

CEPTA and sustainable agriculture activities in Slovakia

How to promote and implement sustainable alternatives in our daily life?

This question led to the establishment in the year 2005 of the Slovakian non-governmental organization called **Centre for Sustainable Alternatives** (*Centrum pre trvalo-udržateľné alternatívy* – CEPTA). It was built as a small, open and flexible expert-based organisation with ambitions to implement gradually more sustainable changes at the local, regional and global level. To be sustainable means, in our understanding, behaving in such a way which minimizes negative effects of human activity on the environment and nature as well as taking into consideration within the decision-making process equally present needs and future generations' rights. CEPTA started with two topics – agriculture and waste management, which, with the undertaken research, remain still the most important fields of our activities. The topic of agriculture has grown into different interconnected directions such as Common Agriculture Policy in European Union, pesticide use and food quality, direct sale by farms, integrated pest management etc. With time, our team of experts has expended and began to work also on projects concerned with nuclear energy, biofuels, air quality and soot emissions.



Picture by CEPTA®



Picture by CEPTA®

With regard to agriculture we have formed two main initiatives: first one at the local/regional level – **Local food community** – bringing together producers and consumers, and the second one at the national level – **Agro-eko forum** – a platform of 19 Slovak NGOs promoting sustainable agriculture, forestry and rural development.

CEPTA is an active member of various international networks, with its strongest engagement in the activities of the Pesticides Action Network (PAN-Europe) focusing on pesticide use reduction in Europe. At the national level we are an active member of EKOFORUM, a platform of 23 leading national ecological and environmental NGOs. We have implemented

numerous projects at national and international level. We receive support from private donors, various foundations as well as European Union and national funds. Annually, we cooperate with different organizations on common actions educating children, young people or adult consumers both at the local level, e.g. during Earth Days (see picture 1) or Car-Free Days, and the national level, e.g. during Organic Farming Days, EU Day (see picture 2) or Climate Day (see picture 3). Additionally, we are a part of the “NGO patrol” monitoring environmental themes during national, regional or local elections.



Picture by Peter Coch®

CEPTA issues annually several press releases on different current topics, prepares or translates studies and reports, does its own research, organizes and participates in various national and

international events. In our work we try to have constant contacts with children, young people, students and adult consumers to reflect better their daily problems related to environmental issues.

Sustainable agriculture



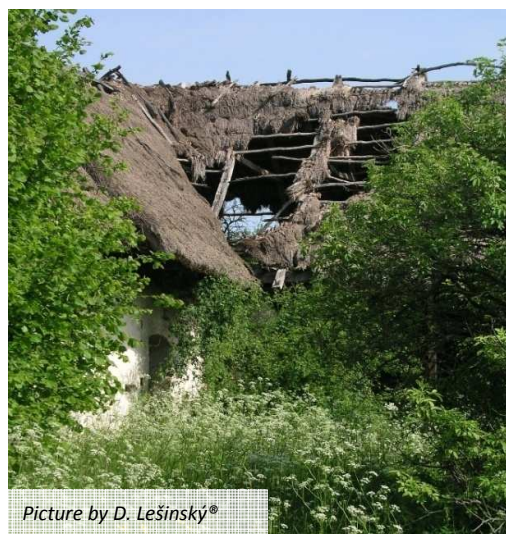
The already mentioned **Agro-eko forum** (AEF) was created at the end of 2004 as a national platform promoting sustainable agriculture, forestry and rural development. Currently, it consists of 19 members and one associated partner. CEPTA has been coordinating the work of the AEF since 2005. The interests of the AEF members cover a broad spectrum of issues – from nature protection (e.g. *Bird Life Slovakia*), through organic farmers (e.g. *EKOTREND – Association for Organic Farming in Slovakia*), animal welfare (e.g. *Sloboda Zvierat*), sustainable forests (e.g. *FSC Slovakia*), to local systems and rural development (e.g. sustainable village *Zaježová*). There are several reasons why such national coalition was created. First of all, working as a group we could become a partner to the Ministry for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Development and other institutions, which is of key importance for national policy making process. As **Agro-eko forum** we have become also a full member of *Monitoring Committee for Rural Development Program* for years 2004-2006 and 2007-2013. This program divides most of the EU subsidies in agriculture and thus can be an effective steering tool for directing agricultural policy at the national as well as the EU level. The Monitoring Committee is the only institution grouping different stakeholders which decides on implementation, changes, monitoring and reporting of the Rural Development Program at the national level in Slovakia. Secondly, as a group we are a partner for media and we can coordinate our media work to achieve the synergy effect as we share our knowledge and expertise from different points of view. Finally, together we can communicate better common interests of NGOs within national policies and control the sustainability element in the activities of politicians and political parties.



Agriculture in Slovakia

The status of agriculture in Slovakia is not satisfactory but improving. Among the issues highlighted by AEF on different occasions are:

- rural abandonment and, in effect, a decreasing number of family farms caused by the loss of work possibilities and social services in rural areas (the highest rate of unemployment is in the countryside);
- insufficient food self-sufficiency – Slovakia imports more than 50% of food which could be produced locally;
- agriculture is the biggest source of water pollution, erosion and biodiversity loss in Slovakia;
- most food is contaminated during the production process, e.g. by nitrates – fertilizers and pesticides residues which harm consumers' health;



- beside maintaining the sustainable production capacity of soil and forests, preserving their various unique non-production functions, e.g. water catchment and filtration, capture of carbon dioxide (sequestration) etc., are of great value for humans and nature.

After the last national elections and change of the government in July 2010, **Agro-eko forum** was asked to prepare the first draft of the new Slovak national agricultural policy. Although the new government presents a radical positive change in the communication style, the Ministry of Agriculture continues its activities in the interests of certain lobby groups, therefore we stay realistic and keep a watchful eye.

Local Food Community in Zvolen



Picture by D. Lešínský®

At the local level, in 2009 in the town of Zvolen (central Slovakia) we started **Local Food Community**, which reflects the need to go against the current globalisation tendencies. These tendencies provide us with anonymous, bad quality, cheap in price but environmentally, ecologically and socially expensive food. This dominant model does not take into account production potential of regions, but instead creates growing dependence of farmers and consumers on supermarket chains. In Zvolen, we started from a small group of about 15 consumer-members, mostly young families taking seriously their responsibilities towards nature and their children's health, and 3 producers offering regional farm products. After one year, without any advertisement, the community grew to 50 consumer families and 7 producers. Annually, the consumers from the community receive more than one ton of healthy vegetables and fruits, milk products, eggs and meat coming from different local/regional farms. This way they support local economy and financial stability of farms. The community has a regional approach and thus is open only to people from the region. It has its own "Code of Conduct" which states clear rules for becoming its member as a consumer or a producer.

The Local Food Community from Zvolen is a member of the European URGENCI network promoting community supported agriculture and consumption systems, which are widely known in most of the western European countries as CSA or box schemes. Not long ago we organized a visit of URGENCI representatives in Slovakia and a visit of 12 Slovak farmers and consumers in France, where they visited different farms participating in the system of local food communities called AMAP, which are already more than 1000 in France.

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