

URGENCI: The International Network for Community Supported Agriculture will be holding its Biennial Symposium in China!



6th International CSA Conference, November 2015, Shunyi district of Beijing, PRC.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a movement that has taken hold independently in many countries around the world and shows how consumers and farmers in various places are responding to the same global pressures. CSA offers one of the most hopeful alternatives to the downward spiral, and is the only model of farming in which consumers accept to share the risks and benefits with farmers. It provides mutual benefits and reconnects people to the land where their food is grown.

URGENCI is the international network of these CSA movements (which have different names in different regions), seeking to unite the farmers and consumers whose actions on a local level are benefiting the global community and ecosystems. The network also introduces the principles of the CSA model to communities where it has not yet taken hold, and builds alliances with grassroots partners with whom we share the ambition of achieving local Food Sovereignty, preserving biodiversity and working towards food justice.

Every two years, URGENCI hosts an international conference with many foreign participants on CSA-related issues, including field visits to local CSA farms.

In 2015, from **November 15th to 22nd**, **URGENCI will host its 6th Symposium** under the banner of the **Rural Regeneration** theme in **China**, in conjunction with the 7th Chinese national CSA meeting. This international event seeks to strengthen links among CSA members and farmers, researchers and activists from around the world. It is also an opportunity to share our strategies and expectations with our key allies from the Food Sovereignty, organic and solidarity economy movements.

About the URGENCI International Network

URGENCI seeks to promote all forms of partnership between producers and local consumers, all kinds of Community Supported Agriculture initiatives, as a solution to the problems associated with global intensive agricultural production and distribution.

URGENCI aims to develop overall coherence at and between local, regional, national and global levels of projects, fostering peer-based solidarity, to emphasize the relevant contribution of CSA to a sustainable and inclusive world. We believe that the more we can learn from and support one another, the faster we will move towards local food sovereignty, sustainable agriculture and peaceful communities.

The core goals of the movement are to maintain and encourage family-scale, sustainable farming and to achieve local food sovereignty for each region and community at global level (see the annex).

Founded in 2006, URGENCI is governed by a committee of representatives from all continents, including both producers and consumers. The current International Committee is made up of representatives from Italy, the U.S., Japan, Mali, France, India, Mexico and China. The organization's offices and staff are based in France.

The URGENCI Symposium

Every two years, URGENCI organizes an International Symposium in a country where the CSA movement is strong. At this event, members of the network and others gather for CSA farm visits, workshops that explore topics relevant to the CSA movement, and to hold the General Assembly of the Network. In the past, the Symposium has been held in France, Portugal, Japan and the U.S.A.

Bringing the Symposium to China

In 2015, URGENCI will hold its 6th International Symposium in China in **the Shunyi district of Beijing**.

Agricultural development has played a major role in China's history. For over 1200 years, farms in have supported cities with populations of millions of people. During the recent decades of rampant economic growth, China's push to ensure food security has put tremendous pressure on agriculture, compromising its long-term sustainable development.

URGENCI has chosen Shunyi for our Symposium because of the government's commitment to make this area a beacon for China's rural life and innovative practices for modern agriculture. The mountainous region of Shunyi District, Beijing is a proposed 'Slow Living' region of China, a government-coordinated project aimed at enriching the ecological and economic development of the area.

The project will focus on jointly enriching the environment and the economy, taking into consideration farmers' rights, sustainable agriculture and scientific development. By highlighting the construction of a modern and fair agriculture in China, the symposium will help provide further dialogue on the interconnectedness of ecological development and environmental protection.

The Symposium will be held in conjunction with the **7th Chinese national CSA meeting**, and will consist of farm tours, keynote speeches and thematic workshops.

SPECIAL FOCUS: Rural Regeneration

Rural Regeneration is attracting young, highly-qualified urban dwellers back to the land bringing new energy and inspiration to rural areas that have been abandoned and depressed. During a seminar on short supply chains organized in August 2014 in Beijing, a small delegation from URGENCI visited 4 CSA or direct-sale farms as well as the Beijing Farmers' Market to see this Rural Regeneration first hand. In less than 5 years, more than 500 CSA initiatives have sprung to life around China, the work of a growing community of young, new farmers. This remarkable development mirrors what is happening in other countries. In France, the proportion of farmers who started farming without coming from a farming family is as high as 35% in CSA farms. Elsewhere in Europe, newcomers like these make up the majority of CSA farmers attracted by the ecological and social innovation of this movement that combines producing healthy, organic food with a real economic alternative to the dominant industrial system.

In a period when mega-corporations are trying to get rid of small-scale family farmers by buying their land and forcing them into ever-concentrating food chains, when farming populations are decreasing (by 20% in 10 years in Europe), many aging farmers are about to retire (the average age of farmers is around 57 years in Europe and the US, and even older in Japan) and megalopolis are persistently draining populations from entire villages. But at the same time a new generation of small-holders is developing technical and social skills with the support of conscious consumers. In the socially and economically depressed countryside of many countries, this generation is carrying new hope and optimism: small-scale sustainable family and peasant farming is a key answer to major environmental, social and economic issues the world is now facing.

The 6th URGENCI International Symposium seeks to highlight this "Rural Regeneration" phenomenon and to focus attention on the results of CSA's potential in mitigating both climate issues and food insecurity.

Expected outcomes of the 2015 International Symposium:

- Facilitate exchanges and updates between CSA movements and initiatives from around the world, sharing successes and challenges
- Improve knowledge of the movement's characteristics, its social and environmental impacts, based on informed debates with researchers, during the "Scientific Forum" segment of the Symposium
- Strengthen political dialogue with other networks and public institutions, on the basis of the experiences and actions developed by the URGENCI network
- Assess the activities carried out since the last symposium in California
- Reach out to allies in Asia. The 6th Symposium is the third to be organized outside Europe. Like the 4th Symposium in 2010 in Japan, it will provide a great opportunity to reach out to new contacts throughout Asia
- Hold a meeting of the International Network's General Assembly, at which official business is conducted biennially.

Itinerary:

The Symposium will take place **November 15th-22nd, 2015**; it will include the following core activities:

- From **November 15th to 18th**, it will start with a 4-day program of **farm visits and workshops** in the Sichuan, Anhui and Zhejiang provinces. This will provide a vehicle for cross-cultural exchange and understanding of the Chinese approach to farming, social life and the CSA movement in China.
- The visits will be followed by the **3-day international CSA conference** that will take place from **November 19th - 21st** in the Shunyi district of Beijing.

Dr. Shi Yan, initiator of CSAs in China and Vice-President of URGENCI, and her team from the "Shared Harvest" CSA farms, is organizing this event in conjunction with the Tsinghua university, under the guidance and support of the municipal government of Shunyi District and the URGENCI network. There will be an Exhibit of locally grown, healthy food along with an International Farmers Market. There will be showings of recent documentaries on food and farming.

- On **November, 22nd**, the URGENCI General Assembly will end with meetings to conduct elections for the next International Committee and chart the course of the organization for the next two years (these meetings are usually attended by a smaller group than the rest of the activities).

Who will attend?

Both Chinese and international participants will attend the Symposium, with at least 50 international guests who will participate in all of the Symposium's activities. The 300-400 Chinese participants will be welcome to take part in the activities they find most relevant to them.

The URGENCI Symposium will be officially held in Chinese and English with a team of interpreters offering simultaneous translation. It might be possible to offer other languages if necessary.

Featured workshops

The conference will feature workshops that will be of interest to farmers, CSA organizers, CSA members and advocates. Workshop topics and guest speakers include:

- Success stories from abroad. Profiles of thriving CSA movements in other parts of the world will be presented by visiting farmers and organizers.
- Member involvement –What does it mean to “share the risk”?
URGENCI holds strongly to the principal that CSA is not just a marketing tool, it is a mutually beneficial relationship between farmer and consumer. We will examine how to ensure that CSAs hold true to their core values.
- Expanding the boundaries of CSA: providing everyone with access to local, organic food using the principles of Community Supported Agriculture. How can the traditional CSA be connected more successfully with low-income communities, schools, institutions, and social programs.
- CSA support networks – what works for spreading CSAs? In different countries, different methods have been used to disseminate the CSA movement; and CSA has spread from country to country in unique ways. How can we help the spread of CSA while ensuring its integrity?
- Building a CSA Coalition/movement:
Special focus and attention will be given to guiding the development of a strong Chinese CSA network.
- Food Sovereignty and Farmland: What's the Connection? Land tenure is a concern for all farmers, but the tools for ensuring access to land are different from country to country.
- Practical biodiversity: Biodiversity is a current buzzword. But how do we implement it in practice on our farms to produce a wide range of crops, and gain ecological benefits from wild areas, beneficial insects and birds, and the balance that comes from a healthy ecosystem?
- Linking rural regeneration to policy at national and international level: advocating for CSA and legislation that supports sustainable small-scale family and peasant farming and consumption.



A few of the many CSA organizations that will participate in the conference

- Japan Organic Agriculture Association, Japan
- Institute for Integrated Rural Development (IIRD), India
- Equiterre, Québec
- Actors from the European CSA Movement, France, Italy, Germany, the UK, Czech Republic and many other countries!

Special guest: Olivier De Schutter, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

We will also be inviting and hosting key allies from the Food Sovereignty and organic movements.

ANNEX :



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URGENCI OBJECTIVES, 2014-2015

What we want to achieve together, as the network of CSA movements and a member of the Nyéléni Movement for Food Sovereignty:

OBJECTIVE 1: STRENGTHEN SMALL-SCALE FARMERS IN THE FOOD CHAIN

Strengthen the position of small-scale farmers in the food chain, to contribute to the realization of the right to food in urban and rural communities and overall rural development.

OBJECTIVE 2: DECENTRALISE FOOD CHAINS AND INTENSIFY RELATIONS BETWEEN PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS

In accordance with the Nyeleni Europe Declaration, work towards the decentralization of food chains and towards intensified direct relations between producers and consumers in local and solidarity-based partnerships to counter the expansion and power of agrifood business corporations.

OBJECTIVE 3: KEEP SOLIDARITY AND COMMITMENT TOWARDS FARMERS AT THE CORE OF SHORT SUPPLY CHAINS

Ensure that Solidarity remains the core value in the short supply chains, that a strong commitment to supporting small-scale farmers is a key component in emerging food systems, and that these food systems are not exclusively consumers-led.

OBJECTIVE 4: SUPPORT THE RISE OF A NEW PEASANTRY

Support the rise of a new type of small scale, sustainable, organic, GMO free, family farming, and foster a new « peasantry », through the development of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).

OBJECTIVE 5: STRUCTURE THE COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE MOVEMENT AND BUILD ALLIANCES

Make the Community Supported Agriculture movement conscious of itself, and the power of its own forces. Raise awareness about the movement's role at the crossroads between 3 larger movements: the Food Sovereignty Movement, the Organic agriculture movement and Solidarity -based Economy.

OBJECTIVE 6: SCALE UP

Work to disseminate our communities' practices and values to larger audiences to build resilient and decentralized local food systems without compromising our ethos of small producer empowerment.

6.1 Provide building blocks

Provide the building blocks for people to develop their own food distribution systems and develop systems which allow farmers to produce and process food for their communities.

6.2 Organize horizontal and independent experience sharing methodology

Work together to organize a horizontal, independent experience-sharing methodology that facilitates experienced local food system activists sharing their expertise with farmers and consumers in other locations.

6.3 Document our initiatives

Share, in a decentralized way, our stories from the field; document our initiatives, identify their limits, and show evidence of social benefits.

6.4 Engage all citizens

Engage all citizens, with special emphasis on initiatives that reach disenfranchised and disadvantaged citizens. The food produced on small farms should be accessible by all people in society, including people with little or no income.