



SUMMARY OF QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FARMERS CIRCLE

Introduction:

The questionnaire adopted on the bases of the same tool for students was given to the members of the farmers circle for Organic farming to get insight into knowing and understanding traditional knowledge as a part of agroecological concept of sustainable agriculture. The questionnaire contained questions about demographical parameters, knowledge about the term Agroecology, recognition of traditional activities, their practicing at the farms of respondents. We wanted to understand the spread of some practices which could be understood as agroecological and the ways they are transferred to respondents families. Some rough data about inclusion into local food chains and the desire for new knowledge and preference of the way of obtaining them. Results can be used as good starting point in planning the transmission of the knowledge in the frame of farmers circles. We tested the tool at the meeting of Farmers circle for organic farming of members of Deteljica Association of organic farmers situated in surroundings of Celje, Slovenia.

Summary

Sample of respondents

The group of people attending the meeting of Farmers circle consisted of 4 women and 3 men, of which 3 live in the settlement with less than 500 inhabitants and 4 from settlement with 1000 – 15000 inhabitants. Majority of them (5) manage farms of 5 – 10 ha including forest. One of them has farm of 10 – 20 ha and one of 20 – 30 ha. Three households consist of 6-7 people and others have less family members and except one family has more than 7 members. Four of respondents live in the family consisting from parents and children and three in the family of children, parents and grandparents. Farms are oriented on Livestock (2), vegetable field production (2), other activities (2). One farmer declared his farm as self-subsistent mixed farm.

Understanding the term agroecology

Only one respondent indicated that he knows the term, but he connected it to ecological factors on the field. The most commonly known sustainable way of farming is Organic farming (4). Respondents confirmed that the knowledge about plants and animals needs and about the specifics of the local territories was very important to farmers in the past. But they didn't give any additional explanations.

Traditional practices which can be considered as agroecological knowledge

From multiple choice answer majority of respondents picked up adequate answers. The most recognized was Slaughtering and slaughter products making in the winter (5) and practice of setaside (5), then sowing of stubble crops (4), wood harvest at full moon (3) and sowing of mixed crops (3). Two of respondents indicated monoculture as an agroecological practice but it can be attributed to the printing error since it was not separated from the question about stubble crops properly.

Knowledges connected to farming

The most regularly used practices were Use of manure (7) and crop rotation (6). Partly they practice the knowledge about the characteristics of the environment (4) and prediction of weather according to different natural phenomenon (4), use of different herbal preparations (4) and sowing stubble crops. Majority of them indicated that they would like to enhance their knowledge about at least one of practices.

Records about the weather conditions are kept constantly by 2 respondents and sporadically by 3 respondents.

Traditional knowledges practiced in the family

All respondents (7) answered that they regularly practice slaughter and slaughter products making in the winter. They use culinary herbs (4) and have knowledge about old local varieties of apples. They also practice maize hulling (3), hand meadow mowing (3) and use of medicinal herbs (3). Some of them use knowledge about hand meadow mowing, production of small wooden objects (3), use of medicinal plants (3) and knowledge about old local varieties of apples (3) sporadically. Relatively extensive knowledge but not using it was responded in the case of mountain pasturing (4), knowledges connected to workhorses (3), basket making (3) and use of haystack (kozolec) (3). They use a lot the knowledge about herbal remedies (4) and use of herbs in cooking (4). There is strong knowledge about old varieties of apples (4). Others use it occasionally (3). They have some knowledge about buckwheat and millet cultivation, but mostly use it rarely. Millet cultivation is only remembered but not practiced (4). Also traditions and customs are practiced (2), practiced seldom (2) or just remembered. Respondents indicated that they would like to get more knowledge at least for one practice each.

Respondents recognized other sustainable agricultural practices as biodynamic farming (2), permaculture (2) and "peaceful agriculture" (1). They were pretty shure (5) that old Slovenian saying "At St. Agnes day hens begin to lay" is still valid. Three of them wrote their own sayings connected to the weather and farming ("At St. Marcs day sow cucumbers", "If St. Joseph is bright, sell the jacket and buy beehive", "A lot of thunder a little rain").

All of respondents are keeping of their own seeds of some crops they are keeping seeds of salad (7), carrots (3), potatoes (3), lettuce (2), squash, beans (2), radishes (2), cereals, tomatoes (2), peppers (2), beets (2) buckwheat, soya, cucumbers, millet and spelt.

Local food chain

Respondents predominantly transform their produce and sell them on farm or on farmers market (6). Five of them use the crops for their own consumption. Those who are selling products have in majority (5) regular customers. Two farms take part in the scheme of Partner agriculture.

Transfer of knowledge

Five farmers were interested in gaining new knowledge about field production, vegetable production and herbalism. Asked about the way of transfer they like the most, they have chosen "hands on experience" (6) and "exchange between farmers" (6). They would like to listen to professional presentation (5) or get the knowledge from (old)parents (2).



Respondents in majority (5) indicated that they are willing to participate in transfer of traditional knowledge. They prefer the demonstration of practices on their own farm (6). Presentation or exchanging in interest group were indicated just once each.

Respondents showed interest in gaining new traditional agroecological knowledge, but non saw the school as a partner in that. Preferred were non-formal ways as “hand on experience” and “exchange between farmers”. Also listening to professional is acceptable for them. Transfer from the parents is limited, since most of respondents are grownups.

All the practices respondents use were taught out of school, mostly at home. This way farmers got the knowledge about herbs and their use (7), seed production (6), slaughtering (6) and production of dried meat products traditional way (6) as well as knowing old varieties of crops (5) and considering the moon at different practices as wood harvesting or slaughter(5). Some of knowledges were transferred also by the farmers’ circles, the association of organic farmers and by advisors of public farmers advising service.

Conclusions

The population of respondents is too small to draw any statistically relevant conclusions.

Respondents were members of the Farmers circle Organic farming and answers were obviously influenced by this. Results could indicate trends for population of organic farmers.

We can conclude that organic farmers don’t really know the term Agroecology nor its concept. So here is a wide field for introduction and forming awareness about agroecological practices, which are more holistic as Organic farming itself.

They understood that farmers had to rely on knowledge and experience about plants and animal needs and local environment they were living in it the past. They didn’t get into explanation of this fact. Organic farming is sometimes also relying on knowledge formed by getting experience.

Respondents recognized traditional practices that could be considered agroecological. Indicating monoculture as agroecology probably can be attributed to the printing error since it was not separated from the answer about stubble crops properly. Nobody recognized agrohomeopathy as a possible agroecological practice.

Knowledge practiced on farm indicate, that farmers are aware of necessity of use of natural fertilizers and crop rotation. They seldom take in to account properties of local environment and try to predict weather “old-fashioned way”. Interest about herbal products and stubble crops can be attributed to their orientation to organic farming.

Interesting about traditional knowledge used in the families is high degree of experience about slaughtering and production of slaughter products, but less about maize husking or manual meadow mowing. These experiences are not needed widely anymore since there are machines to do that. In the past it was common work where neighbors gathered, helped each other and it was a part of social life in rural areas. There is still a lot of knowledge about mountain pasturing, uses of working horses and procedures concerning the use of haystack (kozolec) for drying grass for fodder, but is not used anymore. It can be explained by the fact that majority of farms aren’t in the mountainous region, they don’t need workhorses and the need of basket making and use of haystack is low because of changes in technology of farming. There is strong knowledge about herbs, but can be the result of high public interest about herbs and their use. In contrary the knowledge about old apple varieties is an old knowledge, since some Slovenian provinces were known as “an orchard of Austro-Hungaria” in 19 th century. This knowledge is gaining importance again.



The validity of old sayings is not a problem by respondents. It can be explained by orientation to organic farming and maybe also to the age structure of respondents. In other study with similar questionnaires, younger people were more skeptical about this issue. There is strong awareness about keeping seeds of local varieties connected to practices of organic farming and campaign by some civil initiatives in Slovenia. Respondents are interested in gaining new agroecological knowledges, but never by schools. Interesting is that school are considered only as a formal way of education. And this is very strong opinion in 40+ generations. There is still a lot of possibilities to study collect and evaluate agroecological knowledge in Slovenia. Reinterpret it for modern use and transfer it non-formal and/or informal way.

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