

LIVING ON FARM – A NEW APPROACH OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSA)

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Abstract

Results gained from case studies on CSA-farms in Finland show that emerging CSA enterprises offer increasingly also accommodation and services for elderly. This development requires vocational training in green care and inclusive farming. Both the farmers and the residents are winners: farms create additional income and customers enjoy the salutogenetic impact of rural landscape, organic farming and its products.

Introduction

According to a public consultation 26.165 participants (58 %) consider the economic and social dimension of organic farming as the most needed areas of research and innovation (European Commission 2013). Hospitals, institutions and enterprises caring for people with special needs, even prisons utilise the salutogenetic impact of organic agriculture (Dessein 2008, Gallis 2007, Hassink and van Majken 2006). Salutogenesis (Antonovsky 1997) may also be a reason why community supported farms increasingly emerge in Europe and USA. CSA seeks to create a direct relationship between farmers and those who eat their food (Cone and Myhre 2000). A new CSA phenomenon is that community members do not only procure their food from the farm but also intend to move to the farm as residents, especially elderly people (Sahramaa 2012). In this paper the development of living on farm is described from an agricultural engineer's point of view focussing on opportunities for elderly in Finland.

Material and methods

The methods applied are literature review, personal communication, and analysis of case studies made during visits on the spot since 2008. Based on the collected material an analysis of the new development is made showing the challenges and problems. Recommendations are given to support this development and to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge about salutogenesis and implementation into practice.

Results

Wietheger 2003 and Wiechmann 2006 described first community living of elderly on farms in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. Documentations of recent community living of elderly in Finland concern mainly urban areas (Helamaa and Pylvänen 2012). The first successful community of elderly rose in the city of *Helsinki*. A society of

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elderly founded a shareholder company which in turn built a block of flats supported by local authorities (Minkinen and Dahlström 2009). Inspired by the success of Loppukiri a similar venture started in *Saarjärvi*, a municipality in the rural area of middle Finland (Pesonen 2013). Both cases are valuable examples how to establish a senior community that cares for its own accommodation facilities. Many of the gathered experiences are transferable to farm level where accommodation for elderly is a concern.

CSA has many roots: eco-village, local food production, community living, and social services on farm. Table 1 shows an overview of Finnish farms offering accommodation within the frame of CSA. There are three main groups: Anthroposophical social farms, farms governed by a strict ecological philosophy of life, and farms looking for diversification concerning ecology, business and on-farm living communities. However, the boundaries between these groups are fluid.

The anthroposophical social farms were already established in the fifties and sixties of the last century and focus on inclusion of humans with special needs into farming, food processing, and craft activities. They have the longest experience. Meanwhile many of the co-workers retired and the need for accommodation facilities suitable for elderly is recognised. A great part of the farm income is created by offering social services.

Table 1: Community supported farms in Finland offering residential accommodation

Type	Name, place, web site
Anthroposophical communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Myllylähde-yhteisö, <i>Hämeenkoski</i> • Rihun biodynaaminen tila, <i>Heinola</i>, www.phnet.fi/kylat/paistjarvi/kylatoiminta.htm • Sylvia-koti, <i>Lahti</i>, www.sylvia-koti.fi • Tapolan kyläyhteisö, <i>Orimattila</i>, www.tapola-camphill.net/
Communities with a strict eco-philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaijan Luomukylä, <i>Ähtäri</i>, www.gaija.org • Kangasalan Yhteiskylä, <i>Kangasala</i>, www.yhteiskyla.net • Keuruun ekokylä, <i>Keuruu</i>, www.keuruunekokyla.fi/
New on-farm living communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heinolan tila, <i>Haarajoki</i>, http://heinolantila.wordpress.com/ • Labbyn kartano, <i>Isnäs</i>, www.labby.fi, www.edesby.fi/ • Livonsaaren yhteisökylä, <i>Livonsaari</i>, http://www.yhteisokyla.net/ • Svarfvarsin luomutila, <i>Karja</i>, http://www.svarfvars.fi/fi/ • Yhteisökylä Kurjen tila, <i>Vesilahti</i>, http://kurjentila.fi/

Community supported farms with a strict ecological philosophy of life emerge since the nineties of the last century. They are more or less selective in respect of the community members and strive rather for ecological objectives e.g. permaculture and self sufficiency than for economic success or social services.

New on-farm communities appeared during the past ten years and are open for everybody independent from age and profession. They create additional income outside the farming activities. Target group are people which carry inside an imagination of a beautiful countryside, where farms, fields, animals, forests, and water bodies form a cultural landscape of a perfect organic wholeness. Several families have built their houses on the Livonsaari farm near the city of *Turku* and on the farm Kurjen tila near

the city of *Tampere*. If the Heinola farm close to the capital region could already offer a suitable simple log home, customers would immediately move in.

The realisation of the idea faces with many obstacles: municipality authorities consider the farm yard as part of an industrial production unit not suitable for housing. Change of use of agricultural buildings is extremely difficult. Public authorities are concerned about possible infrastructure investments like street lightening to be paid from public funds. Also the land-use plans do not allow the erection of additional accommodation buildings. Water, sewage, and electric power connection requires special efforts and high investments. Because of restricted funds, ecological construction solutions like renewable energy sources, rain water tank, and natural sewage treatment plant are difficult to realise.

However, the farm may create additional income by offering accommodation, janitorial and transport services, basic and other services to people, who want to live on the farm. Thus, the traditional target of community supported farms - processing and selling the farm products to a community of customers - is considerably extended. In the long run, the increasing number and the aging of the dwellers may create new working places for nursing services personnel, which in turn may recreate doing compensating work on the farm (Wietheger 2003). However, the idea of the Klostersee farm, that green care farming offers recuperation of overloaded nursing staff, is up to now not realised yet but an option for the future.

Discussion

Creating facilities for living on farm requires some convincing in respect of authorities as well as new technical solutions in renewable energy supply, water supply, waste processing and nutrient recycling. Living on farm for elderly requires new skills in both disciplines: agriculture and geriatric care. Industrial farming and food processing do not coincide with salutogenetic aims. Therefore living on farm is, like CSA, a domain of organic farms. Especially the combination of organic or bio-dynamic agriculture with its demand for a healthy soil and nature and an integrated social work is very effective and provides a positive impact on people, nature and landscape. Animal husbandry is essential for CSA and inclusive farming. As part of the ecosystem, they produce food, fibre, and fertilisers, are partners of humans in animal assisted therapy of green care enterprises, support human welfare and salutogenesis, and shape the landscape.

The considerable financial investments required to establish the facilities for living on farms call for new financial business models where competition and maximising the share holder value have to be replaced by co-operation and active partnership of producers and customers. The Darwinian evolution model that only the best survive is deconstructed by ecology scientists (Odum 1996). The maximum power principle of nature proves to be a co-operative network. The lion does not kill as much antelopes as he can, but as much as he needs. This law, also named the fourth law of thermodynamics, applies *mutatis mutandis* to community supported farms which are moving from egosystem to ecosystem awareness (Scharmer and Kaufer 2013).

The farm of the future is more than a bulk production unit. Production and processing of valuable and healthy food, including persons with special needs and elderly as co-workers, may open additional sources of income and working places. These farms consider elderly or disabled people not as being ill, but as real co-workers and partners with specific ranges of performance, able and willing to contribute to an added value of the society and the farm. Exploiting the specific agricultural work and

life-setting provides more and improved social welfare structure in rural locations where service coverage is traditionally weak. As a following emerge better labour opportunities fostering rural economic development.

It is obvious that this demanding issue needs specific education and skills. Therefore a curriculum for a new occupation called “Expert for inclusive farming and rural development” is subject of the Inclusive Farming project (INCLUFAR) within the Leonardo Lifelong Learning programme funding scheme of the European Union (www.inclufar.eu). This project is also an excellent example how to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and practice.

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