

RIFS-Blogpost

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! Zum Aktualisieren der Textelemente, Zitation markieren und dann F9 drücken !

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and the Havelknolle
CSA depot (clockwise
from left).

We all do it every day. In the morning. At lunchtime. In the evening. And occasionally in between. We eat. Surveys show that it's not just the flavour of the food that matters. Most people also want to eat food from farming operations that are environmentally friendly, resource efficient, and fair. However, many of the goods on offer in supermarkets are neither regional nor seasonal, nor are they sourced from sustainable, fair trade producers. This, despite the fact that we urgently need a just food transition and a shift towards plant-based foods.

1.1 There are 1.3 million hectares of agricultural land in Brandenburg – just 0.5 per cent of this land is dedicated to growing vegetables

As part of our work on the RIFS podcast *Negotiating change. Sustainability in Brandenburg*, we examined the feasibility of supplying the Brandenburg-Berlin region with sustainable and locally produced vegetables. We found that only around 6,200 hectares of agricultural land were dedicated to growing vegetables and strawberries in Brandenburg in 2024 – a mere 0.5% of the region's farmland. Of this, the largest areas are used to grow asparagus (3,517 ha) and gherkins (466 ha). While both are undeniably delicious, this comes nowhere close to providing the people of Berlin and Brandenburg with wholesome vegetables year-round.

It is therefore particularly interesting to see what community-supported agriculture (CSA) can accomplish. Brandenburg's 32 CSA-farms supply their members with regional, seasonal vegetables and sometimes other agricultural produce all year round.

Members contribute labour and other services to the farms, which produce vegetable crops using regenerative methods and under the fairest possible working conditions. In return, they receive a weekly share of the harvest, which they collect from the farm or a depot, or sometimes have delivered.

“Today, we have two types of potatoes, floury and waxy, pumpkin, onions –with greens! – radishes, tomatoes and savoy cabbage... and eggs from a friend's farm for anyone who ordered.” Erwine, Havelknolle CSA

Of the 32 CSA-farms in Brandenburg, around one third are smaller operations that supply up to 50 households each and two thirds are larger farms that produce fresh vegetables, fruit and some animal products for up to 350 households every week. Brandenburg's largest community-supported farm currently has a maximum membership of 850. Based on these figures, a single farm could supply a small village with fresh produce all year round.

“We get everything from students to pensioners.” Jenny, Havelknolle CSA

Some CSA-farms use socially inclusive subscription models that enable users to choose from discounted, normal, and solidarity subscription rates. Others use a blind bidding process in which members submit anonymous offers over several rounds until the year's production is funded. These approaches enable everyone to participate according to their means and encourage solidarity within the community. The annual membership model also helps strengthen ties between farms and their members and invites hands-on participation in the fields or in farm logistics and administration.

“Working together in the fields, getting to know nice people... it's an all-round feel-good experience.” Erwine, Havelknolle CSA

Many CSA-farms offer different sizes of harvest shares. A small share is usually enough for two people, a large one for four. The

monthly costs for a harvest share vary from farm to farm and are between €60 and €140, depending on the produce on offer. German households spend on average €62 per month on fresh fruit, vegetables and potatoes, according to the Federal Statistical Office. A regional, sustainable CSA harvest share in the lower price segment can easily compete with conventional and imported supermarket food, while offering much better quality and freshness of produce.

Employees on CSA-farms perform a wide range of tasks, from vegetable cultivation to communications, organising and outreach work. Many find their work both meaningful and fulfilling. However, the physical workload and income prospects mean that few people take up the profession. In 2023, for example, just three people completed their professional training in vegetable cultivation in Brandenburg.

“In my experience, our members would be the last to say that our produce is too expensive and we want you to get less pay.” Philipp Andreß, Kantoffel CSA

People who are willing to work for the common good and preserve the foundations of life for future generations should actually be able to make a good living and sustainable food should be affordable for everyone. CSA-farms show that it all it takes to make this a reality is solidarity. In times of socio-ecological crisis, community-supported farming can help to safeguard food sovereignty in rural areas too. As well as supplying private households, CSA-farms could provide sustainable, regional and seasonal produce to canteens in public education and care facilities. This would enable people who do not cook for themselves every day to benefit from regional food production, create jobs, and keep spending on essentials in the region.



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