Introduction: Learning, education and knowledge sharing are central process that can support the expansion of the practical and political aspects of agroecology, the autonomy of food producers and the pursuit of food sovereignty in Europe.

In order to amplify agroecology in Europe, we need to strengthen the network of training and learning initiatives to pool resources and develop a coherent and coordinated education and development strategy. The European Coordination of Via Campesina (ECVC) is working with partner organisations and networks to link up agroecology learning initiatives to develop a European Agroecology Learning and Training Network.

As a first step, we connected with and 20 people involved in European agroecology training and learning. Among other things, we asked participants how the network could help with their work. Ideas included:

- Mutual exchange of experience
- Joint funding applications and resource sharing
- Organizational and administrative support
- A forum for sharing resources and knowledge
- Facilitation of farmer-to-farmer exchanges
- Campaigning to change policy

Initial Research Findings
At a glance

Our action research intends to better understand the dynamics of agroecology learning in training in different places and to uncover the opportunities and barriers for the further development of agroecology. Our main findings, detailed in this brief were that agroecology learning: (see pages 7-10 for full details):

- Focuses on horizontal learning approaches
- Amplifies the dynamic links between political and practical learning
- Should consider the specificity of place and differences between regional and national context
- Builds local, regional and global networks for mutual support and resourcing

The action research project that forms the basis of this brief is co-produced by the European Coordination of Via Campesina (ECVC) and the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR) at Coventry University. This brief was written by Chris Maughan and Colin Anderson from CAWR and Marion Vizy from ECVC. Support and advice provided by Rupert Dunn, Jyoti Fernandez, Julien Reynier and Michel Pimbert and members of the transitional steering committee for the European Agroecology Learning and Training Network. Questions and comments can be sent to: info@eurovia.org and to colin.anderson@coventry.ac.uk

For more information please visit: www.peoplesknowledge.org and www.eurovia.org
Introduction: Agroecology Training and Learning – Global Movement – European Articulation

Agroecology is emerging as the most important agriculture and food development paradigm in Europe, promoted by farmer organisations and social movements around the world. Agroecology is being taken up around the globe as an approach that can address many of the environmental, social, political and economic problems of industrial agriculture, and especially to transfer control away from corporations and into the hands of food producers and citizens.

“Our diverse forms of smallholder food production based on Agroecology generate local knowledge, promote social justice, nurture identity and culture, and strengthen the economic viability of rural areas. As smallholders we defend our dignity when we choose to produce in an agroecological way.”
- International Forum on Agroecology.

The members of the European Coordination Via Campesina defined Agroecology from a European perspective in 2014:

“We understand agroecology as a process of individual and collective transformation, above and beyond specific agroecological techniques and practices.”

Learning, education and knowledge exchange have been central to the agroecology framework – reflecting a commitment to horizontal learning, a dialogues of knowledges and popular education. There are many exciting approaches and models for these horizontal learning institutions in the Global South, but there is less understanding about what is happening in European territories and countries and a need to support civil society popular education, learning and training initiatives.

How can these grassroots educational initiatives be connected up and strengthened to advance agroecology, food sovereignty and the autonomy of food producers in Europe? What are the most promising education approaches and initiatives, what are the barriers, where are the gaps, and how we can work together? How can we position ourselves to mobilize resources through mainstream institutions and funders (e.g. the E.U.) to support agroecology? ECVC and allies are thus convening this network to address these questions and to advance agroecology and food sovereignty in Europe through bottom-up forms of education and learning.
Establishing the European Network: Phase I

The goal of this work is to develop a European Agroecology Learning and Training network. In the first or ‘transitional phase’ (July 2016 to July 2017), we implemented a process that brings together some of the protagonists in grassroots agroecology training and learning from across Europe to develop a network. This first phase included preliminary outreach and research, an in-person gathering of approximately 150 people and at Nyéléni Europe (Cluj, Romania 2016), the formalization of the network and the development of a plan to implement a broad program that will enable: exchange of experience, funding bids and political work to strengthen farmer autonomy, food sovereignty and social movements. The objectives of this transitional phase were to:

- Gain a better understanding of the common barriers and obstacles as well as the common opportunities across Europe to identify opportunities for collective responses and joint projects through the European Agroecology Learning and Training Network.
- Start to develop a European wide map and database of the most relevant agroecology training initiatives in each country.
- Establish a formal network and governing structure for a European Agroecology Learning and Training Network to increase capacity for the exchange of best practices, international skill-sharing, collective political action and large funding bids.
- Apply for funds to support the network and the national and territorial training initiatives.
- Make connections between the European Region and the Global Agroecology Learning and Training Networks of LVC.

In the transitional phase, spoke to 20 different representatives from agroecology initiatives in Europe and started an initial map of grassroots agroecology learning initiatives (see p. 10) These interviews have been analyzed to pull out key learnings, themes and common challenges and opportunities. A summary of these are included at the end of this brief (pages 7-10). We are also coordinating a series of events and projects over the next year (see timeline below) and are now working to develop the governance of this emerging network and to invite participation.

Timeline – Year 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial outreach and research</th>
<th>Nyeleni Europe Meeting (Cluj)</th>
<th>FAO European Meeting (Budapest)</th>
<th>European network meeting (U.K.)</th>
<th>La Via Campesina Meeting in the Basque Country</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Establish transitional steering group</td>
<td>• Meet in-person with agroecology training organizers</td>
<td>• Present case for grassroots and horizontal learning and training.</td>
<td>• Exchange of experiences</td>
<td>• Organize side-event for regional Agroecology Training networks to exchange experience and to showcase agroecology learning through videos and exhibits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Contact 20 European agroecology initiatives and interview by phone</td>
<td>• Discuss and plan network</td>
<td>• Seek funding opportunities</td>
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<td>• Invite participants to Nyeleni</td>
<td>• Develop project ideas</td>
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<td>• Develop research brief</td>
<td>• Determine governance structure</td>
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**Nyeleni Europe Meeting**

We organised a meeting at the Nyeleni Europe Forum for Food Sovereignty to develop the network in Cluj-Napoca, Romania in October 2017. Many of the people we interviewed attended the meeting, which included the involvement of approximately 150 people over 3 iterative workshops. One important outcome of the meeting was the identification of working areas as a mechanism to identify and carry forward actions. The working areas identified were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working area</th>
<th>Actions</th>
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</table>
| 1. Appropriate technologies and techniques | • Apply for funding for translating existing resources  
• Establish a website – a ‘database of databases’ |
| 2. Political training | • Erasmus+ application for political training across Europe |
| 3. Research | • Organise meeting between the Network and Agroecology Europe  
• Collate all info / complete mapping |
| 4. Pedagogies (methodologies and theories for learning) | • Consolidate resources on pedagogies in agroecology (possibly for website)  
• Participatory Action Research project to document and highlight pedagogies in different parts of the network  
• Participate in erasmus+ bids |
| 5. Community Supported Agriculture and progressive retailers systems | • N/A (group formed after planning session) |
| 6. Agroecology Schools | • Map existing examples of European Agroecology Schools  
• Assemble team of experts to assess quality of education being |
| 7. Seeds | • A network of networks.  
• Put online all the networks of people who work on seeds  
• Lobby again legislation that limits rights of peasants to share and use their own seeds |
| 8. Global network | • Complete mapping  
• Two people to connect to Global LVC network  
• Meeting in Feb/March – need help with logistics  
• 7th LVC gathering in Basque country – July 2017  
• Begin organising international exchanges (Eline) |
Connecting the European Region to La Via Campesina Global Agroecology Learning and Training Network

The development of a European Agroecology Learning and Training Network is intended to link up with and support the international movement coordinated by La Via Campesina (LVC) to build Agroecology Learning Institutions and Agroecology Schools in all regions of the world. LVC has recognized that agroecological, political and practical training and learning is a central process in the struggle for food sovereignty and should be a central priority of all regions, with a focus on regional leadership, women and youth, and should include LVC staff. Each region is being encouraged to identify the issues and methodologies that strengthen their national organizations and regional processes based on a critical assessment of challenges in the region and how training will help to respond to them. Some initiatives at the global level through LVC are:

- **Establishing an International Working Collective of LVC on Training Processes** that can facilitate these processes as well as the connections and exchanges between regions. The VII LVC Conference, held in the Basque Country in July 2017;
- Create a virtual library with programs, courses, video, methodological materials, etc. that can be accessed by members across the world;
- **Strengthen our capacity to work in other languages** beside English, Spanish and French to allow the integration of more leaders in the work at the regional and international levels;
- As much as possible, trainings should be held at LVC’s Agroecology Institutes (IALAs), to help strengthen our growing Articulation of Agroecology Schools. Continental meetings and an international gathering will take place in the coming years to strengthen this Articulation.
- **Communication and information exchange, as well as experiences sharing inside of LVC, are crucial.** Making information more readily available is an important part of strengthening our internal training processes;
- **Increase our collective capacity to mobilize resources** needed for trainings, regional articulations, and to strengthen our struggles;

The key regional struggles, activities and mobilizations should define the training processes in each region. International issues can be added as far as relevant for the region. Thus, the European network will be coordinating in relation to other regions of the world whereby:

1) Each region begins its discussion on what activities and initiatives are needed to strengthen the movement in that region.
2) Each region defines its process towards the VII Conference. This process can be combined with specific training activities;
3) Regions should begin sharing plans/proposals for training activities to be implemented before the VII Conference
4) Each region should identify a minimum of two members – one woman, one man – who will contribute to the building of the new International Collective on Training Processes;
5) Each region identifies needs for technical skills-building or support that can strengthen regional capacity and articulation. This can include, but is not limited to, technical training and support for regional staff in order to strengthen financial autonomy of the regions.

*The Nyeleni Europe meeting, October 2016 in Romania, provided an opportunity to discuss the European Regional network and how it connects to the global movement for agroecology learning and training.*
Highlights of Research Findings from Phase 1

This section represents a preliminary analysis of the twenty interviews we conducted with representatives from agroecology training initiatives across Europe. These interviews generally lasted between 40 and 90 minutes and we asked each person to: describe the initiative they’re involved in; what were the key dimensions of agroecology training; what actors support or hinder agroecology training; what is the role of the government and higher education institutions; what are the current barriers and opportunities in the country; and whether a European network would be useful, and if so, what it could do.

This research has so far revealed widespread support among the agroecology training initiatives represented by our interviewees for the idea of creating a network that could increase the reach and capacity for agroecology learning and training in Europe. The research revealed a number of common themes and issues which provide important considerations that should be taken into account when developing the network and its activities.

- Theme 1: Focus on horizontal learning approaches
- Theme 2: Dynamics between political and practical training and learning
- Theme 3: Considering the specificity of place in training and learning
- Theme 4: Building local, regional and global networks for mutual support and resourcing

**Theme 1: Focus on horizontal learning approaches**

Many participants described their emphasis on ‘horizontal’ approaches to learning as the preferred and most appropriate way to share agroecological knowledges. Many of the initiatives in fact already operate this way and the people we spoke with emphasized the importance of farmer-led and social movement learning networks including horizontal farmer-to-farmer learning, demonstration farms, agroecology schools and intercultural exchanges.

Many participants pointed out such an approach is consistent with the 2015 Nyéléné Declaration (see ‘Background’ section, above). Beyond this, participants also commented on the appropriateness of engaging small-scale farmers this way, who have historically been marginalised and patronised through forms of top-down knowledge transmission approaches or where farmer knowledge is excluded from mainstream educational institutions (e.g. universities) that focus exclusively on professional agronomy, mainstream economics and scientific knowledge. A horizontal

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**Case Study 1: Horizontal learning for the spread of farmer led innovation in appropriate technologies**

L’Atelier Paysan (FR) and Farm Hack (UK)

Farmer-to-farmer learning networks have been increasingly recognized for their capacity to enable the transmission of knowledge/innovation, mutual support, and sharing of equipment, resources and facilities. Farmer-derived innovations are essential to agroecology and can be amplified and shared through these learning networks.

L’atelier Paysan is a collective of small-scale farmers, employees and agricultural development organisations, gathered together as a cooperative in Southeast France. Based on the principle that farmers are themselves innovators, they have been collaboratively developing methods and practices to reclaim farming skills and achieve self-sufficiency in relation to the tools and machinery used in organic farming. They promote sharing farm-based inventions, collectively developing new technological solutions adapted to small-scale farming, and make these skills and ideas widely available through courses and educational materials.

“Farm Hack” is a farmer-to-farmer network that was originally started by The Greenhorns in the U.S.A., and has been gaining momentum in the U.K. FarmHack is founded on the principles of open source technology and that tools and techniques are also shared freely and developed on the online forum farmhack.net. Farm hack events bring together farmers, growers, fabricators, engineers and IT programmers to demonstrate and share tools, skills and ideas through field demonstrations, practical workshops, seminars, entertainment, and sharing good food, local ale and cultural exchanges such a stomping ceilidh.
pedagogical approach is more attentive to the social, cultural, and environmental specificities of place, central to the agroecology movement as a whole.

Furthermore, often participants were eager to point out the benefits of horizontal forms of learning for movement-building purposes. Working internationally and between a large range of participant backgrounds it is important that new entrants feel and other learners feel that they are welcome and have something valuable to contribute rather than only acting as recipients of a one-way flow of information. As Rupert Dunn put it,

‘People often don’t want to join the club because they feel that they’ve got to change something about themselves in order to do it’.

**Theme 2: Dynamics between political and practical training and learning**

Because agroecology is simultaneously practical, scientific and political it requires training and learning that reflects these dimensions. Indeed, participants expressed strongly the potential of linking up the practical and political elements of agroecology learning. Joel Holmdahl from the Swedish Farmer’s Organisation NOrdBruk described the multiple dimensions of agroecology learning:

“So it’s not just the practice of forestry and agriculture it is also putting it into a social and political perspective... it has to be sustainable ways of production in the local setting that has to be one part of it and then absolutely it has to be a question of organisation, regarding the market...[and] what political struggles and obstacles need to be tackled to implement agroecology on a broad scale.”

Agroecology offers an effective framework in which to combine political and practical training related to sustainable food production. Almost all participants discussed the urgent need to focus training on political issues and to advance food sovereignty, and how by combining with the practical and technical learning, can be much more effective in engaging with a wider diversity of food producers who may otherwise be more hesitant to engage in political learning. Often, for practitioners, practical trainings were an excuse to bring communities of producers together during which political discussions can happen naturally. Peter Volz, described how practical training can become political, for him through two strategies,

“It has basically two goals. One is to make people aware of things, provide them with the insight into the circumstances and the second step is tend to enable action on a personal level, on a collective level but anyhow in the frame that these people are operating within so that would be in Germany, I will talk to farmers about the global aspects, the political dimension of for instance seeds and seed regulations.”

**Case Study 2: Linking Political and Practical Learning**

**Ecoruralis, Romania**

EcoRuralis was founded in 2009 in Cluj-Napoca. It is a grassroots association made up of small-scale farmers who practice organic and traditional farming based on environmentally-conscious principles. Ramona, a farmer-activist from Romania, described their intention to link political and practical elements of agroecology.

‘So training on how to do agriculture is not a necessary thing this is happening naturally in the rural communities. But what is missing, and this is what is happening in agroecology, is more political training on how to articulate our political demands and how to act on achieving political aims.’

**Theme 3: Considering the specificity of place in training and learning**

It is widely recognized that agroecology is a ‘situated’ practice and any approach to agroecology training must acknowledge and harness the specificities of place. Indeed, learning approaches must remain
attentive to the highly localized cultural, social and environmental specificities of food, agriculture and society in different parts of Europe and indeed around the world. In this way, techniques and ‘best practices’ that work well in one place cannot be scaled up to replicated everywhere but rather need to be translated and adapted accordingly.

For example, Ramona from Ecoruralis discussed how the historical context in many eastern European countries create challenges around collective approaches to learning and political mobilisation amongst farmers that are much different than in many western European countries.

“Cooperation and collective work has to be very carefully defined because Romania had a super terrible experience with collectivisation and cooperation during the communist dictatorship regime so we have to reinvent all of these concepts and discuss them in a way embrace the history that exists here.”

Using another example, in some countries like Romania and Hungary where a large proportion of the population are still peasant and traditional farmers, agroecological skills are abundant and strengthening agroecology was described as a process to resists industrialisation and resist “depeasantisation” of the countryside. In other countries, such as the UK and Norway, where there are few farmers (e.g. Norway and the U.K.) agroecology training is still about rejecting the industrial model of food, but rather emphasizes a process of re-peasantisation to draw more people into and to re-skill society in terms of small scale agriculture production. These are very different learning and training contexts, but each likely can provide different opportunities for mutual learning.

**Theme 4: Building local, regional and global networks for mutual support and resourcing**

Participants were all very interested in opportunities to build networks at different scales to develop agroecology learning opportunities and to further political efforts to advance food sovereignty. Rupert Dunn, a farmer from Wales who also participates in multiple European and international social movement process described:

‘...the Declaration has been written but it’s going to be hard work, and the social movement is by its very name a movement so we need to be kept in touch with that movement [...] the network is really important to keep us as producers and people running local projects in touch with what’s happening’ – Rupert Dunn.

Many anticipated that new opportunities could be created by connecting up at local, national and international levels to exchange experiences, best practices and to build solidarity and political agency.

More immediately, there was a sense that a European Network could help to enable the
mobilisation of institutional resources through collective funding applications. Most participants highlighted a hostile funding environment as a key barrier to the development of agroecology learning in their country as well as the European region more generally.

Joint funding approaches can strengthen funding bids but also help to increase access for organisations and farmers in less affluent areas of Europe. Ramona described for example the extremely difficult situation in Romania, which, as an EU member is ‘not eligible for foundations that fund Eastern Europe’, but that is simultaneously ‘too poor to have our own foundations’.

Some participants mentioned past European projects, for example through the Erasamus+ program, that helped to build networks around agroecology training, however these were all project based and there is a lack of a durable European network.

Map of projects contacted and interviewed

Based on this initial research, we have drawn up a preliminary map of active projects and institutions. A link to an interactive version of this can be found here: tinyurl.com/nsfblst. The intention is to update this map as the network develops. If you have a project you’d like to be represented here please send details to chris.maughan@coventry.ac.uk.

Details of projects mapped and interviewed

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<td><a href="mailto:irmi.salzer@viacampesina.at">irmi.salzer@viacampesina.at</a></td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Schwarzspanierstrasse, Austria</td>
<td><a href="http://www.viacampesina.at/cm3">www.viacampesina.at/cm3</a></td>
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<td>Fédération unie des groupements des éleveurs et agriculteurs (FUGEA)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:information@fugea.be">information@fugea.be</a></td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>2b Place de la Station, Namur, Belgium</td>
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<td>299 rue de Bomerée, Montigny le Tilleul, Belgium</td>
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<td>Etelä-Suomen Luonnonmukaisen Viljelyyn Yhdistys (Esvy-ry)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Borgvägen 788, Myrskylä-Mörskorn, Finland</td>
<td><a href="http://www.esvy.fi">www.esvy.fi</a></td>
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<td>Confédération nationale des syndicats des exploitants familiaux (MODEF)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:def-national@wanadoo.fr">def-national@wanadoo.fr</a>,</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>14 boulevard d’Aquitaine ANGOULEME</td>
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<td>3 avenue de la Gare 47190 AIQUIOLLON</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.elkana.org.ge">www.elkana.org.ge</a></td>
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<td><a href="mailto:info@abl-ev.de">info@abl-ev.de</a>,</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>31 Bahnhofstraße, Hamm</td>
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<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Wageningen, The Netherlands</td>
<td><a href="http://www.toekomstboeren.nl">www.toekomstboeren.nl</a></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norske bonde-og Smabrukarlag (NBS)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lofoten-gardsyseri@online.no">lofoten-gardsyseri@online.no</a></td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Akersgata 41 Oslo</td>
<td><a href="http://www.smabrukarlaget.no">www.smabrukarlaget.no</a></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confederacao National da Agricultura (CNA)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cna@cna.pt">cna@cna.pt</a></td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Rua do Brasil, Coimbra, Portugal</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cna.pt">www.cna.pt</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecoruralis</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ecoruralis@gmail.com">ecoruralis@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Str. David Ferenc Cluj-Napoca, Romania</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ecoruralis.ro">www.ecoruralis.ro</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos (COAG)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>17 Agustin de Bethancourt, MADRID, spain</td>
<td><a href="http://www.coag.org">www.coag.org</a></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sindicato Labrego Galego (SLG) - Galicia</td>
<td><a href="mailto:nacional@sindicatolabrego.com">nacional@sindicatolabrego.com</a></td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Rúa Ofelia Nieto 13-23, Santiago de Compostela, spain</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sindicatolabrego.com">www.sindicatolabrego.com</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sindicatos de Obreros del Campo (SOC)-Andalucia</td>
<td>sober.alim.sindicatoandalu <a href="mailto:z@gmail.com">z@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1 bajo, Almería, spain</td>
<td>socialmeria.wordpress.com/category/sindicato-obreros-del-campo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11
Organisation | Email | Country | Address | Website | Interview?
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
EHNE Bizkaia | bizkaia@ehnebizkaia.eus | Spain | 14 Simon Bolivar Square, Vitoria, Spain | www.ehne.eus | Yes
Instituto de Sociología y Estudios Campesinos - ISEC (Universidad de Córdoba) | | Spain | Plaza de Puerta Nueva, s/n, 14002 Córdoba, Spain | universidadesdelaberra.org/entidades-formadoras/isec-osala | Yes
Nordbruk | info@viacampesina.se | Sweden | Stockholm, sweden | www.viacampesina.se | Yes
L'autre syndicat | lautresyndicat@bluewin.ch | Switzerland | 5 Chemin du Ruttet 1196 Gland, Switzerland | www.lautresyndicat.ch | Yes
Uniterre | info@uniterre.ch | Switzerland | Av. Du Grammont 9, Lausanne, Switzerland | www.uniterre.ch | Yes
çiftçi Sendikalari Konfederasyonu/Confederation of Farmers’ Unions (ÇIFÇTI-SEN) | ciftcisen@gmail.com | Turkey | Izmir, Turkey | www.karasaban.net | Yes
Scottish Crofting Federation | hq@crofting.org | UK | Kyle Industrial Estate Kyle of Lochalsh IV40 8AX | www.crofting.org | Yes
Land worker’s alliance | landworkersalliance@riseup.net | UK | Trill Farm, Musbury, Axminster, EX13 8TU | landworkersalliance.org.uk | Yes
Torth y Tir | | UK | Caerfarchell Solva Pembrokeshire SA62 6XG | toorthyir.co.uk | Yes
Land Base | courses@landbase.org.uk | UK | Monkton Wyld Court Bridport Dorset DT6 6DQ | www.landbase.org.uk | Yes
Ripess Europe - Solidarity Economy Europe | info@ripess.org | International | | http://www.ripess.eu/tag/agroecology | Yes

Select Resources on Agroecology Learning and Training
A running list of literature on adult education in food movements is available here:
http://www.peoplesknowledge.org/projects/criticalpedagogy/

The final report on the international forum for agroecology is available here:


