

Pilot Roadmaps

2. Food Systems





3.2 Food systems

Introduction

In the Agri-Food pilot, Voedsel Anders represents the agroecological movement and perspective on transformational change in the food system. Agroecology is a practice, a social movement and a science, providing an alternative to the agro-industrial system of food production. Voedsel Anders is a network association in Flanders, Belgium that connects organisations that work on food-related, environmental or social issues. By building connections and looking for synergies, Voedsel Anders aims to strengthen and align the movement to form a strong alternative to dominant players in the agri-food system. A part of the work consists in aligning policy and advocacy work, organising public events to promote local and sustainable food systems, and raising awareness in other social domains about the importance to integrate the agroecological principles in that domain.

Vision

By 2050, everyone has access to healthy, tasty, fair, organic food and a healthy environment. These are basic human rights, accessible and affordable for everyone. Farmers are autonomous and independent from powerful actors. They receive a fair income and are supported by an active, conscious and engaged civil society. Nature is restored. Agriculture is circular and based on local food provisioning. Communities are no longer dependent on large external inputs (energy-wise and resource-wise) and maintain fair solidary relations with other countries in the world.

We all live on a shared earth. We realise that collaboration is stronger than competition. Therefore, people collectively bear the costs and responsibility of sustainable, fair food production. Care for good food, farmers, nature and each other are part of our culture and our daily practices. People will feel connected with each other, nature and food.

Farmers are producers of food, as well as caretakers of the landscape. They care for the soil, the water, the air, biodiversity and nature in general. Food waste is in the past. Chemical fertilizers, (organic) pesticides and other chemical inputs are obsolete. Circular agriculture adapts the livestock to the land's capacity. Agriculture is no longer the toy of a profit-driven economy, with unlimited speculation on land and food. We redistribute power, resources, land and profits from a healthy food system in a just way. We embrace different models of ownership. Through co-creative, practice-oriented and independent agricultural education, (future) farmers acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to farm in a nature positive way.

To achieve this vision, we all collaborate, from farmers, over industry, to citizen and policy, within a common framework. Food industry, processing and distribution have a serving role and facilitate the logistics of the food system. Policy, research, technology and the



financial system are also facilitating, not guiding, the food system. This vision and the agricultural and food policy is inclusive and fully respects and incorporates the rights and needs of peasants¹, explicitly female peasants, Indigenous Peoples, members of the LGBTQI+ community, (labour) migrants, (climate) refugees, people with diverse skills and backgrounds and people in vulnerable contexts.

Baseline

In the roadmapping workshops, four well-known challenges came up as a priority to tackle. These challenges are both related to concrete practical obstacles, as well as to systemic issues that relate to our way of thinking about and valuing food.

1. Cognitive frameworks, values and norms are disconnected from the value of food

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- We are disconnected from food, agriculture, and nature.
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- Our education and food environment show us an industrial, unhealthy and unsustainable reality as the only option, while there is a diversity of food systems possible.
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- We are used to convenience food, everything should be offered at all times, everywhere, with a certain “quality”. We are addicted to fast food, and mostly ‘cheap’ food. We are raised and educated to demand this from producers.
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- Our health (including the health of the ecosystem) is not the priority of policy and consumer.
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- Healthy, sustainable food is framed as expensive, and not realistic to achieve, by dominant actors, to marginalise a systemic transformation of our food system.
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- Policy and economy are focussed on welfare and prosperity, not on wellbeing.
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- Our lives are organised in a hasty, individualistic way, and we disregard the interconnectedness of people, nature and communities.
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2. The logistic organisation of a fair, local food system

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- The public’s demand for convenience, fast food, not seasonally bound, and unrealistic expectations of “perfect” crops is often not compatible/realistic regarding the offer.
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¹ UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP) defines a peasant as a small-scale agricultural worker who relies primarily on family labour and has a close connection to the land.



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- Disconnection from our local food systems makes people (unconsciously) take part in globalised food systems.
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- Logistic organisation is in the hands of large corporations and multinationals, which takes away autonomy and power of local farmers and local networks.
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- Discrepancy between demand and offer: agroecological/nature positive farmers have often a different offer than the conventional demand, different quantities, different varieties, different timing.
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- Lack of time for citizens to visit local food initiatives, for farmers to engage in local markets and corresponding administration, and lack of money to pay a middleperson for it.
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- Idea that logistic organisation is free and therefore no financial means for it (cfr. Package services that need to race from door to door for “free” deliveries).
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3. The economic paradigm and reality

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- A capitalist, profit-driven economy, focusing on producing profit, jobs and welfare do not question the type of welfare and life it offers to the people.
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- Unfair and unjust value chains, with power, financial and technological concentration in the same hands.
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- The neoliberal economic system, globalised food systems with unfair competition and neocolonial land use in Global South.
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- Economy is seen as competitive, instead of collaborative.
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- Food and land are seen as a speculative investment, making it a trading good instead of a basic need and right.
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- Food can be sold under the production price.
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- Subsidies from the CAP distort a fair price setting mechanism.
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- Limited knowledge of farmers on labour income and basic farm economics.
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4. Access to land

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- Land is expensive.
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- Land ownership is concentrated.
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- Land is used as an investment to speculate upon, is bought, held in seasonal leasing, and sold again, making it uninteresting for farmers to apply long term soil conservation practices.
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- Land is more profitable when it is not used for producing food, but instead for industry, housing, horses.
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- Retiring farmers see their land as their pension, because they earned insufficiently throughout their lives to save enough, therefore they sell it to the highest bidder.
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Pathways

The challenges clearly show how it is our thinking, narratives and perspectives on economy and business logic that drive the issues in the agri-food system. Therefore, the pathways (Annex 4) towards a nature positive economy mainly consists of challenging these narratives, and unlearning and relearning about food, peasant economies and establishing real alternatives.

1. Education

Objective	To adopt systemic thinking as a basic attitude in our education (public and institutionalised) system.
Expected Outcome	All students, young and old, are trained in systemic, critical thinking and are able to apply this in their personal as well as professional life. Our education system is adapted to new education methods and learning goals.
Plans	• By 2030: 1 year of education on systemic thinking; 1 educational package for 1 course; education of teachers and other professionals to be able to teach in a systemic way; adaptation existing learning goals of our education system. • By 2050: graduates finished a whole educational programme of systemic thinking and One Health; the adapted learning outcomes of our education system are fully embedded; evaluation of the trajectory in place.

2. True Cost Calculation

Objective	To change the economic narrative to create decent livelihoods for farmers and sustainable conditions for nature.
Expected Outcome	Societal costs are avoided and reduced. Farmers get a positive business case for agroecology. Collaboration and transparency in the value chain is strengthened.



Plans	• By 2030: an agreed upon calculation method to include all societal and environmental costs of the food system; a complete analysis of hidden costs in our high-level food system; a true cost calculation developed for 3 different production systems allows farmers to strengthen business case • By 2050: the true cost calculation is an educational tool to change the economic narrative of public and investors; an effective cost calculation developed for multiple production systems guides investing decisions.
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3. Establish regional food networks

Objective	To establish regional food networks as a logistical and educational alternative to industrial food.
Expected Outcome	Food hubs and other logistical or organisational infrastructure provide easy access to local food, also in big cities. The food networks are based on the principles of agroecology and help to connect us more with local good food. It enables good collaboration, transparency, efficient agreements on production, price and distribution.
Plans	• By 2030: delineated a region with enthusiastic food actors; governance and collaborative structure for the region established; logistical issues identified, and experiments set up. By 2050: Several established regional food networks that cover the needs of Flanders/Belgium; learning networks of food networks enhance each other; farmers produce for local consumption

Summary

The roadmapping process involved a wide group of stakeholders: farmers, peasants, teachers, businesses, civil society, and people from the academic and financial sector. While an effort was made to make the process all inclusive, we acknowledge that not all voices in the agricultural domain could be included, due to timing, capacity and interest to participate. In two workshops with around 20 participants overall, we developed a vision, identified and prioritised challenges and proposed pathways forward. The pathways acknowledge that the biggest change needs to be made in the unlearning of dominant narratives on what an economy is and what and how it should produce. This unlearning and relearning of what it can be, goes hand in hand with building an alternative for the corporate food production system, that does allow people to have access to food, and farmers to have decent livelihoods while caring for nature.

The biggest challenge remains to get engagement from the participants in rallying behind the nature positive concept, as these engagements need to fit in the work they already do.



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