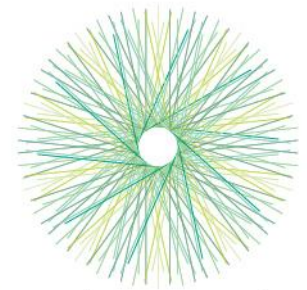


Inspirational ideas

NEWSLETTER JUNE 2020



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AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

Market gardening

'Market gardening' is a type of agriculture that is seen more and more in Europe at the moment. The concept is based on the efficient use of small areas of land using manual labour and simply mechanised equipment. It aims at achieving high yields per hectare and marketing a wide variety of high-quality vegetables directly. We spoke to Alfred Grand who has been running a market garden for about a year:



Where has market gardening come from?

"In the 1950s and 60s, farms got increasingly bigger, with the introduction of machinery and mineral fertilisers. Because this also went along with farms specialising in one, or a few products it was no longer as easy to sell directly to consumers, as often they are looking for a range of products. And so intermediaries were added, and competition increased.

Market gardening is about revisiting traditional methods of agricultural production, improving them thanks to recent research results and the sharing of current practical knowledge. It has a focus on the environment, farmers' well-being and income. We have seen market gardens pop up over the past 10 years, in North America but also in Europe - in the outskirts of big cities."

How does market gardening work?

"Market gardening is innovative gardening, farming on a smaller-scale. It applies a bio-intensive method, meaning a high-intensity, high rotation and broad range of crops. The aim is to produce continuously from as early as possible in Spring to as late as possible in Autumn. Ideally (if possible) growing all year round. It is also about optimising the cultivation of small areas in such a way that their maximum possible productivity can be achieved naturally. It is a very intense production method, today you harvest a lettuce and tomorrow you replant one (which is already 20 days old)! The estimated turnover is actually 200 times higher (per hectare) than growing wheat. This higher turnover, and the direct selling, enables the farmer to increase his/her number of employees – and the work can be done manually, removing the need for chemical inputs and heavy machinery."

Tell us about your market garden

"We set up our market garden last year, as part of the Grand Farm (Austria) which is a research and demonstration farm. With only one hectare of land, we grow 40-50 crops and we deliver 150 vegetable boxes every week. We have the capacity to increase to 250 boxes. We are also going to introduce some new products to our range in the coming years including fruits and berries from our agroforestry area surrounding the market garden.

The beds are 75cm wide, with 45cm-wide pathways between them, so they can be easily worked by hand from both sides. We are seeing specific mechanical equipment on the market which is adapted to this size of bed. We are an organic farm using agroecological methods, and we want to apply a zero pesticide strategy, not even use the plant-protection products permitted within the organic certification. The work is intense, and it requires a lot of know-how from the farmer and staff. We have 6 members of staff, in total 3.5 full time capacity.

On Mondays, we send our customers an email about what they will get in their box this week along with a recipe for inspiration. We use Facebook to talk about market gardening. We are both a fully productive unit, and at the same time a research station and demonstration farm. We still have a lot of things to evaluate and improve and we want to help to promote the further development and dissemination of this concept.”

What are the main benefits?

“Market gardening has many health benefits for consumers: healthy, fresh, organic products. There are benefits for climate change mitigation, biodiversity, soil regeneration. It also contributes to the local economy, reduces import needs, and the decentralised system means if one enterprise collapses, it doesn't impact the others and the system is resilient when faced with many challenges – economic or environmental. Land is more accessible for farmers as you only need a very small area to work with. It is also a profitable system as I mentioned earlier. The demand for sustainable, healthy, local food is constantly increasing, and especially young people are very interested in this method. Market gardening is creating desirable jobs in rural areas. Market gardening has proven a real response to Covid-19 crisis in regard to the local vegetable supply for the European citizens. It produces healthy food, it is a decentralized production system with high numbers of small units and it does not need industry, transport and retailers. All of these advantages make market gardening resilient by nature!”

What are the challenges?

“Market gardeners are using traditional knowledge and practical experience, combined with modern know-how. Gaining this knowledge takes a long time and schools/universities in Europe are not yet teaching these skills. There is huge demand for more research into production, regeneration of soils, plant protection and fertilisation, but also marketing, distribution or commerce. Young people, often coming from different sectors need to have resources where they can find the answers to their hundreds of questions. Supporting start-ups with information and funding is necessary if we want to have promising production systems established all over Europe and beyond.”

So, what is next for market gardening?

“Market gardening is still a niche, and so we want to spread the word. We are working with universities and other market gardens to increase and share knowledge. We get a lot of visitors coming to the farm, researchers, farmers and also consumers who want to see how the products are cultivated. It would be great to set up links between market gardens, to share know-how, or even products when there is a surplus. We have already attended several conferences on market gardening, we write articles for the press and social media. We would like to try and include market gardening on the curriculum for agricultural training in Europe. Our common vision is to have a market garden installed in every large village in Europe by 2035. This makes sure we have a resilient food supply and can provide local, organic vegetables to each and every citizen within Europe.

For me, it is not only about food, it's keeping the planet in a condition so that future generations can have a better life and have a nice planet to live on. A way we can contribute to this is by starting on a small scale, and this is possible with market gardening!”

Further information

Website: <https://grandfarm.at/grand-garten-home/?lang=en>
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 Video: https://youtu.be/ZYON_aPSRqI

