

THE ISSUE OF FOOD



Enjoying a good quality of life and living independently are issues that have a direct impact on the daily lives of the Emmaus groups. Bringing our day-to-day practices into line with our discourse on solidarity and the fight against the root causes of extreme poverty is a form of commitment.

Using and promoting healthy good quality food can be an objective for the Emmaus groups.

Food production switched from traditional farming to being an almost industrial-type activity over 50 years ago¹: **the living and working conditions of farmers are becoming increasingly insecure, land fertility is in freefall and the amount of chemical products being used is seriously harming biodiversity**, the food on our plates is more and more dubious and health scandals caused by industrial farming are on the rise (mad cow disease and bird flu).

How did we get to this point? The industrialisation of growing methods has destroyed traditional techniques that were tailored to each type of land or region and the widespread use of pesticides, fertilizers and nowadays of GMO - genetically modified organisms – is jeopardising the future of flora and fauna. The imposition of these methods all around the world by the requirements of international trade has been a factor in the destruction of local food-producing farming, which used to guarantee the independence of entire populations.

Calling for a different kind of farming that rejects industrial processes and respects human beings and the environment, in the widest sense of the term, is not just one of the options open to us; it is now a necessity.

¹ Two recent films provide more information about the havoc wreaked by intensive farming and the application of international trade rules in this area: *Solutions Locales pour un désordre global*, by Coline Serreau and *Food Inc.*, by Robert Kenner.

Producing your own food

FROM VEGETABLE GARDENS TO FARMS

For a number of reasons many Emmaus groups in Europe and worldwide have decided to produce some or all of their own food.

Apart from this being a green and ethical choice (organic farming and local seasonal produce), this type of initiative helps those who work in the vegetable garden to rebuild their lives. The long-term commitment required helps them to gain in self-confidence and feel more capable. In addition, planting a vegetable garden and farming is a not insignificant way of **ensuring independence and autonomy** while also being a positive ethical gesture if the group is rejecting intensive agricultural production.

La Poudrière in Belgium obtains a significant amount of its food from one of its branches, the **Rummen farm**, where six people live. The farm and the orchards, which enable La Poudrière to produce and **sell its own apple juice**, produce fruit and vegetables for the whole group.

Emmaus Feniks (Netherlands) and Villafranca, Ferrara and Fiesso in Italy all have **large vegetable gardens that produce all or some of the vegetables that they need**, at least from March to November. Moreover, these communities also **breed** animals (including pigs and hens) which are used to feed the group. The International Solidarity Forum in Bosnia, meanwhile, has developed a series of structures to feed the group: **orchards, a cheese dairy and greenhouses which help the group to function** and involve the people who live there in an activity that at least guarantees them a source of income. Un coup de main d'Emmaus Iasi (Romania) has developed a major semi-organic farming project, which produces all the group's food in the summer months, and also hosts **organic farming training courses** in partnership with a university.



Companions picking apples at La Poudrière (Belgium)



Animal breeding, a Coup de Main d'Emmaus Iasi, Romania

Groups in Asia have been reflecting on the importance of organic farming for several years.

Kudumban in India has a 15ha organic farm containing three nurseries. The farm also produces a significant quantity of fruit and other subsistence crops. The farm is also a sustainable farming training centre aimed at farmers and NGOs. The VCDS and FHF groups in India also focus on these issues, as they produce a range of products that they then sell on the local markets.



Fiesso vegetable garden (Italy)



Part of the farm at Feniks, Netherlands



Villafranca vegetable garden,

Opt for local and ethical products

PROMOTING FAIRER TRADE IN EMMAUS

Many Emmaus groups pay particular attention to the origin of the products that they consume, whether for ethical or environmental reasons.

The **leading ethical product** consumed by the European Emmaus groups is **Fair Trade coffee**, which is popular all over the region. Some groups, such as the Emmaus Foundation in San Sebastian and Emmaus Ferrara and Emmaus Cuneo in Italy, go even further and have decided to sell Fair Trade products in their stores in order to encourage a more ethical form of trade.

Similarly, several groups have decided to join a **cooperative** that promotes organic and/or local farming and fairer trade (based on environmental and social criteria), with this being particularly prevalent in Italy, where this type of initiative has been in existence for a long time.



Fair Trade products sold at Swallows Lund - Sweden

Our food has a significant impact on the environment.

It accounts for close to 20% of greenhouse gas emissions. Food production has an environmental impact at the growing (pesticides and soil erosion, for example), processing, packaging, storage and transport stages of the process. Some foodstuffs, such as imported or out-of-season fruit and vegetables and meat have a particularly high impact. For example, for every kilogram of beef eaten, the whole production process generates the same amount of greenhouse gas emissions as going on a 70km car journey! If we opt for veal instead of beef, the total rises to 220km.

Source: <http://www.rac-f.org/DocuFixes/ges-dans-nos-assiettes.pdf> (Réseau Action Climat, Des Gaz à Effet de Serre dans nos assiettes).

The decision taken by some Emmaus groups to look into their day-to-day consumption has also led to them **including organic produce in their daily diets**. This practice is spreading in certain groups. Some groups have gone vegetarian (Emmaus Helsinki – Finland) or are seeking to produce some foodstuffs themselves, such as bread and cheese, in order to achieve ethical and environmental objectives.



Bread making,
Emmaus
Ferrara, Italy



Direct producer to consumer selling systems are called **local distribution circuits**. They may involve a farm shop, a produce box subscription scheme (AMAP in France) or indirect sales via a producers' cooperative.

The aim of this type of circuit is to cut the number of intermediaries between the producer and consumer.

This helps to reduce the number of food miles and to prioritise better quality agriculture by guaranteeing producers a better income.

http://www.arehn.asso.fr/dossiers/circuit_court/index.html

EMMAUS' INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL DISTRIBUTION CIRCUITS

Networks of **local distribution circuits** can be developed more informally by forging links with **local farmers and producers**.

Emmaus Krefeld (Germany), Emmaus Haarzuilens (Netherlands), Emmaus Marseille Pointe Rouge (France) and La Poudrière (Belgium) all opt for local seasonal produce.

These groups seek to **prioritise the economic fabric and local production**, whether they are buying vegetables, fruit juice, meat or cheese, **which helps reduce the number of intermediaries and cuts the miles that food travels, and favours quality**.

Developing local socially-responsible networks often forms the basis for this type of approach with good relations with a neighbouring farmer or the loan of a truck sometimes being at the root of a relationship that enables the group to change the way it eats.



Changing the way that we consume may sometimes seem to be unconnected with managing emergency situations in the Emmaus groups. However, making a change in this area is a strong solidarity commitment and can therefore be considered to be a political objective: championing an alternative way of consuming and therefore fighting a global economic system based on exploiting producers and the land.

Emmaus Navarra's organic fruit and vegetable baskets (Spain)

Emmaus Navarra is seeking to further develop this system. Instead of just supplying the group, a **seasonal organic locally produced fruit and vegetable basket system has been put in place**, with the produce being sold at a modest price.

The system was set up as a result of a partnership with a **cooperative of organic farmers**. The initiative is proving to be very successful within the group, as the number of employees buying the baskets is increasing. The fruit and vegetables are much tastier and of a much higher quality.

