



10th European IFSA
Symposium, July 1-4, 2012
Aarhus, Denmark

PRODUCING AND
REPRODUCING FARMING
SYSTEMS: NEW MODES OF
ORGANISATION FOR THE
SUSTAINABLE FOOD
SYSTEMS OF TOMORROW

www.ifsa2012.dk
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The 10th European IFSA Symposium

Producing and reproducing farming systems: New modes of organization for sustainable food systems of tomorrow

1-4 July 2012 in Aarhus, Denmark

We are happy to announce the 10th European IFSA symposium, which takes place in Aarhus, Denmark July 1-4, 2012.

The International Farming Systems Association (IFSA) – European Group is a lively network consisting of dedicated researchers and scholars from various fields of research and practices. IFSA is concerned with sustainable development of agriculture from a systemic perspective. Being no formal membership association, all who participate in the biennial symposia are considered part of the IFSA family. The IFSA European Group Steering Committee and the local Organisation Committee are now looking forward to the 10th symposium to be held in Aarhus, Denmark. We welcome you to a fruitful and inspiring meeting dealing with contemporary and emerging questions and challenges to the development of sustainable farming systems.

Please consult the symposium website at www.ifsa2012.dk for further information.

Organization of the symposium

The symposium will encompass plenary sessions, workshops, excursions and world cafés, as well as animation/visualisation events, conference dinner and receptions. As traditionally the case during IFSA Europe symposia, most time will be dedicated to workshops.

Symposium theme

A number of challenges are currently facing European family farms. While being the traditional organisational form of farming in Europe, developments during the last 50 years put this organisational form of farming under pressure. Modernisation in terms of mechanisation, specialisation, globalisation and, as a consequence of these developments, structural development, has forced many family farms into intermediary forms between farms and businesses within a strict economic logic. The question is whether these forms of organising farming can successfully deal



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with the challenges ahead and the changing conditions in the surrounding world.

One such challenge is succession. In many areas young people do not want to live in the countryside. The difference in working condition and salary between farm labour and other businesses has grown dramatically. In addition, the visions for future sustainable farming systems, which can also attract new generations of young people to become involved in the development of agriculture, are poorly expressed. Furthermore, the rising cost of farm land has in many places made it almost impossible for young people to buy a farm enterprise, because the necessary investments are overwhelming.

Another challenge is the ability of large-scale, specialised farms to cope with the demand for environmentally sustainable practices. Specialisation combined with the growth in size has led to a range of negative consequences on the environment, biodiversity, landscape, etc. This is a problem for society but also a problem for the farming systems themselves. The systems fall short in capabilities to observe their own ecology, to respond adequately to the critique from environmental agencies and NGOs, and to organise themselves accordingly.

Yet another challenge is the increasing complexity of interaction between farming systems and the rest of society. There are more and more specific interests, perspectives and organisations relating to farming and food systems, as well as an increase in competing use of agricultural land, through urban sprawl, energy production, nature sanctuary, recreation, etc. New forms of organisation are needed to address these challenges in Europe and globally, but also to capitalise on the new possibilities these dynamics may bring in terms of closing the gap between producers and consumers, exploring multifunctional farming activities and the benefits of green care.

There is a need to explore and focus on what the sustainable farming systems of tomorrow will look like; how they may be produced and reproduced in terms of their ability to reshape themselves and their elements; and how new organisational forms may meet the three challenges outlined above in combination with the general challenges of society to deal with globalisation, climate change, biodiversity loss, and conflicts over land and water. IFSA is the right place and the right context to ask these questions. We welcome many different perspectives on farming systems: they are all needed to deepen our understanding of what the challenges and potentials of these emerging contexts are. The changing farming systems also stress the need for the different research approaches and perspectives within IFSA to reflect on how they can address these



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challenges accordingly, and to ask whether new research perspectives are needed.

Some of the research perspectives which have been prominent in shaping discourse within IFSA, will also play an important part in the 10th European IFSA symposium:

Learning and collective action

Apart from a range of multiple functions, food and farming systems are also site of processes of learning and formation of collective action. Given the complex challenges of succession, environmental performance and rising complexity, the management of learning and knowledge becomes even more important. Workshops at IFSA 2012 will explore different aspects of farm-based learning, knowledge systems such as advisory systems as well as the relation between learning and policy development.

Institutions and policy

Institutions play a vital role in relation to sustainable development of food and farming systems. Even if technological solutions might be available, inadequate institutions might hamper sustainable development.

Workshops at IFSA 2012 will contribute to rethinking institutions and policy in relation to farming systems, including how adequate policy approaches can be developed and how different perspectives are balanced.

Farming systems

The issue of how farming systems evolve in a highly complex and ever-changing environment, including processes of adaption and co-evolution, is at the core of current debates regarding sustainable food and farming systems. Workshops at IFSA 2012 will look into how farming systems might adapt to climate change, and what role the organization of farming systems might have in relation to developing resilient, sustainable pathways of development.

Food systems and networks

Among various efforts to develop sustainable food and farming systems, a significant development for the past 10-20 years has been the emergence of different 'alternative' food networks across Europe and North America. Various forms of 'alternative' food networks can be conceived as different approaches to the reconfiguration of relations between urban and rural space, as well as producer-consumer relations. Workshops at IFSA 2012 will explore how new forms of organization of rural-urban and producer-consumer relations can contribute to sustainable development.



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Landscape and land use

Rural space is no longer equivalent with agricultural space. The territorial dimension has become a cornerstone in various EU policy reforms since the 1990s. Also landscape has emerged as a significant dimension for management, policy and research. Workshops at IFSA 2012 will explore different dimensions of the coevolution of landscape and farming systems, including how rural space is constituted and valorized and how landscape forms the context for learning processes.

Assessing sustainability

Farming systems face complex challenges in the future. Some of the challenges concerns the demand for environmentally practices as well as how to cope with the complexity of interactions between farming systems and society. How can we meet the challenges and by which approaches can we improve the process of identifying sustainable options for development? Workshops at IFSA 2012 will explore different aspects of assessing sustainability of food and farming systems from different perspectives.

