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## NutriHAF en route: Impressions from a day excursion

At the end of September the NutriHAF team in Germany was joined by seven colleagues from the project countries, Ethiopia and Madagascar. The starting point of the eight-day-long retreat was the Tropentag Conference in Vienna, where team members presented research outcomes and followed interesting discussions in numerous poster and oral presentation sessions. Afterwards, the team travelled to Bonn to participate in an intensive workshop on participatory and gender-sensitive research at the Center for Development Research (ZEF) led by Dr Maria Gerster-Bentaya from the University of Hohenheim. After these exciting and exhausting days, one highlight was yet to come: a one-day excursion to a local fruit production and processing farm and a community garden.

### **“An apple a day keeps the doctor away...”**

NutriHAF is a research and capacity building project which explores and integrates appropriate fruit and vegetable crops into multi-storey cropping systems to increase nutrition security and diversify and intensify agriculture in biodiversity hotspots. Thus, the NutriHAF team members from Ethiopia and Madagascar were curious to learn more about agriculture in Germany, especially local fruit and vegetable production and processing. The first destination of the excursion – Naturhof Wolfsberg in Bonn Alfter – set a good example for local organic agriculture. The family enterprise, led by Dr Andreas Mager, produces, processes and markets various varieties of apple and pear. The group tasted the delicious fruits not only once but many times – on this day surely nobody had to visit the doctor.



*Andreas Mager and the group on the farm.*

Besides tasting, the visitors learned a lot about the technical side of fruit production and marketing in times when small-scale agriculture and family farming is facing a lot of challenges. “We are working

with cents, not with dollars. We cannot lose a cent, or we would be lost”, says Andreas Mager. He further told the group that a good relationship with nearby villagers, local politicians and the general public is enormously important for a family enterprise. “We must have them on our side,” he commented. Therefore, the family takes part in events like the “Aktionstage Ökoland NRW,” a regional campaign for organic farming, and invites people to the farm whenever possible. A core element of the marketing strategy is the family-owned farm shop. Here, people buy not only apples and pears directly from the orchards next door, but also other local organic products like fruits and vegetables from nearby farms, homemade jam and flowers. Besides the farm shop, apples are also sold to supermarkets.



*Christine Mager explains details of apple production at the family farm.*

The family farm invested in modern processing equipment in order to meet market demands. The machines sort the apples by size and weight, then the fruit is packed and labelled – all of this to fit the quality standards of the supermarket. Even though it is hard to compete with conventionally produced and often cheaper fruits on the market, for the Mager family it was a clear decision to go organic and invest in nature conservation and sustainable farm management. This is also shown by the solar system that provides energy for the on-farm cold storage for fruit conservation. Dr Mulunesh Abebe, a researcher from Ethiopia, was impressed by the farm visit. “All of this is done by only one family – this is a wonderful experience to see that sustainable agriculture can be done this way.”

### **A green oasis in the middle of Bonn**

The second destination of the excursion was the “Kleingartenanlage Bonn Süd e.V.,” a community garden in Bonn Kessenich. Community gardens as a form of urban gardening have a long tradition in Germany. After the Second World War, they were established in order to reduce food scarcity. Nowadays, they mostly function as recreation areas for the urban population and enable hobby gardeners to cultivate food for home consumption. Often, the gardens underlie strict rules set by associations. However, the community garden in Kessenich emphasizes individuality and gardening in harmony with nature and is therefore somewhat special. Stéphane Picard, a tenant of the garden plot, could tell a story for every individual plot on the premises. “Bonn Süd” counts 39 plots with an average of 300qm – each garden shaped to the individual taste. Some tenants come every day to nurse their raised-bed gardens cultivated with different vegetables, while others come to enjoy a good book while lying under one of the trees. “Generally, the purpose is that people get creative and try out new varieties, but if a tenant only wants to have a lawn, it is fine with us”, says Picard.



*Raised bed gardens in Bonn Süd.*

Despite the peaceful atmosphere, the green oasis of “Bonn Süd” is endangered. Stéphane Picard reports that the land is attractive for investors as properties in Bonn are getting scarce and expensive. Recently, the construction of a branch of a supermarket chain was prevented with the help of a citizen movement which collected 1500 signatures. Since then, the garden community has tried to open up to the general public. They organize open house days and participate in neighbourhood events like the “Kessenich Autumn Market” in order to demonstrate the importance of a garden plot like “Bonn Süd”. For some time, one parcel has been used as a demonstration garden for children from a nearby kindergarten. The NutriHAF team was again impressed. “We have gardens in the cities, but we do not have so many rules to follow like in Germany”, says Beneberu Assefa and laughs. “It is nice to see that people can enjoy nature and peace in the middle of the city.”

For more information on the NutriHAF project please visit our website:  
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