

Common Ground for CSA in Europe Declaration-writing project / NATIONAL CONSULTATION

Report on the meeting of the German CSA-Network „Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft“ near Kassel, 13.-15.11.2015

Inspired by the European Declaration Writing process, the „Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft“ themed its whole autumn convention „Common grounds“ and made the work on the declaration the main topic. After the rapid growth of the „CSA-Movement“ and our Network during the last four years here in Germany it was about time to have a reflexion about our basic principles and the international perspective of the Urgenci-process was a good reminder of it.

We started on friday evening with a shared dinner. When we got together afterwards to open the meeting we asked the approx. 100 participants to stand in a circle and enter the middle when they can answer one of the following questions with yes: „Do you work on the farm yourself?“, „Are you about to start a CSA?“ „Does your CSA supply more than 50 (100) persons?“, „Does your CSA supply you with other products then vegetables?“ etc. With this method we all got a picture of the participants.

To get into the topic of the common grounds, Jakob and Julia - who attended the meeting on the declaration-writing in Berlin - read out the declaration in english and in german afterwards. Afterwards we all agreed on having a „work in progress“ during the whole weekend, where we check all that we talk about on it's compatibility with the draft of the declaration. Herefore we put the declaration along with differently coloured papers and a manual on the walls of the venue. Then we got together in groups of four and tried to answer the question „What is the basis of CSA for you?“ with the aim to write down all the we could agree on and get in to an informal exchange in the evening afterwards.



Julia and Jakob reading out the declaration

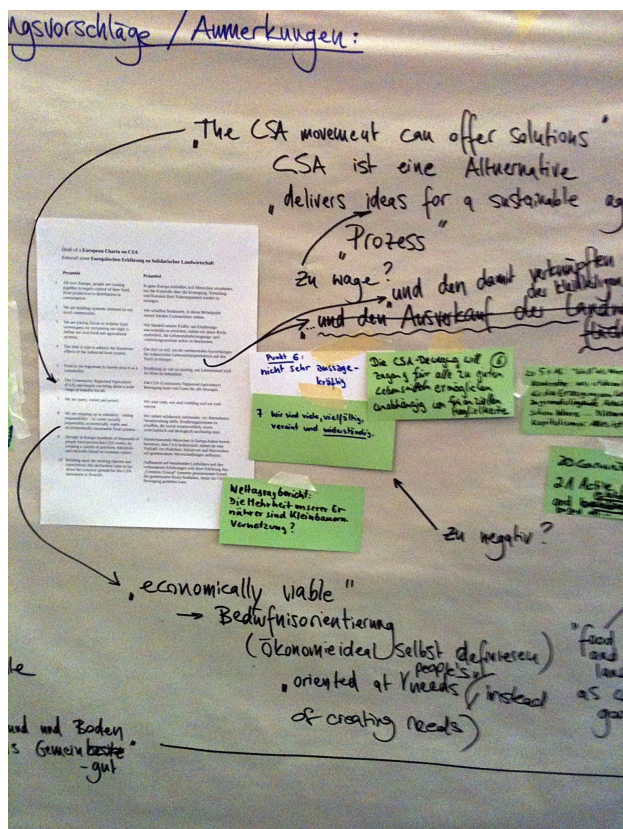
The next morning we started with a look on the results, tried to tie it together and link it with the draft of our focus for 2016. We understood the declaration as a strong political message that we can use to adress our demand: a fundamental change in the food-supply-system. Analyzing the growth of our movement we see that it is relatively easy to start with small-scale projects for the vegetable supply – a lot of this happend: we started the network with 10 CSAs in 2011 and now have approx. 50 in Germany (from the 40 new ones approx. 30 produce vegetables only). Analyzing the situation in agriculture we see the necessity and want to include all of the food- production to have a change in relevant dimensions. The disastrous situation for the german milk-producing farmers and the animals in the industrial food-system shows where change is needed the most.

How can the „Common Grounds“ help us here? On page 3 „Build / Develop / Empower“ the declaration gives guidelines for action. With our network we have already started to work in all of the announced „fields“. For us as a grassroots movement with limited funding it is always very important to be clear of our focus so this is what we tried to do on Saturday: in the „Farm-assembly“ (here all CSAs meet) and the „Assembly of the Interested“ (here the network members who are not part of a CSA meet e.g. persons in a starting/transition situation, scientists, members of other organizations etc.).

We found the following points to work on with more attention: „appreciation and wages“, „action-research and consulting“, „a growth in cooperation“ and „speaking out loud!“.

The first one is crucial as it is a main argument for CSA: a fair share (see declaration draft §17, 20 and 22)! Coming from a system where it is usual that people producing bio-food earn the minimum wage (and often less!) we still bear this heritage. As it is clearly linked to food-prices and we as CSAs are in the same „market“ as all others the strategy of many of our CSAs so far was to try to compete. This means: a family who supplies itself with CSA food should not pay more than they would pay if they shop it in the bio-supermarket. The falsity of this strategy is quite obvious but still not easy to change as it needs producers who stand up in front of their community and say: „I can and do not want to compete with the prices of the bio-food-industry and therefore you have to give a little more than in the shops (money, effort, help) to enable a better agriculture with a better pay for me as a producer!“

„Action-research and consulting“ will be a main focus as we were lucky to start a cooperation with a foundation to boost our capacities here. In an action research we will conduct, consult and document a „multi-farm-CSA“ Project in northern Germany and try to use it as a „role-model“ for our numerous small vegetable-CSAs (this is also linked to „a growth in cooperation“) as well as to open another access for existing (e.g. dairy-) farms. A general topic for the consulting is the help for new initiatives to start with CSA. Here we want to improve access to information and data. Another goal for 2016 is to intensify the exchange with the bio-food-associations (demeter, Bioland etc). These points refer to the declaration draft § 23, 25, 27, 29, 31 and 32.



Work on the Charta in progress

„A growth in Cooperation!“ describes the Agenda of not to open to many new doors but to deepen existing contacts and cooperations. We will not intensify our efforts in a growth of CSAs in numbers but in quality.

„Speaking out loud!“ is the theme of our public relations work. So far our strategy is reacting on requests from outside. We want to prototype messages from our network to the outside in current issues on food. We found somebody who wants to get involved in this work and are curious about the results and receptions.

We hope this report gave an impression of the work we did on the weekend – it is only an extract of what seemed the most important. Last but not least the constructive attitude of everybody, the heartfelt communication and the will to make a change shall be mentioned!

Your „Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft“