



Why Do Farmers Collaborate with a Food Cooperative? Reasons for Participation in a Civic Food Network in Vienna, Austria

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Abstract. Food cooperatives can be qualified as a civic food network as they can create more embedded market relations between consumers and farmers and increase knowledge about food consumption. In this study, we explore why farmers collaborated with the consumer-initiated food co-op D'Speis in Vienna, and assess the food co-op's potential to support a peasant mode of farming. Farmers and working members of the food co-op were interviewed. As the food co-op selected their suppliers depending on their production methods, i.e. small-scale and organic farming, all farmers showed some elements of peasant farming. The interaction between farmers and co-op members, especially regarding price negotiations and quality standards, provided farmers with more room to manoeuvre. As the food co-op's contribution to farmers' incomes was negligible, the food co-op mainly supported peasant farming in the sphere of social and cultural capital. However, the degree of collaboration differed substantially as more peasant farmers interacted more closely with the food co-op. The farmers and co-op members shared their criticism of the hegemonic food system, but on the other hand missed clear common goals. Both farmers and food co-op members regarded their practices as political acts for a different food system. Values deduced from these practices point towards food sovereignty, which could serve as a compass for common political actions.

Introduction

Concepts such as alternative food networks (AFNs), short food supply chains and local food systems have been increasingly criticized in the last years. First, they are charged with focusing solely on the supply chain, leaving out the consumers (Trege-

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ar, 2011; Renting et al., 2012). Second, 'local' is often intrinsically linked to 'good' characteristics such as sustainability, social justice, higher quality or fairness; a link that is problematic (e.g. Born and Purcell, 2006). The main criticism, however, is the inherent binary opposition to the so-called conventional food system (Hinrichs, 2000; DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Holloway et al., 2007; Tregear, 2011; Mount, 2012; Renting et al., 2012; Wilson, 2013). On a methodological level this has often led to biased studies that ignore power relations within AFNs (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Holloway et al., 2007; Wilson, 2013). On an empirical level this becomes increasingly problematic as: 1. retail chains respond to consumer demands for more local and organic food (Allen and Kovach, 2000; Konefal et al., 2005; Lockie, 2009; Darnhofer et al., 2010), qualities that were formerly linked to AFN; and 2. farmers often cater to both retail and 'alternative' market channels (Maye and Ilbery, 2006; Milestad et al., 2010a; Mount, 2012).

Civic food networks (CFNs) are a more recent concept that provides a promising solution to the above-mentioned critiques. CFNs are framed as an expression of civil society influencing market and state governance mechanisms (Renting et al., 2012), linking CFNs to political concepts such as food democracy (Hassanein, 2003), food citizenship (Wilkins, 2005; Seyfang, 2006; Lockie, 2009) and food sovereignty (Nyéléni, 2007; Hospes, 2013). In doing so they meet the demand that AFNs should distinguish themselves by the quality of interaction between the actors, and not the quality of the products circulating in the networks (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Mount, 2012). Thus the dichotomy of conventional/alternative and global/local can be transcended. The concept of CFN encourages the critical assessment of the interactions between network actors as well as between the food network and the political-economic context (Renting et al., 2012).

The view that CFNs influence power relations in the governance triangle of civil society, market and state resonates well with Van der Ploeg's (2008) conceptualization of the peasant mode of farming. In this mode, farmers aim for flexibility in market relations and engage themselves in society as active citizens, all in order to achieve more autonomy. Peasants reduce external inputs and dependencies in their agricultural production, which goes along with the consumers' wish to support local, organic and small-scale agriculture (Van der Ploeg, 2008). Thus, it would be possible to hypothesize that farmers with a high degree of peasantness are more likely to engage in a CFN.

Along the increased interest in CFNs, consumer-initiated forms of CFNs, such as food cooperatives (co-ops), have received more attention from researchers (Little et al., 2010; Murtagh, 2010; Bingen et al., 2011; Brunori et al., 2011, 2012; Martino and Pampanini, 2012; Lutz and Schachinger, 2012, 2013; Fonte, 2013; Grasseni, 2014). Food co-ops are groups of individuals or households who organize at least part of their food purchases jointly in order to avoid intermediary traders. Food co-op members become active citizens sculpting a different food distribution system because of their dissatisfaction with the hegemonic food system¹ (Little et al., 2010; Grasseni, 2014). In this endeavour, market relations with farmers are reconfigured along trust, solidarity and transparency (Murtagh, 2010; Brunori et al., 2011, 2012; Lutz and Schachinger, 2013; Grasseni, 2014). In the sphere of cultural capital, new knowledge and discourses supporting sustainable eating practices are promoted (Bingen et al., 2011; Lutz and Schachinger, 2013). Most co-op members see the actions of the food co-op itself as political, while only some participants are engaged in other political movements (Little et al., 2010; Murtagh, 2010; Brunori et al., 2012; Grasseni, 2014).

Up to now, most literature on food co-ops has focused on the participating consumers (e.g. McGrath, 2004; Murtagh, 2010; Little et al., 2010; Bingen et al., 2011; Pearson et al., 2011; Brunori et al., 2012; Martino and Pampanini, 2012; Fonte, 2013), while the farmers have been less researched (Brunori et al., 2011; Lutz and Schachinger, 2013). By looking into the farmers' motives for collaboration and by exploring the links between the peasant mode of farming and collaboration with a food co-op, we wish to contribute to the wider debate revolving around CFNs in general, and food co-ops in particular. For this reason we tried to work out the specificities of food co-ops, both in relation to mainstream food actors such as retailers and wholesalers as well as in relation to other direct marketing initiatives such as farmers' markets, farm shops and home delivery. The theoretical point of departure for our study is the relation between peasant agriculture (Van der Ploeg, 2008) and CFNs (Renting et al., 2012). Empirical data were collected from a food co-op in Vienna, Austria, whom we hope to provide with empirical data for self-reflection.

Peasant Agriculture, Civic Food Networks and Food Cooperatives

Van der Ploeg (2008, p. 262) describes peasant farming as 'an emancipatory notion. It outlines the potentials entailed within the peasantry.' These potentials consist of ways of redefining ecological, social and cultural capital in order to increase autonomy from the state and financial capital. Ecological capital is strengthened through the use of ecologically sustainable farming methods. Peasants aim at increasing the efficiency of the production system while preserving or even strengthening their resource base. Social capital is fostered in forms of local self-organization among farmers and between farmers and consumers. Cultural capital is redefined by more direct links between producers and consumers, where the specificity of agricultural production is communicated. Depending on the intensity and composition of these principles, varying degrees of 'peasantness' are possible. Van der Ploeg (2008) contrasts the peasant mode of farming with entrepreneurial and corporate farming. The variability in farming modes corresponds to the concept of hybridity: the fact that producers and consumers can be integrated into and influenced by both CFNs and the hegemonic food system (Maye and Ilbery, 2006; Milestad et al., 2010a; Mount, 2012).

Another essential element of the peasant mode of farming is the nature of the interaction with markets. For peasants, the market is where consumers and producers meet. Price is not the major guiding principle in decision-making. In the entrepreneurial mode of farming, by contrast, production is more dependent on external inputs (e.g. credit, pesticides, fertilizers) and is therefore more dependent on price signals (Van der Ploeg, 2008). Drawing on Hinrichs's (2000) usage of the concept of social embeddedness, the peasant mode of farming can be characterized by a lower degree of marketness. On a broader level, peasants aim for a power shift away from the market and the state towards a civil society that includes peasants as active citizens (Van der Ploeg, 2008).

Engaging in CFNs constitutes one way of influencing market and state governance mechanisms (Renting et al., 2012). The concept of CFN focuses on the interaction between the food network's actors and their influence in the governance triangle of market, state and civil society. A CFN influences the relationship between civil society and the market by constructing alternative ways of food provisioning. The relationship between civil society and the state is influenced by taking politi-

cal action and by changing institutions, culture and public opinion (Renting et al., 2012). Thereby, all activities throughout the food supply chain, including political activities by the networks' actors are included in the concept of CFN. Consumers become co-producers, pro-sumers (Brunori et al., 2012; Renting et al., 2012; Veen et al., 2012) or citizen-consumers (Johnston, 2008), terms that reflect their active role in co-producing new forms of food provisioning. In order to be truly civic, CFNs need to transcend market logic (such as private ownership, growth and focus on individual needs) and to build communities that work together (DeLind, 2002). In this way, CFNs become more than niche marketing strategies and have a potential to expand the autonomy of peasant farmers.

Food co-ops can be qualified as CFNs as they reach beyond other forms of direct marketing in several ways. They constitute an institutionalized form of interaction between consumers and farmers, which is 'co-produced' by both of them. Food co-op members are no longer mere consumers as they are at the farmers' market or the farm shop (Haedicke, 2012). This allows collaboration with farmers that goes beyond traditional forms of direct marketing (Brunori et al., 2011; Renting et al., 2012; Grasseni, 2014). The fact that consumers organize themselves as a group for collective purchasing is a major social innovation (Little et al., 2010; Haedicke, 2012). Accordingly, previous studies on food co-ops have focused predominately on the consumers as food co-op members, their motives for participating in the co-op (Hibbert et al., 2003; Freathy and Hare, 2004; Little et al., 2010; Murtagh, 2010), their consumption patterns (Bingen et al., 2011; Pearson et al., 2011) and their interactions in the co-op (Freathy and Hare, 2004; McGrath, 2004; Little et al., 2010; Haedicke, 2012; Martino and Pampanini, 2012). The following literature review deals mostly with farmers' reasons to participate in CFNs or direct marketing schemes in general because there is limited specific literature on food co-ops.

Autonomy can be strengthened in CFNs through an extension of the farmers' room to manoeuvre, i.e. a change of the market's governance mechanisms. As members of CFNs, farmers may have more possibilities of choosing, influencing or trying out new production and processing methods or new ways of marketing. They thereby gain control over the supply chain (Maye and Ilbery, 2006; Mayr, 2011). Furthermore, quality requirements are generally more in line with extensive production methods, as consumers accept natural variations in size and form or are mostly willing to bear the increased production costs (Lamine, 2005; Grasseni, 2014). By selling via CFNs, farmers' income and autonomy can be expected to increase as a result of higher prices paid to farmers, exclusion of intermediaries, on-farm processing and added value, diversification of products offered and/or the development of local brands (Karner, 2010). In contributing to the farmers' income, the survival of farms can thus be secured (Van der Ploeg, 2008). However, it is still ambiguous whether the above-mentioned strategies actually lead to higher income (Marsden et al., 2000; Schönhart et al., 2009; Goldberger, 2011; Flora et al., 2012). Furthermore, this increase in income and autonomy can be gained at the cost of extra working hours, which could impede on the personal well-being of farmers (DeLind, 2003; Zeitlhofer, 2008; Milestad et al., 2010a; Brunori et al., 2011).

Regarding cultural capital, CFN actors establish a link as direct as possible between producers and consumers. As in the case of community supported agriculture (CSA), the French Associations pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne (AMAP) and the Italian Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale (GAS), the boundaries between consumers and producers become less distinct so that researchers refer to consumers

as co-producers (Brunori et al., 2012; Renting et al., 2012). The direct contact between farmers and consumers provides potential for mutual learning (Van der Ploeg, 2008; Milestad et al., 2010b). Farmers often experience higher satisfaction from their work, since they enjoy the contact with customers themselves and the feedback they receive (Zeitlhofer, 2008; Mayr, 2011; Flora et al., 2012). If consumers understand the conditions under which farmers produce (weather, markets, policies), they are more likely to pay the real price for products and appreciate quality. This in turn enables farmers to use sustainable farming methods, which are more in line with the peasant farming principle (Kerton and Sinclair, 2009). By engaging in food co-ops, consumers learn how to integrate seasonal products into their diet and new knowledge and discourses are created (Bingen et al., 2011; Brunori et al., 2012; Lutz and Schachinger, 2013). In the Italian GAS, knowledge is passed on from consumers to farmers as GAS members approach farmers proactively asking them to convert to sustainable farming practices and to supply the food co-ops. Farming and distribution practices are co-produced in this case (Brunori et al., 2011; Grasseni, 2014). Direct contact therefore facilitates a different solution to the natural contingencies in food production than the uniformity and standardization of industrial techniques in the hegemonic food system does (Lamine, 2005).

On the other hand, only communication with actively engaged consumers leads to these positive results (Tregear, 2011). Detailed information about products and production will not reach passive consumers (DuPuis and Gillon, 2009). Moreover, direct marketing systems are not immune to deliberate deception or misinformation (Tregear, 2011). Romanticized images of farming are often used for marketing purposes (Hinrichs, 2000). Also, trust, which is supposedly cultivated in the direct exchange, is not only a result but also a premise for the direct exchange. Direct exchange between consumers and producers provides CFNs with legitimacy because it represents the difference to the hegemonic food system (Mount, 2012).

Lastly, CFNs can be starting points for common political actions launched by consumers and producers. For this endeavour, shared values and goals as normative compass are greatly beneficial. A broad dissatisfaction with the hegemonic food system is a common motive for participation of food co-op members. Food co-ops are in this sense an expression of food citizenship as consumers take control over the distribution in the food system. However, research has shown that the motives of CFN participants are often more individualistic and instrumentalist than this (DeLind, 2003; Cox et al., 2008; Pole and Gray, 2013). For the consumers, food co-ops facilitate the purchase of affordable and local organic food (Freathy and Hare, 2004; Little et al., 2010; Grasseni, 2014). In some cases the emphasis lies more on accessibility, as Lutz and Schachinger (2013) show in the case of a rural food co-op in Austria. In other cases, the prices of organic produce are too high (Fonte, 2013; Grasseni, 2014). Additionally, co-op members gather experience in management and group organization, and consequently gain self-esteem and feel empowered (Hibbert et al., 2003). Food co-op members feel part of a community, which supports their well-being (Hibbert et al., 2003; Little et al., 2010; Bingen et al., 2011; Brunori et al., 2012; Fonte, 2013; Grasseni, 2014). This reveals that rather individualistic and instrumentalist reasons for participation are often more relevant (DeLind, 2003; Pole and Gray, 2013).

Altogether, there can be a wide range of different motives between CFNs (Allen et al., 2003; Little et al., 2010), among participants of the same CFN, and over time (Cox et al., 2008). A major distinction is whether the CFN's activities are aimed at building

alternatives to the current food system without changing the framework conditions, or at changing the food and/or social system as a whole (Allen et al., 2003; Sonnino and Marsden, 2006; Follett, 2009). Holt Giménez and Shattuck (2011) call these two groups:

1. progressive: encompassing the many grass-roots initiatives of CFNs, which act predominantly on a local level and build alternatives into the system;
2. radical: encompassing e.g. the movement for food sovereignty, which calls for structural changes in the food system as a precondition for the success of alternatives such as CFNs.

Other research suggests that there is a core of activists with stronger common identities, goals and values that mobilize less-engaged network members or new participants (Murtagh, 2010). Such is the case in food co-ops, where only some members are affiliated to political movements such as the food sovereignty movement (Drazic et al., 2012; Grasseni, 2014). This points to the fact that there will always be a diversity in participants' motives, which needs to be handled in a democratic and reflexive approach if CFNs are to retain their transformative potential while scaling up (DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Mount, 2012). Depending on the political orientation of CFN actors (progressive or radical) and on the way of handling the heterogeneity in goals (prescriptive or reflexive), CFN actors might or might not engage in further political action.

In conclusion, engaging in CFNs is one way for farmers to implement a peasant mode of farming as CFNs reconfigure the relationship between civil society, the market and the state. CFNs can enlarge the peasants' room to manoeuvre in regard to their economy, in the sphere of cultural capital and by common political actions. Food co-ops constitute an interesting case as consumers themselves initiate them. In some cases, such as in the Austrian example we use here, food co-op members see their practices as a way to enact solidarity for the peasant mode of farming (Little et al., 2010; Fonte, 2013; Grasseni, 2014). In the following we assess this claim. Exploring the question how peasant farming is supported by food co-ops allows us at the same time to shed light on farmers' motives to collaborate with food co-ops.

The D'Speis Food Co-op in Austria

Austria's first food co-op, BERSTA,² was established in 1980 as a response to negative consequences of the productivist agriculture development model and thereby had a clear political aspiration. Contrary to other parts of Europe and North America where food co-ops experienced a growth phase fuelled by the rise of concerned consumerism in the 1990s (Little et al., 2010), the Austrian movement could not maintain its momentum. Firstly, producer-led forms of direct marketing were increasingly promoted by government policies for regional development during this time. Secondly, the two major retail chains in Austria launched their own organic brands in the early 1990s. Since then retail chains have constituted a powerful competitor to direct marketing initiatives. In the past decade, the proportion of traditional forms of direct marketing, such as farmers' markets and farm shops, has diminished, while sales of organic produce through retail chains have continued to increase (Karner, 2010). At present, 69% of organic products are sold via retail chains, while direct marketing covers only 6% (Bio Austria and ORA, 2011). Most of the demand for local and/or organic food was, and still is, met by retail chains. Only recently, alternative

organic marketing strategies such as box schemes, CSAs and food cooperatives have emerged as a reaction to the conventionalization of organic products in supermarkets (Karner, 2010; Schermer, 2012).

At present, Austrian consumer-initiated food co-ops can be divided into three categories (foodcoops.at, 2013).

1. Informally organized purchasing groups consisting of a few households. These groups depend on voluntary work. Decision-making is cooperative, i.e. managed by the group.
2. Food co-ops in the legal form of associations. As a consequence the food co-op's activity becomes less dependent on individuals. Leases, bank accounts, invoices and other contracts are handled within the association. The responsibilities and risks are shared among the members. Most of these groups restrict the number of members in order to retain the values of mutual trust, grass-roots democracy and active involvement of all members.
3. Provisioner–customer networks (Versorger-Verbraucher-Netzwerke). These food co-ops are shops/outlets open to any customer. Membership is voluntary and perceived as ideological support for the idea (NETs.werk Verein, 2012). The management of the food co-op is coordinated, i.e. a central governing body takes decisions for the group (Lutz and Schachinger, 2013).

In this article we focus on a food co-op in the second category. There are three reasons for this. First, such a co-op emphasizes active involvement of all members. This means that everybody should participate by taking over certain tasks and by attending regular meetings. Only members of the food co-op can purchase food from the co-op. Important decisions are taken together at monthly meetings. Usually, separate working groups are responsible for the different tasks that are necessary for the food co-op's functioning. Second, food co-ops in this category have a certain size and are able to scale up, thus being able to make a difference to the farmers that engage with the food co-op. And third, these food co-ops were known to the first author to aim particularly for direct contact with the farmers and supporting peasant farming – issues that lie at the core of this article.

During the time of the field work (spring 2013) there were only six food co-ops of this kind in Austria that had been operating for more than one year. From these six, we chose the D'Speis in Vienna (founded 2010) as our case study. Firstly, with 150 members D'Speis was the largest of its kind in Austria at that time. Secondly, the first author, having been a member of the D'Speis for three years, had significant knowledge about the food co-op's functioning. Despite intensive reflection of her own role during the research, a bias in the study cannot be ruled out (Jaklin, 2013). In order to explore the consumer side of the interaction between the food co-op and farmers, her personal experiences were complemented by a group interview with four members of the 'Products' working group. This working group is responsible for collecting the orders of the members, contacting the farmers to organize delivery and gathering and communicating information about the producers. As the main focus of this study is on the farmers, interviews were held with all 12 farmers supplying D'Speis. Semi-structured interviews, complemented by structured questionnaires, were used to gather information on farmers' marketing profiles, their experiences in the interaction with D'Speis, their reasons for collaboration and their values and goals regarding the (change in the) food system. In addition, two vegetable farms with which the collaboration had ended (N1, N2) were included in the survey (Table

Table 1. Information on the 14 farms represented in interviews and the products they supply to the D'Speis food co-op and others.

ID	Province	(Certified) organic since	Off-farm employment	Cultivated area (ha)	Products	Products delivered to food co-ops	No. of food co-ops supplied	Supplying D'Speis since	Order interval
1	Lower Austria	1990	No	No data	Lamb, beef, honey, eggs, jams	Lamb	1 (D'Speis)	Oct. 2012	Monthly
2	Vienna	2002	Yes	0	Honey	Honey	2	Oct. 2011	As required
3	Lower Austria	1988	No	56	Arable crops	Cereals, oil, pasta, spices, sugar	7	May 2010	Monthly
4	Lower Austria	2005	No	9,2	Apples	Apples, cider, apple juice	4	Nov 2012	Monthly
5	Lower Austria	1989	No	19	Lamb, vegetables, wine, arable crops	Wine, grape juice	1 (D'Speis)	May 2010	As required
6	Lower Austria	1983	No	48	Arable crops, dairy products, herbs, forest	Herbs, herbal products	4	May 2010	As required
7	Lower Austria	1979	No	32	Beef, meadow orchards, forest	Apple juice, pear juice, chestnuts	1 (D'Speis)	Feb 2012	As required
8	Lower Austria	2000	No	10	Vegetables, plant nursery	Vegetables	4	Feb 2012	Weekly
9	Lower Austria	1995	No	252	Arable crops, beef, forest, hydroelectricity, farm holidays	Potatoes, onions	3	Jan. 2012	As required
10	Carinthia	1977	No	36	Lamb, honey, herbal products, seminars, farm holidays	Honey, lamb, pork	2	May 2010	Occasionally
11	Styria	2006	Yes	12	Lamb, vegetables, meadow orchard, forest	Pickles, liqueur, syrups	5	May 2010	Occasionally
12	Lower Austria	2012	No	0,75	Vegetables	Vegetables	4	July 2012	Weekly
N1	Vienna	1989	No	45	Arable crops, vegetables	Vegetables	0		
N2	Burgenland	2006	No	60	Vegetables, fruits, wine, arable crops	Vegetables	0		

1). One of these farms did not want to deliver the vegetables to the storeroom and did not produce enough to supply the food co-op. The food co-op ended its collaboration with the other farm because its produce was considered too specialized and too expensive.

All interviews were transcribed and analysed according to their content using inductive and deductive codes (Mayring, 2000) with the help of the qualitative research data analysis software Dedoose (SCRC, 2010).

Differing Degrees of Peasantness

In order to answer the question whether, and how, food co-ops support peasant farming we began by looking at the mode of farming used by the interviewed farmers, focusing on the main principle of the peasant mode of farming, i.e. striving for autonomy. All farms investigated except two (Farms 2 and 11) were run full-time. The farmers did not have to supplement their income with off-farm activities, which we see as proof of their autonomy. Financial survival of the farms was largely due to two factors: their 'co-production with nature' and their 'interaction with the market' (Van der Ploeg, 2008).

All farms were either certified organic farms, or claimed to work according to organic principles without organic certification (Farms 10, 11). Furthermore, half of them had adopted organic production methods in the 1980s and can therefore be qualified as pioneers of organic farming. The second major group comprised new rurals who took over farms around the turn of the millennium. Financial reasons for converting to organic production proved to be dominant on only one farm (Farm 4). Instead, farmers wanted to provide consumers with quality products. For example:

'Why focus on rare vegetables? Because this was one of my motives to begin vegetable production in the first place. Because in the shops you always get the same varieties and they are mostly tasteless' (Farmer 12).

Most farms had a rather diversified production, either combining different production enterprises or producing a wide variety of species. In vegetable production, the farmers placed particular emphasis on rare cultivars (Farms 12, N2) and/or manual work (Farms 8, 12). Farm 4, which only produced apples, was an exception concerning diversification. Most farmers chose diversification in order to close nutrient cycles on the farm, spread the risk over several production enterprises and at the same time offer a wide range of products to customers.

Production methods and modes of marketing were highly interlinked on the farms. Direct marketing schemes were chosen because they were well adapted to a desired way of producing, or certain production fields were started because they appropriately complemented marketing. All in all, autonomy was a major motive for designing farm production and marketing. As expressed by one of the farmers:

'We didn't want to surrender to the price dictates of an intermediary. And in order to deliver to such an intermediary, I believe, you have to produce really large amounts, which we surely haven't got yet, and perhaps will never have. We don't want to become a big farm. We basically want to manage everything the two of us, with some help' (Farmer 12).

Concerning their marketing, the farms could be divided into groups along two lines of differentiation: the degree of direct marketing and the number of marketing chan-

nels used (Table 2). First, we identified three groups according to the share of direct marketing in their marketing strategy.

- Farms with a low share of direct marketing. These farms mainly marketed their products via mainstream intermediaries and retailers (more than 85% of products) and specialized in one product, such as potatoes, herbs or apples, which were produced in larger quantities.
- Farms with both direct marketing and other forms of marketing (40–95% direct marketing). Three farms used wholesalers (Farms 5, 8, N2) in the case of overproduction, amounting to about 5% of their production volume. Farm 3 produced more than 30 different arable crops and used eight different distribution channels, some of which were wholesalers or producer cooperatives, some CFNs.
- Farms with 100% direct marketing (such as farmers' markets, on-farm sales, home delivery or food co-ops).

Second, the farms were grouped in two groups depending on the number of market channels they used. The first group used several distribution channels while the second group used one channel for 70–90% of their production. The farms that had no clear focus on one distribution channel did so as a deliberate strategy to avoid dependence and guarantee their survival.

The degree of peasantness these farmers exhibited depended on their level of co-production with nature and on their interaction with the market. The more environmentally benign production methods used and the more diversified the production, the higher the degree of peasantness. The more direct marketing and the higher the number of market channels, the higher the degree of peasantness. While the feature 'co-production with nature' of the peasant mode of farming was fulfilled by all of them to a certain degree (farming organically), the market and the diversification of production appeared to be the main differences between the farmers. The degree of direct marketing differed substantially (Table 2), with Farms 4, 6, 9 and N1 showing inextricable links to, and dependence on, intermediaries and retailers. Likewise the degree of diversification of production ranged from Farm 4, which focused solely on apple plantations, to farms that relied on several production sectors, such as animal husbandry, wine production, arable crops and vegetable production (Farms N2, 5,

Table 2. Marketing profile of the study farms in terms of distribution channel type and relative proportion of produce handled (n=14).

	Marketing via intermediaries and retailers (> 85%)	Hybrid marketing (40–95% direct marketing)	100% direct marketing
Combination of several distribution channels	Farms 6, N1	Farms 3, 8	Farm 2
Focus on one distribution channel (70–90% of production)	Farms 4, 9	Farm 5 (off-farm sales) Farm N2 (farmers' markets)	Farms 1, 7, 10 (off-farm sales) Farm 12 (farmers' markets) Farm 11 (food co-ops)

10, 11). In conclusion, the analysis shows that the farmers covered a broad range in the continuum between peasant and entrepreneurial farming modes (Van der Ploeg, 2008), but as a group they tended towards the peasant mode more than the entrepreneurial mode (Figure 1).

Turning now to the reasons why farmers engaged with the food co-op D'Speis, the issues of autonomy, the level of face-to-face interaction and shared values are highlighted.

Potential Increase of Autonomy: Negotiating Quality, Logistics and Price

Local provenance and organic production methods were the main criteria of the food co-op members in their choice of suppliers. Process qualities (artisanal, organic) prevailed over product qualities such as homogeneity, size or shape. Natural variations in size and shape of the vegetables were accepted since the natural contingencies of food production were understood. The vegetables, but also packing and labelling, did not have to comply with norms for size or appearance. This is fundamentally different from private product quality standards such as GLOBALG.A.P. (Global standards for Good Agricultural Practice) governing the hegemonic food system (Konefal et al., 2005; Vorley, 2007). Vegetable producers (Farms 8, 12) in particular benefited from this difference, as it allowed them to use peasant farming methods such as reduced use of machinery and external inputs, growing rare cultivars and propagating their own seeds.

‘We are to some degree quite unprofessional in the production. I mean, we don’t have incredibly nice labels, and all the jars are different from each other. That works with food co-ops. That is convenient’ (Farmer 11).

Furthermore, while organic production was a selection criterion for the food co-op, organic certification was not a requirement. Instead, the co-op members relied on trust in the relationship with producers and on the direct contact, which allowed potential checks on the production methods. This was beneficial for two farms, which had rejected organic certification for ideological reasons (Farms 10, 11). Both argued that the European regulations on organic production omitted important issues such as social standards. They also disapproved of the conventionalization of organic agriculture, in which they believed certification and regulation played a critical role.

In the course of the interviews, logistics emerged as an essential factor. Retail chains exclude small-scale producers through their supply chain management (Vorley, 2007). Their logistic systems are highly efficient, benefiting from economies of

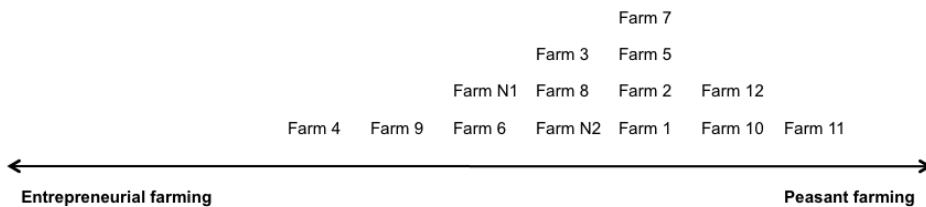


Figure 1. Positioning of farms studied on the continuum of peasant and entrepreneurial farming.

scale (Schönhart et al., 2009). Accordingly, only large-scale farmers in this study mentioned the efficient logistic system of wholesalers and producer cooperatives as an advantage, although these intermediaries were not always as flexible as the food co-op in arranging their logistics according to the farmers' needs.

Still, the interviewed farmers expressed that the logistic system of the food co-op needed to be arranged more efficiently and more according to the needs of the farmers. Most problems mentioned by the farmers related to logistics and delivery. This was due to the organization of the food co-op's storeroom, which was only open for a few hours a week to allow members to collect their food or producers to deliver their produce. As one of the D'Speis members explained:

'Well, we communicate that on Tuesday or Friday our store is open. And depending on whether that is alright for them, then it is alright for us as well... But I'd say that the producers still have to adjust to us, because it is just Tuesday or Friday' (D'Speis member, 'Products' working group).

If farmers could not deliver during these times, they could either fix an appointment for delivery or they had their own key to the storeroom. However, keys were only given to suppliers who delivered regularly (vegetables or dairy products). Some farmers (Farms 2, 4, 7, 9, 11) considered fixing an appointment an inconvenience, while others did not perceive this as a problem (Farms 1, 5, 10). Food co-op members tried to arrange the delivery in a manner that suited the farmers and themselves. However, due to the non-hierarchical organization, such arrangements were seen as 'chaotic' and challenging by one farmer (Farm N2).

Solving logistical questions was especially important in the beginning of the collaboration between a farmer and the food co-op. D'Speis preferred to get its produce delivered to its store by the farmers, as it had only limited transportation means. The farmers, on the other hand, saw the delivery as a cost. If they could not integrate deliveries to the food co-op into another marketing scheme (box schemes, home delivery, catering restaurants) or combine it with private duties, collaboration did not come about (Farm N1).

In order to help farmers deliver to food co-ops, inspiration could be drawn from the GAS in Italy, where networks of several GAS allow for efficiency gains in logistics (Brunori et al., 2012). Another example of well-developed logistic solutions in CFNs is the Austrian provisioner-customer networks, where farmers organize themselves within communities to carry out deliveries (Lutz and Schachinger, 2012). Finding solutions to these questions are primordial as food co-ops scale up and need to convince more farmers to start direct marketing.

On the other hand, collaboration with D'Speis offered farmers more room to manoeuvre compared with retail chains regarding price setting. Food co-ops in Austria are not (yet) in a position where they can influence prices in the way powerful retail chains can and, according to their values, food co-ops do not aim to do so. In 12 out of 14 cases, the farmers reported that the food co-op simply accepted the prices farmers proposed. Sometimes the food co-op members asked for a discount as they ordered in bulk (Farms 8, 10, 12). In other cases, the food co-op was not aware of discounts that farmers granted them without explicitly communicating these (Farms 2, 4, 5). As noted by a farmer delivering honey to the co-op:

'In the beginning they said that they didn't want to beat down the price or the like, but that the producer should also have his share of it. Well, all the haggling was actually left out. So, when I give them the honey a bit

cheaper, then I am doing it simply because I like it. Because I see: 'Okay, ten, fifteen per cent – I don't care.' They should also get something out of it' (Farmer 2).

Problems occurred in connection with two vegetable producers specializing in rare cultivars. Some of their products were too expensive for the food co-op members, which led to termination of collaboration with one farm (Farm N2). Being predominantly students, co-op members preferred a regular assortment of vegetables at lower prices. The problem was solved with the other vegetable producer (Farm 12), who agreed to lower prices and adjusted vegetable production in the next season.

Food co-op members were ready to make compromises in favour of the farmers when it was relatively easy and did not involve any major investments. Mostly this concerned quality standards and the settling of the prices. When it came to accommodating farmers' financial needs, such as paying higher prices for rare vegetable cultivars or helping to install an efficient delivery system, the food co-op's capacity was limited. Mostly, the farmers tried to make the step towards the food co-ops by granting them discounts and including them into their delivery schedules if possible. This mirrors similar findings for CSAs, where, in the end, farmers carry the extra workload of sustaining the community interaction (DeLind, 2003).

In addition, food co-ops were only of marginal financial importance for most farms included in the survey. The amount of a specific product marketed via food co-ops (not only D'Speis) did not exceed 15% of the total production volume of any farm except one, a collective farm, which only marketed the surplus from its subsistence production. The small quantities supplied to food co-ops were due to the fact that most farms started to supply food co-ops in addition to a well-established marketing strategy and that food co-ops did not purchase enough to allow all produce to be marketed via that route. Still, farmers appreciated the bulk orders of the food co-op as they could supply a larger group of consumers in one place, saving time and material for cleaning, packaging and selling. Thus, in regards to costs for the farmers, catering food co-ops costs less than common forms of direct marketing (farm shops, farmers' markets, box schemes), but more than selling to wholesalers or retailers (since they will take larger orders and thus transport costs are decreased).

Considering the material aspects of the interaction between farmers and food co-ops, it can be said that it is mostly peasants supporting consumers and not the other way round (DeLind, 2003). Some farmers perceived their collaboration with D'Speis as support for an initiative coming from consumers (Farms 3, 5, 10, N2). In this sense, the collaboration with the food co-op served as a reassertion of their own practice and/or was chosen as a distribution channel because it fitted the personal beliefs of the farmers as embodied in their practice. For example:

'The second major reason is our ideological preference. I mean, we don't want to produce for the anonymous market... And for this reason we decided on the food co-ops. That feels great and we get a little bit of money. It fits into our concept' (Farmer 11).

This points to the sphere of immaterial benefits, such as common values, increased well-being and direct contact, which will be discussed in the following sections.

More Collaboration But Less Direct Interaction

In the interviews it became obvious that the peasant identity and personal well-being of the farmers was enhanced through the collaboration with the food co-op.

This stems in large part from the appreciation of the farmers' work and the reduction in anonymity in the food supply chain. Food co-op members and farmers alike valued the direct contact between each other. Four farmers expressed that they felt appreciated for their work from the part of the food co-op (Farms 3, 6, 9, 11). This appreciation led to a higher degree of well-being and satisfaction with their own work. Generally, the removal of anonymity in the food system was a major motivation for nearly all farmers to start direct marketing. The farmer at Farm 9 expressed it thus:

'For me, it is much more fun to deliver small amounts to the food co-ops and to see how the people are excited when I come along than to let big amounts simply be taken along by a truck and I think: 'Okay, fifty per cent of it will probably end up in the garbage anyway' (Farmer 9).

On the whole, farmers and food co-op members rated their interaction as 'uncomplicated' (Farm 3), 'cooperative' (D'Speis member) or 'amicable' (D'Speis member). Farmers appreciated the interaction, the swift payment of bills and the clear formulation of orders. Other examples of special arrangements point into this direction too. For example, after a period of floods the food co-op accepted dirty and therefore non-marketable lettuce at a reduced price (Farm 12). One vegetable farm, which converted to community supported agriculture (CSA) was allowed to use the food co-op's storeroom as a pick-up point for its CSA customers (Farm 8). The food co-op sometimes arranged working trips to one of the vegetable farms (Farm 12). Two farms that were part of the movement for food sovereignty and other political movements used the food co-op to circulate political information (Farms 10, 11). These cases of more intense collaboration were mostly with farmers who had a higher degree of peasantness (Figure 1). More entrepreneurial farmers had less interaction with the food co-op, in one case not even knowing what a food co-op was.

The more peasant-type farmers criticized the fact that contact with the food co-op was not as direct as selling at a farmers' market or directly on-farm (Farms 1, 2, 5, 10, 11, 12). In the food co-op the intensity of the contact varied according to the delivery interval, length of collaboration, distance from the food co-op and personal factors. One farmer described this disadvantage thus:

'It is a pity, because this basic idea of the direct contact is just missing, because the people of the food co-op don't come to us and have a look... That is, I believe, the most serious disadvantage. The rest works totally well' (Farmer 11).

This was due to the organization of the food co-op. Most farmers had contact with only one person at the food co-op (the person responsible for purchasing). As a consequence they did not know all the consumers as they would on a farmers' market. This can be partly relativized, as several previous studies have pointed out the limitations of direct contact, for example at farmers' markets (DuPuis and Gillon, 2009; Tregear, 2011; Mount, 2012).

The food co-op members were aware of the lack of contact with their suppliers. If time and workload allowed it, group excursions to farms were organized so that food co-op members could meet the supplying farmers, experience their working life and collect information for other food co-op members. The food co-op thereby followed Mount's (2012) suggestion of maintaining elements of direct contact while up-scaling in order to legitimize its alterity. However, these excursions depended on voluntary work and were only organized twice a year. Apparently, this contact was not enough for some farmers.

Despite the limited direct contact, none of the farmers interviewed complained about a lack of understanding on the part of the co-op members. The disproportionately large share of students of agriculture or environmental studies in the food co-op (23% in Viennese food co-ops, according to Benovic et al., 2012) could explain this. In addition, food co-op members had empathy for farmers because of their own work experience on farms (e.g. WWOOFing) or because of their rural background (Benovic et al., 2012). A second major factor might be the shared criticism of the hegemonic food system, which lays the basis for trust between producers and consumers with limited or no direct exchange of information (Mount, 2012).

Shared Criticisms = Common Values?

Farmers and D'Speis shared a critique of the hegemonic food system. The major problems farmers perceived were the lack of transparency and the growing anonymity in this system. Because of this anonymity, farmers reasoned that consumers lacked an understanding of agricultural production with its dependence on natural factors. This resulted in consumers being ignorant of the seasonal or regional availability of products. Consequently, the farmers attributed the responsibility for the assortment of retailers and for high rates of food wastes to the consumers. The retail chains were in turn denounced for dictating prices and production conditions. Two of the farmers described their interaction with retailers thus:

'The prices are set externally. You cannot decide on them. They are simply in the contract. So you either say: 'Okay, I produce to these conditions' or you look for someone else' (Farmer 9).

'They ask for large amounts, which you have to adjust to of course. It's not easy to produce large quantities just like that. And then you're dependent, because you invested in a storehouse or a processing machine. We have already heard that they (the retailers) send the produce back if it is too much. Or other things like that happen every so often' (Farmer N1).

Comparing these statements from the farmers with texts published on the D'Speis website, it is evident that the food co-op and farmers define the problems with the current food system in a similar way:

'A food co-op is an alternative to conventional food provisioning via retailers. It is mainly about being in direct contact with the producers, paying fair prices and knowing about the products and their origin... D'Speis fosters social cohesion and cooperation. It enables us to reflect on food, its production, distribution and consumption and aims at sustainable production and consumption' (D'Speis, 2013; our translation).

When asked for their vision of a different (better) food system, farmers gave differing answers. The most common answers included values such as organic and regional production. Half the farmers interviewed who supplied the food co-op (Farms 1, 2, 5, 10, 11, 12) also wanted more direct contact with the consumers and an increased appreciation of their work and the food they produced.

Furthermore, most interviewees pointed out the necessity of having a diversity of food distribution systems. Mirroring the analysis of Holt Giménez and Shattuck (2011) two groups could be identified.

1. A progressive group, which could not envision a future food system without retail chains. However, they still appreciated the direct contact and the fair relationships with CFNs (Farms 2, 4, 6, 8). Their emphasis laid in constructing alternatives to complement the existing system. As one farmer stated:

‘The food co-ops have been emerging a lot lately. But whether it is really possible or feasible for the majority of the population to feed themselves through it – I figure it’s rather difficult’ (Farmer 4).

2. A radical group dedicated to a collectively organized food system based on small-scale agriculture. Many of its members were part of the movement for food sovereignty and some were openly anti-capitalist (Farms 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12). For example:

‘I would immediately abolish money. But that doesn’t mean that shops have to be abolished. If I need something, I could simply go to a shop and say: ‘I need washing powder’ or ‘I need bread’. And in the same way someone could come to me and say: ‘I need a lamb next week’. And I deliver a lamb. I offer a lamb and get other things in return (Farmer 1).

The group interview and informal discussions with food co-op members showed that a similar grouping occurred among the co-op members. D’Speis members’ values ranged from openly anarchistic and/or anti-capitalist to ‘only’ wishing for better food directly from the producers.

The lowest common denominator of values named by the interviewees – regional and organic production and decentralized distribution – mainly included product characteristics, which are progressively being integrated into the marketing of retail chains (Konefal *et al.*, 2005; Kratochvil *et al.*, 2005; Seyfang, 2008). Only a few interviewees mentioned democratic organization or other values connected to the quality of interaction between food actors. In general, the interviewed farmers lacked awareness that food co-ops differentiate themselves by their democratic and cooperative governance structure (Mount, 2012). Being aware of these unique features of food co-ops in particular, and CFNs in general, enables participants to emphasize these qualities in communication and political activities. At the same time, we suggest that the actual practice of democratic interaction could be increased. Austrian food co-ops have experience in grass-roots democracy among consumers. More interaction between farmers and consumers could offer new insights and potential for learning processes, increase the participants’ identification (Cox *et al.*, 2008) and thereby offer a solution to the perceived heterogeneity in goals.

A starting point to devise common goals of farmers and co-op members could be the shared view on their practices as their contribution to political change. The farmers emphasized their production and distribution methods as concrete actions for improvements in the food system. Despite the fact that nine of the 14 farmers interviewed were politically active (Farms 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11), ranging from engagement in political parties or the local agricultural chamber to social movements, only four of these farmers (Farms 6, 9, 10, 11) mentioned this political engagement as their contribution to change. According to Van der Ploeg (2008), it is symptomatic of peasants that their resistance and struggle for autonomy are integrated into their food production process, and does not use predominantly classical political tools such as demonstrations, lobbying campaigns or land occupations. Values and goals that are embodied in the interaction between producers and consumers through the

food co-op are the promotion of peasant agriculture, flexibility to adapt to the demands of the natural contingencies of food production, and cooperation.

Conclusion

An important question is whether the food co-op actually encourages the adoption of peasant modes of farming, or whether farmers engaging with food co-ops already practise a peasant mode of farming. In the case of D'Speis, farmers were approached because of their already existing farming practices. Consequently, all interviewed farmers, also those who we positioned more towards the entrepreneurial farming mode, had elements of a peasant identity such as direct contact and cooperation with consumers reaffirmed. While economical and practical considerations were of major importance for some farmers, most farmers chose to collaborate because they sympathized with the food co-op members and their values. Thus, marketing via the food co-op – together with other marketing channels used by the farmers – enabled these farmers to find an income in line with their values. The interaction between farmers and co-op members, especially regarding price negotiations and quality standards, were adapted to farmers' needs as far as the food co-op could afford or manage. As the food co-op's contribution to farmers' incomes was negligible, the food co-op mainly supported peasant farming in the sphere of social and cultural capital.

On the whole, D'Speis can be qualified as a civic food network since the interaction with the farmers goes into the direction of co-producing. Farmers and food co-op members interacted in order to agree on prices, production standards and delivery conditions. Like other food co-ops, D'Speis is not an alternative to the market. Rather, it embeds the market interaction with the farmers in other values such as direct contact, solidarity and transparency (Murtagh, 2010; Brunori et al., 2011, 2012; Lutz and Schachinger, 2013; Grasseni, 2014). However, the degree of interaction, collaboration and consideration differs substantially, mirroring Murtagh's (2010) finding that a core of network actors have stronger identification with the food network, therefore contributing more effort in its functioning. Accordingly, a high degree of peasantness meant close interaction with the food co-op, while entrepreneurial farmers stuck more to their functioning mode and catered food co-ops along the way. In order to support and encourage peasant farming, D'Speis could consider proactively approaching farmers and helping them in the conversion to more 'peasantness', as is already the case in Italy (Brunori et al., 2011).

Regarding the political dimension of the food co-op it became clear that most actors saw their activities in the food network itself as sufficient. Other common political actions are not taken in the name of D'Speis. Van der Ploeg (2008) sees it as typical for peasants not to engage in traditional political activities. Holt Giménez and Shattuck (2011), on the contrary, claim that only a coalition of progressive and radical food movements, meaning an integration of traditional political means with concrete alternatives, can lead to a lasting change in the food system. Before this can happen, the apparent heterogeneity of values needs to be addressed in a democratic approach involving both consumers and farmers. Food sovereignty could serve as a compass in this process, as all actors seemed to aim for qualities in line with the concept of food sovereignty, such as environmental sustainability and autonomy of choice in their practices.

Notes

1. When not referring to the work of other authors, we deliberately avoid the term 'conventional food system', which has its origin in the binary opposition to alternatives. Building on a neo-Gramscian understanding, 'hegemonic food system', on the contrary, points to the fact that hegemony cannot be sustained without the active or passive consent of the dominated. The ruling class consciously employs a mixture of integrating some demands of other interest groups while forcibly pursuing their interests. Hegemony is, by consequence, in constant movement and interaction with counter-hegemonic forces. Based on this, the integration of material and cultural aspects inspired us to use this concept, which was originally applied to analyses of the international state system (Ludwig, 2007).
2. The name BERSTA is a combination of Berg (mountain) and Stadt (city), signifying cooperation between producers and consumers.

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