayor
- Community centre
- Rural homemakers clubs
- Volunteer fire brigade
- Shop
- Church

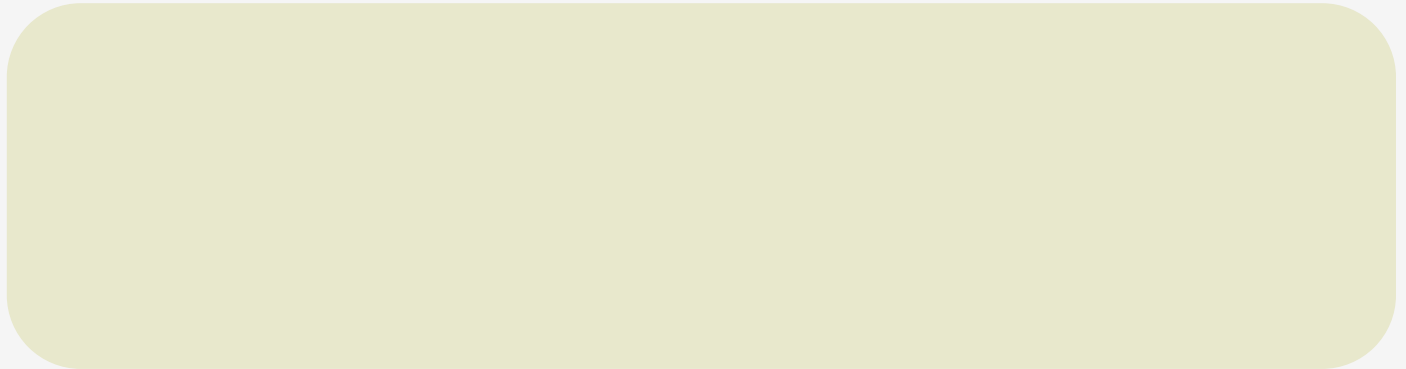
Other public places and organisations
Private individuals I already know

Your notes:

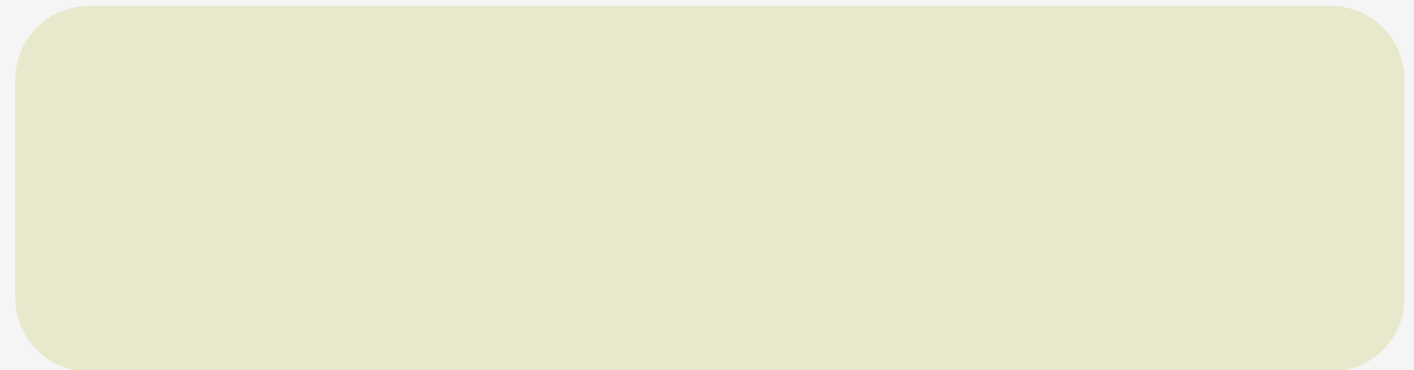
2/ *First contact*

It's on. You got the number for the local vegetable seller at a village, you found the mayor's email address, or maybe you're just going in blind. What will you talk about? Answer the following questions, bring your notes and above all listen.

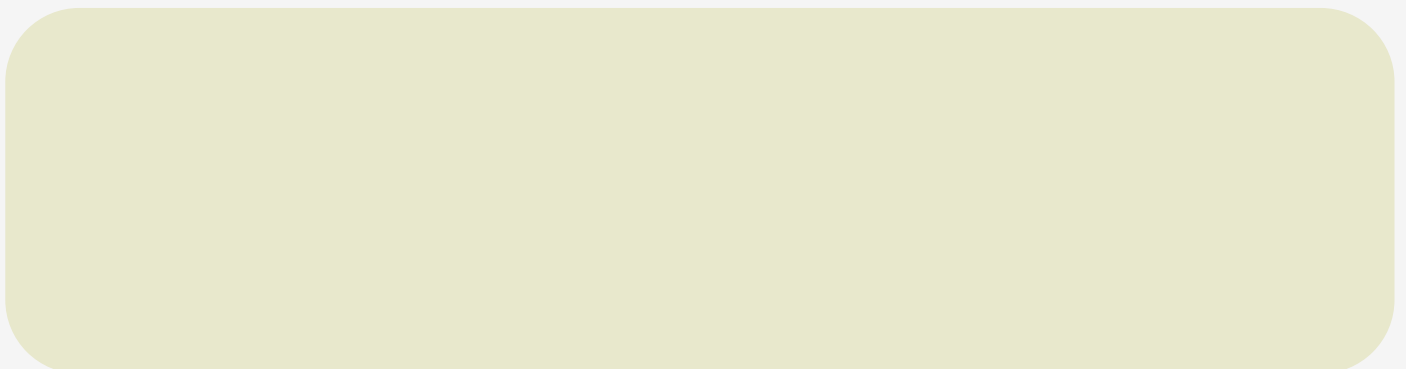
Think about why you're doing this. Even if it seems obvious, try to put your motivation down on paper. Sorting out your thoughts in your head will be helpful before your conversation.



Think about whether you're coming with a specific proposal. What do you have to offer? Do you want to share a solution or invite them to something? Try to be as specific as you can.



What do you want to find out? Prepare clear questions. Aside from general issues, consider the nature of the work of the person you're talking to and what topics could be most meaningful for them.



3/ Meeting

Congratulations! You have set up a meeting, or maybe you've been invited for a conversation after approaching someone in the street for the first time. We haven't prepared a worksheet for this part. Keep all the previous pages in your head (or in your hand). Share your motivations, ask questions and listen to the answers. Listen, take notes, and above all remember that you're talking to a human being. Every person you meet will have a point of view and their own problems.

4/ Further cooperation

Will you stay in touch? Excellent. Scenarios can differ at this point, so we'll just share a few tips.

You are partners

You have shared goals – at least some. You want to tackle the climate crisis together. You are an activist, not a saviour. What you do is not in order to defend anyone.

Go out in the field!

It's important. Yes, many day-to-day matters can be taken care of remotely, but being physically present builds trust and helps you notice dynamically evolving situations and respond to them. Often key information is easier to obtain during a conversation by the fence than over a video call.

Don't speak on anyone's behalf.

Including people is about creating spaces for those who lack them and giving people a voice rather than speaking for them. Support and invite. When someone asks you to speak about a given situation, ask yourself whether you can invite someone who knows the situation first-hand to join the conversation.

Never make promises you can't keep.

Maybe you're hoping that after working together for a year you'll be able to change a lot together. Maybe you believe that new regulations will be introduced or that the network of agricultural activists will thrive and support one another. Share your ideas and hopes, but be careful in your declarations. Unfulfilled expectations are difficult to recover from.

Be flexible

The people you work with can have different priorities. You might work together for a while and then your roads might part, for whatever reason. Try to work with a bigger community so that the success of your cooperation doesn't hinge on one contact person.

Share your experiences!

As part of our initiative we want to collect good practices and we would love to hear from you, talk to you and work together. Write to us at info@wemove.eu.

Footnotes:

- ¹ COP is the annual United Nations Climate Change Conference.
- ² Agriculture Atlas <https://eu.boell.org/en/agriculture-atlas-2019>
- ³ Poland: 2050 climate neutrality feasible and beneficial - report <https://www.wwfmmi.org/?961391/Poland-2050-climate-neutrality-feasible-and-beneficial---report>
- ⁴ <https://www.wwf.pl/aktualnosci/rolnictwo-bez-emisji> (in Polish)
- ⁵ Prospects for sustainable agriculture in Poland. A social and political analysis https://www.isp.org.pl/uploads/download/perspektywy-zrownowazonego-rolnictwa-w-polsce-analiza-spoleczno-polityczna_pl_I649573538.pdf
- ⁶ <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/rolnictwo-lesnictwo/psr-2020/powszechny-spis-rolny-2020-raport-z-wynikow,4,1.html> (in Polish)
- ⁷ Data based on statistics published by DG AGRI <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/agriculture/data/database>
- ⁸ Prospects for sustainable agriculture in Poland. A social and political analysis. https://www.isp.org.pl/uploads/download/perspektywy-zrownowazonego-rolnictwa-w-polsce-analiza-spoleczno-polityczna_pl_I649573538.pdf (in Polish)
- ⁹ https://www.isp.org.pl/uploads/download/kobiety-wies-klimat-i-srodowisko-w-mozaice-postaw-pogladow-i-dzialan_pl_I649573575.pdf (in Polish)
- ¹⁰ This and other postulates are taken from Michel Pimbert's article entitled "Agroecology as an alternative vision to Climate-smart agriculture" available at <https://www.fao.org/agroecology/database/detail/en/c/I047552/>
- ¹¹ <http://www.cultivatecollective.org/in-perspective/agroecology-as-an-alternative-vision-to-climate-smart-agriculture/>
- ¹² <https://rolnictwozrownowazone.pl/en/sustainable-agriculture/what-is-sustainable-agriculture/>
- ¹³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018R0848&from=EN>
- ¹⁴ Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 of 28 June 2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91
- ¹⁵ <https://www.kpodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/II/Agrole%C5%9Bnictwo-spos%C3%B3b-na-zr%C3%B3wnowa%C5%BCony-ekosystem-rolniczy.pdf> (in Polish)
- ¹⁶ Wetlands and Climate. Learning about climate <https://naukaoklimacie.pl/aktualnosci/bagna-a-klimat-wysuszone-torfowiska-na-swiecie-emituja-2-mld-ton-co-2-rocznie/> (in Polish)
- ¹⁷ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/695482/IPOL_STU\(2021\)695482_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/695482/IPOL_STU(2021)695482_EN.pdf)



Are you craving more information?

Sources and extended bibliography

A selection of vetted publications about agriculture and the climate. Below are the reports and articles that we consulted when writing our handbook as well as additional sources you can use to deepen your knowledge about a given topic. We are always expanding our database of such materials, and the most up-to-date version can be found on our website.

The consequences of the climate crisis on agriculture

Agriculture Atlas - publication by the Heinrich Böll Foundation

Living Planet Report 2020 - report by the WWF

Poland: 2050 climate neutrality feasible and beneficial - report by the WWF

Agriculture and climate change

Attitudes of women farmers towards the climate crisis. Women, rural areas, the climate and the environment. A patchwork of views and actions

Farmers' Calendar - climate change and its impact on agricultural production

Water in agriculture - study published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation

Elements of a food system that have a negative impact on farmers - infographic published by the Institute of Global Responsibility (IGO)

The climate crisis threatens Polish agriculture - Living Earth Coalition

Impact of climate change on agriculture in Poland - Agronews

La Via Campesina - official website (in English, French and Spanish)

Agroecology

Nyeleni

AgroPermaLab

Ecological Folk High School in Grzybów

Food sovereignty

Living Earth Coalition

Nyeleni

Organic farming

EU Rural Review - Organic farming

Database on the official website of the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

Sustainable agriculture

Potential for sustainable agriculture in Poland - report by the Heinrich Böll Foundation

Agroforestry

Agroforestry. Diversification of farm production.

Paludiculture

Wetlands and Climate- Learning about climate

Paludiculture

Carbon farming

Study requested by the ENVI committee in the European Parliament

Permaculture

Agropermalab

Community-supported agriculture and co-operatives

Guide to CSA

Examples of organisations of short food supply chains

Potential for shortening food supply chains between consumers and producers