

# REPORT

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

***Food Sovereignty, Climate Action  
and Regional Resilience***

***"Imagining a co-operative, community-led approach to regional resilience"***



**Venue: by Zoom (details given after registration)**

**Tuesday 29 June 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.*

# *Food Sovereignty, Climate Action And Regional Resilience*

## BACKGROUND

On 29 June 2021, **Green European Foundation**, with the support of **Green Foundation Ireland** and **Cultivate**, organised a webinar as part of GEF's transnational project on Climate Emergency Economy with Bulgaria, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) included conversations with leading advocates of food sovereignty and community climate action, and will explore how we might strengthen the resilience of our local places.

The project builds upon the outputs of the 2020 GEF project, '[A Question of SCALE](#)'. A context paper / article on 'Food Sovereignty, Climate Change and Local Resilience' was developed and shared with all the speakers and everyone who registered to the webinar. This article is available [here](#). The outputs and harvest from the webinar will be incorporated into the final document. This is due to be published in September 2021 as a pamphlet on the topic with case studies and graphics, this webinar was designed to feed into the final publication.

Over 120 people registered to attend the webinar, with 68 people participating on the day.

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## SPEAKERS

**FERGAL ANDERSON**, Small farmer / Chair of Talamh Beo, the Irish Landworkers' Alliance.

**SUZIE CAHN**, Climate Justice Centre at TASC / Carraig Dulra / Council Member of ECOLISE.eu.

**JENNIFER McCONNELL**, Food Sovereignty Researcher / former General Manager of Irish Seed Savers Association.

**Dr. OLIVER MOORE**, UCC / ARC 2020.

**MORGAN ODY**, Farmer / Confédération Paysanne / Via Campesina.

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## OPENING

The webinar started with **Davie Philip** from Cultivate who framed the context and purpose of the webinar, and gave an overview of the session. He invited participants to introduce themselves in the chat and to ask questions and share insights there. Davie highlighted that we will be engaging in conversations with leading advocates of regenerative agriculture, rural regeneration and sustainable community and explore how we might strengthen the resilience and wellbeing of our local places through the concept of food sovereignty. He stressed that food sovereignty and local resilience building will ensure that climate action can be responded to by diversifying and strengthening the local economy.

He stated that this project is organised by the Green European Foundation with the support of Green Foundation Ireland and Cultivate, with the financial support of the European Parliament to the Green European Foundation.

## WELCOME

Davie introduced **Sien Hasker**, a Project Co-Ordinator at GEF, who welcomed participants on behalf of the Green European Foundation. Sien outlined what GEF is focused on and the wider Climate Emergency Economy, and the hope to connect perspectives from Ireland and Bulgaria with this project. She outlined and shared links with participants on where they could keep in touch.

An introduction from partner Green Foundation Ireland was given by **Tommy Simpson**, who outlined the Question of SCALE project and other projects and areas of interest for GFI.

## INTRODUCTION

The main points of the context article were introduced by **Fergal Anderson**, a small farmer, the chair of Talamh Beo (the Irish Landworkers' Alliance) and who formerly worked with Via Campesina in Brussels. Fergal outlined the concept, principles and framework of food sovereignty and introduced the need for climate action in agriculture. He stressed there is a danger of approaching climate change with just technological solutions and that our current food and agricultural system functions through the application of ever more industrial systems to natural processes. This system, which we are encouraged to believe is normal, in fact obscures an abundance of hidden social, environmental and cultural costs, and operates beyond the ecological limits of our regions, localities and planet. It has had hugely detrimental impacts on natural cycles and ecosystems which are easier to break than repair.

At the same time ecosystems across the planet – both on land and in our oceans – are under huge pressure due to our food production and land use systems. Agrichemical use is leading to potentially catastrophic biodiversity loss and the nitrification of lakes and rivers, and the increasing mechanisation of farming systems has eroded farm biodiversity and encroached into wild areas and habitats. This pressure is made ever more acute due to the impacts of climate change. On top of their environmental impacts, our current food production and distribution systems are rigid, fragile and vulnerable to shocks.

Fergal highlighted that, across Europe and the world, farmers and citizens are exploring ways of producing and distributing food which have positive environmental outcomes, increase community wealth and resilience, and provide long-term livelihoods into the future. These solutions share the same concepts of an ecological ceiling and a social foundation which must underpin economic exchanges and human interaction into the future. Fergal introduced the blockers and enablers in the four sections of the paper that we will explore in the breakout rooms.

1. Production – using the land for local and regional needs.
2. Organising processing and distribution locally and regionally.
3. Livelihoods: How do we ensure all participants in our food and agricultural systems make a fair living from their work?
4. Trade and Solidarity: Ensuring Food Sovereignty is not just about "eating local and eating well" – linking our actions to the broader picture.

## RESPONSE FROM EUROPE

**Morgan Ody**, who is a farmer and a member of the Co-Ordinating Committee of the European Via Campesina, was invited to make a response. Davie asked Morgan what, from her perspective, is preventing the changes we need to see? She highlighted the constant push to lower prices and that farmers are discouraged to move to agroecological practices as production has to be maximised and providing for the market at the cheapest price. Small farmers need strategies like Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and niche markets which are also taken over by corporations. All local alternatives are a necessity for small farmers to stop value being redirected to corporations. Technology and bigger and more specialised machinery is also driving productivity up and prices down. Free trade with different and weak standards is a major threat to small farmers. There is a loss of production to places with lower social standards.

Morgan was then asked what she sees is happening and can happen to accelerate change? She sees alternatives in localities but these need to value food and give a fair price to farmers. Many citizens need to access food at low prices as they are in poverty – however a more collective approach could help. Food social security is an interesting concept, which meets the needs of people with health or employment challenges. Also local level decision making that democratises food and makes local organic food accessible to lower income people. These approaches can help us value local food producers in a way that addresses food poverty but also help us respond to the climate and ecological emergencies.

## LOCAL STORIES

Davie introduced **Suzie Cahn** from the Climate Justice Centre at TASC, co-ordinator of the Permaculture Training Centre, Carraig Dulra, and a member of ECOLISE.eu. Suzie talked about the People's Transition work which ensures we take action on climate through community led development. The work is a leverage point to taking local action in a way that brings in marginal voices and ensures a just transition. Communities have valuable local knowledge and want to respond to the challenges we face. Local decision making and participation is needed in communities. She introduced the concept of local wealth building as a way to keep money and finance circulating in our local areas. Strategies like these ensure that local communities can drive climate action and rural regeneration.

Next we heard from **Oliver Moore**, a lecturer at the UCC Centre for Co-Operative Studies, the chief communicator at ARC 2020 and the chair of CloughJordan Community Farm. Davie asked Ollie how a transition to a low carbon and resilient society relates to practicing food sovereignty? He outlined how CloughJordan, a small rural town, has elements like a bakery, co-op café, a CSA farm and many local food producers have a number of ways to practice food sovereignty. Ollie spoke about the need for an ecosystem and co-operative approach to respond to the crises and the engagement and participation of citizens. He introduced the Community Farm that agroecological practices, has a lot of its members volunteering and uses participatory budgeting. He also mentioned solidarity clubs like the bread club, the buyers club and egg club, these are ways we can support local producers directly. The plans for local markets and potential diversification through the Open Food Network, an open source user owned platform was outlined and the plans for an online farmers market in the North Tipperary area.

**Jennifer McConnell**, a Food Sovereignty Researcher and former General Manager of Irish Seed Savers Association, was next to speak. She introduced in the context of local resilience why is Seed Sovereignty important? Seeds are imported and leave us vulnerable unless we have control. There is a lot of control over seed with patents and locking farmers open to exploitive relationships with large corporate seed companies. We need to ensure farmers can save and share seed which is often not allowed. Heritage collections of seed are allowed and this needs to be encouraged. Seeds are now a commodity and cannot be saved. Open pollinated seeds can be saved and we need to protect diversity and farmers, without seed sovereignty we don't have food sovereignty or local resilience. Jennifer finished by stressing the need to educate on the practice of seed saving and policies to protect farmers. To be resilient in Ireland we need to support local seed producers and encourage the development for seed production.

Questions and reflections were captured and responded to in the chat function of Zoom.

## BREAKOUTS

Participants were invited into 4 small groups for a short conversation to identify what are the **Blockers** – what is preventing the changes we need to see? and the **Enablers** – what is happening and can happen to accelerate change? We also identified what citizens and communities can do.

## FEEDBACK

In plenary each breakout room gave an overview of what was discussed and harvested.

## THANKS AND NEXT STEPS

Davie outlined the plans for a second GEF webinar in September 2021 with partners in Bulgaria that will launch the GEF Pamphlet on 'Food Sovereignty, Climate Change and Local Resilience' and thanked the partners, speakers and all the participants for attending.

**9 July 2021**