

GOOD PRACTICES IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

EXAMPLES FROM ITALY AND EUROPE



FACE IT!

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Introduction

The goal of the FACE IT! project is to support novice gardeners and small farmers in developing their environmental competencies and to contribute to the spread of ecological farming. This brochure presents successful, practical examples that serve as inspiration not only for beginner gardeners but are also easily transferable and applicable elsewhere. The publication compiles best practices that have already proven effective in **Hungary** and other **European countries**, which show how to grow crops in an environmentally friendly way. Each example illustrates how techniques focused on sustainability and biodiversity conservation can lead to higher productivity and economic viability. As part of the FACE IT! project, these methods aim to address the impacts of climate change in agriculture and to provide opportunities for the economic strengthening of rural communities.

Discover the methods and experiences that show how environmentally friendly farming can become the cornerstone of our future!

1. Greenbirds Organic Gardening and Eco-School



Ágnes Feró and Barbara Ferschl, horticultural engineers with decades of professional experience, founded the Greenbirds Organic Gardening at the end of 2023. The organic gardening and eco-garden is located in Dunaharaszti, near the Danube, in a beautiful and diverse natural environment. The garden was established to provide a community of 30-40 people with fresh organic vegetables, later fruits and eggs throughout the season, under the Community Supported Agriculture scheme.

The two founders believe that short supply chains, organic farming and community building are the answer to the many civilisation problems facing people in the 21st century and that by supporting community (organic) farming they can make a major, positive difference to the environment in the long term.

The garden is 4000 m², with a high number of fruit and vegetable species thanks to the soil and climate. A small unheated foil is used to extend the season. They farm without chemicals, will convert to organic farming in 2024 and will register the land with a certification body for official organic certification.

The two horticultural engineers will sell the vegetables produced in the form of a vegetable basket, together with other organic produce. From September 2024, they will start a theoretical and practical course for beginner hobby gardeners, to teach as many people as possible the good practices of chemical-free, organic and ecologically sustainable plant production.



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2. Rábcakapi Organic Horticulture and Organic Mills Ltd.



István Németh and his wife started their agricultural business in 1993, since then they have been growing organic cereals and vegetables, and since 2003 they have also been growing apples.

The love of the land has become a family tradition in both of their lives, and this has provided the basis for them to set up their farm. With the knowledge they acquired, they started organic farming with full dedication and confidence on the 20-hectare smallholding on the outskirts of Rábcakapi. Since 1994, the horticulture has been controlled by Biokontroll H.N. Ltd. In addition to the annual organic inspections, the farm is also Bio-Suisse certified, an even stricter system of compliance with the Swiss requirements.

The farm has now grown into an organic model farm of 250 hectares (30 hectares of vegetables, 220 hectares of cereals), while the range of crops grown has steadily expanded over the years. Thanks to hard work and the tenders they have won, they have been able to set up state-of-the-art machinery and cold storage facilities, as well as a stone mill and flaking machine, mainly for processing their own cereals.

Most of their products are delivered to the Budapest Eco-market, but they also do business with HIPP Kft. in Hanságliget, SPAR Hungary Kereskedelmi Kft. and several smaller organic shops. In their Bio ABC in Rábcakapi, they provide customers with fresh organic fruit and vegetables every day.



Homepage: <https://biokertesznet.com/>

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3. Biotiful Farm, Bulgaria



Szilvia and Dimitar started the BIOTIFUL farm in 2015. They created the place with a lot of love and care – primarily to grow foods that can restore health, because they grow them the way nature dictates, with minimal intervention on their part.

Biotiful Farm is a permaculture farm in Atiya, 10 km south of Burgas, Bulgaria. It produces 100% organic vegetables and fruits, using only natural farming methods. Fresh products and canned goods are sold directly to end consumers, and the farm supplies many cafes and restaurants in the Burgas region.



The farm combines the activities related to growing plants in the garden with the operation of an outdoor children's centre. Here, it reveals the secrets of nature to children, organizes various activities for them in a natural environment, and shows them how food gets to the table. These child-rearing activities have been a great success. Finally, they want to share their experience, knowledge, and interest with others and help everyone who wants to draw from the wisdom of nature.



Their mission is to connect people with nature – not only the nature around them, but also the nature inside them. To contribute to a higher quality of life through pure food, meaningful experiences, and a deep connection to nature, the wild, and the unadulterated. They understand that the parallel between food, emotions (as a person's inner experience), and health is still underestimated in Bulgaria, but they look to the future and will be there for all those who need what the farm creates and produces.

Fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables, herbs, spices, and eggs from free-range hens are available in their online store.



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4. Flewo Future Farm, Poland



Flewo Future company was formed in 2017 with a well-defined plan, following many years of preparation and market research. The model of their activity is a copy of the program which has been extremely successful in the Netherlands.

Hagranop B.V. is a long-term partner and a base model, which is the source of inspiration for them; they also benefit from its gained experience. The farm is located in Żuławy Wiślane in the northern part of Poland, in an area which is perfect for cultivating products of the highest quality. Organic production is the objective of their business activity, and its founders are passionate farmers with many years of experience in conventional and organic farming and in international trade.

Their mission is to create a farm which takes pride in producing high-quality organic vegetables for the local market. They want to focus exclusively on organic production, making every effort for the finished product to satisfy the most demanding consumers. The entire farming process is precisely controlled, starting from appropriately prepared fields, through care about proper crop rotation, careful control during the growth process, and ending with harvest.

60 hectares of their fields are currently in the 2nd year of conversion. In 2019, they will have the first organic production of vegetables which will be placed on the Polish market. Their planned target assumes 300 hectares of organic production. Following the demands, they are aware of the importance of domestic production and Polish products. Keeping up with new trends, they adapt to the market and cooperate to develop with it.

Their clients include the largest supermarkets in Europe, and the organic product does not differ from the conventional one.



Homepage: <http://flewofuture.pl/>

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5. MyFarm Gardens Community Farm



MyFarm has created an environmentally conscious, locally produced, community-supported farm in 5 locations across the country – Harta, Ópusztaszer, Szentmártonkáta, Ács, Hajdúhadháza – that offers urban consumers a new opportunity to eat well and healthily, while supporting local value creation and bringing consumers closer to the producer.

Their passion is the cultivation of quality vegetables and fruit, because they themselves put what they produce on the table. The farmers' decades of experience in chemical-free farming, their relationship with the land, and their approach to sustainability contribute to the fact that they produce really good and healthy food and deliver it to their subscribers' homes week after week.



Running their farms is a multi-generational task in most cases, as the knowledge of the farmers is complemented everywhere by the modern outlook of the young people in the families, so they effectively combine traditional knowledge with the opportunities provided by modern technology and digitalization. They are committed to ensuring that homegrown, domestic, and local products can be put on the table of families again, and to shortening supply chains with many actors and even thousands of kilometres long, thereby reducing the burden on the environment.

Community-supported agriculture is a system where consumers and farmers share the risk of production and benefit from the harvest. Consumers pay an up-front fee to the farmer to help finance production, and in return they receive fresh, quality food produced by the farmer. In return for this long-term commitment, producers receive a secure livelihood, and consumers receive good quality food from a trusted source.

MyFarm has built into its system a number of good practices that have a significant impact on the community and the environment, from conscious, shared garden planning to returnable delivery baskets and delivery processes without intermediaries. An important goal is to reduce their own ecological footprint by shortening the supply chain, as well as the carbon footprint of their subscribers, and to educate their community members about the benefits of seasonal eating and environmental consciousness.

In the MyFarm Community, in addition to the Farmers, the subscribers – the virtual farmers – , the supporters, and followers also play an extremely important role, as they directly and indirectly contribute to the process of attitude and culture change, which is the fundamental mission of MyFarm: to change the attitudes related to "showcase vegetables" stereotypes and to show that backyard, chemical-free vegetables produced by Hungarian farmers provide an accessible and sustainable alternative for everyone.



Homepage: www.myfarmharta.com

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6. Tuiskula Farm, Finland



Tuiskula Farm is a regenerative family farm in Lappers, Siuntio. They operate from the strongest focus on soil health to grow the highest quality vegetables and eggs; in terms of nutrition, health, and freshness. Their soil is their greatest resource, and anything they do

aims to regenerate it. That means never plowing or spraying, always covering soil with plants or mulch, and managing livestock on frequent rotation (24-48h) – mimicking nature’s ways. While growing food, they bind many tons of carbon in the soil, permanently, and support biodiversity.



Products from Tuiskula Farm can be bought at the farm, selected farmers' markets, reko rings (Helsinki, Espoo, Kirkkonummi, Inkoo), or as a weekly box delivered to the neighbourhood.

Tuiskula Farm is a small-scale, bio-intensive, and highly efficient farm. On their 1-hectare home plot, they grow all their vegetables, herbs, berries, fruits, and nuts, as well as grazing sheep over the summer (home use). They utilise every square metre of it, often for multiple uses at the same time. When practical, several vegetables are intercropped in the same bed. The greenhouse grows vegetables through the summer and houses their egg-laying flock through the winter.

They only operate along regenerative growing methods that build soil. Any activity that degrades their soil is not an option on the farm. In practice, this means they never plow or till the soil, never use chemical fertilizers or biocides, and carefully plan the impact of their grazing animals in order to sequester the largest amount of carbon, build soil, and soil fertility.

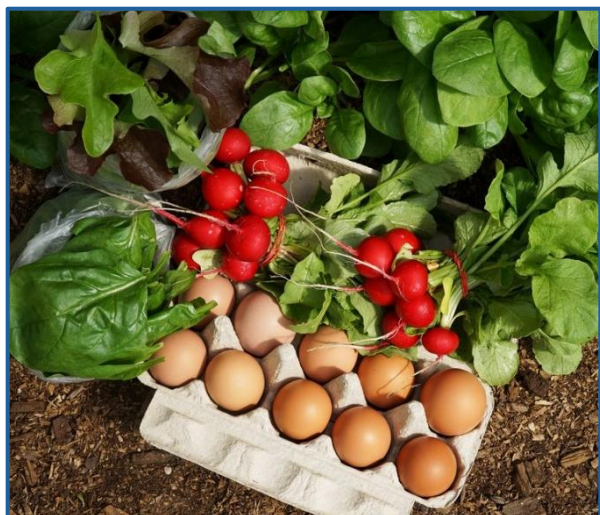
Currently, their two main operations are 'no dig' vegetables and pastured eggs. In the years to come, they plan to start producing more microgreens, berries, fruit, nuts, honey, and other pastured animals.

Their 600m² of beds are never dug or tilled, which increases their organic matter content and with it, the soil health and water retention. The beds are increasingly resilient to harsh weather conditions and highly productive. 'No dig' vegetable gardening is recognized to be the most productive per square metre, as well as to produce the best quality vegetables. The beds receive a yearly application of compost on top, which is worked in by the microbiome that lives in the soil. The compost is produced on the farm, from the winter bedding of their flock of hens and vegetable production waste.

They test the soil to make sure biology and nutrients are both represented in adequate amounts. They also test the nutrients in the leaves (with refractometer) and can thereby guarantee their nutritional quality as well as shelf life. Vegetables are picked the same day or at most the day before delivery. They are stored only short-term in their walk-in chiller at appropriate temperature and humidity levels. Root vegetables for fall and winter are stored in sandboxes in their root cellar.

Their entire vegetable production follows organic standards, and they are in the process of organic certification.

Besides these, they are waiting patiently for their berry bushes and fruit and nut trees to grow. They also produce microgreens and are looking into honey and other pastured animals. They intend on remaining a small but very intensive farm, making the most of little and leaving space for the wild things around them.



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7. Öko-völgy Alapítvány



The Eco Valley project, a non-profit organization, is a village-size experiment involving 150 volunteers and almost 25 different institutions.

One of their main objectives is to become completely self-sufficient while utilizing only environmentally friendly methods. In order to achieve that goal, naturally, they need to be able to produce all of their own food. Every year, they extend the varieties of produce from their fields as they continually experiment and try to grow every single part of their daily nutritional needs. To date, they have mastered the art of growing a large variety of vegetables (such as tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, eggplant, cauliflower, spinach, and so much more), fruits, beans, wheat, corn, sunflower (for oil). As they continue experimenting, they hope to also be able to provide their community with locally grown rice, sugar made of sorghum, and other such staples.



In order to ensure that none of their agricultural endeavors harm the natural environment around them, they utilize only environmentally friendly methods. To supplement soil nutrients in their vegetable and flower gardens, they use cow manure from their cowshed mixed with compost from the garden. For pest control, they use the technique of coupling and spray their plants with solutions made from herbs, making sure their agriculture is chemical-free. They rotate their crops and try to do most of the agricultural work using ox power, thus reducing the need to use heavy machinery and not burdening the environment.

One of the main criteria of ecological sustainability is to protect the natural habitats of local species, thus maintaining a thriving biodiversity. Thanks to 25 years of organic farming and environmentally friendly technologies, where there were meagre pastures and wide areas of land damaged by ploughing over decades of cultivation, they now see the original habitats regenerating. They try to maintain this auspicious process by preserving the hydrophilous flora next to their streams and ponds; they plant forests of native varieties of trees, while reducing the proportion of the non-native locust tree; they reintroduce the native grass fields, and they use ox power to cut them. In recent years, they have recorded many formerly absent species of animals that have returned, and every year there is an increasing number of different species of birds.

While much has been achieved through their organic, ecological farming methods, still much more is yet ahead of them. Therefore, agriculture continues to be one of their ongoing fields for improvement. Through agriculture, they hope to not merely produce all of their food but also all of their clothing, furniture, dining wear, and much more. This can be achieved by growing cotton, bamboo, and more. These goals will continue to remain at the centre of their activities and very much alive, as even after they have accomplished what they set out to do, such gains will require ongoing effort to maintain them.



Homepage: <https://okovolgy.hu/>

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8. Stengården, Denmark



A Stengaarden has been run by the Rasmussen family since 1997 and is now a very diverse organic-mekka in the region and boasts the largest organic food store in Denmark. Their background for buying and running the farm is their rural upbringing and subsequent education as chemical engineers.

They bought the farm to create a good framework for ourselves and our children's lives. The plan was to work part-time as engineers and supplement with home-grown food and a small barn door sale.

When they took over, Stengården was converted to organic farming - and they quickly built up a door-to-door sale of fresh eggs and good vegetables.

They have 5 hectares (with over 100 kinds of vegetables), 3000 egg layers, 50 grass-fed beef cattle, 100 hectares of grains and clover, bee hives + their sweet and energetic dog Ronja and the barn cats. Everything they grow and buy from other organic producers (meat and dairy products, vegetarian spreads, crisps, chocolates, premium olive oils, etc.) is sold in their own organic supermarket and café/restaurant. This sales model enables them to have a very biodiverse farm and focus on old and nutritious varieties. They believe in biodiversity, a self-sufficient on-farm cycle - ie. they don't use any external fertilizer and almost no external animal feed. In this way they try their best to make a sustainable high quality food production in a way that makes their customers, employees and themselves have a good life.



The farm has received a grant for the care of grass and natural areas. The purpose of the grant is to help protect and improve biotope conditions and biodiversity in the prioritised areas. As a result of the grant, the farm's grassland and natural areas have been cared for with grazing or mowing, thus ensuring good nature management of the areas.

The company has received an Organic Area Grant to convert and manage the farm's agricultural areas organically. The purpose of the subsidy is to increase the organic area in Denmark and thereby achieve a number of benefits for the environment and biodiversity. As a result of the subsidy, the farm has been able to maintain organic agricultural production on the farm's agricultural land and sell organically produced food.



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