



Bringing Organisations & Network Development
to higher levels in the Farming sector in Europe
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BOND PROJECT

New Solutions for Collective Action

S Y N T H E S I S

R E P O R T

THE FUTURE OF EUROPE'S **FOODS & LANDSCAPES**





Bringing Organisations & Network Development
to higher levels in the Farming sector in Europe

Highlighting and harvesting collective action benefits: A synthesis reflection on BOND's regional reports

S Y N T H E S I S

R E P O R T



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1 Introduction

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Introduction

BOND aspires to ‘bring organizations and network development to higher levels in the farming sector in Europe’. Farmers and land managers are central to the project, as they play fundamental roles in the environmental and economic sustainability of the farming sector in Europe, and therefore Europe’s foods and landscapes. BOND concentrates particularly on cooperation between farmers and the potential for the collective action and networking of individuals and groups. This document synthesises the principle outcomes of the four regional BOND reports. These reports above all confirm that farmer-led collective action can take many directions and can serve various purposes. This is summarised in Table 1, which provides a first glance of the principle orientations and key findings. These orientations have been categorised under the headings Biodiversity & Locality (for Poland and the Czech Republic), Policies for Family Farming (for Portugal and Spain), Regenerative Food (for Hungary and Croatia) and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) (for Romania, the Republic of Moldova and France). These thematic focal points build on and complement earlier BOND activities, such as the study tours, the interregional forum, the national workshops, the Regional Policy Roundtables, the fora and platforms, the training of trainers programmes and the experimenting with gaming techniques such as Lego Serious Play – a collective decision support and negotiation tool¹. These activities underpin, each in their own way, the significance and strength of the face-to-face exchange of experiences, knowledge and practices as triggers for reflection, learning and further collective action. Their success is reflected in the creation of various memoranda of understanding between social groups and movements brought together within BOND with the aim to expand, confirm and formalise further collaboration and cooperation in line with BOND objectives.

Throughout this document, we link the principle lessons that can be drawn from BOND’s regional reports with experiences and insights gained from other European projects² that focus on collective action. Similar to BOND, these other projects also acknowledge the critical role of social capital building in its various manifestations as a critical condition for sustainable futures in all their facets. By combining BOND’s findings with the outcomes of these other European projects, we hope to contribute to BOND’s successful ‘see, tell and learn’ approach. To do so, we focus in this synthesis report on the following central topics: 1) the social activities and practices that constitute and drive fully or partly farmer-led collective action; 2) the wider societal benefits and impact of these social activities and practices; 3) the principle success factors of collective action in the current, rather turbulent, times, and 4) the multiplicity of support needs and requirements being addressed by collective action practitioners throughout Europe.

1) These initiatives are described on the BOND website: see <https://www.bondproject.eu/>.

2) See for example COFAMI (www.cofami.org), IMPACT (www.rural-impact.net), SUSCHAIN (www.sus-chain.org), GLAMUR (<http://glamureu>), TRANSMANGO (<http://www.transmango.eu>) and ETUDE (www.wur.nl/en/Research-Results/Chair-groups/Social-Sciences/Rural-Sociology-Group/Research/Research-Projects/ETUDE.htm). We realise that the emphasis in these projects is to a large extent on the ‘old EU member states’ and less on the ‘new member states’ (in particular in Central and Eastern Europe). This is not meant to be normative (as examples that have to be copied): our main concern is to describe and illustrate the process of developing cooperation within farmers’ initiative groups and between these groups and other parties and organisations so that others can make use of these experiences in their own ways.

TABLE 1: A FIRST GLANCE OF THE REGIONAL REPORTS

RETHINKING THEME Biodiversity & Locality	WHERE? Poland and Czech Republic	SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness through local media and local markets • Share the UN Declaration of Peasants Rights widely through the media in educational circles and in local languages • Create a 'Friends of the Declaration' group to engage as many people as possible, including researchers and scientists • Allow farmers to produce and exchange their own seeds • Create a seed database in Europe • Work toward stable and clear seed laws and regulations • Create seed networks
Policies for Family Farming	Portugal and Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State commitments to instruments that recognise and value family farming • Develop agriculture and food policies that sustain food sovereignty • Develop policies that encourage young and new farmers • Ensure valorisation of the role of female farmers
Regenerative Foods	Hungary and Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailor networking, sharing of experiences, capacity building, training and education to the needs of agricultural actors • Use participatory methods with multi-stakeholder and interdisciplinary approaches to accelerate the transition to a more sustainable, equitable and environmentally conscious agri-food system • Address regenerative agricultural practices, green public procurement and social economy as means (leverages?) to promote the widespread use of sustainable practices and to create an enabling environment
CAP	Romania, Republic of Moldova and France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of cooperation, rural underdevelopment, distorted food prices and support of quantity over quality are persistent problems • CAP must be reformed to enable more transparent and open decision-making • Short value chains, as a model for territorial development and collective action, should be strengthened by formalising new or existing networks • Legal revisions using human rights tools are needed to develop more inclusive and equitable policy intervention strategies

Farmland in Świętokrzyskie region in Poland
credited @ Dariusz Bałuk for SIE, 2020



2 Multiple motivations of collective action

The background of the slide is a solid teal color. On the left side, there is a series of overlapping circles and arcs in various shades of teal and light blue. Some are thin white outlines, while others are filled with semi-transparent teal. The circles are of different sizes and are arranged in a way that they appear to be part of a larger, abstract geometric pattern.

Multiple motivations of collective action

Cooperation between farmers may involve the organisation of labour, the production, processing and marketing of food products and the provisioning of other rural ecosystem services as part of wider rural resource management. Obviously, collective action may also involve political motivations. As emphasised in the regional reports, without well-organised collective farmers' initiatives that are based on new ideas, new forms of self-organisation and new collective practices, there is a serious risk that the structural weak positions of peasants and small-scale farmers will not change very much. Food industries, retailers and other vested interests are likely to remain largely 'in control', and therefore reinforce the relatively weak positions of farmers. For instance, globalised markets that are 'out of balance' and geared to the interests of powerful actors, which is further addressed in the section on relative autonomy, should not be accepted as they are and need to be transformed. New practices of farmers may incentivise new policies, as is explained later in more detail. Certainly, in agroecological and peasant farming, many examples can be found that deviate from mainstream global models, rules and relations (Van der Ploeg, 2007). As such, these examples represent crucial building blocks for the construction of local solutions to global problems, which contrasts sharply with agricultural modernisation forces that counter local problems with global solutions.

Such local solutions assume a certain degree of freedom. Van der Ploeg (2007) refers to this as a specific form of 'resistance' that entails searches for, and constructions of, local solutions to global problems. This is therefore resistance not only as a form of reaction or protest against policy plans, for example, but also resistance that results in novel forms of cooperation between food producers, food consumers and other social actors. The central point that Van der Ploeg makes is that this type of resistance is omnipresent in today's agricultural practices. Following his line of reasoning, such practices are thought to be crucial starting points for increasing the influence of farmers on future food systems and for improving their socio-economic position.

3 Struggles for relative autonomy

The background is a solid green color with a subtle gradient from light green at the top to a slightly darker green at the bottom. Overlaid on this are several overlapping circles of varying sizes and shades of green, creating a layered, organic pattern. The circles are mostly concentrated on the left side of the page, with some extending towards the center.

3. Struggles for relative autonomy³

Collective action, as underpinned in various ways in the regional reports, often entails social struggle. For example, family farming is increasingly under threat in Spanish and Portuguese settings, and Hungarian and Croatian regenerative food movements continue to face a rather ambiguous institutional setting. Both are expressions of social struggle that tends to improve the position of farmers through the organisation of collective action. Closely related to this, it is important to note that farmers' or peasant's autonomy concerns become particularly meaningful in relation to alternative dependency relations. That is: social struggle is about self-chosen and self-controlled dependency relations. Collective action initiatives hinge on the development of new relations with citizens, consumers and/or social movements as a crucial prerequisite for the creation of new, more 'nested' food markets⁴. Its accompanying more self-chosen and more self-controlled dependency allows the reduction of current dependencies on supermarkets and other food chain actors, which are often characterised by pronounced power imbalances (Van der Ploeg, Ye and Schneider, 2012). Thus, the collective action and cooperation central to the BOND project is always about finding new balances in prevailing social relations and new manifestations of relative autonomy that benefit farmers and society at large (see Box 1).

1. CUMA (COOPÉRATIVE D'UTILISATION DE MATÉRIEL AGRICOLE)

CUMA is a French agricultural service cooperative that allows farmers to pool and share machinery, buildings and workers (CUMA is a partner in the BOND project and the BOND study tour in France visited CUMA). Lucas (2018), a French rural sociologist, conducted research on the role of CUMA for the agroecological transition and the associated autonomy of farmers. Some results of his research are summarised below.

There are almost 12,000 CUMA cooperatives, involving about one third of all French farms. These cooperatives enable farmers to share equipment and labour, and sometimes buildings and hired workers. Initially created in 1945 to make modern farming techniques more accessible for small and medium-sized farms, these cooperatives, which are locally self-organised with an average membership of 25 farms, are now used with a variety of objectives in mind. Although created as a modernisation tool, they are now becoming a tool for the agroecological transition and for the realisation of more collective autonomy for farmers. Lucas' work reveals how French farmers are mobilising the machinery cooperatives to increase their autonomy, especially in relation to input markets. They are also developing more sustainable practices at the farm level, thanks to the sharing of new processes in relation to equipment, labour, knowledge and productive resources (seeds, fodder, etc.). Lucas' work enriches studies about farmers' autonomy by highlighting farmers who seek to increase their autonomy by – which at first sight might seem rather paradoxical – increasing their interdependence with their peers (for more information see Lucas (2018) and Lucas et al. (2018).

This social struggle for relative autonomy often emerges as a response to globalisation processes and the accompanying uniformity and standardisation of primary production features (which do however differ between regions and countries, as also made clear in the regional reports). In general, however, globalisation induces processes that gear networks and social relations increasingly to the interests and prospects of powerful actors, concentrating the control of food production in the hands of fewer and fewer multinational actors. The spatial differentiating consequences of globalisation include increasingly marginalised and sparsely populated rural areas, where agricultural production is being reduced to the production of raw materials or even completely disappearing, with major socio-economic and ecological implications (Van Broekhuizen and Schakel, 2003; Oostindie et al., 2008). As a result of these globalisation, standardisation

3) This paragraph is to a large extent based on Schakel and Van Broekhuizen (2003), Oostindie et al. (2008), Broekhuizen et al. (2015) and Oostindie et al. (2015).

4) Characteristics of a nested market are: it is a specific segment of a wider market that has particular market characteristics in terms of organisational rules, customs and product features; and it is delineated by specific boundaries, normative logics or distinctive infrastructure. For an elaboration of the relation between agricultural rural development and nested markets, see Van der Ploeg et al. (2012) and Polman et al. (2010).

and uniformity processes, the position of primary producers is steadily being undermined by decreasing shares of value-added production and/or loss of control of farm development processes.

Nevertheless, the global forces that reduce farmers' autonomy also generate counter tendencies. The more globalisation and standardisation proceed, the more meaningful become locality and singularity, and the more opportunities there are for distinction and local exceptions with their own 'logics' (i.e. relative autonomy). Many farmer-led initiatives, for example those visited during the BOND study tours, can be understood as active responses to the ongoing 'externalisation' of control and as active attempts to develop new, more favourable dependency relations. Again, as emphasised in the regional reports, actors in many European regions are actively looking for mechanisms and instruments to create new balances between exogenous and endogenous resources, interests and prospects. These actors aspire to maintain, utilise, reproduce and renew specific regional characteristics and, by doing so, to create a certain distance and distinction from 'the global' or rebuild global relations according to their own 'logics'. Their alternative practices may be grounded in the economic interests of farmers, but also in regional history, the passions of civilians and consumers, or policy interventions – and thus initiated and controlled, at least partly, by local society (Schakel and Broekhuizen, 2003; Oostindie et al., 2008).

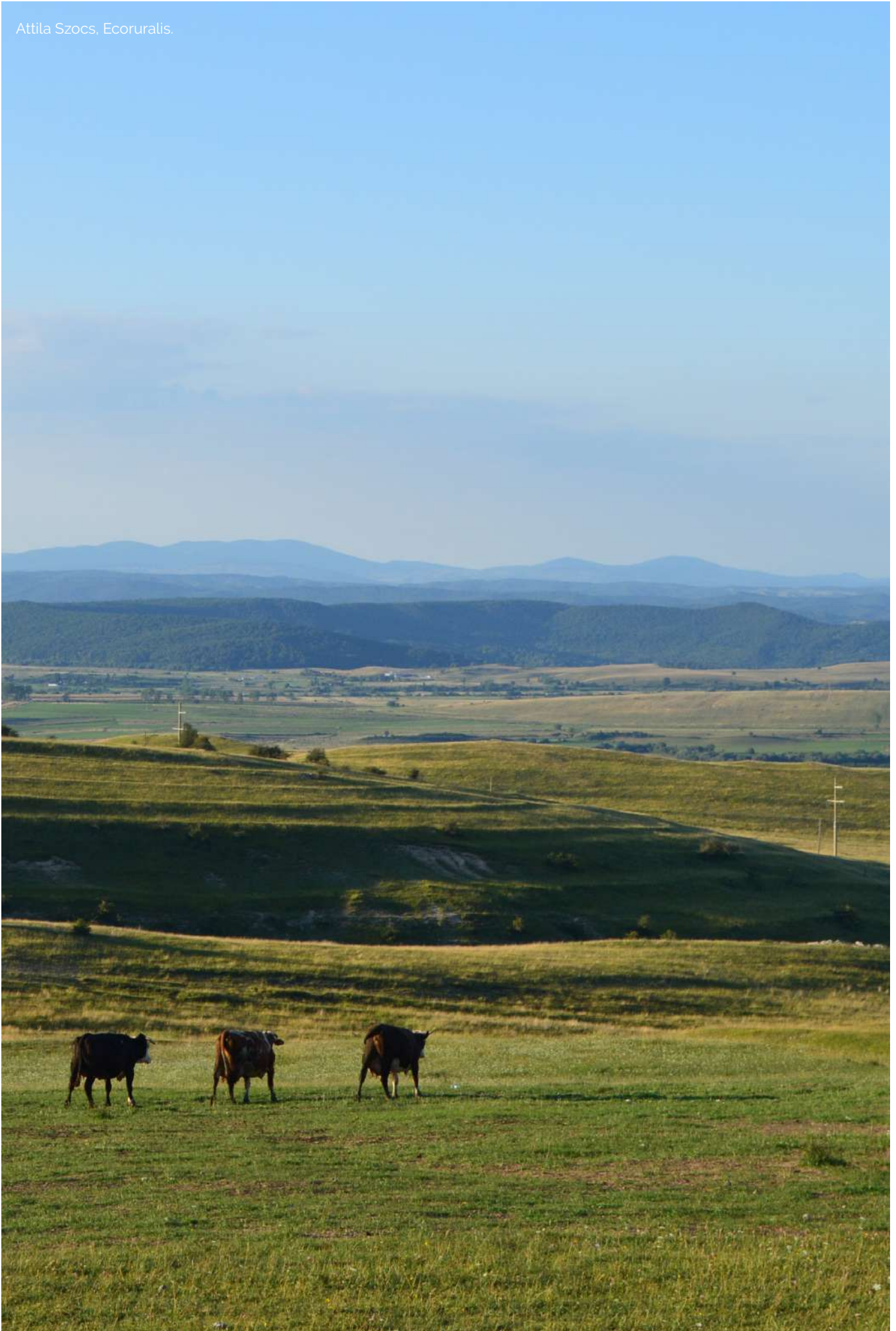
To be clear, creating alternative forms of autonomy is not the same as trying to realise a kind of autarky. External factors may be useful to strengthen regional development and control⁶. See Box 2 for an example of more self-controlled interaction between regional and global dynamics as a way to increase relative autonomy.

BOX 2. NEW FORM OF GLOBALISATION OF RELATIONS THAT STRENGTHENS LOCAL AUTONOMY AND ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT: HOTEL DE BOERENKAMER IN THE LAAG HOLLAND AREA (NL)

Laag Holland is an attractive rural area that is called the 'backyard of Amsterdam'. The Hotel De Boerenkamer (farmer's room) is a cooperation of farmers who offer high-quality accommodation for tourists in individual farmhouses. The quality standards, branding and marketing are organised collectively. Especially successful is the marketing by means of a collective website. Internet offers the opportunity for this 'group of individuals' to develop their own global marketing strategy and for tourists from all over the world to discover and book these hotel rooms on attractive farms in an attractive rural area and in the immediate vicinity of Amsterdam (10-15 minutes by bike to the city centre). Indeed, many tourists from countries such as Italy, the USA and Japan find their way to Hotel de Boerenkamer.

5) Gouldner speaks about the 'iron law' of opposition to oligarchy: "Tendencies toward system integration [...] are always interpreted and implemented by some system part which has its own distinct drive toward functional autonomy. Correspondingly, [...] oligarchic tendencies that threaten the autonomy of the other parts of the system, generate opposition to oligarchy, polarize the system around an internal conflict, and, in effect, constitute an 'iron law' of opposition to oligarchy" (1970: 216).

6) As stated by Long (1988: 121-122): "All forms of external intervention necessarily enter the life-worlds of the individuals and groups affected and thus, as it were, comes to form part of the resources and constraints of the social strategies they develop. In this way so-called external factors are internalised and may come to mean quite different things to different interest groups or actors. Externally-originating factors are therefore mediated, incorporated, and often substantially transformed by local organisational and cognitive structures".





4 Capacity to relate to others and other critical success factors

4. Capacity to relate to others and other critical success factors

Farmers may have manifold reasons to reconsider their farming practices. Dutch farmers, for instance, refer to economic drivers (i.e. additional income, risk-spreading, valorisation of internal surplus labour) and emancipatory reasons (i.e. own influence on farm development, partner's wishes for own income), as well as the desire for more influence on product marketing. Nevertheless, their most important motivation turns out to be relational, that is: the wish to have 'more contact with citizens and consumers'.

This strong relational orientation may elsewhere emerge in the interplays with other rural actors (SMEs, rural dwellers, newcomers, commuters, etc.), more distant actors (food empires, flows of information, images, etc.), or, as in the case of BOND's regional reports, the future of family farming (Portugal and Spain) and/or regenerative food systems (Hungary and Croatia). The main point is that everywhere, throughout Europe and the rest of the world, farmers are being challenged to create new social networks and to reflect on their 'capacity to relate to others'. That is, the capacity to convince and mobilise others, and to create and join new networks, new interlinkages and new interdependencies (Oostindie et al., 2015). The significance of this 'capacity to relate to others' has been studied from various angles in various European research programmes (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: FARMERS' CAPACITY TO RELATE TO OTHERS
AS EXPLORED IN OTHER EUROPEAN RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

MULT-AGRI	Farmers as providers of multiple rural functions
IMPACT	Farmers as initiators of new Rural Development (RD) activities with significant socio-economic impacts at different scales
SUS-CHAIN	Farmers as constituents of multiple transition trajectories toward sustainable food chains
COFAMI	Farmers as collective actors with positive impacts on different types of rural capital assets (social, cultural, ecological, institutional)
RUDI	Farmers as drivers of self-regulation initiatives and more community-led rural policy delivery systems that create new policy-practice relations
ETUDE	Farmers as co-designers of rural webs that preserve rural distinctiveness, competitiveness and quality of rural life
DERREG	Farmers as participants in capacity building, governance and knowledge systems that mediate, transform and re-shape global-local interaction patterns
GLAMUR	Farmers as co-creators of sustainable global and local food supply systems

These different potential societal benefits of farmer-led collective action have all, albeit perhaps to different degrees, been addressed in the broad range of initiatives visited during the BOND study tours. Their acknowledgement and recognition are absolutely crucial in bringing farmer-led network dynamics to higher levels. At the same time, it is important to admit that there are no easy or ready-made recipes for success, although, based on the history of 'best practices', several critical success factors may be distinguished:

- **Bottom-up**

Collective initiatives emerge ideally as farmer-led bottom-up processes. Obviously, this does not mean that alliances with others are not important. Over time, other – preferably local – parties may be included

in the initiative, for example through local citizens becoming members of the initiative or through local NGOs contributing to their further development⁷.

- **Local resources**

The development of initiatives, practices, autonomy and self-control are stronger when these are primarily built on local resources (own labour, own capital, own knowledge, local networks, own machinery, etc.)⁸.

- **Family farm resilience**

The strength of initiatives is often positively affected when their logics are rooted in family farm resilience.

- **Distinctiveness**

Collective action is successful when it results in better ‘defendable’ markets for agricultural produce and services. That is: distinctiveness, not ‘more production’ or ‘higher productivity’, becomes the guiding principle, as it is especially through distinctive produce and services (quality, sustainability, etc.) that new coalitions and networks can be built, that vested structures and interests can be deconstructed and that new, more beneficial market relations, rooted in changing societal and consumer behaviour demands, can unfold and persist.

BOX 3. RURAL DISTINCTIVENESS IN TUSCANY

Tuscany is an attractive region in the middle of Italy. Why does it attract so many tourists? Not because of its multifunctional farms, but because the farmers together create an attractive landscape. The many high-quality and region-specific products, made according to a collective standard and brand (e.g. Chianti wine and the connected wine-routes) create an attractive gastronomy. The many farms with high-quality ‘agritourismo’ create a good tourism infrastructure. The regional policy that reserves the right to start such activities for ‘real’ farms supports the further development of regional-specific products, and protects the quality of the area through spatial policy and planning. All in all, an attractive region is created that results in additional regional income and in turn stimulates new investments in rural development. The various activities are geared to one another and the sum of these activities has added value for the individual actors.

- **We can do better**

When initiatives are not strictly focused on own interests but also offer societal benefits for others (be it consumers, rural dwellers, citizens, nature and landscape organisations or policymakers), these groups become attractive partners for longer-term cooperation and alliances. What is often needed is the capacity to redirect the conflicts and competing claims that often accompany agricultural and rural development processes into more constructive collaborative learning, dialogue and negotiation. Some initiatives may have been started as a social struggle against, for example, the state (spatial planning practices, claims on land, regulation, etc.), vested farmers unions, or large food supply chains. A crucial component of this social ‘protest’ is the conviction that ‘it can be done better’ in the sense of also bringing benefits for other involved actors. This, subsequently, leads to concrete action. This can therefore be summarised as ‘constructive dissatisfaction’⁹; it goes beyond ‘just being unhappy’ but moves involved actors into action mode, in which the objectives of ‘the opponents’ are also taken seriously (Broekhuizen et al., 2015).

- **Step-by-step approaches**

Collective action requires appropriate policies and regulatory frameworks. However, such supportive policy settings do not emerge out of the blue. To put it simply, policymakers cannot be expected to come up with policies that suit the specific conditions and practices of farmers by themselves. Farmers have to provide and induce the ideas for supportive policies, and it is only in close interaction with practice that effective policies and policy instruments can be designed.

7) This is very different from, for example, the many initiatives of large agri-industrial firms to try to realise more ‘chain integration’ by means of ‘more cooperation with farmers’, which in the end reduces the degrees of freedom of farmers who become a smaller and less powerful link in an increasingly large chain.

8) ‘Own’ can refer to individual but also local collective resources; see for example the French organisation CUMA, which shares machinery.

9) In innovation and management theories this appears under the notion ‘constructive dissatisfaction’, see e.g. Brewster and Dalzell (2007).

Put differently, successful collective action may become ‘seeds of transition’ (Wiskerke and Van der Ploeg, 2004), where the well-prepared seedbeds depend on other actors and, increasingly, multi-level governance settings. An important ingredient for the necessary mobilisation of support of such actors is the need to overcome social conflicts, quarrels and struggles in ways that transform initial opponents into crucial allies and partners. In other words, earlier conflicts and quarrels need to be transformed into more ‘constructive’ dialogues and processes of collaborative learning. For example, initially disputed or even unacceptable new agricultural initiatives might become critical building blocks and starting points for the redesign of rural policies and regulatory frameworks. Obviously, this can take time. For instance, the increasingly family farming supportive rural setting in the Dutch Laag Holland region (see Box 2) took about 40 years to develop. During that period, small successes were followed by new conflicts, quarrels, setbacks, solutions, and so on. It is through these small successes and wins that mutual trust is developed and the next steps can be taken. To summarise, supportive policy settings for collective action are often the outcome of many smaller and gradual adaptations with social struggle as one of the critical features (Broekhuizen et al., 2015).

• Iterative learning and trust-based relations

Learning by doing often accompanies the previously mentioned step-by-step approach. This is a type of learning that fundamentally differs from more linear learning processes that are characteristic of planning and policy approaches that are based on strict separations between envisioning, plan design and plan implementation. The much more iterative nature of learning processes within collective action initiatives may be further explained with the help of Figure 1.

Figure 1 highlights how collective action initiatives, both farmer-led and initiated by others, need to cope with various ‘fields of attention’. A distinction is made between 1) internal and 2) external relations, 3) their mutual linkages, 4) the need for integration and 5) collaborative learning. As such, Figure 1 shows that different fields of attention need to be attuned and coordinated in a ‘working whole’ (Roep, 2000), and that successful collective action requires ‘the art of balancing’, ‘creating simultaneity’, as well as a certain belief in ‘better ways of doing’ and ‘glimmers of hope’. After all, no one likes to invest time and energy with no hope of potential improvements or future benefits. These key elements flourish especially in settings characterised by trust-based relationships among involved practitioners (the internal relationships) as well as with their broader institutional environment (the external relationships).

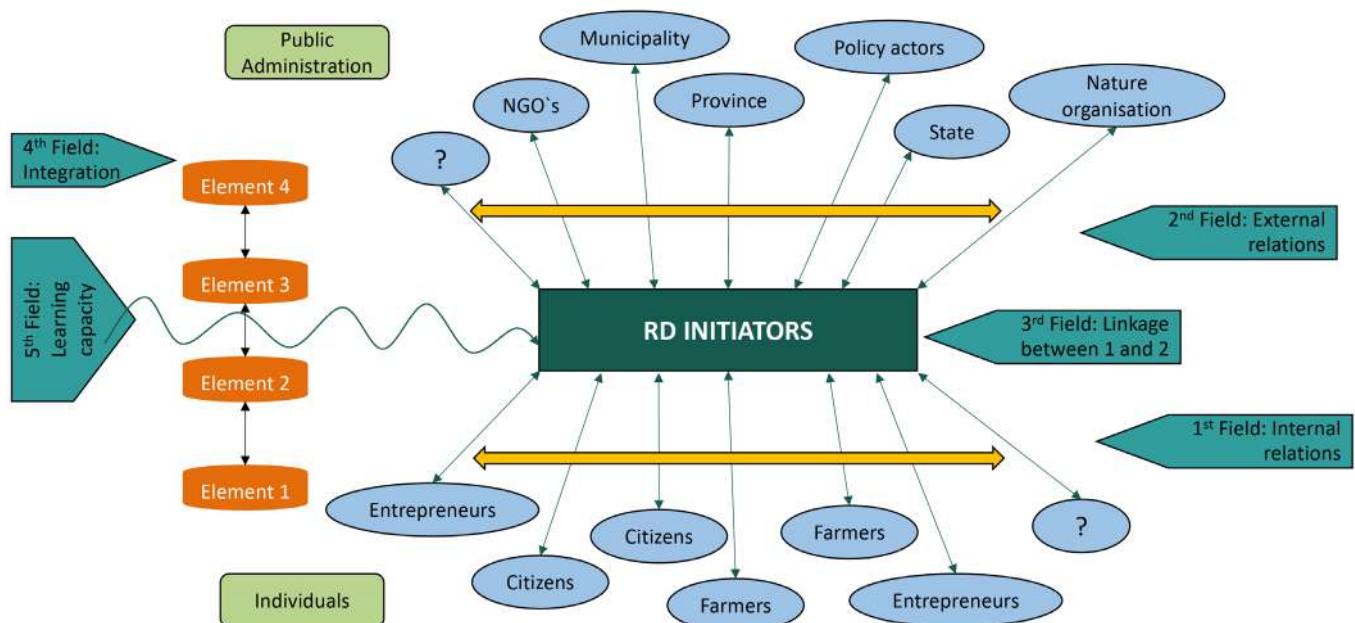


Figure 1: Collective action as complex multi-stakeholder learning processes

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5 Catalysts for strong rural webs

5. Catalysts for strong rural webs

How can collective action induce wider rural and societal benefits? Van der Ploeg et al. (2002) made an analytical distinction between the following critical components of agriculture's role in relation to rural and societal development in a broader sense: 1) the position of primary producers in food chains, 2) farming practices as part of wider rural development in the sense of the valorisation of landscapes, rural-urban relations, sociocultural dynamics, and so on, and 3) agriculture's ability to valorise endogenous resources (knowledge, animals, plant material, capital, land, water, trading channels, etc.). As emphasised, the 'art of farming' hinges on the coordination of these three key components into sustainable rural development through their deepening, broadening and regrounding in line with the following characteristics:

- 1. Deepening activities:** agricultural activities are transformed, expanded and/or relinked to other actors to deliver products with a higher added value per unit because they better meet the demands of consumers and/or society at large. For instance, high-quality products (including on-farm processing), regional products, organic products or new short linkages between producers and consumers (new short chains, marketing).
- 2. Broadening activities:** broadening can be the integration of farm activities with, for example, agritourism, the management of nature and landscape, new on-farm activities (e.g. care activities, education) or diversification (e.g. production of energy, water retention). These activities can increase income and at the same time provide goods and services for which society is willing to pay.
- 3. Regrounding activities:** the farm is grounded in a new or different set of resource uses. That can be pluri-activity (income from outside the farm from a family member), the collective use of machinery (e.g. see CUMA¹⁰), the exchange of special seeds between farmers, different styles of farming referred to as farming economically, agroecology, or low external input agriculture (the purchase of external inputs is reduced while the efficiency of the available own internal inputs (grassland, labour, seeds, savings, etc.) is increased).

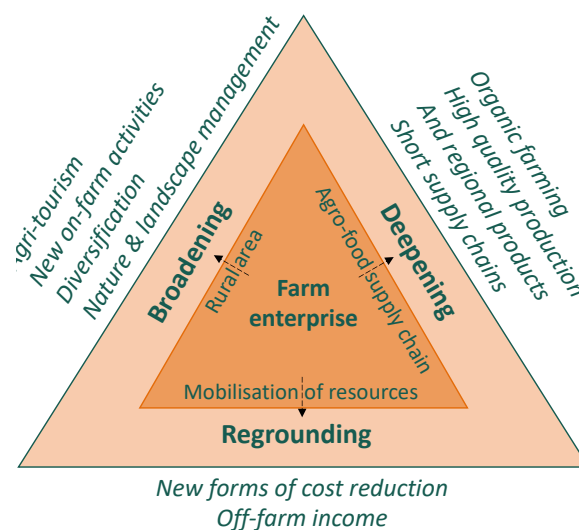


Figure 2: Moving toward sustainable rural development

10) See for general information on CUMA https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_NPbpF-jSQ&t=6s and for a report of the BOND excursion to Cuma Nord'Oignon in the north of France www.bondproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/BOND-REPOSITORY-FR-Cuma-Nord%E2%80%99Oignon-v3.pdf.

Such deepening, broadening and regrounding processes can be observed at both individual and collective levels as in many ways highlighted and illustrated in the four BOND regional reports. Moreover, their significance has been empirically underpinned in various terms, such as contributions to farm income, farm continuity, rural employment, quality of rural life, and rural ability to provide wider social and ecosystem services and goods. In this document, we concentrate on the overall conclusion that collective action not just brings benefits to farmers, but also to rural areas and society at large.

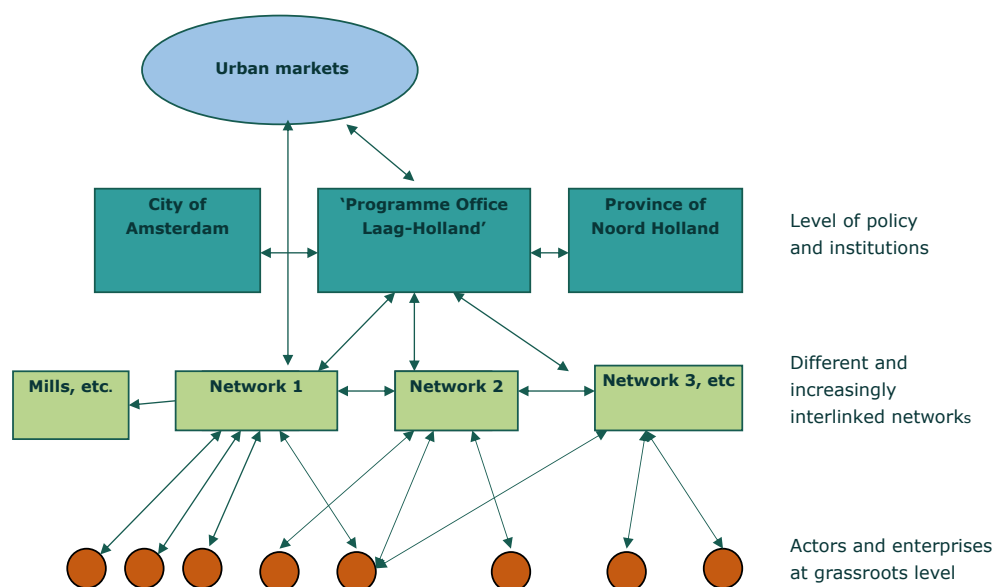


Figure 3: Moving toward a strong rural web in Laag Holland

Figure 3 illustrates this in terms of rural network dynamics. This concerns Laag Holland, a Dutch region where farmers' resistance to agri-environmental policy measures that would seriously limit their future business prospects caused novel, territory-based collective action to emerge relatively early (in the late 1970s). Regional farmers' initiatives started to address a variety of topics, such as regional agricultural nature-landscape, traditional windmill management, agri and rural tourism and establishing, or re-establishing, close relationships with the nearby City of Amsterdam through green education, green care, short food supply chains, public procurement, and so on. In time, these initiatives were increasingly complemented and extended with other forms of territorial cooperation, linking the new farmers' networks increasingly with new institutional arrangements. A programme office, for instance, was created to foster territory-based collaboration with other actors such as rural municipalities, regional major urban centres, the province, several NGOs and traditional farmers' organisations (Broekhuizen and Oostindie, 2010).

Again, various components can be distinguished in this process of change. Farmer-led collective action started in the sustainability domain, but it embraced endogeneity (focus on valorising local resources) and novelty production (e.g. through establishing novel public-private partnerships). Increasingly, these activities strengthened regional social capital by moving toward a broadly shared vision on the critical role of agriculture in wider rural development and rural-urban interaction. This contributed positively to a regional construction of coherence, based on multi-stakeholder collaboration and learning, including experimenting with new institutional arrangements (e.g. the creation of a regional project office and new forms of collaboration with the City of Amsterdam) and alternative governance of rural markets (e.g. short chain development). The interdependencies between these six components shed extra light on how collective action can play a prominent role in developing rural network dynamics;

or, put differently, how it can create the strong rural webs that underlie, induce and explain rural competitiveness and quality of rural life (Ventura, Milone and Van der Ploeg, 2010).

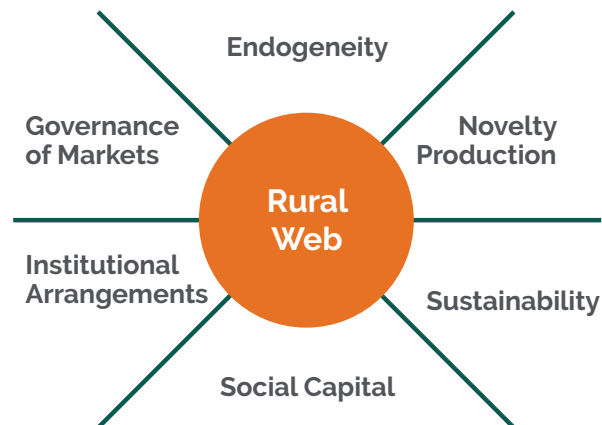


Figure 4: Critical rural web components

The rural web framework builds on empirical material collected in a broad range of European rural settings (Ploeg and Marsden, 2008). It provides an analytical tool to identify missing links in contemporary policy to support sustainable rural development. Fully in line with the principle lessons that may be drawn from BOND's regional reports, the model affirms the key role of social capital building. It also emphasises the importance of the interrelations, interwovenness and interdependencies between social capital building and other critical sustainable rural development components, as visualised in Figure 4. These other components enable social capital building, which becomes especially 'transitional' when it succeeds in moving away from 'individualised transaction models', which have the following features:

- specialised food chains increasingly divided into many specialised parts that are related to each other by means of markets and contracts;
- strong competition within food chains instead of between food chains;
- food chain price-asymmetries that are unfavourable for primary producers;
- food production increasingly anonymous in terms of contact between producers and consumers;
- strategic behaviour calculated at the expense of wider, more broadly shared societal values;
- loss of social cohesion and social capital due to the dominance of individual and/or specific group interests.

By contrast, social capital building that is inspired by 'relational cooperation' would have transitional power, due to the following fundamentally different key characteristics:

- cooperation, especially at the local and regional levels and between farmers and sectors and with consumers, citizens, municipalities, etc., replaces primarily competitive relationships;
- forward food chain integration replaces externalisation of tasks;
- individual interests run increasingly parallel with group interests;
- rural entrepreneurs valorise their resources more broadly than just specialised food production.

This therefore has the potential to make a difference by:

- reconnecting agriculture with citizens, consumers, the city and other economic sectors in ways that generate societal benefits;
- re-establishing close relations between agricultural activity and natural processes;
- re-integrating agricultural activity with new societal demands such as low carbon economies and climate change resilient water management models;

- re-discovering rural added value through new forms of sustainable and regenerative resource use and reduced market-dependency.

To summarise, social capital's transformative power of collective action resides in the quality of novel relations between farmers and a range of other meaningful actors (public, private human, non-human). This quality surpasses the limits of one-dimensional market relations. However, it is also a quality that may have to face opposing visions, forces and powers. Here we follow Borras's (2018: 20-21) distinction between 'what is doable' and 'what is possible' social action strategies. The first stays within the limits of a given balance of social forces by following 'multistakeholderism' that remains within the limits of the status quo and mainstream logics. By contrast, the second strategy includes elements of social struggle, going along with the wish to disturb prevailing power balances and therefore 'stretch' the 'what is possible' in contemporary politics and wider institutional settings. We argue that successful and transformative collective action is about finding the best balance between these two social action strategies.

Gaming Session at the Policy Round Table
on Green Public Catering organised by Védegyilet, Hungary



6 Broad array of recommendations



6. Broad array of recommendations

There are many good reasons to embrace collective action, be it in relation to more sustainable agricultural practices, more regenerative food systems, more prosperous rural futures or wider societal benefits, including those of urban actors. In this section, we dive in more detail into the crucial topic of supportive environments. This is primarily based on the recommendations of participants in the various BOND activities, as described in detail in the regional reports. Complementary to the overall richness of this material, we present additional insights derived from studies that have collected empirical evidence from other European settings, particularly those with more long-lasting experiences of novel and promising expressions of farmer-led collective action (e.g. Remmers et al. (2000), Broekhuizen et al, (1997) and Vihinen and Kull (2010)).

As mentioned in the introduction, BOND's participatory approach is reflected in the different overarching themes of the national and regional workshops. This approach has made it possible to identify a broad spectrum of meaningful support and facilitation needs, starting from regional stakeholders' envisioning of sustainable and inclusive farming futures and regenerative food systems in their specific setting and building on earlier experiences from other BOND activities. The regional reports therefore give a good impression of the EU's different prospects for smallholder farming, historical experiences with collective action, and contemporary institutional responsiveness to emerging promising grassroots initiatives.

A summary of the multiplicity of policy recommendations is given below. This is done in isolation from the specific regional backgrounds and motivations, as this contextual information is available in the BOND regional reports. In this synthesis report, we start with the recommendations that address CAP reform as a crucial prerequisite. A second set of recommendations concerns collective action prospects in relation to the future of smallholder farming, agroecology and regenerative food systems. A third category summarises wider recommendations for institutional reform within contemporary multi-level governance settings. Finally, a fourth list focuses on the internal organisational challenges of collective action practitioners. This last list in particular incorporates insights gained from a complementary literature review.

A) RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO CAP REFORM

- Incentivise through CAP long-term action plans based on international tools and frameworks, such as UNDROP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants), UNDF (United Nations Decade of Family Farming) and VGGT (Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry) and the Access to Land platform.
- Recognise farmers' cooperation as a CAP priority.
- Create a European Land Directive in order to implement the VGGT, as recommended by the Committee on World Food Security, and to facilitate access to land for small-scale sustainable producers.
- Redefine farming activity in ways that overcome current constraints with respect to speculative land use, that include small-scale and peasant farming, and that respect UNDROP implementation in member states.
- Make CAP and other relevant policies subject to transparent and open decision-making processes.
- Safeguard human-scale farming in ongoing CAP negotiations.
- Introduce CAP policy measures that succeed in levelling current gaps between large and small-scale farming in the EU by better targeting the preservation of soil fertility.
- Orientate CAP reform to food quality criteria and achievable environmental targets.
- Realise that CAP reform does not reflect new social realities, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the growing concern about the environmental problems that led to the creation of the Green Deal and the F2F strategy.

- Base CAP reform on the food sovereignty principle, to protect and promote healthy, sustainable, democratic and family farming-based agri-food models.
- Make sure that CAP's National Strategic Plans reflect the objectives of more local and resilient farming and subsidise small and medium-sized farms and the peasant farming model as the only way to maintain dynamic rural areas.
- Guarantee that CAP provides specific support to recover, create and promote local and traditional markets for the commercialisation of local/traditional produce, particularly from family farming.
- Reinforce the management and regulation of the common internal market and production model under CAP to put an end to the relocation of food without concerns for how food is produced or its health, environmental and social consequences.
- Extend CAP's cross-compliance regulations with rules for labour rights of farmers and rural workers in line with international labour conventions and UNDROP.
- End free trade agreements, which have a devastating impact on family farming. As Europe works toward a Green Deal and talks about reducing polluting emissions with a view to achieve carbon neutrality, it is not coherent to continue to allow the unbridled negotiation of FTAs at a global level.
- Link CAP aid to food production features and not to area (ha) to better support those who are actively producing goods to feed the population.
- Progress with a fairer distribution of CAP aid through capping (e.g. a maximum of EUR 60,000 of annual direct payments), mandatory modulation and redistributive schemes that value first hectares more.
- Guarantee that small-scale farmers receive payments as defined under the Small Agriculture Scheme by replacing anticipated direct payments at levels sufficient to ensure long-term viability of the farms.
- Give farmer-led collective action a more prominent role in Europe's regional rural development plans, similar to well-known Leader and Interreg approaches.

B) RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS AGROECOLOGY, REGENERATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS AND SMALLHOLDER FARMING FUTURES

- Put agroecology at the heart of food system policies, practices and related research to transform the European agri-food sector.
- Cherish diversity (age, gender, nationality, knowledge, ways of production, etc.) with policies and food production facilitation that recognise the critical role of small-scale farming in relation to sustainable natural resource management.
- Support and protect peasant seed systems, including low cost seed production, community seed banks and the strengthening of networks of seeds producers at various scales, to improve the availability of organic seeds.
- Educate public sector institutions about peasant seeds and embrace various forms of knowledge exchange on seed production.
- Support farmers' associations to register as operators for plant passports.
- Accompany this with ambitious, quantifiable targets for reducing agrochemical use by implementing adequate monitoring systems to track progress.
- Create national networks for financial support for farmers' organic seed production, to promote organic food production and consumption and the training of consumers with respect to the multiple benefits of organic food.
- Link to the EU F2F strategy by helping farmers to collect information on how to connect effectively to contemporary climate change and other sustainability challenges.
- Focus farmer cooperation on societally relevant issues such as loss of biodiversity, sustainable land use, generational renewal, population growth, farm-based added value production and income stability in the farming sector.
- Ensure research and innovation within Horizon 2020 funding that enhances rather than erodes the autonomy of food producers.
- Give targeted support for young farmers and new entrants engaging in small-scale agroecology, inclu-

- ding allowances to allow progress toward a decent income.
- Embed research and innovation within agroecological and food sovereignty movements and existing low-tech grassroots innovations.
 - Sensitise farm advisory services to small-scale agroecological transitions, including farmer-to-farmer exchange programmes.
 - Promote short food chains as promising models for territorial development and the preservation of family farming.
 - Protect the position of farmers in agri-food distribution by prohibiting sales below production costs (dumping practices and by control of profit margins). This might include more restrictive regulations for the commercial activity of large food distributors and agribusiness companies.
 - Fight climate change and loss of biodiversity by supporting small-scale farming traditions, knowledge, culture, farmers' seeds and indigenous breeds.
 - Reverse the closure of public services in rural areas. The maintenance and creation of high-quality public services (health, education, public transport, communication routes, public administration, culture) is paramount for the maintenance of the quality of rural life and the reversal of rural depopulation tendencies.
 - Set limits to factory farms and their negative environmental and social impacts.
 - Improve European regulatory frameworks to the benefit of family farming and farmer-led collective action.
 - Enhance soil quality and productivity measures to support sustainable land stewardship.
 - Include farmers, farm workers, pastoralists and other food producers that support agroecology in the development of National Strategic Plans.
 - Establish appropriate rules and standards for hygiene and for processing products on farms, as well as financing local and collective equipment initiatives such as mobile slaughterhouses for small farms, options for vegetable processing and infrastructure for local markets, and related initiatives.
 - Prioritise family farming in the supply of public institution canteens and the social economy of the region where farms are located, establishing significant minimum limits for food from this source.
 - Prepare a land directive that facilitates access for young people, protects the soil, prevents artificialisation of the land and ensures access to and sustainable use of natural resources.
 - Preserve family farming practices in policy to ensure the transmission of knowledge between farmers and generations.
 - Change EU competition rules to take full advantage of the potential social, environmental and public health benefits of short food chains.

C) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WIDER INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS

- Facilitate farmer-led collective action for its ability to:
 - transform and improve relations between farmers, authorities and market actors;
 - mobilise resources (knowledge, enthusiasm, problem definitions, directions for solutions, social cohesion, partnerships, support) that are often inaccessible to public administrations but crucial for the socio-economic vitality of rural areas;
 - combine self-interest with wider societal benefits.
- Sustain farming by stimulating collective action that opposes oligopolist market tendencies that are unfavourable to farmers.
- Acknowledge that the cross-cutting of sectoral boundaries in rural areas assumes active civil society engagement. The rural web approach offers an interesting tool for monitoring and evaluating progress in this respect.
- Realise that overall diversity in meaningful collective action requires tailor-made support approaches.
- Be aware that the step from idea to concrete action is often no sinecure and makes support one of the critical success factors, without taking the reins out of the hands of collective action initiators.

- Recognise that collective action practitioners might have a special interest in the following support topics:
 - further development of their ideas/vision;
 - the presence/absence of regulatory space (what is possible and what is not?);
 - who is responsible for what? Room for experiments in policy and regulations;
 - finding subsidy opportunities;
 - finding potential partners;
 - secretarial support;
 - financial support for plan elaboration.
- Consider regional helpdesks to help initiators with these topics, preferably within organisational models that exclude involvement in project implementation.
- Provide regional helpdesks with seed money, to stimulate promising collective action by covering initial expenses, for example for proposal preparation.
- Participate as local and regional authorities (e.g. municipalities or provinces) in regional helpdesks to guarantee close relations with public and civic organisations.
- Formulate clear and transparent rural development goals to facilitate collective action, including a certain space to realise formulated policy goals in different ways.
- Allow for a certain regulatory flexibility by providing experimental space that explores the boundaries of self-governance approaches and perspectives.
- Realise that collective action requires long-standing relationships. The provision of subsidy, therefore, should avoid 'forced shopping' formulas that undermine the opportunity to establish such long-standing and trustful relations.
- Be aware that collective action often requires financial support in vulnerable early-lifecycle phases, which can clash with conditions set for financial support. More suitable development fund criteria might overcome such early lifecycle financial problems.
- Strive for an early uptake of innovative signals in terms of integrative potential of collective action and better relationships between farmers, public authorities and civil society at large.
- Improve visibility of successes of and obstacles to collective action through research, monitoring, documentation and communication plans. As well as public authorities and knowledge institutions, the media (local newspapers, agricultural magazines, etc.) may also play a critical role in this respect.
- Start with small-scale practical tests before proceeding to full-scale implementation of subsidy plans.
- Outsource public employees temporarily to novel collectives to improve their relationships with authorities, to stimulate collaborative learning and to facilitate policy support.
- Create budgets for visits to interesting collective action initiatives elsewhere. Such visits can strengthen internal relationships and deepen insights into the crucial role of external relationships and the mobilisation of wider societal support.
- Facilitate capacity building that enhances the role of regional policy actors in different stages of policymaking and that fosters more direct interaction between the EU and regional administrations.
- Stimulate interregional cooperation to create networks of initiatives with similar objectives in different regions of Europe and to reflect more holistically on the impact of own farming activities elsewhere (within and outside the EU).
- Involve all relevant stakeholders (e.g. farmers, land managers, NGOs, researchers, etc.) to enrich policy debate and to co-create more cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary policy approaches.
- Realise that farmers, land managers and related organisations become particularly powerful change agents with flexible and well-targeted support, including legal, financial and educational support. These should therefore be directly and actively engaged in support design, preparation and implementation as much as possible.
- Stimulate study tours and other forms of personal exchange that strengthen farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, also with the help of more independent model farms.
- Develop training tools adapted to the needs of farmers, land managers and other related actors to em-

- power farming communities and rural environments.
- Refer in National Strategic Plans to positive collective action examples from other countries.
 - Introduce national measures to proactively address EU principles of free movement of labour and capital and its closely associated issue of land grabbing.
 - Prioritise action plans for farmers and regions that are entering the internal EU market.
 - Link collective action to the right-to-land debate in Eastern Europe.
 - Accompany this with transparent data collection systems both at national and EU levels.
 - Reconsider subsidy targeting in line with East-European social and economic realities.
 - Facilitate collective action by formalising new or existing networks of farmer organisations through a memorandum of understanding, for example.
 - Create institutional actors that promote associations and capacity building.
 - Provide fiscal incentives for farmer-led collective action.
 - Improve synergies and collaboration among donors and disseminate good practices.
 - Provide technical and policy support to stimulate innovation and the transfer of best practices and to improve prevailing institutional support for cooperative initiatives and resource mobilisation.
 - Make use of market management instruments to stabilise food markets and improve farmers' incomes.
 - Embrace multi-product producer organisations that benefit small to medium-sized family farming.
 - Encourage farmers' participation in the formulation of public policies.
 - Support new entrants to revitalise rural areas and to combat the ageing of the agricultural population and the depopulation of rural areas.
 - Ensure effective policies for the setting up and maintenance of young and new farmers and allow them to sustain their activity after five years of obligatory project maintenance.
 - Adapt technical support to small to medium-sized family farms, for example through the better targeting of training methods.
 - Train young people to take part in collective action and associated movements.
 - Value the crucial role of rural and farming women through concrete measures that allow them to fully enjoy their rights, in line with UNDROP.
 - Oppose investment approaches that induce land grabbing, displace rural communities, impose industrial models and/or exclude large parts of farmer populations from public aid.

D) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION PRACTITIONERS

- Ensure good internal relationships. Setting up, designing and maintaining farmer-led collective action is a difficult task. The following characteristics are important for success:
 - develop a vision on the desired development of your market, agriculture in the area and/or village;
 - stay 'in action'; in other words, ensure feasible and appealing activities;
 - maintain the relationship with your grassroots. Stay understandable, keep them engaged;
 - be sensitive to what is politically and socially feasible;
 - gradually include partnerships with other social groups;
 - set up a good internal organisation;
 - provide one or more 'pullers' of a project;
 - bridge internal contradictions.
- Before claiming external support to overcome internal problems, try to resolve such problems by linking group interests to other societal interests.
- Remember that good internal relationships set the basis for value-added production that goes beyond the self-interest of directly involved participants.
- Opt for a step-by-step approach. This reduces risks, allows the gradual expansion of existing activities with new ones and helps learning in and through practice by incorporating new insights and building on previously gained experiences.
- Search for marketing possibilities and channels in which closer and more direct relations with consu-

mers and citizens are paramount.

- Build as much as possible on available endogenous resources (land, labour, machinery, craftsmanship, entrepreneurship, financial assets, etc.). The more collective activity succeeds in incorporating these types of local resources, the better the chances of success.
- Mobilise support from other interest groups, not only with regard to further envisioning and implementation of activities, but also with respect to necessary policy coordination efforts.



7 Conclusion

The background is a solid teal color. On the left side, there are several overlapping circular shapes. Some are solid teal with varying shades, while others are thin white outlines. These circles are arranged in a way that they appear to be part of a larger, abstract design, possibly representing a globe or a network of connections.

Conclusion

As we show in this synthesis report, there are many reasons to embrace and foster collective action in agriculture. These include the self-interest of farmers, but also the generation of meaningful wider societal impacts that benefit much broader sets of stakeholders. We started by providing an impression of the multiplicity of farmers' motives to engage in collective action, went on to stress the significance of underlying social struggle to achieve relative autonomy, then drew the conclusion that social capital building becomes especially promising and transformative if it can be aligned with other critical components of the strong rural webs that are characteristic of sustainable rural development. These principle findings consider in different ways the critical conditions and prerequisites of successful and promising collective action.

As highlighted in the four BOND regional reports, it is critically important to stress the significance of supportive policy and wider institutional settings. Particularly in European regions with a history of state-led enforcement of collectivism, such a situation may still be far from reality. This probably explains why BOND participants in these settings frequently appeal for more active, serious and convincing institutional national and regional responses to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas (UNDROP) or similar international declarations that fully realise, acknowledge and support the critical role of smallholder farming in relation to rural development and wider societal progress.

This synthesising report finishes with a rich collection of ideas of how institutional settings can become more sensitive and responsive to collective action initiatives and prospects. Rich, in the sense that it encompasses a multiplicity of more generic recommendations concerning CAP reform and wider institutional settings as well as more detailed recommendations concerning the safeguarding of family farming futures, progressing with regenerative food systems and agroecological prospects. Moreover, a set of recommendations has also been formulated for the initiators and practitioners of collective action. As part of BOND's wider successful see, tell and learn approach, this mixture of generic versus specific, and external versus internal recommendation orientations, aspires to foster supportive change and agency. In that respect, it is good to know that various BOND participants have continued and intensified their collaboration by establishing memoranda of understanding on future shared policy advocacy. These concrete indications for continuity in collaboration and collective learning firmly convince us that BOND will contribute in many ways to the strengthening of collective action to the benefit of farmers and society at large.

8 References

The background is a solid green color. On the left side, there are several overlapping circles and arcs in various shades of green, ranging from light to dark. These shapes are partially cut off by the left edge of the page.

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