

Hello and welcome to our podcast episode. This is an assignment that is a part of the course sustainable organising in times of crisis at Hanken School of Economics. Our group consists of myself, Camilla Lehtinen, Rebecca Laaksonenn, Hemant Wadekar, Simon Enkvist, Daniel Schönberg. In today's episode, we will discuss topics about agroecology with Joshua Finch from Finch Agroecology. Enjoy.

Come to start then I can just briefly go with an introduction here. Firstly, so hello and welcome to our podcast assignment. So we are doing this podcast as a part of our core sustainable organising in times of crisis at Hanken School of Economics. And my name is Camilla and with me today, I have. Yeah.

Hi, I'm Rebecca. I'm also here. And who else I can quickly present. So we will save some time. I have Daniel with me, Simon, and Hemant, and, of course, super, super well, welcome to you, Joshua, as well.

Hi. Thank you for having me.

Yeah, Camilla is fine by you if I start with the first questions.

Yes, you can go ahead.

Yes. So we have divided this into a more listener friendly format. So we start with getting to know you, Joshua. So our listeners get to know you live and also a bit about agroecology in the concept itself. Then we delve more into your business. I mean, we are students at the Hanken School of Economics, so we are interested in the business side as well. And then, of course, agroecologist, maybe something someone or anyone here wants to adapt. So we have the expert, Joshua, here with us and want to get some tips and tricks from you as well. But yeah, do the introductory part, please. Joshua, tell a bit about yourself. We want to get to know you a better.

Well, thank you for that. Well, my name is Joshua, and I am not Finnish. I'm an American. I was born in southwest Florida in the United States. Yeah, I'm from a borderline true tropical climate, but I moved to Finland ten years ago. My wife is Finnish and I wanted to experience something other than the United States. So we moved here and pretty much, you know, actually even before I landed, I was already getting in touch with people who are working with urban farming because we moved to Helsinki.

So urban farming made sense. I'm actually not all that. Oddly enough, I'm not very interested in urban farming. Like it's not really for me personally, but I got in touch with people and you know, 2016 I received funding was Start the Raha the Start-Up support, which is I always laugh and call it unemployment for this because it's the same it's like the same amount of money. But now you've moved categories, but it's super useful.

It really was nice to have. I wouldn't I don't think I would have started the same way without it. And so I've been working with agroecology with permaculture for a long time since I became interested in the ideas, which was when I was a university student studying history, University of South Florida, and, you know, Americans, we have a different university system, to say the least, not just because we have to pay a lot more for it, but it's a very different idea.

And it's highly encouraged at most universities to get involved with non-profits or with student organizations, which operate more or less like non-profits. And so I was interested in the

environment because I was in Florida. And if you know anything about Florida, if you don't know anything about Florida, most of it's only a couple of metres above sea level.

And so, when you learn about climate change and you look at the maps, you're like, wait, where did Florida go? And then you realize like, you know, what are we doing about this? So after about a year of being introduced to these ideas, I got frustrated that we were mostly complaining about other people and what other people were doing. And that's how the agricultural side got interesting for me was like, well, this is something we can do. And I could go on a lot longer than that, but I'm not going to go to the next year to another person or yeah,

That was super, super introduction to you. And I think it's important for our listeners also to hear that you have experience from many, many different kind of ecological environments. So you have seen some stuff. But just to get into the agroecology as a concept itself, if you want to define it for you, what this means for you in just like one sentence, two sentences, so we can start getting into that topic and then of course finish agroecology after that.

Well, I like that you framed it as how I see it because it is seen very differently by many other people. If I boil it down to one sentence, it's the understanding that we live within a biosphere and agriculture came after the biosphere and therefore we should take the lessons from, I think flowering plants are something like 100 million years of evolution, just flowering plants.

So perhaps we should try to orient our agricultural systems towards this super resilient hundred plus million year old evolution and then see what we can do as humans to support that system rather than try to like rebuild something completely different that's not even based on this. So agroecology for me is the incorporating the lessons of ecology into agriculture on the understanding that we live within it.

Yeah. Is this also kind of how you started to get into your business with Finch agroecology? Or how did that idea pop up? You started told something about start the Raha?

Well, agriculture started in agroecology, sort of as permaculture, and that's because I'm extremely uncreative when it comes to memes. I just I'm not very good at it. And so I had asked if I could start a small farm at a place called Lillklobb, and I was interested in using permaculture design to do that. So I put those two things together and I knew I wouldn't really ever get into marketing too much.

Okay, that's not something that maybe economics students want to hear, but I'm more of a word of mouth kind of person. So, you know, I didn't think too much about the name and the idea there was to take a place that had a lot of potential. So as a two and a half hectare lot in the city that has over 500 years of recorded farming history, the people who lived there a lot, there were more than one family, but they owned much of that part of school and, you know, sold all of that off over time.

And then they moved they moved in the seventies, I think it was when the highway got built there and they decided, look, we have enough money, we don't have to live next to a loud highway. That's probably not the way they would say it. But that's how I would imagine, because it's loud. It's really loud there. And so it's been forgotten, but it has a lot of potential and it has a lot of potential as well, because there are more than one youth theatre that operate from that space. So we had the potential to implement by bifurcated design with one half focusing on small scale commercial agroecology.

And the other small actually would be large scale for large scale forest gardens and incorporating children, outdoor theatre and teaching about like domestic scale ideas and if you do that right in the middle of the biggest city in Finland, you know, if someone's interested, then there's very little barrier for them to come visit because it's not a two hour bus ride, you know, it's okay, maybe it's an hour bus ride if they live in East Helsinki.

But it's still it's definitely the the barrier to seeing it and experiencing it would be very small. The last thing I'd say is that it was going really well and then it was Corona came. And so as soon as I was ready to start teaching because I didn't want to teach or share like anything until I had something to show people because I really don't like it when people learn something and then two days later they start trying to sell it.

That's yeah, I can smell that from a mile away and it happens way too often with sustainability and stuff like this. But then Corona came and we weren't allowed to see people. And then after almost five years and Espoo decided that they didn't want me there anymore, they never said why specifically. I won't get into anything more than that, but that's the way it was. And we all just sort of nodded our heads and went another direction.

So thank the agroecology then was born a couple of years ago when I realised no one knew where a Little Club was fine. And then permaculture. I like permaculture design, but the first if you Google permaculture or you put permaculture in a YouTube, a lot of the first hits that come up are not things that I identify with, and they are things that my target audience don't identify with.

So I decided it would probably be best to, and also I didn't want to differentiate what I was doing based on something that I want to be commonplace. So if I want it to be commonplace, why would I use it to like, hey, I'm doing permaculture, like everybody should do it properly and then it would mean nothing if everyone's doing it. So I think agroecology was a way to step back and focus it on what it was really happening, and that was me doing weird and wacky stuff and doing it under this bigger framework of focusing on the ecology.

Yeah. Thank you. I think this gave a really good introduction and also understanding us. So we're going to talk more about. But next to Daniel, I will hand it over to you.

Yes. So we were a bit interested why you moved from Florida to Finland, but you gave a short introduction on that. But did you move here because of your wife or was it more like you wanted to experience another continent? Why Finland?

My wife would have to say it's my wife for sure. Yeah, that's it. That made it so much easier, of course, because no one asked any questions. As soon as you're here for family ties, that's for sure. But the truth be told, I was interested in moving to Sweden at first, and that's never going to happen now that I'm that I live in Finland.

But I did really want to live someplace where even almost all people agree that if you get sick, you can go to the doctor and you should be able to see a doctor and get treatment and you shouldn't go broke. Or if you decide to have children that you don't have to have \$50,000 for an ambulance.

You know, that's what it takes to get to the hospital. And so I got tired personally and we were speaking here from my personal business. So that's nice. I can say what I want to say is that I got tired of being called a communist, even though I am centre, right in Finland. Yeah. You know, to go from being communist to being conservative just by changing the geography is wild and, you know, that's it. Finland is a great place to be if this is the kind of system you want to live in.

Yeah. Sounds good. And there is some differences with Florida on that land. And one of those is the weather. So how are you? Well, like the four seasons here and what they do during winter times where you can maybe do it as much in a garden.

Yeah. So the hardest thing about being here is not the cold for sure. I mean, of course, I mind it to a degree when it's June or, you know, we're supposed to be selling, celebrating mid-summer and I'm wearing a jacket all my life. One of the first things we did is I moved the week before midsummer was to buy a summer jacket.

Yeah, this is an oxymoron. There's no such thing as a summer jacket. But truth be told is the darkness that's the hardest part for me is how dark it is. So where I'm from, we have sometimes more sunlight on Christmas than Finland, than this part of Finland gets in the whole month of December. So, like, we have one of the shortest days. So that's the hardest. That's why my face is totally lit up right now is because I have giant lamps and in the last couple of years I've had that and that has taken away the seasonal affective disorder like completely for me.

So, you know, that's the hardest part of adjustment is the darkness and how it affects the body because there's no way of getting around that. And then, you know, what do I do during the winter? Well, fortunately, I do live in southern Finland, so sometimes the snow melts in mid-April. And by the time the snow melts with you've got healthy soil, then you can start doing not what's the right where. It's been a few years since I've done this, but you can go out on a limb and you can plant early, and if it works then you're like, Yeah, but it's not like your main thing.

So in order to do that, you have to start in March. So really I start from March until, you know, almost until Christmas. I can farm in southern Finland, so there's not that much downtime. And then the rest of it is an app business analysis. And when you're not trained, I mean, I'm a historian, but I don't know, spreadsheets or anything like this. So I had to learn all that myself. I don't have any of that business acumen.

I have no business training. Everything that I know is from what I've read and what I've had to do. So it takes me a lot longer than probably any of you to analyse my business, but I try to do it really thoroughly. So we'll look at every single week that we sold something and we will break that down by who was buying it and what exactly did they buy and what did I plan to sell that week?

And so you get a really annoying looking spreadsheet, but at the end of the day that allows you then to really dial in the seed orders and exactly the way that I wanted the business to look the next year. So I didn't really take much time off because I was constantly reiterating system every winter.

So it's design and you know, writing. I do a lot of writing. Maybe I don't publish everything that I write, but I do a lot of writing. So, you know, the winter for me is spent that way. And

that's how I planned it too, was that it would be work incorporate feedback and then also is hoping to do more teaching in the winter of the theory and fundamentals. But like I said, Corona came around and nobody wanted to see me anymore, so to speak.

Well, interesting to hear also about the business side. And just wondering, have you seen any trends of sell products or some interesting trends of sell products during your five years at the club?

I certainly did. Yeah, I certainly saw some trends. So in small scale market gardening, where you're growing mostly annual plants and you try to grow almost as much as you can as fast as you can in like a three month growing season. There are certain crops that as you go on to YouTube, you know, University of YouTube, and you also see and market garden courses that float to the top based on your scale.

And at my scale, being at the small end of that, a lot of things that were promoted were these fast growing vegetables, radishes, but also a lot of salad crops that you grow, not microgreens or sprouts. You know, we could buy these to start. They just come out of the seed, but you let them go a little bit bigger to the baby they call it the baby phase, which is very funny when you harvest them, because then you take this blade that cuts with a it's an electric blade and then you're slicing these baby plants off and like babies.

I try to laugh at what we call things a lot. Yeah, but what I found was with that was trying to bring that process into play with my, my personal goals for sustainability. And if you go to the supermarket and you look for baby greens, they look a lot, right?

Or any of these, like what are they sold? And they're sold in little plastic containers that are single use containers and it's convenience. Food is what it is. It's a convenience food. And yeah, it's got a high price point, but then you're generating quite a bit of plastic.

So what I tried to do to get around that was to try to sell that by volume. So I always asked my customers to bring containers and then we would use a scoop and sell, you know, like a litre, you know. And of course I'd have an idea of how much it weighed or whatever, and they would know and everything.

But people, the trend was that was soon as you did that, as soon as you asked people to bring a reusable container, your sales went way down because what people were after, even if they espouse the the sustainable ethic, you know, as soon as they're asked to do one extra step, which is to slow down and let me put the food in your bucket.

Like, that's too much, even if it means that they would even save money because very often by prices where a lot less for those things. So that was a you. Another thing is that, you know, people have a really strong sense of seasonality here, but not based on what is in season, is based on what they're used to seeing in season. So I was able to bring to market a lot of vegetables that I was almost exclusively outdoors.

I had a very small greenhouse for starting baby plants. So it's not like I had, you know, five hectares under glass being heated or something so I could do tomatoes year round. It was outside, but I could still bring things to the market a lot sooner.

People just want to buy them. Oh, I didn't know you could have, you know, this and this month. And I'm like, Oh, here it is. And it's good but you know, that's a winter vegetable. Okay, now

it's going to be a compost that's not very nice. But, you know, that was something, too that I found was interesting, is that people were kind of in shock, really, that they could get that kind of diversity that soon.

And so that's something that it started to change, I think, in the last few years. But it's hard to say. I only have my own experience. I can also tell you that customers you can give people too much. And so the trend really needs to be, you know, matching their expectations with what you what you bring to them and really making sure you only give them what they can use because even if they can preserve it, they're not going to. So I guess the overall thing that I'm kind of pushing out here is that just because customers say one thing doesn't mean they actually do it or want it.

And you have to you have to be adaptable to to find that out and and also be willing to let go of some things like there's a lot of vegetables that I love to grow and I like to eat, but other people don't like to eat it. And so you just don't grow it anymore. Yeah.

Interesting stuff and actually the next question would be on that, but would you have wished to know before starting the little Club?

And then I think you talked about many of those things maybe already but how would you summarise for yourself five years or ten years earlier what would you tell to you?

It's interesting because the answer to that question, did they give a good answer. What we'd have to have in a hypothetical that would be that I was I would have been allowed to been allowed to stay in the club as long as I wanted. Because anything that I would have learned that could have made the business grow. And there were a lot of things that I did learn that helped me produce more and better. In many ways that would have actually put me in a worse position than I am now, because it would have meant that I would have a larger financial or I'd have a larger need personally for that income.

And then to have that taken away from me without ceremony would have been a harder place to fall from necessary in order to jump to something new. So if we could pretend that I could be there as long as as I intended, then the importance of cold storage on the site. So that was something I tried to have from the beginning, but it was always really slow.

But as soon as I had the proper refrigerator and it was really specific to farming, you know, I guess, you know, having the refrigerator changed everything. Yeah. And it's really funny too, to think about how much it changes things, but to go from needing to harvest between, 24 hours, you kind of really harvest much more than 24 hours before.

So you'd be working crazy hard to deal with all the orders and to get everything set up and to have it be quality when you're there and not just be like collapsing under your sweat compost and here's your vegetables. But I like to have a presentable. The cold storage helps so much with that. And then something else that is maybe more broadly applicable would be either learn something about contract law or find someone who's willing to help you and stick it to people who don't uphold their end of the deal.

I really wish I had learned that because I have been in a lot of situations over the last few years where people say one thing, they even write one thing and then they'll do another, and it hasn't worked out in my favour. So I would definitely be looking into pursuing my interests more strongly. I think the thing the thing is, is that in this space about sustainability, we want to have

this impression that the people we're working with are also working from an ethical point of view. But it's just unfortunately better safe than sorry. Business has to be business at some point.

Yes, it's true. And, Rebecca, you had some question maybe. Yeah.

I was thinking when you were saying about different deals then, you know, so I want to ask how do you think that the Finnish market or let's say the market in Espoo responded to your business with Little Club and or the sustainability idea overall? How do you think the response was?

It was overwhelmingly positive. Honestly, you would think if I say this, that I would have turned out to have a lot more money in my pocket than I do. But it costs a lot of money to start a farm from scratch, especially when you don't have anything to begin with. I never had a problem selling my products.

My problem was always I couldn't grow enough where I was because the space was too small. That's something that happened to me as the place was too small to do, to do things in a way that I felt was the right way to go about them. So I you know, this third year when I view really made a push to see how much we could get from this place.

So that was 2019. I had set a goal. I have to remember that the farm is tiny or really small. It's very small. But I set a goal to raise €10,000 in pre-sales from this Community Support Agriculture Program. And well before the Cut-off date, I had to close the farm because it was artificial and I was afraid and we didn't have the cold storage yet. I was pushing really hard to get that and I didn't have it. And so I was afraid. And so I said, okay, no more people want more, but I'm not going to be contractually obligated to this.

So I never had that problem. And I can't speak for any other farmer. There are lots of other farmers in Finland. There are a lot of other people growing vegetables. But one of the ways that I tried to market without marketing was to say what I was doing as clearly as I could, which I'm not very good at, because I talk too much and I'm very like, I just I don't do summaries, so that can be a turn off for people.

But I tried really hard to get what I wanted to say as small as possible. Have it only be about my farm. Because with marketing, whatever you say also is a reflection of the other people in the market space. So if you make a claim about your farm doing this, that or the other, then people will start to think, well, why is he so what are these other what is he saying about the other farmer?

So I was trying really hard not to disparage other farmers because there are so many there's so many other farmers. And it's but it's also a small net community. And so there's no point if I want people to look at what I'm doing and model their farm after it, then to, you know, say that I'm number one, I've got the most sustainable products or anything like this.

So I talked about what I was doing and then my prices. So some of my prices were more than at the supermarket, but almost always when people would say, well, how do you come up with your prices? I go to the grocery store and I look around and I write down how much they're selling per kilo.

And then I look at it and I'm like, Well, is my product better than this or is it worse? Yeah, because I didn't also want to set it up that only people with lots of money could purchase food from my farm. So very often if you joined the Community Supported Agriculture Program, you might get 15 to 20% more food and more value. Then what you actually paid or the nominal price, and then they got a discount.

So they actually usually were getting like 30 to 40% more food than what they had bargained for. So that kept people coming back was that they didn't have to think about the price so much because it somehow felt. You know.

But it's not like the Finnish market is sort of ready for it. So I think this leads to your next question. I get the question.

Yeah. Yeah. Is this. And they're all also told that the little problem area was maybe a bit too small. And I know in that project it is older. So what's your next project then? Is it going to be bigger than or they know?

Yeah, well, it's funny. As of currently, I'm working full time as a project manager for Novia University of Applied Sciences and I don't have a farm. We have a project site and it's very different. So that takes what I found interesting from the Club, which was not necessarily the best production anymore, although there were a lot of things I still would love to have kept developing there, but really like.

When you start to think about how many vegetables you have to grow and sell to earn a living, it really makes you start to wonder about priorities here because, you know, have you ever stopped to consider what €50,000 worth of vegetables looks like? And that's in order to pay what that would be, to pay one person, you know, pension and insurance, and then to have them get a decent income.

So even if you saw €50,000 in vegetables, you still don't have enough money to pay to grow those vegetables in the first place. So, you know, we had actually run through this scenario a few times about how much space it would be to have a viable small farm. And I came to the conclusion that what I really need is about five hectares, and it would be designed so that the vegetables don't take up the whole five.

But you have a system there and then that should produce enough revenue to pay three people, not throughout the whole year, but one per you know, we had the models, you know, go a few different directions, but it felt good at about five hectares, a hundred families food for six months out of the year. But that's still a lot, you know, it's a lot of work and you have to find the land and then you have to find somebody with the land who's willing to let that happen because you probably lose your subsidies because the EU hates this kind of farming.

Nobody wants to think about it. It's too complicated for them. And they they want to be able to check boxes about what you're doing. So you'd have to also find somebody who's willing to, you know, decrease their property value by withdrawing the farm from the system in all likelihood.

So I'm not going in that direction. So my project manager, I'm doing something else and I'm following my passion. And that was bioremediation with plants and fungi and using biology to restore soil fertility. So we have a field that was taken out of production. You can actually look

at the aerial images from today going back until 1944 as the first aerial picture taken during the Second World War.

And you can follow that farm's modern history and you can look and you can see where that field started to degrade. And then it was no longer producing anything of value. So we're going in there and we are implementing on a small scale about 8000 square metres, a system that brings sort of like all the things into that field that you would need to do on a bigger scale.

And then following the soil's development, it's really hard to sum up in one thing because we didn't just change one variable in the system like we're going from. Monocultures to poly cultures. We're going from annual plants to perennials and annuals. We're going from only cash crop production to cash crop production, biodiversity production, so to speak, and multi layered in space and in time systems.

So like the whole thing is totally different, but it's also really exciting because it's the only project of its kind in Finland at the moment, which is weird. Usually I never try to say that because I'm afraid someone's going to come out of the woods and say like, but they are actually doing it and then I'm wrong. But we've talked with people who know and I could be the only one doing this. And the idea there, which sets it apart from high labour, high intensity, is that it's been designed to use tractors and machines as much as possible.

And then where we can't use tractors and machines, then as the project manager, it's my job to stop and write to three or four other options that if a machine was available, what should the machine be doing? That was the least clear answer. I could give you a different direction.

It's a little niggles in Kirkkonummi we just got started and it's it's weird, you know, it's really weird because I get paid again. I'm not speaking from an obvious perspective at this point. You're just getting me. I get paid on the 15th of every month and I didn't have to grow a vegetable, you know, sell it.

So it also in some ways feels a bit like I'm copping out. It feels like I'm not exactly selling out. But it does. It does I feel like I am losing credibility, even if I. Even if we're recording, if I'm in the field properly and making sure that the calculations for profitability are based on like what's actually taking place.

There's no way to get around the fact that I'm much more comfortable now, at least for the next eight months, than I would be if I was farming. So we're taking risks that farmers, most farmers would not be allowed to take or what are they willing to take? But. That's a pilot project, right? I mean, why do a pilot project if you just do what everybody else is doing and don't try anything new?

So. I think that's also really important job that you're doing now and to get more knowledge on a topic that's really important for the future of agro farmers.

We hope so, at the very least, we're going to learn a lot of things that don't work. Like that's going to be really valuable for people too, because what works only may not what works in Kirkkonummi may not work somewhere else. You know, even 20 miles away, because the people who work it are different and their context is different. But if something doesn't work, like absolutely doesn't work, those things usually scale. Usually those things kind of, you know, if it really doesn't work, then everyone knows. And we can save people time and heartache.

Sounds great. And Simon, you had some questions?

Yeah. Okay. You're a gold mine of information that you sort of have already, but I would love to ask them anyway. So while they're on your on the topic of your career and such, so the please tell us what it's been like being like a teacher or a consultant in this eco agro, agro ecology and agriculture area. So how's the business looking to Finland overall for your line of work?

Oh, well, it's hard here, to say the least. Well, you know the hardest part, probably is that I don't come from a farming background in Finland and the people who are still farming in Finland, it's just my impression is that there's a high barrier to getting within their so-called circle of trust. Right they've seen a lot of things. They've been promised a lot of things. And, you know, I think the last thing they want is somebody from Florida coming and saying, like, this is the way I mean, I've been told since I came here that, you know, you're not in Florida anymore. And so that's a big thing. And then also the language.

In Finland, especially, younger people speak English quite well. But even if you try to avoid jargon, it still comes along with the territory. And so it's very easy to talk, start talking way past people and they're so polite that they don't tell you stop. It's not until the end that they're like, I only understood about half of what you were saying.

Yeah. So that can be that can be a challenge. And I've also found that in Finnish, so I don't speak Swedish. There are some words that simply don't exist.

You speak by the way Finnish?

Okay. You know, my finish is okay. I understand quite a lot, but I do also need faces so I can almost. I can't speak finish on the phone really at all. I have to have the human interaction. Otherwise I just feel like I am not making any sense so I can speak normal things, but I'm not fluent. And of course, my, my bar for fluency is, is quite high because in English at least, you know, I write and you know, I'm used to like university level academic kind of writing.

So, you know, I compare my finish this way down. So those are two big mitigating factors for having developed. Right? And then as soon and I also mentioned that I didn't want to promote what I was doing until I had something to show people. And by the time that happened, then Corona came. So it really just never took off. But I was able to, you know, get in touch with sort of the right people that this project opened up. Right. So, you know, it wasn't a success and then it was like, you know, suddenly that's all I was doing, very little of it.

And then that was all I was doing, you know, is, is the consulting in some ways. But I think that it's going to grow very fast because the sheer number of farmers around the world adopting these ideas is staggering. Like the, you know, you were getting 15, 16% adoption rates on some of these techniques in Iowa or Illinois, of all places, where it's that's the heart of industrial agriculture, as far as I'm concerned, know, at least in the US.

And so people are changing rapidly. And when you have that many people, you know, failing but also doing well, the practices suddenly gain a lot of credibility with farmers who, you know, they want to see a scientific study, perhaps. But what they really want to hear is how this helped another farmer. And so when you can go to any state, any province of Canada, when you can go to, you know, even Ukraine is a huge agricultural country as well.

And, you know, before the war and even during the war, right. There are a lot of people who are putting these things into practice, gaining success. So farmers in Finland are seeing that. And they also want to I wouldn't say get in on the action, but they also want to figure out what this is all about. So when they realise. The biggest thing about all of this is mindset. Because you can't do any of this without changing the way you see the farm.

And that's the ocre ecology for me. You can pick up the five or six principles, but if you don't put them to work in concert. They don't work very well. But once they start to work, you gain more financial independence. And with financial independence and stability to some degree, it's so farming comes, you know, operating space headspace to think about new things. So it's one of those age old things where, you know, to those who have more will be given. And if you don't have anything that sounds awful, but if you follow these principles, you can start to have something and build on that success.

And I think that will restore a lot of the independence that farmers want to have as well. So I think the future is really bright, but it's going to take it's going to take a few more years before it becomes more commonplace because like really the farmer attitudes and bureaucracy around farming in Finland, from my personal perspective, are, to use an over overused term, extremely toxic. You look at, you look at like the Common Agricultural Policy at a glance, you know, paperwork that all the countries have to put out, go through and read some of those and read Finland.

And Finland is like, you know, a defensive, you know, it's awful here, but we do it anyway kind of paper. And you read Denmark, which of course is a better climate than Finland to some degree. But you read some of the other ones and like they don't read this way. And so the mindset and this constant negativity about being here and how there's no opportunity, you know, unless farmers can break free of that and say that they're tired of hearing it the same way that I got tired of hearing about how awful it was to be a human being when I was in the university.

It was like everything about being humans. Terrible. We only destroy. We can't make anything better. It's probably better if none of us were here anyway. Like how do you expect anybody to develop anything positive, if that's the that's the messaging, even if there's some truth in, you know, some kernel of truth. So I hope that that kind of gets a bit to your answer. But it's got to be. Yeah, we got to we got to stop being afraid of being positive.

Yeah. So for the everyday citizen, how's the interest there? Is there a genuine interest in practising these things as well as just buying from the producers or farmers themselves? Is there an equal interest among.

Well, it's interesting. I could answer that from a few different perspectives. One thing that I have noticed is that there are it seems like there are more younger people. Young could be a relative term who are interested in becoming farmers. And a lot of them, when they do, they settle on some constellation of these patterns being put into practice. So maybe they're interested in, you know, holistic planned grazing and they don't really they don't want to grow a vegetable, but they would really like to maintain the landscape in a perennial system, or maybe they do want to grow vegetables.

And so there are a large number for Finland anyway. It seems like there are a lot of these small scale farms popping up and that's wonderful. I think that the consumer demand, you know,

Finland's a tough cookie like I think from the Helsinki region. And that automatically disqualifies me for a lot of people because I don't have the same struggles that somebody 3 hours away with no market has to deal with.

But I think that there is demand for it. And when I mentioned that independence of farmers, I think Finns, if I can generalise in a positive way, do like this idea of Finland being able to produce for itself, even if it's old school and it's anti-globalization or it's this out of the other.

Like they like to know that their community is viable and these processes help communities become viable. But again, being in the Helsinki region, it's just big enough that the sample is large enough that you can find this niche. But I do think that overall, most of the most of the eco conscious people, this is again my opinion, they don't want to farm. They never want to farm. They'll never want to farm.

And they also don't want to learn anything about farm. That might be odd to hear, but I think that a lot of people who again, espouse certain ideas, they're not actually very interested in learning for themselves what's taking place on farms. So, you know, where are you going to find the biggest market for lab grown meats?

Helsinki. Where are you going to find the biggest markets for vegan vegetables? You know, it's going to be Helsinki. Now, if you if you want to be vegan, that's fine. I'm not saying that no one should be vegan. It's your own thing. But to go, you know, I've been told by the outspoken vegans that they won't buy my food because my food's not vegan.

And I tell them that there's no possible way that I can grow this food without being vegan, because I also care about the soil life and that includes animals. I raise animals composting worms are animals, folks, you know, and they keep I keep them in a concentrated animal feeding operation and I feed them on a regular basis in order to harvest their products.

And so, like, I can't call what I'm doing vegan. What I'm trying to get at is like there's, there's a big dichotomy between what is possible and what people are being told is possible, you know, with agriculture. And that's something that farmers also are going to have to start to stand up and say something about what they're doing, because it's no secret that there are groups of people who want to legislate other people's daily lives. And it could come to a point where some of these practices aren't possible legally, not because they don't have a good basis in terms of what they actually do, but because of people's mindsets and what they want to allow and not allow.

And I think that's something that's kind of not kind of dangerous. I think it's extremely dangerous is said to do that. And so I went down a rabbit hole when I was sorry about that. But yeah, maybe maybe a certain somebody warned you about the tendency.

And nowhere is thing still on my list that I want to check up with you. So we've been talking about de-growth in class. Like how not? If you want to grow constantly, you might not be able to be sustainable in the future. So how do you implement De-growth or how do you handle De-growth in your line of work? And how do farmers commercial and look at De-growth?

Well, I have to be honest and say that I don't think about Degrowth, but I also don't really think in that, you know, as a term. So the way that I handle growth or degrowth or how would you might say the the use of resources maybe by my business is that I kind of mentioned that with

the plat use of the single use plastics already. Like that's already something that I had to think about. I conceive of the farm with agroecology.

So, you know, ecological processes, agriculture. Marrying those two things together. How do you do that? Well, one way to do that is to use holistic management, which is a decision making framework. And in that decision making framework, we have four ecosystem processes. So we have to think about how each action or not action affects those parts of the ecosystem and whether or not those impacts are moving you towards your goal, which generally is to have an ecosystem that you know is getting better over time.

So our goal is already regeneration. So in some sense, I don't really like the word degrowth in my field because I see growth from this ecological and biological capital and I want, you know, as much growth. Yeah, I get like I want as much solar energy converted into biological capital and I don't really like that phrase, but most people know, kind of know what I'm getting at when I say biological living things and that things as possible.

And but you can only you can kind of put that into overdrive, though, if you make certain decisions like if you want to use certain fertilisers, right or if you want to use a certain amount of irrigation or if you want to cover your whole farm in plastic or in glass, there are a lot of regenerative farms that grow only inside under plastic, and then they go to the farmer's market and then they sell to customers who don't want to buy tomatoes from Spain.

That are grown under plastic. You know. And so you get these weird you get these really strange. As you call them with they incongruence there's a word for this this mental incongruity that takes place where it's okay to cover everything in plastic if it's local, but it's wrong to cover it in plastic if it's in Spain. And so it doesn't make sense. So degrowth for me wouldn't be anything that I would be personally interested in, but I'm interested in the whole, as far as possible, the whole chain of production, of all of the inputs that I use on the farm.

And I want to try to localise that as much as possible, because I see the farm as a service to the ecosystem and the community, the people as well as obviously the organisms with people, and that it needs to be stable even if those chains of production that allow it to occur where I am, are no longer available. So I don't want to be sustainable only if I get x, y or z inputs. At the same time, you have to be economically minded and you can't tackle all of those supply chain issues in year one.

Right. So I've also been accused. I get accused of all kinds of things, but people get extremely angry with me because of the seeds that I used. You know, like I use hybrid seeds as well as heirloom seeds. And if you know anything about hybrid seeds, you know that they're not produced on the farm. Although there's a new rice variety that looks like you can get you can start doing hybrids on the farm, which is kind of interesting.

But. I wanted to see what the difference was. You know, I've heard the activist perspective, but now I'm a farmer as well as an activist to some degree. So why can't I do both? So sometimes people want it all at once. So degrowth right? Would it mean jumping off the cliff? More than likely, I'm sure. Right. So we also have to take that kind of curve, you know, into account. Yeah. So can be growth.

Yeah. It's not always bad

You know, that's for everyone. You know, it's a real. Now, what's the overall framework that we're even conceptually conceptualising economic activity yet? Right. And, you know, for me, growth is a problem if, you know, economic growth is a problem. If economic growth is divorced from we live within a biosphere and the biosphere has certain processes that need to work in certain ways so that we can continue to exist.

You know, so if the growth is working to pull that apart, then it's a problem. But if the growth is looking to support those things, then it's of benefit. So we have to even get down to all the way down to what it is that you find valuable as a human being. What is what is value? Where does that come from? Is it intrinsic in nature or is value, you know, completely a cultural construction? And I think that it's a bit of both. But I you know, I think that we've got some major issues.

If we don't get more people talking about this, because, again, decisions are going to be made. I alluded to that my rabbit hole decisions are going to start are already starting to be made at levels that which normal citizens aren't participating. And I don't like that because again, I'm American, I've got a loud mouth and I'm very much about representative government.

Like, I like I like that. I want to know that that I have a voice and I don't want to be told that I don't understand and that I should just be quiet and let the smart people in the room figure it out that, to me is an anathema to what what I'm trying to achieve. Another radical nobody.

So I'm satisfied with my question. So I will leave with over to Hemant.

Thanks, Hi Joshua. It's so nice to, you know, listen, about your journey. It's been a very interesting podcast so far. You also, you know, wife and then how it worked out for you, what kind of challenges you faced initially and also so many different concepts, you know, and in a way it's a good learning experience. But, you know, I feel that our listeners through most of them would be in an urban setting and they probably a little motivated by your talk and they would also like to do something similar, you know, like in the cities we where we have vertical farming or greenhouse farming in their houses. So how do you think we could implement agro ecologically thinking in an urban setting, for example.

That's a very good question because there there are a lot of possibilities here and in some ways there's almost too many. You just, you mentioned a lot of them right there. One thing that happens is once you elevate the Biosphere two being where it should be, which is all around us, is that you don't draw the distinction between if I don't draw a distinction between a farm and ecology, then there is no distinction between the urban space and ecology either.

So the ecology is happening all around us all the time. So getting that out of that and then focusing in on the core ecosystem processes. So understanding solar energy, conversion to biological energy and getting that conceptual framework to start to see the urban landscape as a place of resource flow and accumulation, right? So you then begin to identify where good places might be and also being very aware of the legacy of pollution and you know where you know the brown sites.

I don't think it's probably worked for that and finish as well like I'm sure they're real they need to be taken into consideration. You know, even five or six years ago, inputs that would have been approved for human consumption may no longer be approved for human consumption

like these forever chemicals. Right. This was a. What is it? Somebody knows. You know, they're in like Teflon.

It's in everything. But was it? The World Health Organisation changed the recommended rates from something that was doable to almost zero. And now that it's almost zero, you know, a lot of farms are in trouble because they've used inputs that include these things and they bio accumulate. So understanding that there are a lot of possibilities, but there are also a lot of potential drawbacks. And the second thing is, is that most people in the city don't have a lot of space to work with generally. But if you understand how ecological function operates, you'll realize you don't need much space in order to grow a lot of food and to do it on a relatively sustainable basis.

So. Not being afraid to study and get started and then to fail and maybe chuck it in the bio waste if you have to, you know, and if you want to work alone, you work alone. But also, more importantly is to find a community. So the nice thing about farming is and gardening is that you can probably find a community that you feel comfortable in. If the region is large enough, so like the Helsinki area, you can find people who are approaching it from community first and the farming is part of what they do. You can also find it where the gardening is first in the community just sort of happens as it goes.

So you can find your niche by exploring and you know, not, you know, how would I say, don't you know? They'll walk away with a ring on your finger the first time you meet a group, you know, go out, explore a little bit, do some dating, so to speak, you know, see where you feel comfortable and start growing. Because urban spaces have so much opportunity and it is something where you can feel like you're having a positive impact.

But if you're the kind of person who immediately goes home and opens up the carbon footprint calculator and starts to jam in all your numbers. Urban farming probably is not going to move the needle that much for you. So what are you doing it for? What is your motivation? Is your motivation to have a positive impact on the environment? Well, more than likely, you're not going to have a positive impact on the environment as an individual living in an urban space. That's just at the end of the day, it's human ecology. It's a human system, a human landscape, human oriented landscape.

And so, you know, the motivation probably should be to learn something about food, to learn something about your neighbors, to have fun and learn to laugh a little bit about what's going on and try to have a good ride while we're here. Because, you know, really, like, I don't like I live in an apartment, I don't like this. Like I would love to get out and be away, but it offers me a lifeline, you know, it gives me something where I have the biophilia that's part of being a human can express itself.

And then you also get to start to challenge received wisdom from people that you, you know, a lot of people that you might respect, but also you might start to hear arguments from people that you didn't respect before you started. You know, like, wait a minute, now I have this experience and it connects. And suddenly you start to see other people not as adversaries belonging to different groups, but as other people with valuable insights and life lessons that we could all learn from each other because the rural, urban divide is huge.

And how can we make a link? You can forge a link by getting urban people to understand something about the challenges of rural people. And rural people can forge a link with urban

people by providing things to them in the way that they would like them to be produced and doing it profitably. So there's cross-pollination that takes place from something as small as urban gardening, and it's not. Last thing I'll say is it's not just me blowing this out, you know, friends or offices that no one should see in public. Like there are so many initiatives all around the world where these kind of things are taking place and it's forming real communities. So, you know, this digital stuff is nice, but but the real work happens outdoors.

Yes, Joshua, I completely agree. Like these are some good insights and I will be touching back upon the community factor you mentioned. But I was also reflecting on the fact of, you know, your definition of permaculture. I'm coming from India. So, you know, back in India, like if you go really two centuries back we had the shifting agriculture, you know, where rural people would just clear a piece of land they would like prior to it. And like permaculture, they would allow the natural aspects of earth like, you know, rainwater and sunlight to, you know, have processes going on. So yeah, it was interesting to reflect how, you know, even in the urban life, we can go ahead with this. But like I was thinking as to, you know, if anyone just starts with this journey, what you mentioned, like how much time do you reckon it could take to reach a full potential for this entire journey and the process in an urban setting?

In an urban setting, as you're talking from a garden about for a garden, right.

From the basics like, yeah, this for a newbie. Yeah.

So if you were to start well, you know, I had zero farming experience or running a farm and very little beforehand, before I started. So I went from having a little bit of gardening knowledge. I'd done some stuff and I had the theoretical background. In 2017 was my first growing season as a farmer. By the end of 2019 three growing seasons later, I had already picked the maximum production that I could get out of that space that I thought.

So if you can give yourself a solid 4 to 5 years. And you could be in a place like this where it's your learning is like that. It's not it's not kind of up and down, but it starts and it stops because of the because of the climate. So you can one of the things that I always say is that what I'm trying to share with people, this overarching view of agroecology, ecosystem processes, human beings are also part of this millions of years long evolution.

Whatever started it. You know, if you have a spiritual belief or a religious belief that says something else started the journey of life, that's fine. I actually do. But I don't care where it started. But this length, human beings have the ability to read landscapes, understand what they see around them, and to share the information.

Our ancestors were practicing horticulture of some kind for millions of years. What was the Stone Age? The Stone Age was human beings honing the skills of working within their ecosystems. So I don't think that unless someone is born with severe physical disability. Right. Or there's something that is outside of the normal pattern of being human. You know, almost everybody can learn this stuff if they actually want to. It's mindset.

There's nothing about being a human that's like because this is about reintegrating, reconnecting with our past. Give yourself five years and you'll be growing so much food. Nobody wants to be your friend anymore because all you do is eat zucchini and kale.

Yeah, like, I completely agree. Like, thank you for this time and as to how you connected with the past and how the future would be like. But a quick final question, because you talk about community. So, you know, look at that. I have also read about your theatre forest project. You know, you're integrating all the various aspects of the ecosystem. So as you mentioned, you know, your public community, they have given you wood chips, they've given you green compost. So like, what would you expect more from the public community in Finland to help you contribute in your journey and how you know you can also grow it like Finch agroecology can grow in the coming years. So what do you expect from the public?

Well, If I expected anything from the public, it would be to come up with a much clearer agricultural policy that is based on measurable outcomes from farms and then get out of the way. That's what I would expect. Get out of the way, because I am so tired of these false ideas that punish farmers for doing novel things.

For example, our project that we're doing, we had to remove a portion of it from the subsidy system. Why? Because I've planted trees that don't produce fruit. Now we're also planting lots of trees that produce fruit. And the ones that don't produce fruit are there to support the ecosystem and to provide necessary inputs to the system. But nope, not allowed. Got to take it away. One of the things I would like to see is the public really start to think about what they want Finland to look like.

What does Finland in 2100 look like? If we could have the landscape that we wanted clean drinking water in all the rivers and all the lakes. Great. Put that up on top. Biodiversity. Put it to the top. Put these things up to the top. And then when farmers start to implement things that you don't understand, but they're moving in the direction you set.

Without, of course, doing something weird behind their back that, you know, is not allowed then that, you know, like that using some kind of chemicals or something that you know is right there. We could always think of caveats then to really support that because farming in Finland may never be this high profit, super economically viable thing. We live in a world where even with if we're going to degrowth and move away from fossil fuels, food is going to be transported long distances.

Finland is always going to have a very weird and wacky climate because we're at the top of the planet. Like, we just have to deal with that. If we want farmers to move towards the goals that society sets and society being, well, more than 90% of the people who live here, most people don't farm, then we also need to think about the social status of farmers and all the things that society asks them to do. Because it's not fair, from my perspective, to ask farmers to fix all of the world's problems, because when it comes down to it, the vast majority of the land is being managed by farmers, even in Finland, if it's a forest, is probably a farmer. Maybe that farmer owns a lot of this land, right? So, you can't separate those two things if those farmers don't have a way to feel appreciated. Socially, culturally, and economically, they're going to be alienated and they won't be able to participate in the society that is asking so much of them. If I were to ask anything from the Finnish public, look, you don't want to be a farmer. Fine. Don't. I'm not saying everybody should be a farmer. That's okay. But, you know, farmers. They're losing their farms. They're losing their heritage. Young people don't want to be farmers anymore. What do we want?

What do you want? And that's one of the biggest problems, like kind of degrowth kind of gets into this because it asks people like, what kind of world do you want to live in? And we must get serious because I hate this climate crisis. If it's a crisis, we would be doing something. Obviously, enough people don't think it's a crisis who have the resources to do otherwise. So, you've got to decide either it's a crisis and we're going to come together as a society, as citizens, not as consumers, but as citizens who have something to share with each other.

And we're going to try to chart a way forward so that our species and all the other species that are here, that we are, you know, in community with, can continue. Then we need to have a real conversation and not 'how much meat did you buy at the market' and have that determine whether you're a good person or a bad person. We need to get serious.

We need to stop shying away from these rabbit holes because there are only rabbit holes when the culture says that that's the place you're not supposed to go. You're questioning. You're asking too many questions. Someone else who's better than you has figured this out already.

Yes, you know, I completely understand. Like, it was a holistic point. And I understand the frustration because you're looking at, you know, having the tree for, say, ecological balance for, you know, avoiding deforestation, providing better soil retention capacity or it's a carbon thing, whereas people want it for a fruit like, you know, for a public utility. They're looking at the output, but you're looking at the much granular on a deeper level. So before I ask, I mean, a lot of people would like it was really insightful and I understand your viewpoint and I'll be happy to share with the other listeners. But yeah, if you can go ahead with the final segment of the podcast. Thank you.

Well, thank you for your questions. All very good questions. And yeah, it's probably not what anyone expects from the podcast, but I always speak as honestly as I can to the people who are here.

Yeah. We appreciate your honesty. Thank you so much.

Yes. And I'm just going to try to wrap up this podcast with a few last questions, because we are and probably our listeners will be students as well, and we don't necessarily have the most amount of money. I want to ask you, do you have any affordable tips for interested students and how individuals could support or get engaged in our ecology?

Well, you know, I also started from that same position, right? I mean, that and that was another part of my story that I left out. It wasn't just that we can engage with the world around us in different ways that support the system and kind of fight global warming or climate change. It was also that as a student I didn't have very much money and the food that I was being told is healthy was outside of my price range.

But then, you know, you look around and you see all of this space getting irritated by solar energy that's growing no food. And you realise, wait, you know, for a little bit of investment, learn something and invest in a small garden, you know, you can alleviate or you can mitigate, you can help out a lot of these problems that people have. And so it's probably a bit challenging for students, especially in our climate because the school, the academic year sorry, the academic year corresponds kind of with the non growing season more or less.

So you can't really form a group of people during the academic year to tackle these, you know, directly like food related things. But you can start if the university has a campus or a students or an alumni has land somewhere nearby. You could think about doing what I failed to do, which was create a student community garden and a student community association that tries to do these things. And in that way, you can get hands on, you know, growing information.

You can learn. You can learn how soil works. You can learn how the water cycle works in this place. You can learn tough lessons. And, you know, YouTube is free, although I think there's some paid stuff on YouTube. Now. I'm old enough to remember when it was all free and there were no ads, but you can learn an incredible amount for free. And that's one of the neatest things about regenerative agriculture in agroecology right now is that we understand and I'll use the royal we understand that no one individual, no one company is going to monopolise the space because the things that farmers need to do are process based and knowledge based.

So invest your time. That's one thing that usually students have a fair bit of is time. Invest the time that you have into learning these things and especially learning them from people that you would normally not listen to. So if you run across somebody who speaks with a weird accent, who's from, you know, the countryside, you know, somebody who's not from the bubble that you're in, instead of turning the podcast or the video off and you say, Oh, this comes from an American perspective, this redneck can't even speak English.

I'm from the South, so I can make these jokes. You know, you stop and you listen and you will learn a lot. So it doesn't take much. This community wants to share. They want people to be engaged. But if you're going to do it, the heart, the highest price to pay, in my opinion, is following through. You know, this is, you know, just it'd be better if you don't say anything at all. So because if we start to overshare, we start to invite and give advice,

and then if it doesn't move forward, you know, it just sort of feels a little bit bad. Not that we expected anything in return, but like, you know, buck, the trend of the the lazy university student who doesn't follow through and follow through. That would be my advice.

Okay. Great. Thank you. I think. Okay, we can take one last question and then I think we're done. Yes. So I would like to know, where do you see yourself and finch agroecology in ten years?

Oh, I have no idea. Well, the whole world gets pulled upside down. So the business was based upon having a living working model. A living working model. And before I even started it, I had presented a timeline of that, eventually split out and said. Is what I'm doing, working or not working and presented different options for what would happen afterwards.

So I thought that instead of having my whole world turned upside down, that it would be a discussion about changing what happens there in the future. So I was really thrown into a pretty bad place, you know, a year and a half ago when I was told that I'd have to move out. So I would hope that in ten years, if I'm still working as a farmer or in this space, that I would say a farm that's at least 50 hectares with a fields and then it could have as much forest is as attached to that as possible. But that's where I would like to be. I would like to be as close as possible to the the economics of farming.

And I like the project. I like being a project manager, but I also really loved being a farmer. And so I hope that I have lots of trees and lots of cows. And if I had anything other than trees and cows, then that's a bonus. So that would be my that's where I hope that I could be in ten years.

Yes. Okay. Thank you for your great and extensive answers, and thank you for your time. And if you're interested to hear the podcast episode, we can fairly send it to you. Well, I mean, it's mostly you're talking, so I don't know. But. Yeah. Thank you. What's interesting and it was nice to hear about your story and we appreciate your input.

Well, thank you very much. It was nice to have this opportunity to listen and to talk, I guess mostly to that happens often and in interviews is that I talk too much. But I hope that it was. I hope that if someone finds it interesting, at least, you know, it's a different it is a different perspective. So, yeah, good luck with everything, with your course, with your studies. And you know, if you ever feel like reaching out, you know where to find me. You can share it. You can share the podcast if you want. But I try to avoid looking at how many people have watched or commented because yeah, I'm not very good at comparing my self to myself and you know that.

Yeah. Thank you so much for for doing this podcast with us. It's been really, really good for us. And I, I think many of us will find it interesting that we are becoming more fanatics one of us. One by one I think it's really, really interesting content in this course and this is a good supplement to that.

Yeah. Thank you for my side also.

Well, thank you. Thank you. It's a real pleasure.

But I thought that we should have good luck with the cows and the trees.

I honestly, I don't even know anymore. We'll see. It's going to be what it is.

Yeah. Thank you.