

T5.2 Case study report (Code DE7A)

**Gut Wulksfelde GmbH - Entrepreneurial
approach and ecological goals well-
balanced**

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Abstract

Problems/Opportunities

The promising practice Gut Wulksfelde GmbH (hereafter referred to as Wulksfelde farm) is situated in close proximity to Hamburg in a prospering region between two nature conservation areas. The farm land and the old farmhouse are owned by the city of Hamburg and for years, they were not economically viable. For this reason, the senate decided to lease the property under the condition of ecological farming in 1989.

Results

The Wulksfelde farm is a holding which ecologically farms on 460 hectares (Bioland) and provides more than 230 jobs, most of them beyond agricultural production. There, a wide variety of products are produced, processed and marketed directly. It includes a nursery, a farm shop, a bakery (which is built especially for demonstrating the baking process), a café and restaurant and an organic delivery service. There is also an on-site kindergarten and a petting zoo for visiting families. The farm is integrated into an attractive landscape that can be considered a touristic region as it is used by people from Hamburg for local recreation. Moreover, the farm is engaged in the local community through farm festivals and harvesting events and provides environmental education. It uses renewable energy and takes measures to reduce its energy consumption. The Wulksfelde farm is promising as it is very diverse. The product range and the target group are very wide. The entrepreneurial management consciously and purposefully develops new products and thus attracts new customers.

Recommendations

This practice shows how economic and ecological goals can be achieved. This requires sufficiently large agricultural land, proximity to a large city (and thus a target group) and political support. Furthermore, entrepreneurial skill and ecological idealism are necessary for success.

Context

Regional context

The case study of Wulksfelde farm is located in the small town of Tangstedt in Northern Germany. Tangstedt is part of the Stormarn district in the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein. However, the town immediately borders the federal state of Hamburg to the south and the district of Segeberg to the north and west. Due to this special location “in between”, Tangstedt is the only town in the district of Stormarn not administered by the district itself, but by the municipal office in Itzstedt in the neighbouring county of Segeberg.

The statistical analysis includes the municipalities surrounding Tangstedt and the city districts of Hamburg. For other statistics, the districts of Stormarn and Segeberg are the reference.

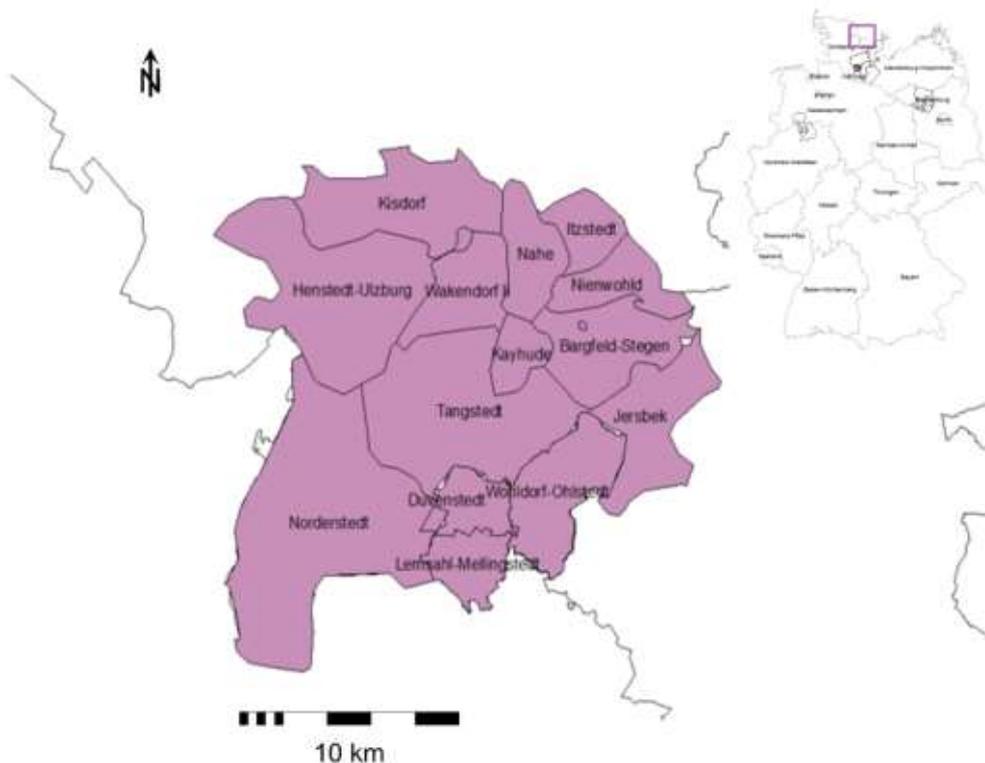


Figure1. Study Area

Source: own illustration, created with RegioGraph

Geography and nature conservation

The district of Stormarn is located between the cities of Hamburg and Lübeck, so Tangstedt is very well connected. The most important transport links are the national road 432 crossing the town from south to north-east as well as several bus lines.

The average altitude is 42 metres above sea level, so the whole region is very flat. The most important water areas are the river Alster, with its side rivers in the east and north of the town (also the area around Wulksfelde), and several artificial lakes in the west of the town, for example the lake Wilstedter. In general, the region around Tangstedt has a relatively high share of areas protected under the Natura2000 directive (about 9%, Stormarn 6%, Segeberg 4%) (Bundesamt für Naturschutz 2019)¹. In addition, Tangstedt borders on the Duvenstedter Brook, which is a large Natura2000 area in the federal state of Hamburg.

Demography

The small town of Tangstedt has about 6,499 inhabitants (which are about 160 inhabitants per km²) and is thus one of the more populated towns of the district as of 2018 (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 31.12.2018). Besides the city of Hamburg, the most populated towns of the region are Norderstedt and Henstedt-Ulzburg in the west of Tangstedt (see Table 1). All other towns in the surroundings are smaller. Since 2013, the population has increased due to a higher in- than outmigration. In 2017, 419 people moved to Tangstedt while only 380 moved away (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 2017). This is because Tangstedt is part of the prosperous Hamburg metropolitan region.

¹ Estimated value based on Federal agency for Nature conservation 2019: conservation areas in Germany

Name	Population	Area (km ²)	Population density (people/km ²)
Segeberg, district	276,032	1,344.47	205.31
Stormarn, district	243,196	766.21	317.40
Henstedt-Ulzburg	28,070	39.46	711.35
Itzstedt	2,329	7.13	326.65
Kayhude	1,162	5.25	221.33
Kisdorf	3,938	24.51	160.67
Nahe	2,396	10.37	231.05
Norderstedt	79,159	58.10	1362.46
Wakendorf II	1,353	12.80	105.70
Bargfeld-Stegen	2,988	17.82	167.68
Jersbek	1,727	17.91	96.43
Nienwohld	485	9.19	52.77
Tangstedt	6,499	39.86	163.05
Duvenstedt (Hamburg)	6,220	6.80	914.71
Wohldorf-Ohlstedt (Hamburg)	4,662	17.30	269.48
Lemsahl-Mellingstedt (Hamburg)	6,803	8.00	850.38
Total study area	142,193	274.50	538.40

Table 1. Population of the study area

Source: Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 31.12.2018 / c(Statistikamt Nord) / BKG – 2018 / © Statistikamt Nord for the city districts of Hamburg

Today about 23,8% of the population in Tangstedt is older than 64 years. This value is slightly higher than the average of Stormarn and of the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein as well as higher than in most other towns in the surroundings. The share of children under 15 is also slightly higher in Tangstedt than in most other towns in the immediate surroundings and also above the average of Schleswig-Holstein but lower than the average of the district of Stormarn. However, the share of young adults in Tangstedt is the least in the whole region (Statisches Bundesamt 2018a).

In 2019, 2,451 of Tangstedt's 6,500 residents were employed and 76 were unemployed. Compared to other towns, the proportion of employed people in Tangstedt is rather low

(37.5%; average in Stormarn is 38.7%; Segeberg 41.6%), but the proportion of unemployed (1.1%) is below the average for the district (1.6%/2.3%) and the federal state (2.8%) (Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2019).

Economy

About 60 % of the land in Tangstedt is used for agriculture. Compared to the other places in the region, that is an average value. The share of agricultural land in the region of Stormarn and Segeberg is about 56-62%. These values demonstrate the importance of agriculture in the region. The number of farms in Stormarn and Segeberg is below average as well (Statisches Bundesamt 2018c). In total, there were 1,054 farm businesses in the district of Segeberg in 2016 (7.6% of all businesses), while there were only 590 farm businesses in Stormarn (4.5%). In the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein 9.5% of the farms are agricultural holdings. Recently however, the number of farms in the region was growing (Statisches Bundesamt 2018c).

Only about 1.5 % of employees in Stormarn work in the primary sector, compared to 2.1 % in Segeberg and 2.4 % in the entire state of Schleswig-Holstein. Except for the independent cities of Kiel, Lübeck, Flensburg and Neumünster, the values in Stormarn and Segeberg are the lowest in the federal state. Similarly, 1.1 % of the employers in Stormarn are farms; in Segeberg and Schleswig-Holstein (1.3 % each) this number is slightly higher. These employment rates have not changed significantly over the last 20 years (Statisches Bundesamt 2018c).

In the Stormarn district, 24.4 % of all employees work in the secondary sector, differing slightly from the Segeberg district with 23.6 % respectively. The federal state Schleswig-Holstein has a value of 19.5% employees in the secondary sector. Over the last 20 years, the number of people employed in Stormarn in this sector decreased by about 3,500 (from 30,860 to 27,490), while in Segeberg it also decreased at first, but then, employee numbers in the secondary sector recovered to where they were in the year 2000. (Statisches Bundesamt 2018b)

Looking at the employment rates in the tertiary sector, Stormarn (74 %) and Segeberg (74.1%) have very similar values. The average value of the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein

is 78.4%. In total numbers Segeberg has more people employed within the service sector (91,700), but the number in Stormarn (83,500) grew more rapidly since 2000. Stormarn and Segeberg have relatively low numbers of people working in administrative, educational or entertainment jobs (about 26% and 28%; Schleswig-Holstein: 35%). In the other tertiary economic sectors (these include, for example, trade, finance, IT or tourism), the two districts have similar values to Schleswig-Holstein.

The absolute value of the GDP in Segeberg (approx. € 8,100 million) is higher than the GDP in Stormarn (approx. € 7,900 million). However, in terms of GDP per capita, the value for Stormarn (€32,900) is above the state average (€31,400), while the value for Segeberg (€30,600) is slightly below. The share of GDP in Stormarn and Segeberg (8.8% and 9.1%) reflect their share of the population in Schleswig-Holstein (8.4% and 9.4%) quite well (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 2019).

Agriculture

Agriculture plays an important role in the region around Tangstedt, in other areas in Schleswig-Holstein however, its role is relatively small. The most important crops are wheat, winter wheat, silage maize, oleaginous fruits and plants for a green harvest. In general, the agricultural area is rather used for growing these crops than for breeding cattle. In Segeberg, about 3.5% of the farms are cultivated ecologically, which is below the average of the federal state. However, in Stormarn about 3.9% of the farms work ecologically, which is lower than the federal state average in Schleswig-Holstein (3.6%) in 2016. For Stormarn there are no data available. The average value for organic farming in Germany, in contrast, is 7.2 % (Statisches Bundesamt 2018c).

Of the 640 farms in Stormarn, 555 are at least partly owned by the farmers who run the business. Nevertheless 483 out of the 640 farms are at least partly leased by the farmers: The average lease for agricultural land in Stormarn is 296€ per hectare. In Segeberg, 1,046 out of the 1,174 farm businesses are at least partly owned by their farmers, while 893 farms are at least partly leased. The average lease fee is 257€ per hectare (Statistisches Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein 2019). In general, there seems to be a diverse mix of owned and leased land within each farm in Schleswig-Holstein.

In 2010, 3,251 people in Segeberg and 2,291 people in Stormarn worked on farms. Most of these workers belonged to the family that runs the farm, especially in Segeberg this is often the case. Seasonal workers rather play a role in Stormarn (Statisches Bundesamt 2018c).

The vast majority of the farm businesses in Segeberg and Stormarn are individual enterprises (91% and 90%). The ownership form of legal persons or larger companies owning the farms is rather unusual in the area.

As mentioned above, agriculture plays a rather minor role in terms of employment in the area. However, about 38% of the workers in agriculture in Stormarn are female, in Segeberg the percentage of female workers in farming is about 32%. These numbers are both above the average of Schleswig-Holstein. The percentage of farmers in Stormarn and Segeberg who are older than 45 years (65.9% and 65.4%) is higher than the average of the federal state (63.9%). However, at least in Stormarn, the share of businesses with farmers older than 45 years and already defined succession for the farms is higher (37%) than the federal average of Schleswig-Holstein of 31.4%. The value for Segeberg is about the average (31.2%) (Statisches Bundesamt 2018c).

Interim conclusion

Overall, the region of Stormarn and partly Segeberg can be described as rather wealthy with a high GDP per capita despite a low employment rate. Furthermore, they have a low unemployment rate and a high level of education. A reason for this might be the location between and the proximity to the important cities of Lübeck and Hamburg, with the latter being of high importance. The data indicate that especially the region around Tangstedt is part of the commuter belt of Hamburg. For example, retired people might move to the area (low unemployment rate, low employment rate) but also producing businesses that cannot afford the rents within the city. Moreover, the high share of secondary sector activities might also be a statistical effect due to the rather rural north of Schleswig-Holstein. This is also supported by the fact that fewer people are employed in that sector. Agricultural output, which is rather low, could also reflect the proximity to urban centres.

Origin of the practice

Origins of the idea

The Wulksfelde farm is a holding which ecologically farms on 460 hectares (Bioland) and provides more than 230 jobs, most of them beyond agricultural production. The farm is located on the outskirts of Hamburg, was bought in 1922 and was a location for work and education for young people in the 1960s. With increasing mechanisation, the farm turned to large scale pig fattening and arable farming. Since the mid-1960s, the city of Hamburg owned the Gut Wulksfelde and the Wohldorfer Hof as they planned a new airport north of Hamburg and needed an ecological compensation area for these plans (Bahner 2011, 9).

Over time, the farms were converted to natural and protected areas adjacent to existing nature reserves and the farm land have reduced in size. At the end of the 1980s, the Hamburg Senate decided to look for new tenants for the two farms. The idea was to complement two nature reserves in the northern part of Hamburg with ecological farming. The city issued a public call for tenders, with the tender procedure managed by the city's environmental department. The city of Hamburg decided to lease Gut Wulksfelde to two organic groups on the condition that they join forces and agree on a common concept. In return, the group received more start-up aid from the city to renovate the run-down farm buildings. The city invested around 800,000 D-marks, which is roughly the same amount in euros today (Bahner 2011, 10).

The initial lease contracts had included the purpose of organic farming. This was defined according to the standards of the German association for organic farming (EU regulations were not available at this time). The lease did not specify any other additional obligations such as a locally oriented marketing or cultural activities. Thus, the tenants were entirely free to set their own priorities (Bahner 2011, 10).

In 1989, the lease was signed from the two organic teams – a group of six people in total - that tendered for the farm, which had 260 hectares of agricultural land at the time (DE7A / int. 1). From 1990 on, the farm products were sold in the hallway of the farm. The milestones of Gut Wulksfelde from 1994 to 2020 are listed in the following:

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- 1994: the farm store was extended
- 1996: the first ten pigs moved to the farm
- 1997: the delivery service started with 40 customers
- 1997: the farm's own nursery was established
- 1999: the bakery was expanded
- 2001: the farm store was enlarged again
- 2008: the farm store was completely rebuilt
- 2009: the animal garden/ petting zoo was opened
- 2009: the farm restaurant was opened
- 2013: the neighbouring farm Stegen with 200 hectares owned by the church (Evangelische Stiftung Alsterdorf) was leased
- In 2015, the farm cafe was opened and
- In 2020 it was extended

(Gut Wulksfelde GmbH 04.06.21)

Promoters, motivations and targets

The key person in this process was an environmental activist and environmental technician by profession. He had connections to the city administration and was able to convince the environmental senator with his idea “to turn the two estates into multifunctional organic model farms and to organize a public call for new tenants” (Bahner 2011). The parliament agreed to the plan and saw shaping “a different future for Hamburg’s largest area of farmland” as a unique opportunity. Another important issue was the creation of new jobs (Bahner 2011, 9).

The initial group of founders consisted of people with different professional backgrounds. Among them were landscape planners, technicians and farmers. The interests and goals differed within the group. While some were more concerned with overall social or political issues, others aimed to "*realise a nice, big agricultural [...] project*" (DE7A / int. 1).

Constraints and conflicts

The early years, according to the farmer and entrepreneur, were economically very difficult and could only be managed with great personal commitment. This also applied to the type of farming, which led to conflicts in the beginning.

The closed farm cycle, on which organic farming is based, is not as pronounced at Gut Wulksfelde. The farm has a lot of land but few livestock. As a result, the plants showed signs of deficiency quite early on, which negatively affected the yield. In addition, there were conflicts within the team in the early years. They started as a team, but over time they had to realise that not all members of the group fit together. Some of these conflicts were “*existential*” (DE7A / int. 1) complicating the division of labour and decision-making due to different and thus conflicting attitudes and priorities. Especially during the tough economic conditions in the beginning the group faced hard negotiation processes.

The condition for organic farming in the lease contract later cost the farms the possibility of EU support for organic farming (Bahner 2011, 10). “For the legal principle of subsidiarity, a farm that is obliged to farm organically anyhow cannot apply for public support to do so. In an amendment to the contract in 2000, the condition to farm organically was therefore replaced by a regulation that the price of the lease would be doubled if organic agriculture were [was] to be abandoned” (Bahner 2011, 10). Through this amendment the farming is no longer legally obliged to be organic. “The city influences the way of farming only by choosing tenants who propose an appropriate concept for farm development” (Bahner 2011, 10).

In addition, the farms were confronted with conflicts of use, as the area is used by various user groups and for different purposes. There are cyclists, motorcyclists, horse riders, dog owners, walkers, etc. imposing different space requirements. Furthermore, the main road on which Gut Wulksfelde is located is sometimes very busy, which is why it takes longer to reach nearby facilities at the farm. (DE7A / int. 1)

Actors involved

Description of actors involved

An important actor in this case study is the city of Hamburg, which leases the farm and the agricultural land thus making the project possible. This includes the municipal administration but also the political level (DE7A / Int. 2) (see section “Origins of the idea”).

This group of six people had a strong influence on the development of the Wulksfelde farm, especially in the beginning. Since then, all of the managers have left the farm or have passed away (Bahner 2011, 12). In the meantime, Gut Wulksfelde is mainly represented by the managing director/farmer (who was there almost from the beginning in 1993) and a new second managing director.

The Wulksfelde farm is basically organized in four GmbHs

- Gut Wulksfelde GmbH;
- Gut Wulksfelde Landwirtschaft [agriculture] GmbH;
- Wulksfelder Gutsbäckerei [bakery] GmbH and
- Gut Wulksfelde Lieferservice [delivery service] GmbH)
- and two leased branches (Gärtnerei Gut Wulksfelde GbR [nursery] and Gutsküche Wulksfelde GmbH [restaurant]). (Gut Wulksfelde GmbH 04.06.21)

In total, about 230 employees and about 40 seasonal workers work in the four companies (DE7A / Int. 1). (Gut Wulksfelde GmbH 04.06.21). Beyond that, internships are regularly offered on the farms.

Customers play a central role at Gut Wulksfelde because the actors address new customer groups directly and offers are developed according to customer wishes. The farm shop serves around 5,000 customers weekly, the delivery service another 4,500 (Gut Wulksfelde GmbH 04.06.21). “The food prices are comparable to the general price level for organic retail stores. For consumers, it is the quality and transparent local origin of the food, allied to the attractive environment of the farm shop, which attracts them to buy at the farm. For customers of the delivery service, the prices reflect usual retail prices plus a convenience premium” (Bahner 2011, 14).

Since 1995, sponsoring association has been accompanying ecological projects on the organic farm Gut Wulksfelde. The association offers a voluntary programme for a so called “ecological year” (Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr). The daily tasks of those volunteers include taking care of the animals and providing educational support for the visiting kindergarten groups and school classes (Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Norddeutschland).

Moreover, in the field of sustainable and environmental education Gut Wulksfelde cooperates with the Ökomarkt Hamburg e.V, an association from Hamburg. The central aims of the association are the promotion of organic farming as a sustainable form of production by providing education about the advantages of organically produced food, information about sources of supply and advice on sustainable nutrition (Ökomarkt Verbraucher- und Agrarberatung e.V.).

There are also overlaps with the Alsterland Active Region (Aktivregion Alsterland) which is funded by the EU (for more on this, please see section “Synergies and networking”).

There is also a cooperation with the Stegen farm, a facility for people with disabilities. Gut Wulksfelde has leased land from the Stegen farm. This farm employs 24 people who herd the cattle for Gut Wulksfelde. Eggs are also purchased from there.

Style of farming

Resources activated and adaptability

The basic prerequisite for an agricultural business is access to farmland. Access to land was given through the lease from the city of Hamburg by an 18-year lease with an option for another 12 years. In 2000, the lease was extended until 2032 (Bahner 2011, 12). It offered farmland and the farm were tendered. The owner, the city of Hamburg, has placed emphasis on an ecological farming concept (see section “Origin of the practice”) (DE7A / Int. 1). “The price corresponded to a normal rent level of 100 € /hectare.” (Bahner 2011, 12)

At the beginning, expertise, vision, courage and personal commitment of the group were also required. Especially during the period when the Wulksfelde farm was not economically viable, perseverance was required (DE7A / Int. 1, DE7A / Int. 7).

In addition, the project was also supported by financial aid (see section “Policies and Institutional supports”).

Farming approach

The distinct characteristic of this case study is that the Wulksfelde farm an ecological farm with a broad spectrum of other features The following aspects are discussed in more detail:

-  Organic farming (Bioland),
-  Processing and distribution,
-  Product range and the target group,
-  Entrepreneurial farm management.

Arable farming is carried out on the agricultural land. The cultivation of potatoes (over 40 ha) and the cultivation of cereals play a large role. The grain is used for processing into baked goods in the “transparent” bakery, but also as feed for the animals on the farm.

Berry fruit cultivation includes e.g. strawberries and blueberries. In the nursery, 50 different kinds of vegetables and herbs are grown.

Animal husbandry includes suckler cows, fattening pigs and chickens.

Besides farming and keeping a herd of suckler cows and other livestock, the form of processing and distribution is very special. Many of their own products and products on behalf of external parties are refined on site and marketed directly. The scope of production and processing is tailored to the demands of the retail customers.

The products can be purchased directly in the farm store. These include, for example, various meat and dairy products, but also baked goods, which are produced on site in a “transparent” bakery. The bakery is partly made of glass walls so that the baking process can be demonstrated for educational reasons. They are also processed in the farm's own café and restaurant and offered directly to guests and visitors. What is more, the online delivery service primarily serves customers in Hamburg and has been growing strongly since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Certainly, the very wide product range and the large target group also render the Wulksfelde farm special. The offer is a very comprehensive and broad. Additionally, the farm offers much more than the opportunities described above. For example, education for sustainable development takes place on site. Above all, this offer is aimed at kindergarten groups and school classes, which can experience a day on the farm and, for example, learn how bread is made in the “transparent” bakery. Furthermore, there are seminar rooms for rent and various guided tours of the farm are offered. Thus, Gut Wulksfelde also engages in adult education (Gut Wulksfelde GmbH 04.06.21).

Farming is made experienceable by, e.g., self-harvesting (individual harvest of berries or events on potato harvest) or the partnership with Ackerhelden, where private individuals can rent and cultivate a pre-planted piece of land (DE7A / Int. 3). There is also a petting zoo and playground for families and children. Throughout the year, some farm festivals for local residents take place. All in all, the Wulksfelde farm is a destination for trips and recreation in the Hamburg area. It is a very attractive and touristic region with a great hiking trail network. The Wulksfelde farm is a limited liability company (GmbH) that is subject to entrepreneurial management. In this respect, the company is also clearly pursuing an economic interest. For this purpose, targeted marketing is pursued. For example, the website presents the rural

idyll in a very professional manner. The products and services offered at the farm are developed further in a targeted manner. The management tries to remain as close as possible to the customer (and currently, for example, to serve the increased demand for a delivery service as well as possible). The management constantly and strategically tries to attract new customers and create their own market itself (DE7A / Int. 1, DE7A / Int. 7).

The ensemble of farm businesses has a total of 230 regular employees. A clear ecological interest certainly also drives the people of the Wulksfelde farm. However, the farm must also be economically viable. Here, ecology and economy are strongly integrated. This case study demonstrates, that these two aspects can work well together and are in no way mutually exclusive.

Innovation introduced and transferability

What is special or innovative about the promising practice is that it is such a large agricultural holding that combines ecological and economic interests. This practice shows that these two interests are very compatible. Another defining characteristic is the depth of processing and direct marketing as well as the wide range of products and the size of the addressed target group. These aspects might perhaps not be extremely innovative if isolated, but the composition of them and the operating scale of Gut Wulksfelde are remarkable.

In addition, there are some smaller innovations. For one, they developed a small device was developed to collect potato beetles. Also, they experimented with new plant varieties (e.g. hemp). In addition, the collaboration with Ackerhelden is also a new form of cooperation (DE7A / Int. 1).

Environmental issues

At the time, the city of Hamburg made a sustainable decision by favoring organic farming to be set up between the two nature reserves in the north of Hamburg. Thus, a "*several thousand hectares area was created, compatible with nature but also serving recreation*" (DE7A/Int. 1)

The whole practice is accompanied by various conservation measures. These include, for example, soil conservation. One of the measures to increase biodiversity is the creation of 25

ponds, which have created new habitats for animals and insects in and around the waters. What is more, new hedges were created and existing ones with old tree stock maintained. This environmental work is partly implemented by the sponsoring association (DE7A / Int. 1). Furthermore, heat recovery from the bakery and solar panels on the roofs cover up to 25% of their electricity demand; 20% are fed into the public electricity grid are used to cover the energy need partly. The remaining energy demand is supplied from renewable sources. Moreover, single-use packaging is mostly avoided and reusable options are available for customers. The Wulksfelde farms intend to reduce packaging in their transportation/delivery process. In addition, the Fridays For Future Movement is supported actively (Gut Wulksfelde GmbH 04.06.21).

The farm is located on the outskirts of Hamburg and represents a popular destination; however, it is poorly connected to the public transport system. Therefore, many visitors use motorized individual transport for the trips to and from the farm, which is associated with a negative impact on the environment (DE7A / Int. 4).

Synergies and networking

Relationships with the local community

Overall, high- income households live in close proximity to the Wulksfelde farm. They attach more importance to healthy nutrition and organic food and are more likely able to afford it. This is advantageous for the farm (DE7A / Int. 1).

For the local population, the farm offers local recreation and the experience of nature and farming. This happens for example through hiking in the area, self-harvesting events or the rental gardens at the farm. Occasionally, there are smaller cultural events (piano concert, reading, rap music). The farm also supports a small regional theatre (DE7A / Int. 1).

In addition, there are guided tours for local kindergartens and school classes. There is also a cooperation with the village of Tangstedt at local festivals, for example. (DE7A / Int. 2)

The needs of the local population are not very well known to the operators and are not very much in their interest. At the beginning however, the local population encouraged the farm (DE7A / Int. 1).

Synergies enabled

In the beginning, there were smaller cooperations with neighbouring farms, from which the equipment was borrowed (DE7A / Int. 1). The nearby Stegen farm, owned by the Christian church (the Evangelische Stiftung Alsterdorf), was leased in 2013. This added 200 hectares of farmland to the Wulksfelde farm. As a result, more grain could be grown, the cattle herd could be increased and new winter quarters could be obtained for them. Some of the added land consists of bog soils on which blueberries are grown (Gut Wulksfelde GmbH 04.06.21).

The beforementioned cooperation with the company "Ackerhelden" has established 250 rental gardens on the land of the Wulksfelde farm. Each rental garden plot is 40 square metres with pre-planted organic plants. The tenants are both producers and consumers and are accompanied by the company throughout the gardening season and informed about the farming tasks on the field. The tenants take care of their plot and harvest their own vegetables. The Wulksfelde farm provides the land for the rental garden company. The Wulksfelde farm benefits from this, as the tenants regularly spend time on the farm site and also consume the products offered there (DE7A / Int. 3).

In addition, there is also cooperation with the Ökomarktverein from Hamburg, especially in the area of education, for sustainable development (see also section “Actors involved”).

Networking

The Wulksfelde farm actively benefits from the Alsterland Active Region (AktivRegion Alsterland). Such Active Regions are part of the funding programme "Landesprogramm ländlicher Raum" (LPLR) of the state of Schleswig-Holstein. They receive funding from the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD). The aim is to strengthen rural regions and promote sustainability.

The AktivRegion Alsterland was founded in 2008 and is one of 22 Active Regions in Schleswig-Holstein. The recognised development strategy of the Alsterland qualifies for state and federal funds as well as European funding. The region includes southern parts of Schleswig-Holstein and northern parts on the outskirts of Hamburg (LAG AktivRegion Alsterland e. V. - A). The managing director of the Wulksfelde farm is also on the executive board of the Active Region (DE7A/Int. 1). The “transparent” bakery was built at Wulksfelde farm using the funding, thereby expanding the educational offers for kindergarten groups, school classes and other groups and creating an off-campus learning experience (LAG AktivRegion Alsterland e. V. - B).

In addition, the Active Region has signposted a hiking network of over 300 km. The hiking trails often lead to, start or end at local farms, such as the Wulksfelde farm (DE7A / Int. 4).

The Wulksfelde farm is one of 290 organic demonstration farms designated by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture. Through guided tours, farm festivals and open days, they show organic farming to anyone who is interested (Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung 2021). Mutual inspiration and exchange take place in this Germany-wide network (DE7A/Int. 1).

Furthermore, the managing director of the farm is one of the co-founders of the association Eco Regional Initiative North (BIÖRN - Öko-Regionalinitiative Nord e.V.) (DE7A / Int. 7). This network promotes awareness of sustainable agriculture, rural agriculture farming and food sovereignty (BIÖRN e.V. Öko-Regionalinitiative Nord).

The sponsoring association also maintains close contact to the local branch of the environmental group NABU (Nature And Biodiversity Conservation Union) (Bahner 2011, 15).

Policies and institutional supports

Policies

The subsidies, especially at the beginning, certainly were decisive. The farm has received direct payments (pillar 1) and also payments for rural development (pillar 2 - EAFRD) and funding from the national support for organic farming. As the farm has a large number of hectares and the mentioned subsidies are based on the size of the farmland, Wulksfelde farm benefits from the agricultural support in a great manner.

Several times, larger projects (e.g., canteen kitchen, the farm as a demonstration farm) were individually funded by public funds (partly from the EU). Funding from federal ministries for energy efficiency improvements and energy upgrading was also obtained. The Renewable Energy Sources Act (Erneuerbare-Energien-Gesetz) has also been beneficial, e.g., for the installation of photovoltaic systems.

Nature conservation projects on site were also partly supported through nature protection contracts (e.g. small-scale agriculture and flower strips).

In addition, educational projects such as the "transparent" bakery or the expansion of the petting zoo and purchasing of playground equipment were founded through the Alsterland Active Region and thus through the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD). The farm's managing director played a decisive role in promoting and shaping the application process for the Alsterland Active Region (DE7A / Int. 4).

Several interviewees considered the bureaucratic processes as too complex. Even if the same goal is pursued by the public administration, procedures are very slow and time-consuming and could be "*optimised and streamlined*" (DE7A / Int. 1). Especially the high bureaucratic demands of the Works Constitution Act are mentioned here (DE7A / Int. 2).

Institutional support

At the very beginning, there was certainly political will to transform the Wulksfelde farm into organic farming. On the one hand, the government of the city Hamburg decided to lease the farm and link it to the condition of organic farming. On the other hand, the lease contains

advantageous conditions for the farm (in terms of leasing costs and leasing duration) (see section “Origin of the idea” and section “Actors involved”) (DE7A/Int. 1).

Overall, it is estimated that the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein is more politically committed to sustainability compared to other federal states. As a result, the farm would also receive support from the state government. The local political environment also seems to be particularly oriented towards ecological action (DE7A/Int. 3).

After the farm had developed successfully for 15 years, the city invested 650,000 in total for manure and silage storing facilities, a drainage system and a barn. It was managed “by the city’s commerce department (Wirtschaftsbehörde), which had previously taken over responsibility for the estates from the environmental administration” (Bahner 2011, 12).

Impact and perspectives

Impacts on rural regeneration and generation renewal

The main reason this practice is promising, is the impressive demonstration of how economic and ecological goals can be achieved simultaneously. The Wulksfelde farm is a prospering holding, which farms ecologically and protects nature. It introduces an innovative approach to farming and rural economy by offering a wide range of products for a wide range of customers. Assuming access to large agricultural areas and proximity to the sales market, the promising practice shows potential replicability and transferability.

Economic impacts

Although the area where the holding is situated cannot be seen as a declining area the creation of jobs of this promising practice is still positive as new services and products were created at Gut Wulksfelde, most new jobs are in fields beyond agriculture. The jobs on the farm site include jobs in retail, catering, processing, but also marketing and education. The economic success of the Wulksfelde farm is thus beneficial for regional partners and local crafts, service providers and local traders (e.g. electricians, plumbers, butchers, agricultural machinery dealers, construction companies, building material dealers). Thus, external jobs were also created.

The promising practice is a modern agricultural business. Even if the individual branches and products (bistro, restaurant, bakery, petting zoo) are not that new, what is innovative is the interaction of all branches and the size of the whole business.

The case study revitalises the rural economy by increasing the regional value added through the intensity of processing. This farming approach creates further fields of economic activities and revenue opportunities that diversify the local economy. Through education it increases the local (social) capital as well.

The interviewees also assumed that the Wulksfelde farm and the way it approaches agriculture has inspired other farms (DE7A/Int. 4).

Environmental and ecological impacts

The farmland of the Wulksfelde farm links two nature reserves to each other, all while located in a predominantly urban area. The farm thus creates a continuous natural space. The organic management of the large areas follows the principles of the Bioland association. It creates an ecological benefit, as the farming method protects the soil and promotes biodiversity. Furthermore, concrete measures especially for nature conservation are implemented on the farm's land, such as the creation and maintenance of hedgerows, flower strips and ponds. The members and volunteers of the sponsoring association have also planted an orchard with 40 old varieties of fruit trees (Bahner 2011, 14–15).

The farm focusses on its energy supply, trying to reduce consumption and use renewable energy by installing photovoltaic panels. It thus contributes to the sustainable energy supply in the region. The use of reusable packaging avoids waste and especially plastic in the environment.

Social impacts

The jobs provide a livelihood for many people in the local and regional context. The farm also regularly offers apprenticeships and thus contributes to the regional training market and adult education. The sponsoring association provide internships for young volunteers for ecological work (Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr). They offer guided tours for the public and for school classes, discussion evenings and environmental workshops (Bahner 2011, 14–15). The human resource efforts at the farm focus on training and development of the staff so that they can realize their potential. By creating 230 jobs the company contributes to the financing of public coffers (social contributions, income tax, sales tax, corporate income tax). (DE7A/Int. 1)

The farm also hosts regular farm festivals with several thousand visitors and smaller cultural events, which support the community relations. The farm also provides education for sustainable development for kindergarten groups and school classes. In this way, it demonstrates the functionality of the rural economy. Last but not least, the farm takes on an important function as an excursion and local recreation destination. It is aimed at different social groups and towards all ages.

Perspectives

“A recurring problem is securing the investments made by the tenants. In the years after the first lease was signed, the local farmers' cooperative bank granted unsecured loans for farm equipment because the bank was satisfied with the farmers' business plan. This is now no longer possible. This has led to the farmers asking customers for private loans ("profit participation rights")” (Bahner 2011, 14–15).

The next projects planned on the farm are related to the consumption and source of energy. It is under discussion to introduce a combined heat and power plant or woodchip heating. The stated goal is to reduce the ecological footprint by 25 percent by 2025 and to become a climate-neutral company in the long term (DE7A/Int. 1).

It is also planned to further expand the educational offer on the farm with, for example, a "green classroom" and additional conference rooms. The provision of education will most likely be realised with suitable cooperation partners (DE7A/Int. 1).

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Annex 1. The List of interviews

Code	Interviewee (Pseudonymy)	Gender	Role	Place and date of the interview
DE7A /Int. 1	Hueber, Thomas	m	farmer and entrepreneur	Via phone; 23.09.2020
DE7A /Int. 2	Kaestner, Phillipp	m	employee	Via phone; 29.10.2020
DE7A /Int. 3	Eberhart, Martin	m	cooperating partner	Via phone; 18.01.2021
DE7A /Int. 4	Probst, Katharina; Hirsch, Stephan	f, m	practitioner	Via phone; 19.01.2021
DE7A /Int. 5	Eiffel, Lucas	m	farmer	Via phone; 09.02.2021
DE7A /Int. 6	Kuster, Ulrich	m	cooperating partner	Via phone; 23.02.2021
DE7A /Int. 7	Junker, Uta	f	cooperating partner	Via phone; 26.02.2021
D7A /Int. 8	Hoffmann, Birgit	f	cooperating partner	Via phone; 01.03.2021

Table 2. Interviews