

REPORT

Green European Foundation, with the support of
Green Foundation Ireland and Cultivate,
invite you to participate in:

***Practicing Food Sovereignty
in the Climate Emergency***



Venue: by Zoom (details given after registration)

Tuesday 19 October 2021 – 15:30 to 17:00 (Irish time)

Further updates about this webinar will appear on [our website here](#)

Admission to this event is **FREE** but you **MUST** register beforehand.
You can do so through [our Eventbrite page here](#)

*This event is made possible with the financial support of the
European Parliament to Green European Foundation.*

Practicing Food Sovereignty in the Climate Emergency

BACKGROUND

Following on from the September 2020 project 'A Question of SCALE', **Green European Foundation**, with the support of **Green Foundation Ireland** and **Cultivate**, led the 'Food Sovereignty, Climate Action and Regional Resilience' project as part of GEF's Climate Emergency Economy programme.

The project included a number of outputs:

- Develop initial 1,200 word context paper/ article;
- Host a webinar on the topic – exploring other perspectives and outlining the blockers and enablers of action;
- Develop a pamphlet on the topic with the findings of the first webinar included;
- Host a second webinar exploring the topics further and launching the pamphlet.

SECOND WEBINAR REPORT

On 19 October 2021, **Green European Foundation**, with the support of **Green Foundation Ireland** and **Cultivate**, organised the webinar 'Practicing Food Sovereignty in the Climate Emergency' as part of the Food Sovereignty, Climate Action and Local Resilience project.

The objective of this webinar was to host conversations with leading advocates of regenerative agriculture, rural regeneration and sustainable community to explore how we might strengthen the resilience and wellbeing of our local places through the practice of food sovereignty. This session also launched the Pamphlet, **Food Sovereignty, Climate Action and Regional Resilience**.

96 people registered to attend the webinar, with 62 people attending on the day.

***This event was made possible with the financial support of the
European Parliament to Green European Foundation.***

SPEAKERS

LISA FINGLETON, Artist, grower, writer and film-maker based on an organic farm on the Wild Atlantic Way;

JUDITH HITCHMAN, Food sovereignty activist, and currently President of URGENCI;

BRIDGET MURPHY, Regenerative hill farmer in County Sligo, and Core Group member of Talamh Beo;

EWA SUFIN-JACQUEMART, Director of Fundacja Strefa Zieleni (the Green Polish foundation);

THOMAS WAITZ, Austrian MEP, organic farmer, beekeeper and forester.

The webinar was facilitated by **Davie Philip**, a Community Climate Coach with Cultivate and a Network Weaver with ECOLISE.eu.

Davie introduced the themes of the session, the context for the project and thanked GEF and GFI before introducing the publication **Food Sovereignty, Climate Action and Regional Resilience**.

Ewa Sufin-Jacquemart was introduced. Ewa is a Board Member of the Green European Foundation and Director of Fundacja Strefa Zieleni (the Green Polish foundation) who are co-founders of the KZZ – the Living Earth Coalition (Koalicja Żywa Ziemia, KZZ), a Polish platform of advocacy for agroecology, food sovereignty and more sustainable and just CAP.

Ewa welcomed participants on behalf of Green European Foundation (GEF), introduced what the foundation does and what its objectives are. She highlighted the Climate Emergency Economy project that this webinar is part of. Ewa outlined the work in Poland she is involved in promoting sustainable agriculture, food sovereignty, organic farming, and soil. She gave an example of the work with a project opposing a large greenhouse project that went ahead without any public consultation or engagement.

Before going on to introduce **Judith Hitchman**, Davie invited participants to introduce themselves in the chat to build a sense of community. Judith is food sovereignty activist, currently president of URGENCI, a social movement that now represents approximately 3 million people. She also represents URGENCI as a Board Member and joint co-ordinator of the intercontinental Social and Solidarity Economy network (RIPESS).

Davie asked Judith how might a locally-based economic model of agriculture and food distribution help us respond to the climate emergency and why is the solidarity economy important?

Judith introduced what URGENCI does and outlined how with climate change and COVID-19 are interlinked, saying that the key question for us all is how to build local resilience. She introduced how Community Supported Agriculture relocalises our food systems and contributes to the realisation of a solidarity economy, as well as bringing many benefits to local communities. These include: low food miles, low packaging, ecological farming; safe, healthy, nutritious food from trusted sources; building the local economy and decommodifying food; and re-educating the community on food issues. Judith explained how local food systems help us to break with industrial agriculture and agrifood systems and can protect communities from land-grabbing.

She stated that localising the solidarity economy and food sovereignty represents a systemic change and must include an economic paradigm shift. Judith went deeper into Community Supported Agriculture, highlighting that each initiative is self-governed, sharing the risks and benefits with farmers. CSA has a minimal carbon footprint: shorter food supply chains and therefore can be described as low impact farming that provides nutritious, fresh, local seasonal food. CSA networks are national and international and have strong advocacy synergies with other social movements. She stressed the importance of building legislation frameworks that link food sovereignty, solidarity economy, nutrition and agroecology, and can support policies for system change that focus on participatory governance and truly sustainable food systems.

The next section was titled **Local Stories**. The first speaker was **Lisa Fingleton**, an artist, writer and grower at the Barna Way, an ecosocial, organic farm and native woodland near Ballybunion in County Kerry. Her book *The Local Food Project* explores the power of growing and eating local food. Every September she organises the 30 day Local Food Challenge. Lisa is currently the Kerry Visual Artist in Residence, exploring issues around climate, creativity and food.

Davie welcomed Lisa and asked if she could tell us a little about what she has been doing and share any lessons learnt from her local food initiatives.

Lisa started off by highlighting that many people now do not know what real food tastes like. She grew up with her father growing a lot of the family's food. Now she and her partner run a farm and her work is all about food. Her *Local Food Project* was a book that shared her food journey and the realisation that our food contains so many additives and that most people don't know where their food comes from. The Local Food Challenge is a project that came out of the book, with a challenge to eat 100% local food for a month (for 30 days). This highlighted to her that labelling of food can be confusing and misleading – imported ingredients can be labelled and marketed as Irish which is not always the case.

Her motivation is the concern for the climate and how the poorest of the poor will be impacted by our food choices. Art has been a way for her to highlight the issues and to encourage engagement in local food systems. Everything is connected and we need to support local farmers, small producers and to give consumers the information they need to make the right decisions. Lisa outlined how her work as a Resident Visual Artist with Kerry County Council is about sparking imagination to reconnect with nature and engage in the issues around food in a creative way.

Bridget Murphy was our next speaker in this section. She is a regenerative hill farmer based in County Sligo and a Core Group member of Talamh Beo, an alliance of farmers, growers and landworkers on the island of Ireland. Bridget's background is in land use, tenure and agrarian reform in Southern Africa and Ireland, with a dedicated focus on women and their role in and contribution to food and farming. Talamh Beo is a member of the European Co-Ordination Via Campesina, and have just published a Local Food Policy Framework.

Davie welcomed Bridget and asked if she could tell us a little about the Talamh Beo and its Local Food Policy Framework. Bridget highlighted that we have a very low percentage of land in organics and there is a need to increase that and get more people on the land. She introduced Talamh Beo's mission and how it works to support an ecological approach to farming, protect soils and encourage more women to get involved in food production. They support the principles of food sovereignty and put farmers at the centre of decision making, and campaign for CAP reforms that benefit small family farms and agroecological systems; moving away from export driven policies and supporting food production that is affordable, with low emissions and that gives support to farmers who produce for the Irish market and protect soils. She stressed the need for land being available to young people – there is an aging farm demographic and this needs support, training and access to credit.

A panel discussion between Judith, Lisa and Bridget followed. The first question was how to stay buoyant and energised in these difficult times. Judith mentioned the need for surrounding yourself with people that keep your energy up and inspire you. Lisa said that creativity and being mindful of good food help her from burning out. Bridget added that building community helps support each other and it is time to link up to ensure that local food initiatives are accessible. The need to associate with networks that have similar objectives was discussed and the need to move beyond our own organisations. Lisa stressed that we must be aware we can't do everything and we should focus on where we are strong. Judith added that we should ask what we can do together to meet our common goals.

The next speaker was **Thomas Waitz**, an Austrian MEP, ecological farmer and forester. He has been a member of the European Parliament since November 2017.

Davie asked Thomas how, from his unique perspective, might the practice of Food Sovereignty help us respond to the climate and ecological emergency, what examples does he see and could he highlight any European policies and actions will support agroecology and food initiatives locally.

Thomas started with the COVID crisis and that many people now had a new interest in local food and the environment around us. He highlighted the fact that we are net importers, especially of food and inputs for animals, and that we sell back to the world with the impacts being felt locally. Production costs are high in Europe compared with the rest of the market and we subsidise farmers to be viable. He explained how this does not help our local economies in rural areas, it has a large ecological impact, and we need to change the policy towards a priority to support farmers to produce healthy food in an ecological way for European consumers. We need to factor in the externalities and integrate the damages into pricing and move towards an ecological way to produce food that is healthier for consumers.

Food sovereignty is the framework to localise food systems and to stop undermining developing countries by dumping cheap produce into their economies. The new CAP has been fought for and there has been some progress – including the support of organic and agro-ecological measures. However, we did not go far enough and, with the climate emergency so close, we need to change the current model of food production. Thomas stated that there is a huge opportunity in taking a different approach, but the agri food lobby is powerful and undermines us going in a direction that reduces emissions, reduces dependency on imports and increases seed saving which is important for food sovereignty.

A circular economy on farms gives animals a place in the system. We are losing hundreds of farms every day as we cannot compete with the large farms and agribusinesses. There is an opportunity with direct marketing, food co-ops, CSAs, and solidarity and community based farming that has increased during the pandemic along with the demand for organic food. There are so many reasons for the State to invest in local and regional food supply with public procurement and we need to push for this. Co-operation with tourism is also key, with restaurants putting local food on the menu, shortening supply chains and reducing emissions. Authentic stories around what we are eating helps us support sustainable and local food systems.

The webinar then opened up to questions and a discussion followed around community wealth building and keeping money circulating in our local economies. Thomas stated that the new CAP will allow this and lead to more agroecological production and help rebuild local food economies. Judith highlighted good practice in public procurement around food and the benefits for small local food producers. Food waste is lowered and the local economy strengthened. Thomas gave examples of regional approaches and the wider benefits for our health and the reduction of environmental damage. The high cost of low prices was highlighted and the need for education on buying direct, eating seasonal and supporting local producers.

The webinar was closed with the invitation to download the new pamphlet on these topics from the GEF website and to explore the resources on GFI's website. Davie thanked the partners and all the speakers and ended with appreciating the work that all the participants were doing in their own communities.

10 November 2021