

Intervention of Fatih Özden from Doğa ve İnsan Dostu Gıda Topluluğu at Izmir at the “The Solidarity Economy in Turkey: First Meetings between Actors and Researchers” webinar, 14 Dec, 2020.

English Translation of the “Doğa ve İnsan Dostu Gıda Topluluğu” Podcast

Thanks to all those who organised and contributed to the event. Giving information about our community, about what we do. What we do, why we have created such a community, I would like to talk a little bit about that.

Our group started its activities in 2013 within the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Ege, Department of Agricultural Economics. So we are actually a workplace based community. I also work as a physician-researcher assistant in the same department.

Faced with the needs, we thought it would be interesting to make an effort to propose an alternative to the current industrial agri-food system, which is based on the excessive use of synthetic chemicals, the excessive use of fossil fuels and water, especially in recent years.

In this context, we have established a food community. Although this thinking has been influential in the creation of the community, one of main motivations of our group members is to achieve clean, healthy and safe food.

When our group was founded, there was a tea room in our own department, where we met with other teachers and staff for 15 minutes twice a day. We started to put order lists there. At the beginning, 14-15 people started to write their names and products on these departmental order lists.

Later on, this number started to increase first within the department and it started to expand and spread to other departments of the faculty. There were those who wanted to order from there. We started to increase in number. In the meantime, Taytin Özkaya, our retired professor but with whom we continue to work together, made great contributions, especially in setting up the group.

And after a certain stage, the requests started to come from different faculties on campus. We tried to help set up the group for another 3 months in the Department of Public Health and Medical Pathology in the Faculty of Medicine, and in the Department of Economics in the Faculty of Economics and Administration.

At present, 118 people in our Faculty of Agriculture, 45 people in Public Health, 49 people in Economics and 15 people in Medical Pathology are in these groups on the campuses.

Each group has 1 or 2 coordinators working voluntarily, and we try to act in coordination when placing orders. As a food community, our first contact with producers started with our visit to the producers of Seferihisar, Orhanlı village in 2013.

We concluded that we can establish a food community in the counties we work with and that we can buy products from them that they will produce with environmentally friendly

methods. This was an offer that was accepted in the first place. But unfortunately we couldn't bring it later. Let's say we didn't give enough motivation.

Again, almost at the same time, through another acquaintance, we met Caner, a senior university student, who is the son of a farmer family in Mordoğan. And he was an economics student and he wanted to continue the family business that had ended. We contacted him. How about such a production? He and his family accepted that. It was basically a family that grew artichokes and sold a small number of chickens and eggs. We started with them.

In the food community we also use the concept of initiators, but I will at least use the term consumer in this presentation. Because as a group or community, I think we need to put a little more effort into the more inventive phase.

What do we do now? If possible, we attach importance to buying from producers engaged in traditional, artisanal agriculture or in producer cooperatives. It is important to us that these are produced using environmentally friendly methods.

Mutual trust is essential and we do not seek any certification requirements. However, we have no problem with the fact that the products are certified. On the one hand, it is possible for us, as consumers, to reach the products below the organic prices on the markets. On the other hand, it is clear that the farmers get a fair price without being trapped by middlemen.

Indeed, it is possible to divide the orders placed by our group into 3 in general. First of all, in Mordoğan, which I just mentioned, there is a system of supplying seasonal vegetable products, including eggs, from Caner and his family, who produce in Balıklıova, and who used to ensure weekly deliveries as much as possible before the pandemic.

In this context, we share the future delivery day and time of Caner and product information with our members via Whatsapp. And when he comes to campus, our members come and buy these products. Caner goes to each group separately: agriculture, public health and medical pathology, economy. Of course, I said there are more than 200 members. Are the products enough or not? Of course, these 200 people do not have a demand for all the products anyway. Sometimes, of course, the products may not be enough. We encounter something similar. We see this now as the nature of our community, our group.

In this context, in our relationship with Caner, we offer a 20-25% discount on the solidarity price for non-teaching employees in our community and those with relatively lower salaries.

A second type of product is our procurement mode, the purchases we make by collecting orders on the Whatsapp group at certain times. For this, we share a list of orders with name and surname, product information and price via Google Forms via a link. Products ordered from outside Izmir are usually delivered to the departments by Kargo (postal parcel) and distribution is done from the departments.

For orders from Izmir, the producers or cooperatives themselves bring the products to the groups. The groups organise their own distribution. In addition to fresh fruit and vegetables,

we buy many products such as olives, olive oil, honey, jam, dried tomatoes, for example, from the Izmir Gönence Agricultural Development Cooperative.

We try to source local products as much as possible, but from time to time we can have small spoilage on the parcels regarding products from outside Izmir. The main ones are products like cheese, butter, bulgur and noodles from Boğatepe village, once or twice a year from Kars.

The fact that we are at the Faculty of Agriculture and have the opportunity to reach different producers and farmers through field studies frequently plays a facilitating role in this process.

A third way of delivering our products is the Community Supported Agriculture project, which we started to implement this year by getting together with other food communities in Izmir and which we have decided to continue next year. Over the past two years, we, as food communities in Izmir, have been meeting at regular intervals to form various working groups in order to strengthen communication and cooperation among ourselves.

We have started to develop joint community supported agriculture projects. Community supported agriculture is defined as a model in which the risks are shared with the producers. In this context, we tried to focus on the community supported agriculture model with guaranteed purchase and price in the production of products such as potatoes and onions.

For this, orders were collected in pre-season groups. After determining the quantities required, this was planned with the producers. We also tried to be participatory and transparent in determining the price. In the meetings we held before the process started, we tried to determine the price by keeping the price of the product above the price of the conventional product and above the cost of the producer, but below the price of the certified product in the markets and the organic markets.

In the meantime, we have also met with our producers in the pricing phase and talked to them to determine the price. I can also mention this: we are at the Faculty of Agriculture. We are 10 separate departments within the faculty. Of these departments, the Department of Agricultural Economics is the department closest to the social sciences within the natural sciences

In other words, one of the things that we value, apart from the direct relationship that we have established with these producers on the basis of solidarity, we also have an Agricultural Economics Association under the roof of this department. As an Association of Agricultural Economics, we also organise activities in parallel with food sovereignty and agroecology. We organise workshops, conferences, panels, because we think this is important too.

In the last few years we have been doing panels to see if our economic production is possible, if it is possible to have another type of agriculture, another agricultural model. We have had a series of meetings and we have even published our work to try to broaden the scope of these methods.

And last year in November, in Izmir, we held an agro-ecological working meeting and launched an agro-ecological movement. We are also going to publish the results of this work soon and Professor Ceyhan was one of the participants in this working session, he is one of the authors of the book that is going to appear.

So, in other words, within the Faculty of Agriculture, the fact that we are carrying out this kind of activity and thus supporting the work of the productions and the cooperatives, we are trying to have a critical social science approach in this field. This is valuable in itself and as I said before, we have other contacts with other associations, we try to discover, to learn together, and this cooperation is also there. And this objective of working is also important to us.