



Report

Rural agriculture – can creative methods bring new ideas?

Luttmissen workshop, Germany 2017

What do we need in order to get new ideas into rural agriculture, especially for small-scale farming? An international conference? A scientific symposium? A congress or summit? The answer is unexpected: No. Just three motivated activists and a creative workshop!

Photo credit: Luttmissen workshop



Farmers and consumers are connected in a relationship based on the food system and the economic system that was chosen by society. Most farmers are part of the complex market network. They are just an element of some intangible economy that maneuvers within the “new economy.” This new system changes the way of conducting business and the organizational structure (Kinsey, 2001). But a farmer can be an empowered person if he/she understands the way this system functions and his/her role within the system.

The *creative workshop for saving rural agriculture* took place on the 1st and 2nd of July, 2017 in Luttmissen, Germany. The two-day workshop gathered experts from different areas: an entrepreneur, an artist, a professor of electrical engineering, a managing director from the water industry, a student, a software specialist, a lawyer, a hotel professional, a publisher of an online journal and 3 farmers .

The questions which are of importance to the whole of society and inspired the activists to organize a creative workshop are also highly significant for our current rural agriculture:

- “Is it a political solution idea to just hope for a political solution when the number of farmers forced to leave the land is increasing enormously?
- Nutrition concerns everybody - can we really afford to just protest, hoping that politicians and the food business will change in favor of a more sustainable agriculture?
- Throughout the economy, creative minds are developing new ideas, turning the markets upside down. Why not in agriculture?
- How to create completely new ideas with creative methods?”

The two-day workshop was intensively planned: there were only a few small breaks for coffee, lunch and small-talk with other participants. But the interest in the topic was so huge that even these breaks were filled with hot debates. What exactly is rural agriculture? What makes it different from industrial agriculture? While it seemed plausible to everybody that farming should be done with love, there was lively, even controversial debate on why small-scale farms are so important and whether big farms could possibly deliver similar results. "Is it possible to love 1000 cows?" All participants were so committed that the debate continued over venison ragout and rhubarb cream at lunchtime.



Photo credit: Luttmissen workshop



During the creative phase, the debate focused on the questions "How can farm products be marketed?" and "How can farmers and consumers be linked?" To find answers, the participants approached the problem from the perspective of non-agricultural players (e.g. of a bodybuilder, a genius or a magician)

The result: more than 150 ideas: from soil perfume to marketing happy pigs or sweet potatoes. From co-operation with mass media stakeholders to creating a shop "direct from the producer" in the city.

The second day, all ideas were rated and ranked according to the criteria such as ordinary / unusual, feasible / not feasible and little effort / high effort. It should be noted that it is not always obvious which of these "rough diamonds" has potential. For this, they would have to be further developed and tested in practice.

The idea of the "creative workshop" has completed its first practical test. The result: unusual / practical / high effort. And of course, there's potential for optimization.

With an even more concrete question, with fewer guidelines, and more space in the creative section, the different potentials of the participants would be more effective. "The mix of people was incredibly exciting. I would have loved to have had more time to talk to others, the breaks were much too short!" explained one of the participants. Ultimately, there is only one possibility to convey the advantages of rural agriculture to the point that outsiders understand it immediately: permanently work on it.

Because the interest is there:

"Especially the discussions with the farmers changed my world view and really made me think about agriculture"

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Source

Kinsey, J. D. (2001). The new food economy: consumers, farms, pharms, and science. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 83(5), 1113-1130.