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New Solutions for Collective Action

LAND MANAGEMENT

THE FUTURE OF EUROPE'S **FOODS & LANDSCAPES**

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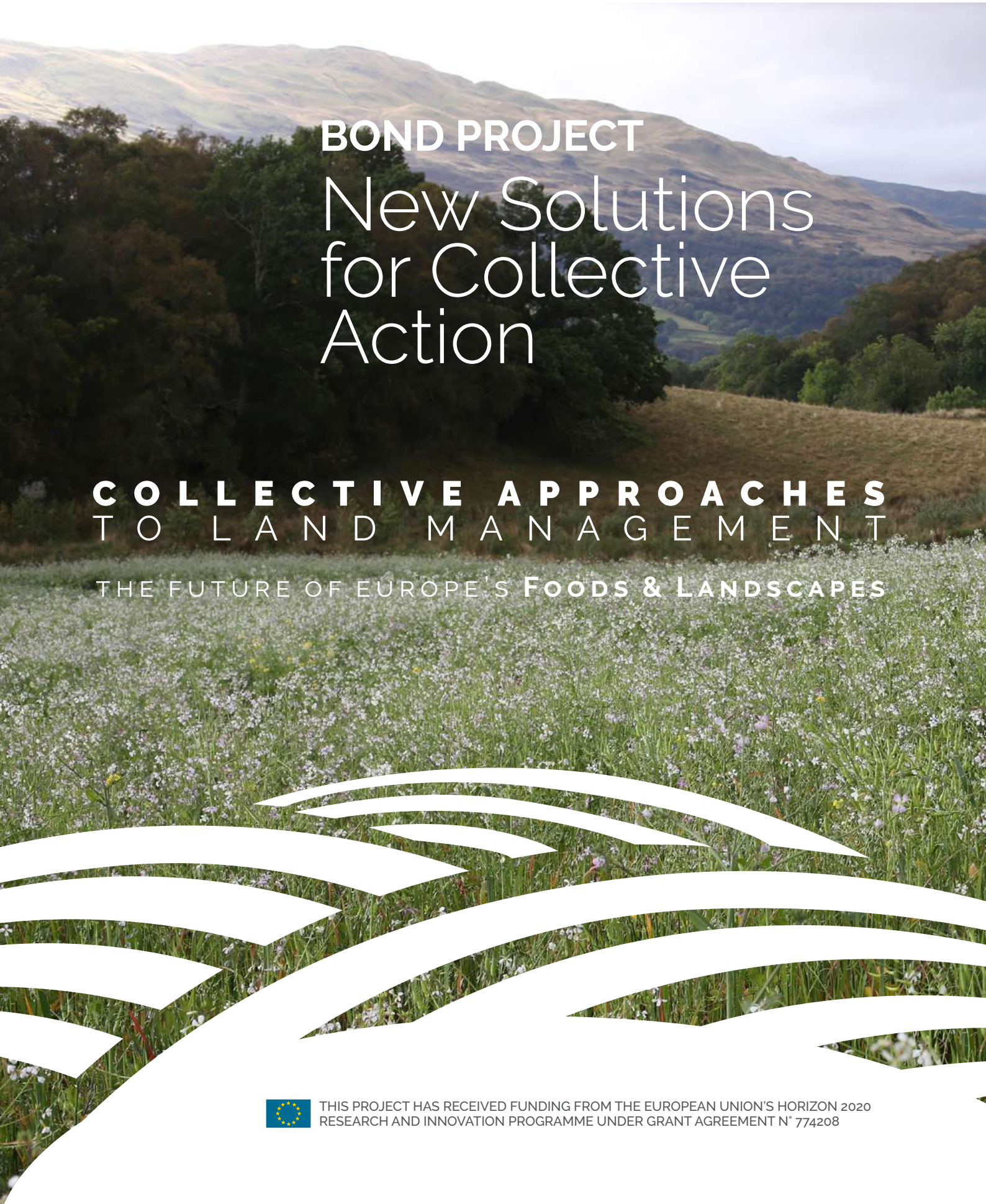

BOND PROJECT
New Solutions for Collective Action

COLLECTIVE APPROACHES TO LAND MANAGEMENT

THE FUTURE OF EUROPE'S **FOODS & LANDSCAPES**

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Executive Summary

In order to tackle the mounting environmental, social and economic challenges that humanity faces due to the impacts of climate change and other crises, agroecological and other sustainable good practices are needed to be put forward - and upscaled. To achieve this, empowering agriculture-focused organization in the form of collective action - organized and carried about by a group of people - may present a working alternative. This publication showcases a number of different forms of collective action with the aim to provide a better understanding of their specific contexts, operations, challenges and opportunities supported by the activities carried out within the frame of BOND project (Bringing Organisations and Network Development to higher levels in the Farming Sector in Europe). The report points out that networking, sharing of experiences, capacity building and education tailored to the needs of agricultural actors using participatory methods with a multi-stakeholder and interdisciplinary approach are essential to accelerate the transition to a more sustainable, equitable and environmentally-conscious agri-food system. Finally, the report also helps decision-makers in both countries by providing policy recommendations formulated by farmers and other related actors (researchers, members of civil society organisations, etc.) - addressing for instance regenerative agricultural practices, green public procurement and social economy - as means to promote the widespread usage of sustainable practices, measures and to create the enabling environment for the transition and to regenerate our food systems.

Introduction

Introduction

The land is the common source of wealth for the whole of humanity. Anyone who has land has access to energy, water, nourishment, shelter, healing, wisdom, ancestors and a grave.

Yet the land is more than a tool cupboard; although it gives, it dictates its terms, and its terms alter from place to place. So it is that agriculture begets human culture; and cultural diversity, like biological diversity, flowers in obedience to the conditions that the earth imposes. Land management must be rooted in the local, but we must think globally.

Land and its resources are increasingly contested. Six billion people compete to acquire land for a variety of conflicting uses: food, water, energy, timber, carbon sinks, housing, wildlife, recreation, investment. We all live together on a densely populated planet where we must balance the needs of feeding everyone of this generation and future generations enough nutritious food, while leaving room for wildlife at the same time as mitigating the effects of climate change.

A collective approach to the management of land is more important now than ever – we must think together about who owns it, how it is managed, who has access to it and how to protect and restore the land so it creates financial viability based on public goods.

A collective approach

Land management in Europe has evolved over centuries. In recent decades, conventional land management has involved contracts between an individual farmer and a state. An alternative way of managing land is a collective approach, which typically involves multiple stakeholders and can bring increased social and economic benefits. Collective approaches in which farmers, growers, local communities and authorities collaborate can function for the common good of society, biodiversity and the environment.

This report focuses on six different collective approaches to agriculture and land management systems, ranging from traditional to progressive methods. Each approach is illustrated with a case study and includes 'how to' and policy suggestions to help others who wish to embark upon similar schemes. The featured case studies are examples of how innovative farmers and growers across Europe are adapting to changing situations and are succeeding in nurturing the land. Importantly, although the case studies are in different countries and are operated on different scales and in different landscapes, they all foster a sense of collaboration between farmers and local communities. The case study examples describe how villagers in the Transylvanian mountains of Romania work together to raise livestock on common lands; a French land trust that helps newcomers to farming; Italy's biodistricts; small-scale dairy farmers in the Netherlands who have formed a group to protect their farms and way of life; how one Hungarian man's vision to plant a tree for every citizen in his country is becoming a reality; and the nascent Nature Recovery Network scheme in the UK.

The case studies aim to show that adopting a holistic view towards land management in Europe is essential to ensure food security and establish a climate-resistant environment with thriving biodiversity. Protecting ecosystems is firmly on the EU agenda, as evidenced by the publication of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.[1] The years ahead will involve addressing the main drivers of biodiversity loss, such as land-use change, pollution and climate change. Encouraging sustainable agriculture practices will help to address those and will bring added benefits including job creation, climate change resilience, help to restore populations of the pollinators and ensure soil health.

1) European Commission, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Published May 20, 2020.

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has taught us the importance of sustainability in land management and the benefits that can be brought to communities by local food networks with short food chains and access to green space for leisure. It has also shown us the importance of working together in a spirit of solidarity as a community to survive a crisis. Farmers and growers have shown remarkable resilience and ability to change rapidly in response to changing customer demands by working together. Unifying themes among those featured here include willingness to adapt and evolve to changing situations, an openness try new ideas, and confidence to collaborate and involve others, such as the local community and non-farming groups, such as schools.

The world is currently facing a climate and nature crisis, where sustainable land management has taken on a new level of importance. Every village, town, city and region must manage the land carefully to produce food, fuel and fibre, restore biodiversity, sequester carbon and connect people with nature to respond to the ecological emergency.

This great challenge requires collective action on a scale never before seen in history. These case studies provide valuable insights. We can learn and we can be inspired and together we can rise to the challenge.

Case studies

Case study 1: Romania – Managing the land as commons

Case studies

Case study 1: Romania – Managing the land as commons

Traditional hay pasture management on the village commons and cheesemaking in Alunișu, a village in the Transylvanian mountains of Romania are an example of a community approach towards common land management. Lars Veraart, co-founder of Provision Transylvania, a farm and learning centre for agroecology and nonviolence, is a new entrant farmer to the village. Lars explains how he works with the traditional land management systems due to their importance for preserving meadow diversity and the life of the village.

The long-standing traditions of common stewardship of larger pieces of land seen here can serve as an example for modern agroecological peasant farming practices.

The village of Alunișu (in Romanian) and Magyarókereke (in Hungarian) is situated in Transylvania, in north-west Romania. At 650 metres altitude, Alunișu has a typical continental mountain climate with cold winters, wet springtime, and warm and mostly dry summers. The grazing season for the animals starts at the end of April and lasts until the beginning of December.

As of 2020, Alunișu has around 100 inhabitants, of which one-third are ethnic Romanian and two-thirds are ethnic Hungarian (plus three foreign nationalities, including the author of this case study). In 1940, more than 750 people inhabited the village. During communist times, the number declined dramatically because many peasants were displaced to factories in the cities. By the end of this era (December 1989), a little over 200 villagers were left.

Ever since that moment, the village has seen a steady decline in population, mainly caused by young people leaving (now voluntarily) for the city or going abroad. The number of animals has also been in decline. In 1985 there were more than 200 cows, 100 goats, 350 sheep and 180 pigs. At present the peasants of Alunișu together own approximately 15 cows, 10 goats, 50 sheep and 25 pigs.

The agricultural lands around the village (750 hectares) are still partially farmed by the local peasants and privately owned by them. A few hundred hectares of fields around the village (the exact amount is unknown and is increasing yearly) has been bought for use by a large sheep farm, which rears thousands of sheep for meat to export to the Middle East.

Some of the land around the village is used as commons. The commons are defined as lands that rural communities possess and use collectively in accordance with community-derived norms.[2] Around 10% of Romania's utilised agricultural area is used as commons. Rather than buying or leasing their own grazing land, small groups of farmers and peasants send their livestock to graze together on these lands.

These groups contribute to the maintenance and financial needs of the commons in exchange for access to the land for their animals. Without this access to the commons it would be impossible for them to keep animals because of the costs of owning or renting enough land to own privately as individuals.

The lands used as village commons (around 60 hectares) form the foothills of the Horaita mountain (1,078 m), and are not easily accessible for cultivation by mechanical equipment, so are used for grazing animals owned by the local peasants. Most of the common grazing lands are privately owned by many

2) Sutcliffe, L. M. E., Paulini, I., Jones, G., Marggraf, R., & Page, N. Pastoral commons use in Romania and the role of the Common Agricultural Policy. International Journal of the Commons, 7, 58–72 (2013).

different households and an agreement is made to use the lands as the commons of the village. In Alunișu, this agreement is made without any official association or legal entity, but orally between people who live in the village. The agreement is re-evaluated annually during a yearly in-person meeting. Other villages in the region choose legally established entities to manage the common lands.

The common lands in Alunişu over the past 100 years

Before the communist regime, the common lands were partly used for common grazing and partly for cultivation of wheat. During the communist regime, forced collectivisation of lands and animals undermined the autonomous use of the common lands.

Collectivisation started in Alunișu in the early 1960s. Some farmers joined willingly, while others were later forced into it. The situation caused mistrust in governance as well as between community members. This same mistrust seems to still complicate many potential forms of cooperation – such as establishing a legal entity dedicated to the preservation of the common lands.

From 1990 until 2016 a sheep farmer from a nearby village rented the common lands from the community for his own herd as well as the herd of sheep from the villagers (see below how this worked and still works today). Another shepherd was hired by the villagers to herd the cows.

Every morning at sunrise, the shepherd would walk through the village and each peasant would release their cow or cows (maximum four per household). The milking was done beforehand. The shepherd would walk the common lands until sunset, when he would bring them back with their stomachs and udders full. The cows would find their own barns, in the back of each peasant's house, be milked and spend the night inside. This would start on April 24 (St George's Day in Romania) and last through to December 6 (St

Traditional pasture

Nicolas's Day), or stop sooner in years when the snow arrived early.

This system worked until the number of cows declined to such an extent that the few peasants who still kept a family cow could not afford the price of a shepherd for the whole summer. In Alunișu this moment arrived in 2016.

In 2020, the 15 cows that remain are penned in on a part of the common lands by a simple electric fence. The owners take their cow in the morning and come get her in the evening. The rest of the common lands are used by a small-scale sheep farmer who lives in a village higher up in the mountains and takes his herd of sheep to Alunișu around April 24.

The sheep farmer stays with his flock until the winter comes. He pays around 900 euros in rent to the community for the use of the common lands. Half of the payment is made as a donation to the church (to avoid the complicated work of paying each private owner of the different pieces of land separately) and half is paid in labour for pasture maintenance. Besides caring for his own sheep, he also takes care of the sheep and goats of the peasants of Alunișu. For this work he is paid around 7.5 euros per animal per season (seven months). He returns 40 litres of milk from each animal that he milks. The remaining milk is for him.

So, for example, if a family has six sheep that spend the summer with him, he is paid (6 x 7.5 euros) 45 euros and the family receives (6 x 40 litres) 240 litres of milk. This milk is received in quantities of 50–100 litres at a time and used by the families for cheese making. At the moment the shepherd delivers the milk and the family provides him with meals for that day.

This method of giving and receiving weaves old traditions together with new circumstances and keeps the whole community functioning. Without access to the common lands, local peasants would not be able to keep their family cow, sheep or goats. The structure of their lives, and the whole subsistence lifestyle of the community, would perish.

Most of the sheep's milk is used for cheese. The shepherd makes cheese every day at the sheepfold and sells it locally. The milk that the villagers receive is used for their own consumption. The local village priest has also become a cheesemaker – he buys cows' milk from the villagers and sheep's milk from the shepherd and makes and sells his own cheese. He started cheesemaking when he saw that the milk collection truck had stopped visiting Alunișu.

The milk collection stopped because the relatively small village was economically unviable for the milk cooperative (now owned by FrieslandCampina, a multinational dairy company headquartered in the Netherlands). With that change, the villagers saw an important part of their daily income disappear. They would have been forced to sell their cows if the priest had not intervened and started buying the milk. For now, there exists a fragile, though functioning, balance between animals, land and people.

The future

Common lands are under pressure, but not only in Alunișu. Land consolidation, the large scale purchase of land by large companies, a decline in the number of peasant farmers and unequal distribution of subsidies from the European Common Agricultural Policy are some of the reasons why.

The existence of common lands is crucial for the continuation of subsistence farming. The re-emergence of lands as commons could help established farmers and new entrants to manage small numbers of animals while maintaining access to enough grazing land. This model could make a big difference in the viability of many small-scale agroecological farms.

Besides the many direct advantages that common lands give to small farmers, the community at large is profiting through natural and cultural enrichment. Common grazing lands harbour many more species of plants and animals than the monoculture pastures of industrialised farms and the increased social bonds contribute to a more resilient local community.

'How to' tips:

- Rethink and be flexible with the concept of the commons. Cooperatives and associations, official and non-official, can help to manage grazing land together. Several small farmers can pool together, divide labour and apply for subsidies with greater ease.
- 'Non-farming citizens' and new entrants in farming are likely to be interested in joining a project.
- Think of 'the village concept'. The African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child" can be translated into: "it takes a village to have a herd".
- Keep an eye on European development funds.
- Be well informed about the farming dynamics in your area so that you can avoid unexpected disappointments or don't miss surprising possibilities.

Village shepherds (photo credit Lars Veraart).

Figure 5 Sheeps cheese photo credit Lars Veraart

Policy recommendations:

- Value and protect the remaining common land and recreate land commons where they have been lost.
- More subsidies for small farmers from the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- Local policy: transparency for young farmers and new entrants. National policy should support local consultants and short food chains ('from farm to fork').
- Small agroecological farmers must be recognised as essential contributors to a new sustainable agricultural model.

Case studies

Case Study 2: Scotland - Collective action for access to land

Case Study 2: Scotland - Collective action for access to land

Newcomers to farming usually find the greatest challenge is to find a suitable plot of land. Roz Corbett is an aspiring new entrant farmer who was inspired by France's Terre de Liens organisation that assists peasant farmers and is working with the Scottish Farmland Trust and a network of farmland trust across Europe to help new entrants farms access and manage land.

Sheeps' cheese (photo credit Lars Veraart).

In Europe, a small but significant number of people entering the farming profession come from non-farming families.[3] Traditionally, new farmers are the children of existing farmers who take over their family businesses, working the land owned by their parents and grandparents. Yet research suggests[4] an increasing number of newcomers are turning to farming as a way of life and bringing with them an approach to land management which combines a modern awareness about the environmental crisis and sustainable food production.

In particular, some of these newcomers are setting up small-scale organic farms where supply chains are shorter – to a local farmers' market for example, rather than to a large supermarket chain.

One of the most significant challenges faced by newcomers to farming in Europe is finding – and gaining access to – suitable land on which to farm. Other major problems include learning how to establish and manage a farm, and then finding a market at which sell produce.

So how might new farmers work together to create opportunities to access and manage land collectively?

Initiatives have been established in Europe to help newcomers to the farming profession. In France, one of the pioneering organisations is Terre de Liens (TdL), which was set up in 2003 to provide practical support to small-scale or peasant organic farmers.

3) European Access to Land network. Europe´s new farmers: Innovative ways to enter farming and access land (2018). Available at: www.accesstoland.eu
4) Monllor i Rico, N. & Fuller, A. M. Newcomers to farming: towards a new rurality in Europe. Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica 62, 531–551 (2016).

Terre de Liens assists its farmers with access to land by purchasing and leasing land to farmers on long-term contracts to be farmed ecologically in perpetuity on long term leases. A collective approach to land management across the contiguous farmland plots is key. Each of the farms operates individually but as part of a larger plan to deliver ecosystem services and grow food ecologically.

Their farmland is run with the cooperation and collaboration of local authorities and citizens through events such as workshops and farm tours, and by supplying fresh produce to local farm shops and markets.

Since it was set up, Terre de Liens has supported, or continues to support, around 200 farmers on 150 farms and has preserved 3,200 hectares of farmland across France. It does vital work because the future for farming is a major concern in France, where, every year around 30,000 farmers retire, yet only around 13,000 new famers enter the profession.[5] What is more, 72% of new farmers helped by Terre de Liens have not come from a background in family farming – although all have a keen interest in a farming career.

Collective action creating networks of land trusts across Europe

Roz Corbett is an aspiring farmer who was inspired by Terre de Liens in the early days of developing the Scottish Farmland Trust. “Lots of people want to start farming,” syas Roz, who adds “I live in Glasgow where there is a huge market for local food with extremely limited access to land, which is very expensive. With access to land I could have a beautiful farm that could employ lots of people train other new farmers, provide good food and look after the environment. I’m not interested in owning land. I just want to look after it nicely.”

Scotland has one of the most concentrated land ownership patterns in Europe, making it very hard to find land as a new entrant. Any land that comes up for sale is expensive and is commonly sold to existing farms and not put into the public market. Housing is also really hard to achieve. Tenancy arrangements are also poor.

Farmland trusts are a solution to both of these problems, because they enable new farmers to access whatever size land they need on a very long-term lease.

Seed sharing workshop (photo credit Clem Sandison)

5) https://www.accesstoland.eu/IMG/pdf/a2l_newentrants_handbook.pdf

The ownership of the land in a trust supports broader scale habitat management across farms and facilitates collective supply chains. Because land managers know the land will be protected for future generations to the same ethos, it enables them to think longer term and plant trees or restore soils and meadows.

In 2016 member of the Scottish Farmland Trust with others from Czech, Germany, Greece visited for a week-long programme of visits to the staff and tenants of Terre de Liens to share experiences and also learn other support that businesses need. When Veronique Rioufol from Terre de Liens visited Scotland for an event in parliament, she met with the Scottish Land Commission to inspire them to set up a programme of farm starts and discuss regulations of the land market.

Roz says, "These European-wide access to land networks will create a revolution in land ownership and management by creating land trusts in every region!"

Scottish Farmland

'How to' tips:

- Building networks is the best way to find the support you need to start farming.
- Entry into a farming career may be through formal training at college or progressive entry (learning by doing).
- Identifying and cultivating connections with the local community can help to secure suitable land for a farmland trust.
- Think about how "the whole can be more than the sum of its parts".

Policy recommendations:

- National governments and the EU should support finance for Land Trusts through the rural development budget and also as a means of achieving more environmentally sustainable land management
- The EU should provide start-up capital grants for new entrant farmers
- Grant support should reflect changes to the farming community by providing support to those that may not be supported by traditional grants including older farmers (over the age of 40) or support for niche farming and innovative land management models like agroecology and agroforestry.
- Social investment tax relief really helps land trusts to establish.

Scottish sheep

Case studies

Case study 3: Italy – Collective action for regional regeneration

Case study 3: Italy – Collective action for regional regeneration

Italy's biodistricts are collective actions that takes place on a regional level, bringing together land management, organic food production, the local community, cultural heritage and traditional crafts. Andrea Ferrante is one of the founders of Italy's biodistrict movement. He explains how the co-operation between local authorities, farmers, food markets and tourism supports biodiversity, local farmer income, promotes cultural heritage and local identity and is working to encourage young people to take up a career in organic, small-scale agriculture.

Biodistricts foster collaboration between farmers, local residents, tourism operators, local authorities and other cultural and historical institutes and organisations to revitalise whole regions on an economic, social and environmental level.

Italy has 30 biodistricts: the first – Biodistrict del Cilento – was established in 2004 (though it was not formally recognised until 2009); the most recent – Biodistrict Maremma Etrusca e Monti della Tolfa – was set up this year (2020). Biodistricts have been set up across Italy and beyond – the International Network of Eco-Regions, which was set up in 2014, includes Portugal, France, Austria, Switzerland and Spain.

Biodistretto della Via Amerina e delle Forre is an association based on membership, which comprises 13 municipalities of the Province of Viterbo and the local organic farmers' association (50km north of Rome), with a population of approximately 70,000 inhabitants, it is a collaboration of more than 300 active organic farms.

The main aim of the association is to promote sustainable development at territorial level with an agroecological approach, which includes sustainable tourism, the use of renewable energy, environmental protection measures, sustainable waste management, and promoting the circular economy.

The biodistretto also aims to support the local community to shift to a zero emissions model of production. The biodistretto promotes the use of renewable energy and is the key actor at local level to create the conditions to allow the realisation of the project to be successful through the involvement of local public authorities, civil society and the private sector.

Azienda Lucciano (photo credit Andrea Ferrante)

Amerina (photo credit Andrea Ferrante)

Sustainable innovation

I live in Viterbo and was one of the co-founders of the Biodistrict della Via Amerina e delle Forre in Viterbo, central Italy, in 2011.

I'm part of an agri-social cooperative that runs a four-hectare organic vegetable farm in Tuscania and a seven-hectare cereal and pasture farm in Civita Castellana that produces mainly organic vegetables for the local markets in Viterbo province and Rome, which is around 50km (30 miles) to the south. For as long as I can remember, our region – which has around 70,000 inhabitants living in a network of old villages or small farms – has had an organic movement.

In our biodistrict, the farmers and producers make and sell diverse products: wine, olive oil, cheeses such as mozzarella and sheep's cheese, pork products and saffron. We have an agrotourism business and an international agroecology school called Schola Campesina.

Many of the products from our area are sold in the main markets in Rome or smaller local markets. During the current coronavirus pandemic, people's habits have changed. Instead of eating at restaurants and friends' houses, everyone has been eating at home for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Families have wanted to buy good quality food and so farmers have set up direct selling schemes to local families. This kind of adaptation is a strength of our biodistrict's small-scale farmers – we are not linked to one particular market and so we can easily adapt to different situations.

The small farmers and producers who live in Biodistrict della Via Amerina e delle Forre are innovators. I call them innovators because they have adapted their traditional farming methods to the demands of the modern world and yet remain focused on sustainability. The farmers have strong social and cultural principles, and work together with the local community. Part of the ethos behind the biodistrict movement is to go beyond the 'single farm'. As a cooperative, we have learned that we are more effective working as a group of farms that includes the entire community. We need farmers and people from other professions to work together towards a sustainable model of food production and distribution.

Being part of a biodistrict can also help to protect the territory from threats such as land-use change or pollution. For example, there are several former quarries within our territory, which some garbage companies want to fill with waste. We have a high number of organic farms in our region and we worry that filling those quarries with garbage would risk polluting groundwater supplies and that, in turn, could harm local biodiversity and farmland. Instead, we would prefer sustainable waste management and recycling of different fractions of waste – organic, plastic, aluminium, glass and paper, for instance – and want to prevent unsustainable management of the quarries.

A nutty problem

Our region is one of Italy's main hazelnut growing areas. Hazelnut farms used to be small scale here but since the 1970s, they have been increasing in size. One of the biggest socio-economic and environmental challenges we are facing in our biodistrict is from intensive hazelnut plantations. In 2012, we saw the arrival of large farms that grow nuts for the multinational confectionary firm Ferrero, which produces Nutella.

Some organic farms in our biodistrict are close to monoculture hazelnut crops and those farmers are concerned that pesticides used to cultivate those hazelnuts may have devastating effects on essential insects and pollinators. Reduced biodiversity could have a negative impact on local organic farmers who rely on nature-based methods of pest control. The farmers in our biodistrict are working with the local authority to ensure that the use of pesticides is in line with EU Directives. By working together as a group of farmers we are stronger and can safeguard the health of the environment and local communities.

Implementing an agroecological approach will lead to better protection of local biodiversity and a sensible reduction of greenhouse gasses.

Castel sant Elia- (photo credit Andrea Ferrante)

Keeping old traditions alive

Another important role of biodistricts is to improve education in schools to help children understand the territory and the value of organic farming in the framework of sustainability. Twenty years ago, Italy's organic farmers were ridiculed for their alternative way of life, but now we are seen as a central part of society.

Organic farmers are recognised by the community and we are proud to encourage a new generation of farmers to the profession. Younger people have the courage to adopt an agroecological approach and to care for the environment. The Biodistrict della Via Amerina e delle Forre is an experienced social cooperative and helps newcomers to become established by providing advice on farming techniques and finding land.

Finding land on which to farm can be difficult because small-scale organic farmers must compete with big companies, who are investing in large farms and making the cost of land increase. Hazelnut farms are changing the social structure of local communities by assimilating the numerous small farms that would have been common 20 years ago.

Future prospects

Our biodistrict is a non-profit legal organisation that includes farmers, cultural institutes, artisanal potters, and scientists from Università della Tuscia of Viterbo. Our future plans will continue our work on local food policy, by addressing four main areas of work:

1. Adopt sustainable, agroecological practices covering 50% of our total arable land. Currently around 23% of the total amount of arable land in the biodistrict (the territory of the 13 municipalities) has been converted to organic or agroecological practices.
2. Produce zero waste in all the villages.
3. Promote forms of renewable energy.
4. Encourage eco-tourism by promoting the path of the Via Amerina, establish a local network of museums, and open a small hotel and restaurants.

As an example of our work, our cooperative rented a farm from a retired farmer who didn't want to sell his land. The farmer is supporting the cooperative with his knowledge and wisdom, which means that his practices will continue through future generations – this is exactly the sort of knowledge transfer that is typical of being part of a biodistrict. We want to ensure that rural towns and villages are attractive places to live where our residents can enjoy a high quality of life and young people can find employment.

Within the next few years, the cooperative will begin farming an area of land in Civita Castellana that we rented from the Church. We plan to use the land for educational activities and eventually want to grow and sell artichokes. The local variety of artichoke is called 'carciofo di Orte' – Orte is a village along the river Tevere, to the north of the biodistrict. Carciofo di Orte artichokes are a regional speciality and are recognised by the Lazio region through genomics characterisation. We are planning to apply for Geographical Indication (GI) status, which will add value to the crops. GI status will strengthen the network of local farmers involved in the programme to resurrect this old variety that is a valued link to the cultural heritage of our community.

We hope we will inspire farmers across Europe to create their own collectives by working together to go beyond their fantastic individuality. The dynamics promoted by the work of this and the many other biodistricts in Italy is an example of a new approach to address food systems and nutrition in a holistic way and to show that agroecology is the way forward from a local to a global scale.

'How to' tips:

- Go beyond just food production to include other sectors, such as tourism and crafts.
- Take a holistic approach and keep an open mind to working with everyone.
- Each region needs a special focus or speciality based on the local environment and its natural and cultural diversity.
- Create a farmers association so that farmers can work together to negotiate with the municipalities.

Policy recommendations:

- National level government should provide financial support to both farmers associations and the municipalities for the regional territorial initiatives in the context of a national plan .
- European regional development funding should support the bio-district concept.
- The creation of biodistricts should be a part of the green economic recovery programmes from Covid-19 as a way to promote sustainable economic growth.
- The Biodistrict concept could link with sustainable transportation such as renewed investment in trains.
- Land trusts should be incorporated into the biodistrict model to provide access to land for new entrants in combination with laws to limit the purchase of land by companies located abroad.

Azienda Lucciano

Case studies

Case study 4: UK - Nature Recovery Networks collaboration from the local to the European level to restore biodiversity

Case study 4: UK - Nature Recovery Networks collaboration from the local to the European level to restore biodiversity

The UK is part of a wider European plan to create a network of biodiversity corridors by connecting collaborative land management initiatives to reinstate nature across the landscape. Sue Young, from The Wildlife Trusts, a UK charity, explains how a nationwide nature network could be rolled out across the UK. Ines Cavill works on the local level with farmers and land mangers across the Char Valley in Dorset in the south of England in a community led project called 'Lifelines', which connects individual areas or land (no matter what size) together as part of this ambitious European land management effort.

Biodiversity crisis

Ecosystem recovery at the local and landscape levels is essential. Global biodiversity loss is a crisis and is taking place at a rate unprecedented in human history, according to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, an intergovernmental body. The widespread loss of animals, birds, insects and plants spans many types of habitat and covers terrestrial and aquatic environments: a report by the WWF[6] in 2018 found that global populations of wildlife (fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles) had declined by an average of 60% between 1970 and 2014. The losses have been accelerated by human activities such as deforestation, pollution and land-use change – some of the destructive activities have been due to agriculture and food production.[7]

A healthy ecosystem is one that supports a rich number of different animal and plant species. This biodiversity is important for many reasons, including soil health, carbon storage, pollination and plants for new medicines – not to mention human health and wellbeing. The protection and restoration of wildlife

6) WWF. 2018. Living Planet Report - 2018: Aiming Higher. Grooten, M. and Almond, R.E.A.(Eds). WWF, Gland, Switzerland.
7) Rands, M. R. W. et al. Biodiversity conservation: challenges beyond 2010. Science 329, 1298–1303 (2010). Doi: 10.1126/science.1189138

and ecosystems is urgent but complicated by the necessary inclusion of other factors such as farming, and energy generation. As a result, governments, non-governmental organisations, farmers and academics are exploring the most effective ways to use land to assist the recovery of nature.

The European Commission's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030[8] discusses a visionary, long-term plan to restore biodiversity. A key part of the EC's proposal involves mitigating the loss of nature – and avoiding species extinction – by widening the network of protected areas and developing an EU Nature Restoration Plan.

Creating conservation areas such as national parks is one (traditional) way to help protect species. Several initiatives promote connected approaches to conservation, such as trans-boundary conservation, and those that incorporate economic benefits are becoming increasingly important.[9]

UK policy in the environmental Land Management Schemes

In the UK, the is working on a scheme to inspire collective action to establish Nature Recovery Networks as part of its new Environmental Land Management Schemes and an ambitious '25 Year Environmental Plan'[10] that aligns with the pan-European plan to encourage the return of nature.

There are plans in *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*[11] to reverse the unintentional loss of nature on land, in freshwater and marine environments. Within its proposal, the UK government's specific strategies include planting 11 million trees and establishing a Nature Recovery Network, the latter of which is intended to "protect and restore wildlife and provide opportunities to re-introduce species that we have lost from our countryside".

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Agricultural practices are essential to achieving this strategy. Land-use change for farming has been a major driver of biodiversity loss. Subsidies need to support agroecological farming and agroforestry to aid species recovery by improving soil health and incorporating wildlife margins and hedgerows to encourage wildflowers and scrub that are beneficial to insects, birds and other wildlife.

In addition, a Nature Recovery Network will help the UK to meet UN Sustainable Development Goal 15: "Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss".

To achieve its wide-ranging aims, the UK government will create 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat to connect existing protected areas across different landscapes such as woodland, coastal regions, peatland, grassland and scrub. This has the added benefit of giving us more spaces to enjoy watching wildlife and spending time in nature.

Creating a network for nature

Organisations like The Wildlife Trusts are helping the UK government develop its plans.

Sue Young explains, "Several Wildlife Trust branches are now working to develop Nature Recovery Network maps for their area. We propose that all locally mapped Nature Recovery Networks should join

8) European Commission, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 Bringing nature back into our lives. EC: Brussels (2020).
9) Rands, M. R. W. et al. Biodiversity conservation: challenges beyond 2010. Science 329, 1298–1303 (2010). Doi: 10.1126/science.1189138
10) United Kingdom Government Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Policy paper 10 March 2020: Nature and conservation covenants (parts 6 and 7). Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environment-bill-2020/10-march-2020-nature-and-conservation-covenants-parts-6-and-7 [accessed June 16, 2020].
11) UK government. A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018).

up to form a national Nature Recovery Network map. The ideal would be for Nature Recovery Networks to span urban and rural regions and connect up habits for wildlife, particularly for species that rely on the farmed environment.

The impact will much greater for wildlife if farmers work together. For example, restoring a small area of isolated, species-rich neutral grassland will have a biodiversity benefit. However, by selecting an area that provides a functional connection, or stepping-stone, for dispersal will have considerably greater benefits than by choosing an isolated area. The Nature Recovery Network therefore provides an opportunity to guide the application of public money to habitat creation or network enhancement possibilities. For example, payments should aim to create healthy soils, and strong, abundant populations of pollinators everywhere."

Bringing the networks to a local level

Residents of Char Valley in Dorset have been working at a village level to implement this UK strategy of restoring nature by collective action amongst local farmers, villagers and the parish council. After declaring a climate emergency, the local council started a village level project called 'Lifelines', launched to promote wildlife corridors in the Char Valley and surrounding areas. It encourages farmers and landowners to commit to steps such as reducing pesticides and herbicides, planting hedgerows or trees, creating wildlife habitat and field margins full of seeds for the birds.

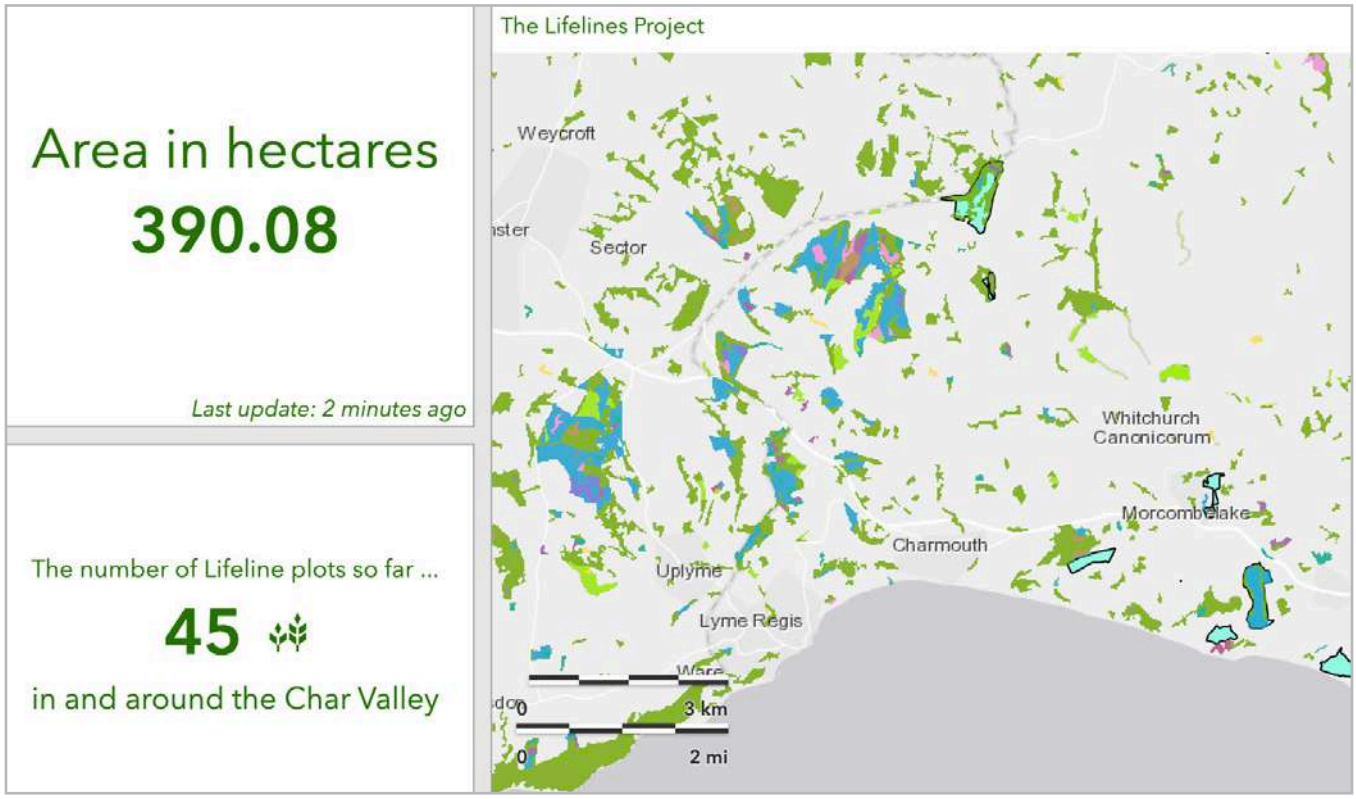
Ines Cavill, local resident and smallholder says "Many of the young people is this parish joined the youth climate strikes, taking the train from the villages to the local city of Exeter demanding that adults take action to reverse the climate crisis for their generation. As adults we were inspired by their passion and declared a Climate Emergency in the parish. This is a community-based voluntary approach, but it works to inspire and motivate people. As they see the map filling up with green, they realise that their part of the world can be a part of something much bigger and very exciting!"

She explains, "the UK agriculture department will be paying farmers for restoring biodiversity by paying for farm subsidies to encourage farmers to recover ecosystems across landscapes. The project goes further than farmers to encourage a joined-up approach between farmers and local residents, who can create habitats in their back gardens."

The project is being coordinated by a small team of local residents who want to strengthen the health and resilience of wildlife and soil in the area by encouraging the creation of pesticide-free corridors. They hope to involve as many residents as possible – whether they have an allotment, a small garden, a farm or a large estate. The project has at its heart an interactive map that highlights in bright green areas of land where chemical pesticides (insecticides, herbicides and fungicides) are not being used. Local residents who are willing to commit to managing their plot without pesticides are invited to join the scheme. Farmers who are not organic can join the scheme by including parts of their land, such as field margins, hedges or woodlands, where no pesticides are used.

Property owners are invited to 'subscribe' to the project by undertaking to manage a delineated area to the benefit of wildlife by avoiding the use of pesticides and in managing the land in a way that would allow wildlife to utilise sunlight, cover, nutrients and water where not otherwise used. Once an owner has volunteered, then this land is added to the map as a green area on the Lifelines map.

Local people who are part of the project are encouraged to spend time at local farms and woodlands, learning land-based skills and connecting with nature.



Char Valley Nature Recovery Network Map (credit Lifeline Project)

A national legal framework to support community efforts

Despite wide pubic support, the establishment of a UK Nature Recovery Network will not be easy. The broad aims set out in A Green Future are being taken up from the grassroots and are welcomed by UK environmental charities including The Wildlife Trusts[12] and Wildlife and Countryside Link[13] but there are calls for the vision to become legally binding.

The Wildlife and Countryside Link is a coalition of 52 environmental and wildlife organisations in England that has been working with the government to advise on an Environment Bill. In its 2019 report, *The 25 Year Environment Plan: One year on*,[14] the Wildlife and Countryside Link has raised concerns about whether sufficient funding and the necessary legal underpinning will be in place soon enough to ensure the protection of species and habitats.

The coalition suggests that to be successful in its aim to establish a Nature Recovery Network, the UK government needs to work quickly to build local action while establishing a clear strategy at the centre of the network. It urges the government to create a law through the Environment Bill to help ensure the measures are implemented as effectively as they can be for future generations.

'How to' tips:

- A state or government should be prepared to work across departments and even country boundaries to achieve goals to protect nature.
- Strategies for nature should work at a local level upwards and involve a wide range of people – everyone can get involved.

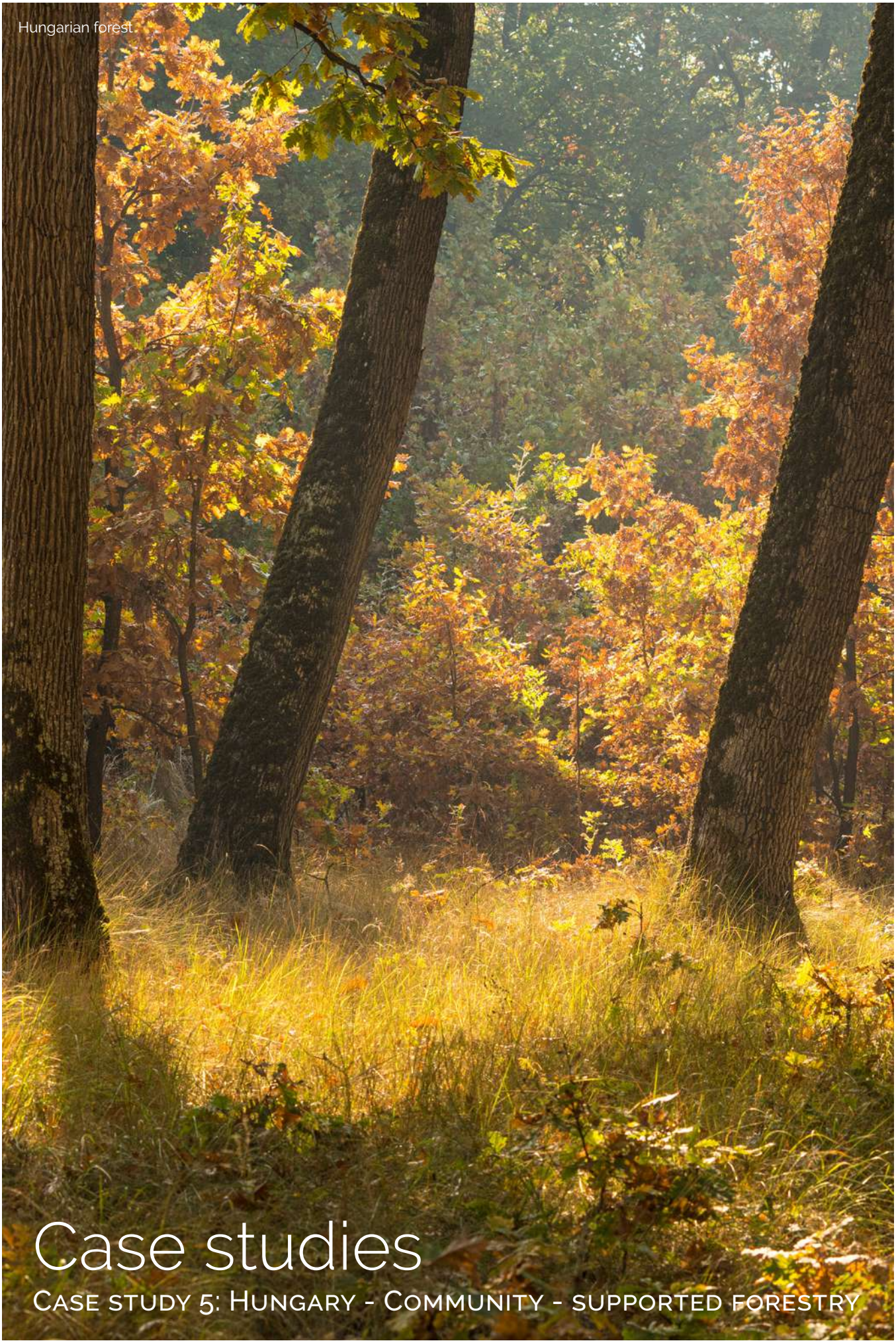
12) https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/nature-recovery-network
13) https://www.wcl.org.uk
14) Wildlife and Countryside Link. The 25 Year Environment Plan: One year on (2019).

- Set up a strategy that has clear spatial and temporal goals.
- Learn from the mistakes of past projects.

Policy recommendations:

- Targets to restore nature must be legally binding.
- Implement repercussions for failure to achieve measurable targets.
- Set up infrastructure to collect, manage and interpret environmental data.

Local residents in the Char Valley enjoying the woodland (photo credit Kit Vaughan)



Hungarian forest

Case studies

Case study 5: Hungary - Community - supported forestry

Case study 5: Hungary - Community - supported forestry

Laura Balázs is a volunteer at Hungary's 10 Million Trees foundation. Here, she explains how the project started, the key part played by local communities in planting trees and the foundation's plans to establish ecologically diverse forests.

Why the name 10 Million Trees? It is very simple – Hungary has roughly 10 million inhabitants and we would like every citizen to plant at least one tree. Our goal is to plant trees in a way that helps to preserve biodiversity and contribute to climate protection. We are also building the largest eco-conscious, non-political, non-partisan, non-profit nationwide community in Hungary to mobilise all those living in our country to mitigate climate change and other environmental problems.

The organisational structure

The establishment of our foundation is unusual because it was not a planned process. The movement – and the resulting community and registered foundation – was a spontaneous response to a Facebook post written in July 2019 by Iván András Bojár, an art historian, journalist and editor.

In his post, Bojár asked his fellow citizens to help him plant 10 million trees to help mitigate climate change. Within days, thousands of people had joined the initiative, which now has more than 35,000 Facebook followers. The 10 Million Trees Foundation[15] currently has around 130 local groups and 25,000 volunteers.

The key to running 10 Million Trees is regular communication between volunteers. Each local group has a Facebook page and manages tasks at a local level. They also have a representative who is in regular contact with the central organisational team.

The central organisational team has administration staff and – crucially – a board of experts that includes Réka Aszalós, forest ecologist at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA); Balázs Bozzay, a forest technician; and Balázs Zsolnai, a horticultural expert.

The local group representatives regularly share practical tips, such as how to contact local government and businesses or how to raise funds. A shared online space is used to store all the important documents – logos, pictures, spreadsheets and contact lists – and is accessible to all the representatives. Around 70% of representatives are women (mostly in their thirties and forties) and most of our Facebook followers and local group members also fall into this category.

From the beginning, everybody has been working for the foundation on an unpaid, voluntary basis. We are trying to become a professional organisation so it seems inevitable that we will in future provide payment to a few staff members. Funding for the project is from local businesses, large companies and private donations.

15) https://10milliofa.hu/

Ways to strengthen our community

Our strength lies in our community. We aim to find different ways to involve our volunteers and to provide education on important environmental issues.

Local groups plan community tree planting events, which can be bonding experiences. “It was the first time that the inhabitants of our village came together to discuss a local issue,” said the representative of Bogád, a village in the south of Hungary, after a planting session. Local groups have devised innovative ideas to further help local facilities: one group in Budapest started an edible forest–garden project at a homeless shelter; the group in Nagykanizsa has planted trees in a dogs’ shelter and at the Temporary Home for Families Institution.

We consider tree planting to be a joyous community event that should be celebrated. Last year we introduced a ‘day of life’, one week after All Saints’ Day. On our ‘day of life’, thousands of people gathered in small groups all around the country to plant trees and hold picnics and other community events. Residents in the village of Szilaspogony, which has a predominantly Roma population, planted as many trees as the number of inhabitants in their village.

To celebrate Earth Day on April 22 – which this year (2020) marked the 50th anniversary of the annual global event – we extended our tree-planting event to last one week. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic meant that we did not hold large gatherings but instead launched our own television channel. We invited scientists, musicians, journalists and other public figures to engage in lively discussions about planetary health and our desired future. During our Earth Week we held a live broadcast every afternoon. Many people enjoyed watching the online discussions so we decided to continue the programme. Now, every Tuesday

10 million trees community volunteers (photo credit Laura Balázs)

we broadcast a gardening programme to discuss issues related to planting trees. Topics have included: how to manage water supplies; the greening of Budapest; and our 'edible garden for the homeless' project.

We collaborate with other tree-planting organisations to discuss ways to strengthen our lobbying power or share resources and volunteer labour power. For example, if one organisation were to acquire land but did not have enough volunteers to carry out plantings, other organisations would assist. Plans were drawn up this spring for joint plantings with Hungarian branches of international organisations including Plant-for-the-Planet, a reforestation initiative and foundation headquartered in Germany, and the Jane Goodall Institute, a conservation organisation headquartered in the United States, but were postponed because of the pandemic. We also started to develop strong ties with the Hungarian Forestry Services and the Hungarian Gardening Society.

The right species at the right place, at the right time, with the right aftercare

When we plan tree planting in a public place, the first step taken by our volunteers is to gather information about possible locations. They check the underlying utility system using maps that show gas and water pipes. Then they contact the local authorities to obtain permission to plant the trees and the city gardener or architect about suitable tree species and the size requirements – many city authorities require trees to be a certain size.

Before planting trees in the grounds of schools or social institutions, local groups contact the appropriate authority to obtain permission. They also work closely with local experts such as gardeners or horticulturists. Local experts often offer free workshops to teach our volunteers planting techniques.

Hungarian trees

Our panel of three experts put together a comprehensive 36-page tree-planting guide to help the volunteers in each group. The guide promotes planting native tree species such as Norway maple (Acer platanoides), European beech (Fagus sylvatica), flowering ash (Fraxinus ornus) or sessile oak (Quercus petraea), to name just a few. Equally important is to avoid planting invasive species such as green ash (Fraxinus pennsylvanica), tree of heaven (Ailanthus altissima), foxglove tree (Paulownia tomentosa), false acacia (Robinia pseudoacacia) or box elder (Acer negundo).

We place great emphasis on tree aftercare. Saplings can only survive if they are taken care of for five or even ten years – especially now that we are experiencing drier conditions each spring. Volunteer groups ensure young trees are watered and pruned for the appropriate number of years. Often, local governments help out with aftercare.

Positive plans for the future

In the past ten months we have planted 34,960 trees and 3,469 shrubs – a total of 38,429 plants – in private gardens, public spaces, schools and social institutes.

Our future plan is to focus on creating ecologically diverse forests that attract species and promote biodiversity. We are trying to find appropriate plots around the country and our forest ecologist is putting together a scientific plan. We are also lobbying to create more windbreaks around agricultural fields and exploring plans to work with agro-forestry experts, although talks are still in progress. Our aim is to create is community forests with a high diversity of native species.

We have a great and exciting year behind us and have lots of new ideas and projects for the future. We hope to grow the number of our local groups, continue with our educational programmes, work together with domestic and foreign organisations and – most of all – plant a lot of trees.

‘How to’ tips:

- Make use of online platforms and social media to keep in touch with other volunteers, share information and to tell other people about your work.
- Encourage community involvement through regular local, regional and national meetings, workshops and events.
- Ensure trees are planted professionally using an appropriate species, in the correct location, at the correct time of the year and with suitable aftercare.

Policy recommendations:

- Seek support from local government/authority to help tree-planting organisations by providing land, expertise and water supply.

Fumewort flower in Hungarian forest

Hungarian forest

Case studies

Case study 6: The Netherlands – Landscape-scale land management by a small farmers association

Case study 6: The Netherlands – Landscape-scale land management by a small farmers association

Albert van der Ploeg and Wout van Vulpen of the Northern Frisian Woodlands Association in the Netherlands explain how individual small scale farmers can work together through an association to create landscape scale contracts with the government using the 'front door- back door' mechanism as a way to save on paperwork yet maintain the independence of their small scale farms.

In the early 1990s, following growing concerns around groundwater pollution and acid rain, The Hague imposed new regulations on farmers to protect the landscape and reduce ammonia and nitrogen emissions. These included injecting manure into the soil instead of spreading it on the top.

Such regulations posed a serious threat to small peasant farms. The new methods not only increased costs, but, more importantly, some farmers suspected the heavy machines necessary would have a detrimental effect on the condition of the soil and the quality of groundwater. In 1992 four men in the northern part of Friesland came together to fight for their farms and their way of life. They were Fokke Benedictus, Pieter de Jong, Geale Atsma and Douwe Hoeksma.

Their message to The Hague was that they wanted to take care of the environment but needed some help. Rather than be fined for not following the new regulations to the letter, they believed in an alternative. As farmers, they wanted to look after the land as much as anyone, but they realised that, to convince the government of their commitment to the environment and the value of their traditional ways, they needed to understand the environmental issues better. They reached out to stakeholders specialising in soil, water, nature, landscape, biodiversity and food so they could present a viable, well-researched proposal to The Hague. When they reached out to other farmers they were initially met with skepticism, but over the next four years these men were able to win many farmers round and, in 1996 with a membership of 60, the Northern Friesian Woodlands Association (NFW) took their solution to the government. Because they had scientific backing from universities and nature organisations, demonstrating that their type of farming was less environmentally harmful than that of larger agrobusiness, the government was willing to make a deal with certain exemptions.

Collective bargaining

Although agricultural associations had existed before, the NFW was different. Where previously each farmer had his or her own contract directly with the government, the NFW negotiated on behalf of all. The NFW refers to its big regional agreement with the government as the 'front door' contract, and at the 'back door' it holds lots of little contracts with its members.

Members pay 35 euros per year to be part of NFW and agree to deliver their specific activity, which might be, for example, to reduce on-farm emissions or to encourage biodiversity on their farm. The farmers benefit because a farmer is generally not a writer nor an accountant – there are people in the office who can do those things for them. As an association, the NFW takes responsibility for ensuring all members do what has been agreed in their back door contracts so that together they are in a position to honour the front door contract with the government. Continuing in this way develops trust, which is very important.

As the model of alliance has grown, other associations have formed across the Netherlands. When the NFW first started, The Hague held 18,000 contracts with farmers. Since 2016, they hold only 40. Every year there is a consultation with the stakeholders, area partners and participants to evaluate how things are going. The NFW also holds regular consultations with the government to justify policy and approach, and to review achievements and discuss what improvements can be made for the following year.

Working with nature

Just as a farm is always developing, the association is always developing. Initially, the NFW's agreement with the government focused on landscape, but it has expanded to include biodiversity and education. By adopting an innovative approach, each time the NFW negotiates with the government they take solutions rather than problems.

The NFW listens to its stakeholders, who understand trends in agroecology and environmental issues. The association has always said 'measuring is knowing'. If increasing pollution levels are blamed on farms when cars or industry are the real cause, then tests will be needed to prove that NFW farmers' methods are not contributing to the problem.

Tests convince members as well as the government because it demonstrates that growing more intensively is not the future. Some members think that intensive agriculture is the future – they know there is money for food, but if they produce nature and landscape who pays? So, if the NFW can show them their produce is improved – and therefore becomes more valuable – by farming inclusively with nature, their perspective changes. Dairy farmers learn that maintaining trees attracts more birds; the birds eat the insects that damage the grass; there is less need for insecticides; the cattle consume fewer chemicals; and the health of their animals improves.

The newest focus of the NFW are the field laboratories. Teams on the farms test innovative production, to see which methods are the most inclusive of nature. Since 2015, the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy offers subsidies to collectives for nature and landscape management. If the NFW can prove that certain ways of farming help our governments and municipalities to solve part of the climate problem, the association can receive money for further innovation.

The NFW is planning 150 projects over the next five years. The more the association discovers as it works with Wageningen University in the Netherlands and NFW farmers around agroecology, the more they can hope to influence policy in the Netherlands and even across Europe.

The NFW invited a group of primary school children out of the classroom and into the fields. Together, they built little wooden houses and taught them how to keep the landscape in shape – about insects and other wildlife. The children know what a computer is, but they had never seen a cow! Once home, they can share their day with their parents and other members of the family and, just like that, new connections are made across generations.

Protecting traditional knowledge

Now, within the province of Friesland, there are 800 NFW members – not only farmers but inhabitants who support what they do. Members receive regular information through newsletters and meetings in the fields. They don't have a lot of membership turnover. Mainly farmers leave NFW because they retire, or their farms grow very big. And there is a financial cost to leave which functions, in part, to encourage long-term commitment.

The association's goal continues to be healthy farming, within the community, in balance with the environment. Alongside this, the five core values are: trust, transparency, communication, working from the heart and knowledge.

The NFW has a long history of establishing trust with the government and with its members. It's a bot-

tom-up model – the farmers resent being told how to do things by the government, but the association empowers and encourages them to have personal ambition for their region. They can work with the scientists making suggestions from their experience on their farms using the knowledge passed-down from their ancestors – they have an opportunity to show the government how they can make things better.

There is a word in the Frisian language: Mienskip. It loosely translates as 'community', but more fully it means joint use, or joint action to achieve something – being responsible for something together and jointly ensuring that things are successful. This approach has always worked well for the NFW, so they will continue to use it.

'How to' tips:

- Present solutions to the governing body and gain backing from external bodies such as university researchers and/or non-profits.
- Ensure any membership fees for farmers are as low as possible.
- Provide members with administration back-up such as accountancy.
- Operate with transparency and encourage community engagement through educational talks and events.

Policy recommendations:

- In this example of a territorial approach to collective land management, small-scale farmers created a regional arrangement with the government. The project was – and continues to be – led by the farmers not officials.
- Working together as a group of farmers with one contract between farmers and the state benefits all parties. Farmers benefit because important decisions can be made as a group; the state benefits because the collective ensures all farmers keep to any binding agreements.
- An example of how a bottom-up model, led by farmers, leads to a relationship built on trust between farmers and state.

NFW farmer

Conclusion

Conclusion

The inspiring stories presented in this publication, Collective Approaches to Land Management, illustrate how innovative methods can provide effective and workable solutions to restoring our landscape, economies and future. The common thread running through all the case studies, is co-operation.

The land is a complicated ecosystem of relationships- co-operation between all parts of this ecosystem keeps it healthy and abundant for everyone.

Achieving true co-operation on a project – particularly if it involves diverse stakeholders who may hold different ideas – can be a long journey that requires dedication. Working together with many people is a complicated task, but the rewards for efforts invested can be successful and can bring a community together.

It may seem daunting to land management newcomer to decide how and where to start with their chosen project. But as the case studies illustrate, we can learn from others and once inspired take the first steps.

The Chinese Tao Te Ching says that "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step" No matter how ambiguous the task is, how long the journey is or laborious the work is, a movement is always required to begin it. If an initiative is taken, the rest of the venture falls into place, and the mission starts.

You can start by calling a meeting of like-minded people, bringing farmers together to inspire them or visit other projects, having a first taster day of planting trees, or making a display at the village fair. Once people are inspired the idea can grow and each can bring their own abilities.

The Transylvanian village realised that the commons are crucial for the continuation of subsistence farming in the region and although the commons are under pressure from such practices as the large-scale purchase of land by large companies they have adopted traditional pasture management techniques and is maintaining old traditions to keep the community alive through use of common lands.

In Italy, the biodistricts began as the producers in the region came together to resist the monocultures of hazelnuts. But grew to such a position of resilience that in spite of the coronavirus pandemic, Italy's local producers and growers thrived because they were in a position to adapt and innovate.

The nascent Nature Recovery Networks in the UK are part in a wider European plan to create biodiversity corridors by encouraging farmers to work together. This will happen at the wide EU level if EU citizens push for it, but until the policies are in place people are working from the grassroots upwards. In the Char Valley local residents were inspired by the youth climate striker of the village to declare a "Climate Emergency" for the local council and start the Lifelines project to create nature recovery networks in the place where they live and work.

The citizens of Hungary were likewise concerned about climate change and took it upon themselves to do something bold. Hungary's 10 Million Trees project, which aims to plant one tree per resident of the country, celebrated its first birthday in early summer 2020 and is well on its way towards creating ecologically diverse forests in the country with the help of farmers, ecologists and local residents who plant saplings.

The Northern Frisian Woodlands Association in the Netherlands started with just four farmers who joined forces to protect their traditional way of life and farm inclusively with nature. The association now has 800 members and collaborates with agroecology researchers at Wageningen University. Even as

small-scale agroecological farmers they work together to make large landscape-scale changes.

Each of these initiatives has taken the steps to begin, starting our journey towards restoring the land.

We can learn from them to follow the patterns of the land and gain the skills of co-operation to manage it together. It will take listening, and the ability to admit sometimes you are wrong and others are right or that there may need to be a compromise. It will also, in many cases, mean starting again when things go wrong. But the rewards of working together can go beyond the difficulties and we mustn't be afraid to try.

Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it!
Goethe

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