



School of the Human Environment
Geography | Archaeology | Classics
University College Cork, Ireland



REPORT

Green European Foundation, with the support of Green Foundation Ireland and in partnership with Dr Colin Sage of the School of the Human Environment in UCC and Chair of the Cork Food Policy Council, present a Summer School:

Restoring Food to the Heart of the Community

in collaboration with artisan producers, community food security NGOs and local growers

***FRIDAY 29, SATURDAY 30 JUNE
and SUNDAY 1 JULY 2018***



Opening Reception, University College Cork: Dr Colin Sage welcomed all and thanked Waterford based **Green Party Senator Grace O'Sullivan** for attending, hoping she would take their discussions to Seanad Éireann (the Irish Senate). **GFI Chair Duncan Stewart** spoke passionately of the need to address climate change in the context of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP); he pointed to the unusually hot and dry summer weather Ireland had been experiencing this year, with no rain for the past month and dairy herds needing gallons of water every day to feed animals, and that we are now at risk in the near drought conditions.

Saturday Morning: Brookfield Centre, University College Cork

Dr Colin Sage opened with a presentation on the importance of food and health. Food visibly connects human and planetary health, yet access to food (a biological necessity) mediated through market; consequently, exchange value swamps other attributes of food. Food and nutrition has the potential to integrate diverse policy strands; it can disrupt thinking in 'silos'; this potential is not so far realised. Governments have vacated responsibility; health systems are not focusing on maintaining the health of the population but on emergency provision. Food production does not exist to optimise human nutrition but to reinforce corporate control.

He stated that the public policy choices were either:

cheap food from distant markets at huge environmental cost;

or

a regionalised supply chain, with diversified farms providing decent livelihoods with sound environmental stewardship.

Food Citizenship in Italy

Professor Cristina Grasseni talked of her experience in Italy with "solidarity purchase groups", *Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale (GAS)*, grassroots groups of consumers which have developed since 1994 and are a form of "sustainable food citizenship" (*M. Micheletti and D. Stolle*).

She presented an online survey in collaboration with Tavolo RES (GAS national co-ordination group) – participants: 204 GAS group co-ordinators (out of 429) + 1,658 gasista families (out of 7,083); also an ethnography (participant observation) with ReteGasBergamo, a network of 36 GAS groups. Although she found that only 13% of the family food budget was spent through such purchase groups, the impact on attitudes to food and food citizenship could be profound, creating and encouraging social engagement with food production.

The EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

Dr Oliver Moore (ARC 2020) gave a commentary on the review of the CAP in 2018 which is a lead in to CAP 2020-2027. While there were some positives in the European Commission's proposals, the response of the Institute for European Environment Policy (IEEP) states that "the gap between expressed intentions and mechanisms proposed is so large as to be alarming", and that "while CAP has in recent decades somewhat balanced agricultural support and societal expectations, this new proposal suggests that the Commission is ready to more or less abandon the public goods strand of this strategy" (*David Baldock and Allan Buckwell, IEEP*).

He then went on to outline strategic areas to focus on such as:

- Positives: Climate and environment – the European Parliament Environment Committee has been given a greater say in the reform of CAP. This includes the right to bring proposals direct to the Plenary of the European Parliament.

- "Targeting" gives room to 'encourage' best practice, for example, High Nature Value (HNV) and organic farming, to be adopted.
- Strengthening of conditionality needs mechanisms to ensure it happens.
- "Permanent grassland and permanent pasture ... may include other species such as shrubs and/or trees which can be grazed and, where Member States so decide, other species such as shrubs and/or trees which produce animal feed, provided that the grasses and other herbaceous forage remain predominant".

Eat Locally and Seasonally

Regina Sexton spoke about the importance of locally produced fresh food and how this had changed dramatically in the twentieth century. However for centuries Cork had been at the centre of a global food market, producing salted beef and butter for the transatlantic trade. She stressed the renewal of local producers in the 1960s led by the doyenne of Irish food, Myrtle Allen, while at the same time the intensification of agriculture in the opposite direction was taking place.

Mrs Allen had recognised the quality of the food available in the Cork countryside and coast, and led a revival of interest in local produce simply and beautifully cooked which was at the core of traditional food. She was also the first to seek out artisan cheese producers and led the way in opposing the intensification and industrialisation of food.

Discussion and Debate

A major theme was the disconnect between agricultural production, food and nutrition, health and environment, and how to change this.

The Summer School reconvened after lunch at **Cork's English Market** which is a haven for local and craft food producers. They visited **St. Stephen's Sustainable Food Lab** in the south inner city where they listened to a presentation about the project from project leaders. They also visited the **Knocknaheeny Hollyhill Community Garden**. Both community gardens were enthusiastically supported by the local community and endorsed by the city authorities.

<http://greensideup.ie/knocknaheenyhollyhill-community-garden/>
<http://cgireland.org/>

Discussion and Debate reconvened in the Lecture Room of the Nano Nagle Centre

Participants emphasised how disconnected agricultural policy was from food and health. The community garden showed the importance of restoring food to community and of Local Government support for such projects. The link between health and food was emphasised and useful policy measures at local level considered, such as: urban agriculture: community gardens, growing and greening schemes; procurement for the public plate: reconnecting regional producers to public institutions; innovative and convivial food provision; street markets > supermarkets: bringing food back to the public square; planning restrictions on fast food ('no-fry zones'); civic initiatives/associational forms capable of engaging people as citizens.

The day ended with dinner in the **Good Day Deli** in the Nano Nagle Centre, a sustainable foods café serving a mix of local, seasonal, organic foods with a commitment to sustainability throughout the food chain – <https://www.gooddaydeli.ie/>