Almanac of the Future

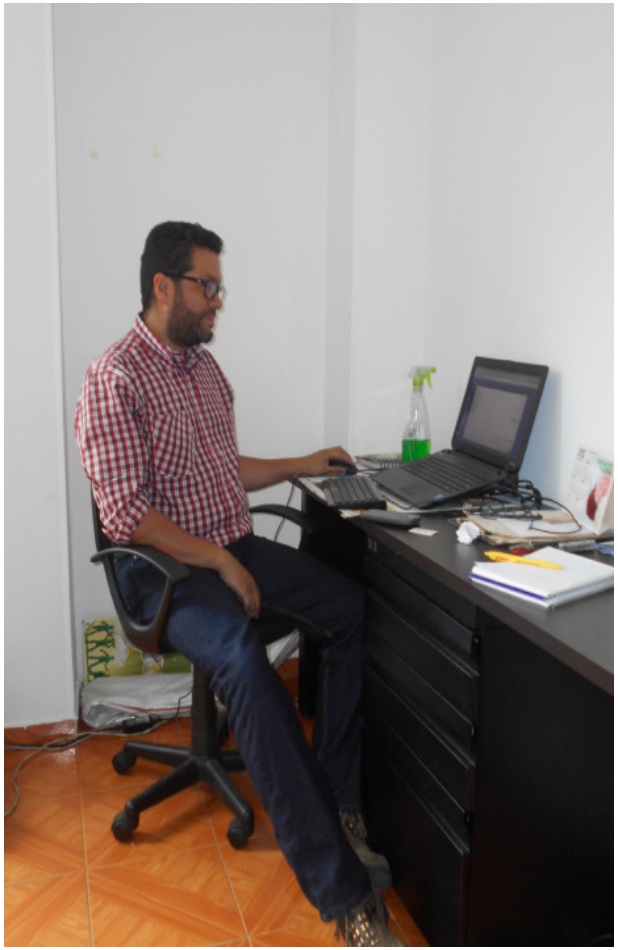
A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational experience No. 1

Alliance of prosumers

WE HAVE JUST BEGUN

Conscious consumption of healthy food, produced by farmers at an ecological small-scale and marketed by a solidarity of consumers and producers leads to an alliance of short distances between country and city, producers and consumers.



Nilson, one of the pioneers of proactive consumer

Engativá, once a rural community, has turned into a district of this 9 million people metropolis because of the continual growth of the Colombian capital, Bogota.

Bogotá has the highest concentration of consumers in the country. The supply of food is in the hands of intermediaries and supermarket chains, which hardly allow small-scale producers to intervene. The result of this regular exclusion is a dilemma, especially in big cities: families living in the city prefer the food from organic agriculture, such an offer is hardly available or only at very high prices. On the other hand, there are small-scale organic farmers who only sporadically get to reach conscious consumers in the urban context with their products.

Two years ago, 9 consciously consuming families from different districts of Bogota decided to start the direct marketing of natural food together and in an alliance with the associations of ecological small-town producers. At the same time, the small collective decided against a permanent sale of stores from the outset, but rather favored actions which are more strongly oriented to the demand by supplying commodity products with fresh vegetables and other natural foods once a week to the interested households.

Nilson Morales is involved in the initiative of “Agrosolidaria Engativá” from the beginning. "At the moment, we have a total of 50 households participating in the consumer’s networkwith a weekly shopping cart. In addition to delivering the foods, we have opened up another marketing channel by attracting potential interested customers such as hospitals, university canteens, social and academic events, school feeding etc. In this way, we have managed to enlarge the circle of our customers ".

In an analysis of consumer behavior, it turned out that a considerable part of potentially interested consumers actually hardly prepare their own food

at home, but rather prefer the finished product. “Agrosolidaria Engativá” then started with a line of ready-to-eat products based on healthy food ingredients (Rice, soups, salads, chicken, fish, vegetarian meat), Snacks (cakes, cookies, tacos, wraps, arepas and crepes) and beverages (coffee, cocoa, tea, , Yoghurt drinks on quinoa or banana basis, various fruit juices).

Conscious consumption

To make conscious consumption attractive and feasible, “Agrosolidaria” has set itself the task of bringing ecological small-scale producers from rural regions together with urban consumers. Stronger social sustainability, horizontal producer and consumer relations and ecologically balanced production conditions are the fundamental building blocks of the solidarity economy and a country-city fair trade. The aim is to consolidate the solidarity ring between urban families and rural small ecological producers. There are now 50 consumer families and 475 producer families participating in the solidarity ring. The producers belong to different groups and sections of “Agrosolidaria”, some of which are located in the urban surroundings of Bogotá (for example vegetable producers), partly in other country and climatic regions (coffee producers, etc.). Due to the until now small number of participating consumers, the producers are only able to sell a part of their harvest via the solidarity ring.

One of the key objectives of the solidarity ring is to enable middle-income families to consume healthy food. The prices for such products in conventional markets are often three times as expensive as the conventional products, which means that a healthy diet is only affordable for well-heeled consumers. At the same time, producers are paid a small price dueto high profit of the intermediary. The “solidarity ring” tries to rearrange these rules: stimulating conscious consumption and nutrition at reasonable prices while paying fair prices to producers. It is no longer a secret that for a long time it has been primarily the small-scale producers who subsidize the poverty of the city by selling their products at unjustly

¿How to participate in the solidarity ring of “Agrosolidaria”?

- Check the offer list which comes by email or Facebook.
- Order the desired basket for the next week until Wednesday by e-mail.
- The order, price and delivery will be confirmed until Friday.
- On Saturday, the desired products are delivered.

(Text of a flyer from Agrosolidaria section Engativá - Bogotá)

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low prices. This is where “Agrosolidaria” starts. As more consumers participate in the solidarity ring, the naturally produced food changes to the owners at a mutually acceptable price. The long-term goal of “Agrosolidaria” is, however, to ensure that even families with a lower income are able to enjoy healthy food. However, in order to achieve this, the number of consumers involved must grow more strongly in order to allow price reductions through larger volumes. “Agrosolidaria” is currently working on public facilities, as these are legally required to operate at least 10% of their purchases locally and, in the case of food, to buy priority ecologically produced products, such as the ICBF (Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing).

Facilitating access to healthy food in Bogotá and increasing demand at fair prices will make organic farming more profitable. “Agrosolidaria” is nowadays perceived by many as one of the most important solidarity marketing rings for organic food in the city of Bogotá.

“The solidarity ring aims to stimulate responsible consumption, in which producers are paid fair prices”

There is no lack of challenges: the current balance sheet of solidarity is promising.

- Market positioning of “Agrosolidaria”.
- Further processing and production of ready-to-eat products.
- 2000 people participate in the solidarity ring.
- Increasing participation of consumers in solidarity ring increases the demand on the producer side.
- Registration according to the food legislation and very good processing and production processes.
- Elimination of plastic waste along the entire process.

(Extract from the institutional profile of Agrosolidaria section Engativá - Bogotá)

Lights and shadows

Agrosolidaria is not lacking any challenges: the financial viability is rather limited, but the new market segment of the major customers as well as the inclusion of ready-to-eat products in the offer assortment helps in this direction. The available infrastructure as well as the paid salaries are very modest. The impact on the market is still rather small, and for many consumers, a healthier, ecologically and socially acceptable diet does not appear to be a priority issue. The producer associations need a more intensive accompaniment. This panorama has chosen the collective as the starting point to create an aspired future vision that does not lack courage.

The process of transition to the solidarity ring is of pedagogic relevance since the conventional consumer is used to entering into a unilateral relationship in which the customer is the“King”. “Agrosolidaria” tries to break this unilateral relationship by participating in the solidarity ring: the consumer assumes more responsibility, adapts his consumption habits to healthy food, elimination of waste production as well as the smallest possible ecological footprint regarding the handling of the topic of transport. “Agrosolidaria” is currently busy setting up a virtual sales portal in order to simplify the ordering of the cartridges and to optimize the coordination between demand and (prior to) agricultural production.

Don Rodrigo, such a other producing families associated with Agrosolidaria, is waiting for the solidarity ring to open up a larger market for naturally produced vegetables in Bogotá.

Extension of the offer

Initially, Agrosolidaria offered eight agroecologically grown products, including coffee, quinoa, salads, mushrooms, organic vegetables and honey. Today, there are about 40 products, most of them from organic farming. A basic principle with Agrosolidaria is that the producer is not hassled about the price. The challenge for Agrosolidaria is to reduce prices for consumers through the expansion of marketing.

Perspective on short and medium view

- In 10 years, to reach more than 200,000 families participating in solidarity ring.
- To strengthenthe ecological agriculture through the increase of demand.
- To contribute to the achievement of the food security and sovereignty of Bogotá.
- Consolidation of solidarity, consumers, producers and marketers.
- Absorption of the total production of the agroecological producer sections located in Bogotá´s outskirts and in the cityitself and connected to Agrosolidaria.

(Extract from the institutional profile of Agrosolidaroa section Engativá - Bogotá)

"The goal of agrosolidaria in a long term, is to allow families with lower incomes to access healthy food products."

Considerations of Don Rodrigo, who produces ecologically in Usme, at the outskirts of Bogotá

“I produce strawberries, onion, chard and other vegetables, which is a clean production, free of chemicals, and I can live from it, before I joined “Agrosolidaria”, I used to sell my products through another organization but they were often delayed with the payments.Nowadays I sell most to Agrosolidaria, but I still have some fixed customers. The sitution for organic producers is not easy, We are often less productive than we could If we had a safe market, we could process our milk to cheese or yogurt, but the problem is that if you want to produce at a large scale you have to secure the sales market before, this is not yet the case “.

Richard Doughman, consumer of solidarity in Bogotá

“I have learned about Agrosolidaria through an organization I personally know, and it is a great challenge to make healthy food for financially vulnerable groups economically affordable. Fast-food may be cheap but it is expensive in the long run as it puts health at risk. It is regrettable that public policy has no interest in supporting the small producers, but rather the monopolized marketing structures, above all the supermarkets. But as a university teacher I am in contact with young students, and they become more aware of the importance of healthy food. It is important to offer ecological products, but even more important is to offer information and increase the interest in healthy and conscientious consumption”.

The objective is to create a consumer conscience about healthy food, to favorize products a reduced footprint and minimal waste material.

Messages to the futures

- Consumers are changing the game rules by joining together with small producers and accessing healthy food while creating a more equitable and environmentally compatible distribution system.
- The economic framework for the production of nutrients cannot be left to monopoly structures (production, intermediate trade, final marketing). The restoration of reciprocal relations between consumers and producers is an important step towards food security and sovereignty.
- The massive spread of healthy and responsible consumption, which accepts the principles of the solidarity economy and Fairtrade, allows even families with lower incomes to buy healthy food.

The text, which is based on visits and discussions in situ, was created by Jorge Krekeler (consultant Misereor as AGEH specialist), but initially made consensible with the people visited. Special thanks go to Nilson Morales of Agrosolidaria Engativá.

Almanac of the Future

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Original title “Alianza del Prosumidor”
Experiencia Motivadora N ° 1 Almanaque del Futuro
Author: Jorge Krekeler, jorge.krekeler@scbbs.net
Consultant Misereor as AGEH specialist
Translation: Samuel Suárez
Layout: Diana Patricia Montealegre
Images: Agrosolidaria Engativá, Jorge Krekeler
Contact to the story of the success:
Nilson Morales email: engativabogota@agrosolidaria.org
www.agrosolidaria.org
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