

2000 m²

Farm Examples



ERTO FARM, ESTONIA

Margo Mansberg started farming organically in his Erto Farm from the beginning in 2008. Organic or conventional was not even under discussion — Margo's parents' farm was one of the first organic farms in Estonia and he studied organic farming in Germany.

The managed area of the Erto Farm is ca 300 ha; about half of it is permanent grassland and half of it is in arable rotation. Main activities are arable and vegetable farming and animal husbandry.

Vision and motivation

Margo is an organic farmer at his heart. From the very beginning, the focus has also been on diversified production. On the one hand, livestock provides manure for fertilising the fields, while on the other hand, diversification helps to spread the risks. In farming, you never know what will produce a very good harvest and what will make a loss. And, with many different things to do, it is possible to develop in many ways and achieve much more.

According to Margo, it is very interesting to learn in practice how to manage organically, test different technologies and find the ways how to do better. Margo's vision is to achieve the real regenerative organic farming system where

there is living soil, healthy plants and healthy animals. And of course, healthy and happy farmer and customers.

Arable farming

On the arable fields he grows rye, oats, wheat, turnip rape, peas. Arable rotation varies year by year, but in principle it goes as follows: 2 years of clover-grass – turnip rape – winter cereals – summer cereals. All cash crops have under-sowing.

Arable crops are grown in partnership with two other organic farms. This way, there is more land to cultivate and greater efficiency than if you work alone. There are hired workers to do the field works and major investments are made jointly.





Vegetables

Vegetables are grown on 3 hectares, incl. 0.4 ha asparagus. Other vegetables are mostly brassicas: cabbages, cauliflowers, kohlrabi, kale. Margo has experimented with a variety of vegetables but has stuck to brassicas. Brassicas are quite difficult to grow in organic system, but Erto Farm has the suitable soils, and the farmer has learned the most important aspects of growing and tried them out. The harvest is usually decent and of good quality, and the produce sells well.

It should be noted, however, that a great deal of work has been done to educate and inform consumers. For example, kale isn't a very widely used vegetable by Estonian consumers, and domestic asparagus has been also a surprise to many.

Vegetable growing could be expanded, but the volume of work is high, and it isn't easy to find people willing to do it. In the vegetable field, Margo does the machinery work himself, and also uses paid workers for weeding, harvesting and packing. Sometimes the family helps too – three sons at primary school and wife Kairi, who works as a doctor.

Animal husbandry

Margo has studied veterinary medicine at the university, so definitely there is the livestock in the farm, a relatively small herd of beef cattle: ca 40 Aberdeen Angus suckler cows and one Charolee bull for better meat quality of fattening animals. Animals are kept under a quality scheme of grass-fed cattle.

Selling

The arable produce is sold collectively with two other organic farms to different purchasers. Beef cattle are sold to Livonia Beef Cattle, 8-month-old bull calves are sold for export to fattening farms.

Vegetables are sold mainly through the producers' co-operative South-Estonian Food Network LET to the Estonian market — shops, restaurants, kindergartens, schools. Margo is also the Board Member of this co-operative.

Additional activities

Margo's farm is more than just farming. He is a member of an organic farming innovation cluster, and experiments with both arable and vegetable crops

take place in his fields. In addition, every year the farm hosts school children who are introduced to organic farming and farm life in general.

Margo also trains other producers; he has organised several field days in Erto Farm and he goes to other places to share his experience. A newer idea is to join a network of carbon-sequestering farms; measure carbon sequestration in the fields and one day start selling carbon credits.







VILLAGE PROJECT JUCHOWO, POLAND

Village Project Juchowo-Radacz-KądzIELna is situated in Juchowo, in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, near Szczecinek. The heart of the Village Project is a huge biodynamic farm covering 1 900 hectares. In accordance with the principles of biodynamic farming, we grow crops and keep animals on the farm. Out of the farm's 1 900 ha, 1 400 ha is arable land which we use for growing crops. Besides, there are 340 ha of permanent grassland (meadows and pastures), 140 ha of forests, trees and wastelands, and 15 ha of vegetables on the farm. Out of the 1 400 ha of arable land 650 ha are ley, which we use to produce hay for dairy cows for the winter and as pastures in spring and summer. Another 650 ha is covered by cereals, which we partially use for fodder, but mainly for consumption purposes. About 100 ha we use for seed production.

Farm description

The farm primarily produces hay-based milk and cereals. We keep about 600 head of cattle (Brown Swiss and Holstein Friesian), including 360 dairy cows, 13 breeding bulls, 200 breeding hivers and fatteners, and a herd of about 30 Polish Red Cow. On approximately 15–20 ha we cultivate root crops such as red beet, carrots, potatoes and fodder beet. There is also a herd of laying hens in place an apiary.

On the farm, we try to reduce the negative impacts of farming on the en-

vironment, improve soil fertility and support biodiversity, by following the principles of a closed matter cycle. That's why the number of animals on the farm must be adapted to the possibilities of on-site production of feed and to the needs of agriculture — 97 % of animal feed is produced on the farm, and natural fertilizers of our animals come to our fields. To maintain and improve soil fertility, we also use five different crop rotations, adapted to the given soil conditions.





History of the farm

There are several independent, but interconnected entities within the Village Project. The two main ones are Fundacja im. Stanisława Karłowskiego/FSK (Stanisław Karłowski Foundation) and Spółka Rolnicza Juchowo sp. z o. o./SRJ (agricultural company Juchowo). FSK was founded in 2001. It took over the ownership of the land that until the beginning of the 1990s was used by state-owned farms, then present around Juchowo. In the course of restructuring the former state-owned farms in the 1990s, the land was temporarily managed by a private initiative that followed principles of biodynamic agriculture. From 2004, SRJ, as a leaseholder, cultivates the land, applying the principles of biodynamic agriculture, while the owner of the land, buildings and livestock is FSK.

Processing and products

We process some of the products produced on our farm on site. The products made on site include bakery products (bread, cakes, cookies), pasta, syrups and fruit and herbal elixirs, herbal teas, cheeses (cottage cheese, soft cheeses, cheese) as well as charcuterie products and meat. We sell crops and products from the farm in a little shop on the farm and in a shop in the nearby town of Szczecinek, but most of the produce goes

to larger processing plants in Poland and abroad. Some of the farm's products also go to the local canteen, which supplies breakfast and lunch for employees who want to use this service, and provides full board for groups of students who come to the farm mainly in April–October.

Our challenges

One of our main challenges is to maintain, or obtain, soil fertility and ensure satisfactory yields by using only natural fertilizers, while working poor sandy soils. The soil has been devastated by bad treatment in former times, and now it takes a very long time for the soil to recover. Another challenge is to find a market for organic and biodynamic products that are relatively high-priced.

Additional activities in the Village Project
A variety of activities is taking place in the Village Project, all of which are related to (biodynamic) agriculture in their own way. Among these activities there is research, rehabilitation activities for people with disabilities, and educational activities. The latter include classes for all age groups, from preschoolers to seniors, lasting from one day, through two-week internships for students, to year-round volunteering for young people.







SÖRBRO FARM, VÅRDINGE, SWEDEN

Sörbro is located in Sörmland, Sweden and has been organic/biodynamic since the 1970's. Since 2009, the farm is run by Artur Borghs and Åsa Nyberg. Sörbro is a diverse farm with a focus on goats and the farm dairy. In addition to goats, they keep chickens, beef cattle and horses. For Arthur and Åsa, it is important that all animals on the farm fulfill a function and are allowed to live based on their specific nature. Because the animals specialize in different things, they complement each other on the farm. The goats provide not only milk, but also meat and manure that increases soil fertility. They eat brush and thereby help keep the landscape open.

The goats are supplemented with a small number of beef cattle from a local dairy farm. They graze after the goats, eating plants that goats reject. This helps minimize parasites. They also provide supplemental fertilizer. By collaborating with other dairy farms, Sörbro can produce beef by raising animals that don't fit into a dairy farm.

The farm also has 150 hens that lay eggs and keep insects away in the yard and in the barn. The most recent contribution to farm is 15 pigs that help prepare the ground for vegetable cultivation. The pigs will also browse in the for-

est. Whey, which is a residual product in the dairy, can be used as pig feed.

The 240 goats' milk approximately 150,000 liters per year. The goat milk is processed at the farm dairy into different types of cheese and yoghurt. One third is also sold to other small-scale dairies in the region. Goat cheese has not been so well known on the Swedish market, but more and more people appreciate both the taste and the fact that goat's milk is often better tolerated by those who are sensitive to cow milk. Arthur and Åsa sell their products in their farm shop and to nearby shops and restaurants. Today, they easily



sell all they produce. The dairy also processes a small amount of cow milk from another biodynamic farm in the area.

On 100 hectares of arable land, Sörbro has a crop rotation that consists of grass-clover ley, winter rye and wheat, and spring oats and wheat. The grains are sold to local bakeries and kitchens and are used as fodder. The farm is self-sufficient with feed for the animals, manure, straw, and to a great extent with seed. In addition, they have natural pastures of about 15 hectares. Sörbro also has a vegetable market garden of about ½ hectare. It is run by two gardeners who sell their products in the farm shop and at local markets.

By carefully choosing the number and species of animals on their farm, Sörbro has created a balanced system of ecological regenerative agriculture that allows them to manage the farm without inputs other than diesel for tractors and some

seed. They have also developed a cooperation with the neighboring organic crop farm, which delivers their ley as fodder to Sörbro. The farm is a functioning ecosystem that simultaneously produces dairy products, meat, vegetables, eggs, and grain. In the future, they plan to also include pulses in the crop rotation to encourage a more vegetarian diet.

To succeed as a small-scale producer, you have to be innovative — Arthur and Åsa's vision is to continue to develop farm diversity. In addition to the pulses, their plan is to become self-sufficient with energy on the farm. They want to invest in solar panels and electric machinery and grow rape seed as fuel for the tractors. The leftover from the rapeseed is nutritious feed for the animals and the rape seed complements their crop rotation. Another goal is to help and inspire young people who want to begin with organic farming and processing.





SI. Supported by
**Swedish
Institute**



Photos Gustav Gerdes (cover);
Erto Farm (pp. 2–6); Juchowo Farm (pp. 7–11);
Johan Nilsson (pp. 12, 14); Sofi Gerber (p. 13)

Graphic design Alexandre Westerlund