



**GREEN FOUNDATION IRELAND
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ANNUAL REPORT ON ACTIVITIES

for the year ended

31 December 2021



ANNUAL REPORT ON ACTIVITIES
for the year ended 31 December 2021

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GENERAL OVERVIEW

for the year ended 31 December 2021

Green Foundation Ireland aims, through education, to inspire the public to work towards a sustainable society for Ireland.

In 2021, we held seven extremely successful events, most of which took place online. These consisted of the following:

- Farm Buildings, Bats and the Heritage Council
- Biodiversity Week:
 - Coastal Riches and Coastal Restoration
 - Virtual Bat Box Building
 - Gardening for Butterflies
- Food Sovereignty, Climate Action and Regional Resilience
- Farm Walk
- Practicing Food Sovereignty in the Climate Emergency

As always at our events, including those held online, time was allowed to have discussion and interaction between the attendees and the panel of speakers at all of these events which will no doubt lead to important impacts for the wider community.

Details of all these events (including reports, videos and photographs where appropriate), as well as our events held in previous years, are available on the [Events Section of our website here](#).

Education is key to empowering young people to make a difference in their world and education is central to creating the changes needed for sustainable development to become a reality which has the potential to benefit all of society.

GFI uses the *Eco Eye* series as a teaching and learning platform for ESD by indexing and in other ways making individual programmes more accessible in short bites on our website.

GFI continues to communicate the already existing resources on the GFI website to a much wider audience of both committed green activists and the interested wider public.

These resources can also be used by educators as part of their curriculum subject development in second level and further education. The GFI website is also available to all students and we are raising awareness of this at a national level.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of our Board and Management Team, as well as to all our supporters, who have all contributed so much to our successful year on a voluntary basis. We are looking forward to the challenges that the coming year will bring.



FARM BUILDINGS, BATS AND THE HERITAGE COUNCIL



25 MARCH 2021

Talk:

[Farm Buildings, Bats and the Heritage Council](#)

Held Online by Zoom

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

THEME

This talk explored the Traditional Farm Building Scheme – how it works and its implications for wildlife conservation.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKERS

Jonathan Mcnaughton: Jonathan is a farmer in County Meath who, along with his family, has restored a stable yard and overhead grain store/loft to their former glory. The courtyard at the farm, which is a mixed beef and tillage enterprise, dates back to the late 18th century and is shown on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map. The stable yard is adjoining the basement section of a Norman Castle, and the buildings were used as a coach man's residence, the storage of the coach and stables for horses.

Anna Meenan: Anna is Project Manager of the Traditional Farm Buildings Grant Scheme at the Heritage Council since 2008. Prior to this she was the Assistant Conservation Officer for Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. She also was engaged as Built Heritage Officer for Mourne Heritage Trust and as Conservation Officer for Waterford County Council.

Donna Mullen: Chair of Green Foundation Ireland, Donna is an environmentalist and works as an ecologist, drawing up nature trails and sustainability plans. Her work involves spending many happy hours surveying buildings for bats, and she helped draw up the guidelines on bat surveys for the Heritage Council (Traditional Farm Building Scheme). She is a founder member of both Bat Conservation Ireland and the Irish Environmental Network, and has also served on the board of the Irish Wildlife Trust.

Claire Downey (Director of Green Foundation Ireland) introduced our first speaker, **Anna Meenan** from the Heritage Council, who opened her talk with information about the Heritage Council grant system for conserving, improving and maintaining vernacular buildings, for instance, older farm buildings and outbuilding dating back to the 19th century, as well as indicating the Council's support for traditional building skill to conserve them, such as lime mortar and slating. This was illustrated by beautiful examples of the use of both these techniques in the process of the renovation of conservation of particular farm buildings.

The Heritage Council encourage farmers to hold open days on farms with heritage building and wildlife, and urge the training colleges to hold open training days, giving the example of Carlow Institute of Technology.



Anna also went into detail about how such preservation and conservation is invaluable in maintaining biodiversity in bats and birds. The Heritage Council has bought a farm building in County Clare because it was the roost of bats which were endangered across Europe. The Clare roost is extremely valuable in preserving the biodiversity of there.

Donna Mullen, Environmentalist, Bat expert and Chair of Green Foundation Ireland, was next to speak.

Donna started off by speaking eloquently about bat habitats in traditional farm buildings, and how to know if you have bats, for example, the droppings are different to mouse droppings as they crumble into dust. Bird habitats are also important in the preservation of old vernacular buildings – an example being swallows nesting in these.

She went on to tell us about different bat species and their preference – some species like to stay close to home, so it is very important not to disrupt them when renovating buildings or observing and counting bats. Some bats are endangered, for example, those who need roosts near feeding area so traditional building near their usual feeding ground are extremely important for endangered bats.

Donna was also informative about different bat species and showed beautiful illustrations of pipistrelle and horseshoe bats, etc. When breeding, females need to be hot, they like to be approximately 30° Celsius so they need places to reproduce where they can roost together when pregnant and get hot enough.

Donna stressed how important it was not to close all small apertures in the building when renovating so bats could access them. She also said how important it was not to allow toxic timber treatment.

Jonathan Macnaughton told the story of his project to renovate farm buildings on his farm in County Meath with support from the Heritage Council. They discovered that they had four species of bats occupying the farm buildings that were in need of conservation and renovation so no work was possible between May and August.

However the project got under way in the autumn and the Heritage Council gave him much support in doing the conservation in an appropriate way.

Jonathan and his family learned much about bats in the process, and they also acquired invaluable traditional building skills from the Heritage Council.

As usual at all of our events, there was a lively Q&A session which was moderated by Claire Downey at the end of our event.

The talks on farm buildings, bats and the Heritage Council were really interesting as well as being informative and, with more than 70 participants attending from all over Ireland, the topic is a really popular one.



BIODIVERSITY WEEK:

Coastal Riches and Coastal Restoration



15 MAY 2021

Biodiversity Week:

Coastal Riches and Coastal Restoration

Held Online by Zoom

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

THEME

This talk explored aspects about protecting our coastlines, as well as discussing habitat restoration and projects.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Karin Dubsy: Karin is an experienced member of the environmental NGO community, post-graduate scientist researcher, consultant and teacher. She works in Trinity College Dublin, and has practical scientific and basic legal expertise in water, biodiversity, waste, planning, public participation and access to justice issues.

Karin founded **Coastwatch** – which developed into Coastwatch Europe – a voluntary organisation which monitors the coastal and wetland environments of several European countries, campaigns for improvements to environmental policies and for the implementation of existing environmental legislation, and organises public information events and seminars.

Claire Downey (Director of Green Foundation Ireland) introduced our speaker, **Karin Dubsy** from Coastwatch, who opened her talk by telling us of the wonders of our 7,000 km of Irish coastline. She asked us to go to the beach and listen out for the clip clapping noises of limpets and periwinkles in the evening as they move around. This magical sound has been lost from Germany, where pollution from oil has decimated the limpet population.

Karin then showed us the shells and egg cases of whelks. Unfortunately, there are no protected areas or closed seasons for whelk harvesting in Ireland, and this is chipping away at their numbers. We need to take the precautionary approach on harvesting.

She went on to speak about the kelp in Bantry Bay where it has been proposed to cut the top 6 inches from the top of the plant, which would kill it. An older way of harvesting was to trim the top every year, taking a small amount and preserving the plant.

Karin then spoke about the latest EU plan for restoration, which has great potential.



The Estuary at Hook Head is protected and has many different types of seaweed. A sudden abundance of sprat led to common dolphins and seals visiting the estuary. However then came overfishing, with dead dolphins and seals caught as bycatch. 6,000 tonnes of fish were caught between October and January, all for fishmeal. Cashing in financially took precedence over allowing nature to return.

But restoration measures can work. TBT paint used to be found on large boats. When it was eaten by female dog whelks, the females turned into males, and the species collapsed. TBT paint was banned from sale 25 years ago and the dog whelk numbers are increasing.

She then talked about a case taken by Coastwatch against Drogheda Port for destruction of a mudflat. The Port Authorities eventually restored the mudflat having been taken to the Supreme Court. Scientific evidence by citizen scientists played a major part in showing the Judge the damage which had happened to the mudflat.

Karin remains hopeful about the protection of biodiversity, feeling that we have reached a tipping point, and the public is now behind protection of our biodiversity.

An extremely lively Q&A session followed, with some highly interesting questions being raised by the 45 participants who attended our talk. Karin's talk was wonderful – and we all need to now go and hear those limpets clip clapping on the beach for ourselves.





BIODIVERSITY WEEK:
Virtual Bat Box Building



16 MAY 2021

Biodiversity Week:

Virtual Bat Box Building

Held in individual homes

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

This workshop was not on Zoom, as it was a hands-on, practical event, which was carried out in individual homes under COVID guidelines.

ABOUT OUR WORKSHOP

Donna Mullen (Chair of Green Foundation Ireland) gave the original talk on bats to some tidy towns groups in Fingal, County Dublin. Those who had already attended the talk were supplied with bat box kits which they made up on Sunday 16 May 2021. They made these in their homes.

Sites for the boxes had been chosen in Balbriggan, County Dublin and the boxes were put in place there on 24 May 2021.



BIODIVERSITY WEEK: *Gardening for Butterflies*



21 MAY 2021

Talk:

[Gardening for Butterflies](#)

Held Online by Zoom

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

THEME

This talk looked into how we should protect butterflies, as well as what we should be growing in our gardens to help them survive as a species. We also had a virtual tour of Jesmond's garden to see his work in action.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Jesmond Harding: Jesmond is an educator, and Founder Member, Director and Conservation Officer of Butterfly Conservation Ireland, which was formed in 2008 by a group of dedicated naturalists following the alarming decline of most of our butterfly species.

Jesmond is author of the award-winning book "*Discovering Irish Butterflies and their Habitats*", as well as papers for scientific publications, and articles for newspapers, periodicals and magazines. He has appeared in the TV series *Living the Wildlife* produced by Colin Stafford-Johnson, and in the recent Burren documentary broadcast on RTÉ in April 2021. Jesmond is Ireland's leading butterfly expert.

Donna Mullen, Chair of Green Foundation Ireland, welcomed everyone to our event and introduced **Jesmond Harding** from Butterfly Conservation Ireland, who opened his inspiring talk with a tour of his front garden where, despite traffic noises, he showed small wildflowers growing around the edges, such as Herb Robert and Cowslips, much loved by butterflies – they also love Oxeye Daisies and Violets. Comfrey likes damp shady corners as does Red Campion and Bugle.

We soon moved to the rear, away from traffic and heard only birdsong from then on. Jesmond explored various hedgerows, cautioning us to avoid Leylandi for hedging at all costs, as it is useless for butterflies. Ireland needs more native hedging beloved by butterflies, such as Hazel and Whitethorn and Blackthorn, even Crab Apple which he had in his hedge. Jesmond was full of tips to encourage wildlife as he walked his garden, such as cutting hedges into an A shape so as to give thicker cover at the base.

Jesmond talked eloquently about various plants which have special affinities with Irish butterfly species, always underlining that native moths and butterflies need native species of plants to survive, for example Kidney Vetch, Common Knapweed, Violets, and Primrose. He touched on the seasonality of plants and butterflies, telling us of the importance of St. John's Wort at midsummer and also Devil's-Bit and Bird's-Foot Trefoil on which the larvae of several butterflies feed. Herbs such as Marjoram are also important.



He continued to speak interestingly about propagating Kidney Vetch. He also cautioned against buying wildflower seeds which were usually imported, and talked about how he collected seeds himself, such as Bloody Crane's-Bill. The problem with some of the garden centre plants is they are so cultivated they have very little pollen content. Our listeners contributed several suggestions, mentioning www.wildflowers.ie which supplied truly native seed, and www.caherhurleynursery.com an organic nursery in County Clare that sells many native plants.

Jesmond then moved into a small woodland area at the back of the property which was populated by Birch, Alder and Buckthorn and Wild Cherry, and he waxed lyrical about Rowan. The birdsong was almost deafening and we could see for ourselves the beautiful wildlife habitat it was. Nettles were spotted which also are useful to wildlife.

Jesmond emphasised about importance of a number of species, including Grey Willow and even Oak and Ivy, which he said was most useful both as cover and as food. Flowering Ivy is vital for bees in late October. Please do not cut them.

There were enthusiastic questions from the almost 70 participants who attended about the particular plants touched on and how to gather wild seeds. Many good suggestions were made and information exchanged. Everyone thanked Jesmond for a really practical, interesting and inspiring talk.





FOOD SOVEREIGNTY, CLIMATE ACTION AND REGIONAL RESILIENCE



29 JUNE 2021

Webinar:

[Food Sovereignty, Climate Action and Regional Resilience](#)
Held Online by Zoom

GFI Co-Ordinator: Tommy Simpson

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.

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.

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.



FARM WALK



11 SEPTEMBER 2021

Event:

Farm Walk

Held at: Golashane Nature Reserve

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

THEME

This farm walk at Golashane Nature Reserve near Kells in County Meath, our first in-person event since COVID, was hosted by GFI's Chair, **Donna Mullen**.

Farming for Nature, which was established in 2018, is an independent, not-for-profit initiative which aims to support high nature value farming in Ireland.

These farm walks are an opportunity for the Farming For Nature farmers to showcase their contribution to nature and good farming practices on their land.

ABOUT OUR FARM WALK

We were lucky to have glorious weather as people arrived for the walk and talks. We started with our usual tea and cakes, and **Donna Mullen** gave a talk about the bats on the farm. Seven species of bats have been found here, and we went into the large barn to see the bat box projects, and look at a little soprano pipistrelle which was tucked into a box.

Next we looked at the cage where we had just released red squirrels, and we spoke about soft releases and the work done by Wildlife Rehabilitation Ireland.

Then it was off to the forest, with some discussion on ash dieback. We visited the pine marten box where **Brian Keeley** spoke about pine martens and the way in which they are helping in the return of the red squirrel.

After this, it was time to visit our artificial badger sett. Some of the people visiting had helped in building it several years ago. We then looked at the barn owl box, and all too soon we finished up by going back for more tea and cakes!

With approximately 30 people attending, it was really inspiring to see so much enthusiasm for farming for nature.



PRACTICING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY



19 OCTOBER 2021

Webinar and Pamphlet Launch:

[Practicing Food Sovereignty in the Climate Emergency](#)
Held Online by Zoom

GFI Co-Ordinator: Tommy Simpson

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.

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 localises 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.