

# COLLABORATION BETWEEN FARMS AND SCHOOLS IN SWEDEN - WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO SUCCEED?

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## Abstract

In the new curriculum for the Swedish comprehensive school, there is on one hand few formal demands regarding teaching of agriculture and food production, but on the other hand great opportunities to use these contexts for learning in several subjects. The question is how this potential can be utilized? Our study shows that teachers believe that it is important that students know how our food is produced, and many teachers would like to learn more about farming and food production. Teachers believe that the teaching of agriculture and food production should include food security and recycling, and how to decrease environmental impacts. Furthermore, teachers reckon that pupils ought to have an opportunity to grow food in school, and believe that skills as responsibility, cooperation and problem solving can be developed through practical work on a farm. Nevertheless, few teachers visit farms with their pupils and if they do - it is occasional visits. Instead, teaching of agriculture and food production, are carried out as briefings, discussions or by studying books or the Internet in classroom settings. Although the area is considered important and the teachers see many opportunities, they do not exploit the potential they see. The structural obstacles are large and the added value is not clear. The farms who see educational activities as an exciting area of development must therefore take an active role in the implementation process. This article discusses the characteristics of the entrepreneurial process where farmers have managed to reach school and translate good intentions into action - collaborations truly systemic and unique in its nature. Further, what makes the partnership come into place? Which of the school's challenges does farm cooperation help to deal with and how is the work rooted in the curriculum? Based on three case studies tentative conclusions are drawn that we hope will support other farmers in their ambitions to bring about tangible interactions.

## Background

### The Swedish school system

Sweden has general compulsory education and all students must attend nine years in compulsory school. Although the school is a municipal responsibility, it is controlled by the government to ensure that all children receive an equal education. After compulsory school the majority of Swedish youth attend upper secondary school although it is not obligatory (98% in 2006, according to National Agency for Education, 2008). Young people who are not qualified for an upper secondary school are offered an introduction program, which aims at making them qualified or prepare them for working life. Swedish municipalities are obliged to offer young people below 20 years occupation through upper secondary school or occupational preparation.

### ***Children with special needs***

Children with learning disabilities can attend the compulsory school for pupils with learning disabilities as an alternative to the compulsory school. This school also consists of nine years

of schooling. To be allowed to attend in the compulsory school for learning disabilities the pupil must have ascertained mental retardation or brain damage. After the compulsory school for learning disabilities there is an upper secondary school for these children.

## Farming and food production in school

In 2011 a survey was made to find out more about teachers' experience working with issues of agriculture and food production in compulsory education (Lundstrom, 2012). The questionnaire addressed the teachers of home economics, geography and biology in compulsory schools. The results showed that all teachers thought it was important that students know how our food is produced, but at the same time more than 60% never visited a farm with the students and only 10% did so regularly with every class. Instead, briefings and discussions, books and films were the most common ways to teach about farming and food production. 65 to 100% of the teachers felt that students can practice cooperation, empathy, responsibility, self-esteem and problem solving through practical work on a farm. Consequently, teachers thought that the topic was important and brought it up in class. They did it in a theoretical way, although they saw other values than purely disciplinary in making farm visits. The respondent rate was 40 % and more than half of the respondents had grown up on farms or in rural areas.

In the new curriculum for the Swedish comprehensive school, there is on one hand few formal demands regarding teaching of agriculture and food production, but on the other hand great opportunities to use these contexts for learning in several subjects. The question is how this potential can be utilized? We know that only a few teachers visit farms with their pupils and if they do - it is occasional visits. Although the area is considered important and the teachers see many opportunities, they do not exploit the potential they see. The structural obstacles are large and the added value is not clear. The farms who see educational activities as an exciting area of development must take an active role in the implementation process. This article aim to discuss the preconditions for and characteristics of the entrepreneurial process where farmers have managed to reach school and translate good intentions into action. What makes the partnership come into place?

## Method

The empirical data in this study come from three cases in which a school has or have had collaboration with a farm. The empirical data is the result of semi-structured interviews either during visits or by telephone. The interviews conducted during visits were recorded and then transcribed, while for the interviews conducted by telephone, hand-notes were made. In the case *Räntan* visits were made both in school and at the farm. Totally four people were interviewed, the farmer (father), the social worker (daughter), the principal and the special pedagogue. In the case of *Svärtan* the farm and the school were visited. Interviews were conducted with the biology teacher (owner of the farm) and two other teachers at school. Later on, an interview with the principle for the compulsory school for pupils with learning disabilities, were carried out by telephone. In the case of *Berget*, telephone interviews were carried out both with the farmer and with the person in charge at the program in upper secondary school.

## Analysis model to identify success factors

In order to capture the complex reality when trying to implement new concepts within the school system a broad analysis of enabling preconditions and supporting processes have been used, based on a general model for program evaluation. The analysis model (fig. 1) illustrates the dynamic processes at three levels: a) the external preconditions; b) the internal conditions

which are structures created within each collaboration, and thus are unique for each project, and c) activities and processes that describe the efforts which weld together all social activity. The most central of the latter is the basic communicative acts between the involved actors, who creates, maintains and constantly change the interrelated actions of actors. In addition, each unique project is initiated at a particular time and in a specific way. Likewise, the results and impacts are emerging along the way.

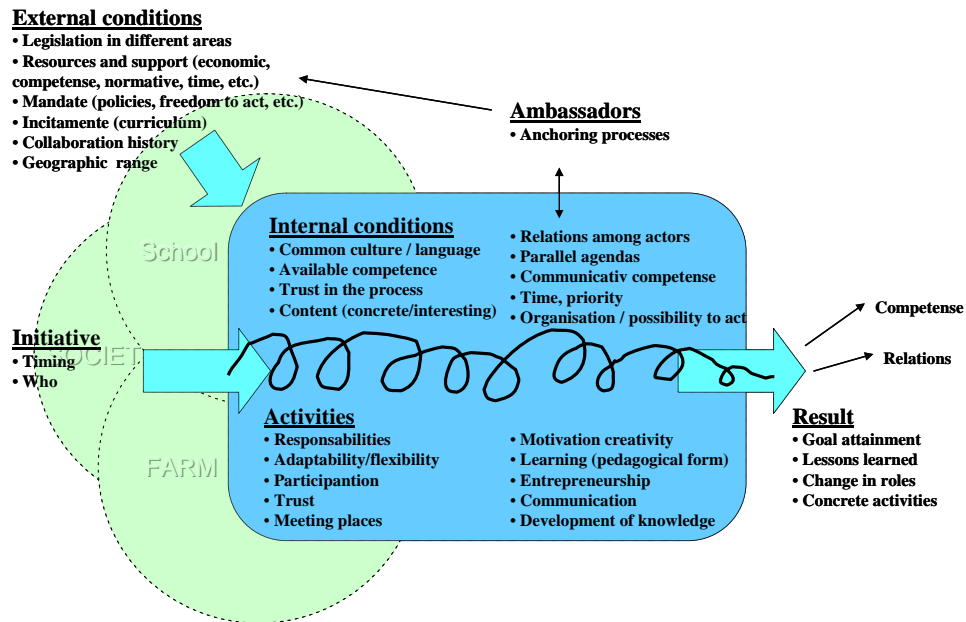


Figure 1. A model to evaluate and critical analyse different dimensions of collaboration between schools and farms.

## The farm *Räntan*

The farm *Räntan* is situated in Kristinehamn in Värmland. The farm's main source of income is forestry and besides that they also practice social farming for disabled persons on behalf of municipal social service. The farm's main revenue comes from the forest, but about 40 % are estimated to come from the social farming activities. At the farm the father (farmer) and the daughter (social worker) work full-time and the mother (deacon) participates when she is needed.

## Initiative

In 2006 the project Green Arena started in Värmland with funding from the European Agricultural Fund among others. The project aims to develop new businesses in rural areas, such as social farming, elderly care, education and psychiatry, following Norwegian models. Green Arena has made various information campaigns directed towards municipalities in Värmland and organized study tours to Norway for employees in the municipality, politicians and entrepreneurs.

The initiative to collaborate came from different directions simultaneously. One benefit of Green Arena was that many people had access to similar information. In 2008 the ownership of *Räntan* changed and questions about the farm's future was brought up. The idea came up to develop a new business segment in the enterprise and to share the farm resources with others by working with people. The headmaster of the school needed new tools to reach students

with difficulties. Politicians and officials in the municipality saw the farm-school cooperation as an opportunity to help young people and ultimately reducing the municipality's costs for unemployment and also achieve welfare benefits. The principle speaks of farm-school cooperation as a way to develop three levels of the community simultaneously:

- Individuals: personal development of participants so that they can complete their education or move on to employment or other activity.
- Countryside: small farms can survive, develop and give more people job opportunities.
- Society: lowering societal costs, social problems and risk of exclusion if people can support themselves.

In the spring of 2009 Green arena offered a study trip to Norway. The mother at *Räntan* and the headmaster as well as the family coach in the upper comprehensive school and several local politicians and officials joined. Thus there were several who had access to the same information and in the discussions that followed, they shared this experience. The year after, the social worker from *Räntan* and the special pedagogue from the school went on the same trip. Before summer holiday a decision about cooperation was taken. The school employed the daughter at *Räntan* and the first students came to the farm at fall 2010.

### **External conditions**

The municipality is responsible for offering all young people below 20 years occupation, study or work. The aim is to help adults support themselves. Kristinehamn is a relatively small municipality (23 000 inhabitants). According to the principle, the school has every year a few students who stay home for various reasons. The principle has a great social concern and the school has a family coach employed. The principle regards the school as part of the community and he wants to work long term for the student's best. He believes that good examples are important for the dissemination of new pedagogical methods in school and the study trip to Norway gave him such. In upper comprehensive school it is possible to get an internship instead of ordinary studies, but some people can-not handle regular internships. They need motivation and to build their self-esteem first. In such situations the school has difficulties. Something between normal school and regular internship is needed, often in smaller groups. Some young people have long-term, poor experience of school, which has contributed to low self-esteem. Some young people also lack a context to belong to and participate in. But neither the principal, nor the special pedagogue has close experience from farming or rural areas. However, they are interested in nature and animals and understand what the farm as a place can provide: "I love to come out and sit down in the sheep pasture during spring time" the special pedagogue said. The principal stresses the importance of personal qualities of those who will work with students. Relevant education provides increased security for the school, but the personal qualities are most important.

*Räntan* is situated about 15 km from Kristinehamn and without bus service. This can be an advantage because the students are not able to go home before stipulated time. The farm owners have a strong social interest and an explicit value system based on every individuals equal dignity and opportunity to develop. The farmer and his wife are or have both been politically active in the local community, which has provided important contacts and networks. The daughter has a relevant education and experience from working in social services and a willingness to move back home and develop the farm.

### **Internal conditions**

The employment of the social worker means that she has the same rights and obligations as other school personnel. She is also a part of a team, have access to information about students and takes part in school meetings. *Räntan* is an internship closely tied to the school where the

school's own staff is working. The requirements for monitoring the work at the farm are equivalent to those of other teachers. The education of the social worker provides security for the school, since she has experience from individual planning and monitoring. The social worker is free to control the daily activities. The goals for different students are set in agreement between the farm and the school. *Räntan* accepts up to three students at the same time and there is flexibility, but students must be divided in an appropriate manner.

The old barn has been converted into a community room with a kitchen, where lunch for everyone on the farm is prepared every day. A part of the barn has been converted to a carpenter workshop. Before the rebuilding of the barn one of the owners private kitchen were used for cooking and as a place to gather. The rebuilt barn means that the users feel an ownership and a right to be there. Since the activity at the farm has increased, more animals have gradually been purchased. The farm has a small-scale animal production with cows, sheep, horses, cats, rabbits and a dog. During this winter they have built a new chicken house and hens will be bought this spring.

### **Activities**

Good personal relationships mean confidence between the parties. The cooperation between the special pedagogue and the social worker works very well. Many local government officials and politicians have visited *Räntan* and have appreciated the work. The employment gives the social worker a professional and social context, natural channels of communication and regular meetings with school staff. The parallel activity with people from the social services is positive. The social worker has responsibility primarily for the students and the farmer for the people from social services. Nevertheless, working together provides flexibility for them all. They are never alone and they represent different skills and gender. All participants are collected and delivered at home by one of the people from *Räntan*.

### **Result**

The work at *Räntan* has only been going on for a year and a half and no quantitative evaluation has been done so far. Building confidence and creating motivation takes time. Several students have made progress and in many cases of substantial nature, while some students have quit. Goal attainment in individual school subjects is not the first priority. Rather, the work aims to create motivation, context and to encourage students to participate. How long time the students have been on *Räntan* varies. Some have increased their motivation and moved on to school, internship or work and some have stayed for a longer time and participated in a way they have not done in school for a long time. *Räntan* has achieved something that the school did not: It has provided a positive response from young people, school, community, parents and the media. The interest in making study visits to *Räntan* is growing. The social worker has only a one year employment, but positive feedback from various people provides some kind of safeness. Everyone involved think that the *Räntan* intervention should be organised earlier in students' schooling and such discussions are in progress within the municipality.

### **The farm *Svärtn***

The farm is located in Hjo municipality in Västra Götaland, close to both forests and a lake. The fields are demised and the owners have not cultivated the farm themselves for a couple of years, except for horse keeping. One of the owners works as a teacher in science in the comprehensive school in town. *Svärtn* has a couple of horses, a dog and cats.

### ***Initiative***

The teacher has biology as her main interest. Often she brings her classes out in the school vicinity. She believes that young people need to get out, get in touch with nature and relax. Many pupils have difficulties to concentrate in the classroom and the teacher's experience is that the school often makes students limit what they show and venture. Many have lost faith in themselves after a long history of failure. The teacher has had thoughts about using the farm for outdoor education for a long time. In 2010 she made an application for starting a project on outdoor education on the farm, which was rejected. Instead she contacted the headmaster at the comprehensive school for learning disabilities. One day a week she teaches children from this school and she asked if it was possible to take the children out to the farm to use it in science education. The idea was to use the farm's assets, as landscapes and animals, to meet the special needs of these children. The principle was positive and they decided to use the farm and its surroundings when working with children with special needs.

### ***External conditions***

*Svärtan* is situated four kilometers from the school, which means short journeys by car. Goal achievement in science and the general part of the curriculum are the basis for the education on the farm. The School for children with special needs have to buy in expertise for science education. The principal herself has a big interest in animals and has for a long time had thoughts about the values and possibilities of interactions between animals and children. One of her earlier pupils used a farm during school time, but it did not work out very well, since the farmer did not get paid and therefore had very little time for the girl. The principle believes that such collaborations must be "based on the establishment of a close cooperation between each other". She also says that it is an advantage if the "farmer" is known by the school, understands the school system and gets paid. Economic compensation means responsibility and shared commitment for the pupils. It is also important that such projects are on a long term basis. Employing the farmer would facilitate cooperation, by managing the economical relation and to ease communication between all involved. The headmaster believes that the farm can be seen as a teaching resource, by tying the school subject to the reality, training of communication, using different senses, and getting out. Schools for children with learning disabilities are already working a lot with alternative pedagogical methods, so it was not so complicated for them to start collaborating with *Svärtan*. The special pedagogues are interested in new methods, accept some extra work and to use their own cars for transport. The teachers responsible for the group with special needs always want to use students' experiences as a starting point in all teaching. Among people involved there was a consensus in this respect from beginning. The teacher was known at school already and they had confidence in her. Some of her work is located in the farm, but she receives no compensation for buildings or animals. The school pays only for the transportation to the farm and for salary.

### ***Internal conditions***

The relationships between the teacher and the special pedagogues are very good. There is an ongoing exchange of experiences and ideas, but they are experiencing difficulties finding time for joint planning. The teacher feels support from other among the staff. The special pedagogues believe that the teacher meets the pupils in a good way. The teacher is flexible about the groups and individual participants' needs and adapt her teaching. All persons involved agree that this type of teaching would be good for all students - not just those with special needs.

### **Activities**

Communication, flexibility and consensus among the individuals are described as crucial for a good result, why special efforts are made to withhold the collaborative culture created. The teacher is responsible for the content of teaching and the other adults assist the children. The work has made the teacher even more convinced about the value for the pupils to get in contact with animals and nature. In spring 2012 the plan is to invite the local newspaper to the farm and inform about what they are doing.

### **Results**

The results cannot yet be described in quantitative terms. What the teachers describe are, for example: students with disabilities who use their language actively in order to communicate their experiences from the farm and take the animals into account in a new way. Students, who earlier refused to take part, are now positive to the lessons at the farm and shows with pride what has been achieved, but no regular follow-up has occurred. They tell about students with a long and bad experience from school and of their own abilities, who now builds self-esteem and self-confidence through nature-interaction, and then also accomplish better in the classroom. The small group and the possibility to move outside are important prerequisites for some students. It sometimes takes long time to get pupils to accept and enjoy the farm visit. Some requires a long introduction. Consequently, the principal is very pleased with the activities and all involved have received positive feedback from students, parents and other teachers.

## **The farm *Berget***

*Berget* is located about 5 km from Grums in Värmland and is owned by a teacher in upper comprehensive school. He is now working at a program for students who are not qualified for a national program. He has also previous experience from teaching at agricultural college (Naturbruksgymnasium). The farm's main focus is forestry.

### **Initiative**

In spring 2010, the staff in school discussed how the program for not qualified students could be developed. The teacher was part of the network Green Arena and wanted to use the farm to some form of social activity. He suggested therefore that he for 1-2 days per week would take a couple students home and work practically with them. The person responsible for the education sought new tools and was positive to the idea.

### **External conditions**

The activities are anchored in the general part of the curriculum, focused on creating motivation and self esteem among students. The effort to encourage students to want something is strongly linked to the municipality's monitoring responsibilities. The goal is to support the student to move on to further studies or internship. The teacher used his farm 1-2 days per week to do practical work with students. The coordinator of the program said that important arguments for the farm work was the other teachers' earlier experiences from agricultural colleges, the confidence in the teacher and the link to the Green Arena project. Green Arena put this initiative in a wider context and contributed to an acceptance of the method. The coordinator was also recently employed and was open for new ideas. He did not have a rural background, but enjoyed the woods and nature. He believes that schools need more practical connection to theory and that many students have chronic bad experience of schooling. They lack both motivation and self-esteem. Practical work which provides direct, visible benefits is something that many students really like. The school paid a small rent and

reimbursement for supplies. The school's own bus used for transportation to and from the farm. The number of students varied from individuals to smaller groups.

### ***Internal conditions***

The teacher had the freedom to approach his work as he thought was best. The experiences from the first year were very positive and the staff at the school planned to develop the work with a larger group of students. They planned to involve students from theoretical programs as well, but a decision to close the school stopped all these thoughts.

### ***Activities***

The teacher had the responsibility and freedom to design activities that he and the students wanted. It varied which students who took part in the farm activities. The contact with the teacher was an important aspect for many of them, while it enabled them to quickly see the results of their work and to be out and move. When theory is linked to practice it became easier for them to understand.

### ***Results***

For the coordinator the experience was positive and he believes that all students in school, also of younger ages, would benefit from practical work on a farm. He previously had worked at a comprehensive school as a language teacher and has lacked interdisciplinary themes and a common thread in the school work. He has identified three obvious benefits: Students get a possibility to connect with nature, theory can be linked to practice, and a deeper understanding that food production requires work efforts. He also sees opportunities to develop entrepreneurial learning through farm cooperation. Most of the students were positive to the experiences they have had.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The review of the three cases shows that only one has resulted in a farm with full time occupation and significantly additional cost for the municipality. The difficulties of establishing a substantial partnership and key reasons for its success can be illustrated by references to different dimensions.

### ***The municipality***

The only reason for the school to pay extra for collaboration with a farm is that it shows some kind of advantage or a solution to a serious problem. The farm must offer a value that the school is missing or has difficulties to provide otherwise. It could be a pedagogical model for learning about sustainable development through outdoor education on a farm, but that has no one in Sweden so far managed to sell to any municipality. What has been achieved is to offer a solution to a problem with students who have great difficulties with motivation and self-esteem or who are not attending school at all. What makes the municipality put so much extraordinary arrangements are legal requirements and /or the expectancy of a long-term economic gain. The municipality has a responsibility for monitoring young people under 20 and an obligation to provide them with studying opportunities or other occupations. Young people who are not attending school or internship enforces special arrangements. Arrangements aimed at these individuals can be expected to generate financial gain in the long term through reduced costs for social assistance, unemployment, exclusion, or likewise. The clearer the link between efforts and results, the easier it should be to implement the model.

There are many options for extraordinary arrangements. Which one to choose is probably due



to the persons in charges own experiences or good examples that you have experienced or heard of. But personal experience of working on farms is not so common in Sweden today. Still, there are adults who spent their summer vacation with farm work, but they are becoming fewer and fewer. Many more, however, have positive experiences of nature and animals. Many can also understand the satisfaction of using ones hands and carry out practical work, from which you quickly can see the results of. In order for a municipality to engage in some arrangements it is needed that many persons share the same ideas or beliefs. In a small community one can assume that the distance between urban and rural cultures is smaller and that more people have experience from each other contexts. A smaller community most likely also means that fewer people need to be convinced. If, as in the case of *Räntan*, an external actor that inform broadly in the community and provides key experiences such as field trips, it would simplify the efforts to explain the possibilities of farm practice.

All know that late interventions in emergency situations decrease the possibility of a good result. The danger is that the late effort is not providing enough good results for the municipality to be willing to develop the idea and invest in more long-term commitments. Hopefully the collaboration can go on even after the immediate needs are satisfied and thus also help less acute needs. Preventive work with similar arrangements with younger children is likely to hinder many situations to occur at all. What is needed is that more people believe in a model based on a personal experience or that you have seen good examples that convinces you. Furthermore, one should not underestimate the importance of individuals gut feeling telling them what is the right thing. This is often were many good ideas have come from. The driving force may be legal requirements, long-term economic gain or a set of values and humanity, but one must believe in the model and agree in the belief of the possibilities with it.

### **School**

The school or school staff can make arrangements within their determined frames. Teachers who live on a farm can, by offering farm visits for a smaller fee or even without compensation at all, use the farm and spend part of their working time at home. A school principal can provide compensation for travel or might consider the place as a learning tool, but the economic space is small and it will influence other urgent matters. As long as the work in the classroom works reasonably well it may continue. To stay in the classroom is safe, inexpensive, and much information can be presented per unit of time. The insight that some elements could be done better outside the classroom, is something that many teachers do not prevail or have time to consider in today's school system with strongly limited room for maneuver. If the student fails in a classroom situation, however, the school must put in other measures in order to reach its goals and societal obligations. Pupils with diagnosis can become part of the school for learning disabilities or at least they may participate in its activities. Teachers in these schools know that the classroom situation often is complicated and that other pedagogical methods and arenas are needed. For a school, with a teacher who has a farm and is willing to use it for pedagogical purposes without any economical claim, regular farm visits work excellent!

### **The entrepreneur**

In order to bring about collaboration between a school and a farm, three important conditions must be fulfilled from the entrepreneur's perspective. These are location, credibility and sustainability. The location means a place to use – a farm, with credibility means confidence from the customer, and by sustainability we mean a long term commitment enabling primarily economic opportunities.

A person, who lives on a farm, but working in school and receiving full payment as a teacher has probably the best possibility for obtaining a school - farm collaboration. If no agreement is settled and the payment from school only consists of the normal salary the long-term sustainability of the project is not secured. As long as the teachers wants and feels like using the farm the students have access to this educational activity. From a teacher's point of view, this is boring, but it does not mean either any financial nor personal risk, except for the responsibility towards the students. Those who will suffer if the project is closed are the students who have it as a positive and stimulating part of their school training. The school's safety, in order to offer their students this activity, is therefore limited. By writing contracts and compensate the teacher economically the security for both parties will increase. The school also signals that what is done is valuable. Even driving spirits might end if they feel exploited.

A person attached to a farming business, either as part of the family or as business owners have the place available and possibly some financial security. The existing company may possibly in the context of other activities for a shorter period of time cover the initial costs of a new line of business. Thereafter, compensation for enhancing collaboration with the school must cover the cost for salary and other utilized assets. The financial compensation can be done either through contracts or through employment. In both cases, payment for the place, other assets, transport etc should be paid for. This person must gain trust from the school or local authority to bring about such a partnership. Confidence and trust must be based on personal relations, but can be facilitated by appropriate training and experience. An obvious agreement will give both schools and farmers better security.

A person who does not have a farm and do not work in the school, needs to build a network in two directions. The complexity is high, putting even higher demands on entrepreneurial thinking, something which can be positive in some matters. If you do not have a farm of your own there might be opportunities to choose the location, as long as there are suitable and willing farmers to rent from. This person has the same demands as the mentioned above for a strong contact with the school. Costs for hiring a place makes compensation obvious, why it is clear that the customer has to pay for the service.

Anyone who wants to start social activities on a farm should have or acquire good contacts at various levels in their community. Being politically active and involved in local community provides insight into the unique socio-political context, its problems and discussions, but gives also possibilities to participate and initiate discussions and suggestions. Our study has shown that the personal network and people's trust is important to be able to have influence on municipality decisions. Establishing a social network, introducing new ideas and gain support takes time and is as such a long term challenge. Probably, the municipality or the school must have the opportunity to test the business and approach before long term commitment. This includes, of course, the pupils. To also invite school staff, parents, politicians, officials, media and others are good ways to market the ideas and getting help pushing the issue. A decision to expand the school and the classroom into a farm is unlikely made by a single individual, especially if it requires financial commitments. It takes many convinced people to muddle through, reaching socially and economically sustainable collaboration between schools and farms. If there is another actor working to implement these kinds of collaborations, for example Green Arena, it is of great value.

A person who wants to collaborate with the school and be credible must understand the school world, talk school language and be able to interact with the students in a professional way. An

understanding of the curriculum and its core content, both in general and in syllabus is necessary. Core values and humanity is central to be successful and get the school's trust to take care of the students. In today's schools monitoring and planning is required. Teaching must be linked to the curriculum. The knowledge and experience of these facts increase the trust from the school about quality assurance and goal achievement, at least in its early stages.

Procurement or employment may be an issue. The experiences of the three cases described here show that an employment provides advantages in that it increase efficiency, the school is accustomed to dealing with employment and the employee get closer tied to the school by becoming one in the staff, something positive for both parts. The form of communication and responsibility becomes more obvious and easier to manage. Compensation for facilities, animals and other resources can be solved in other ways. Procurement is often more complicated and takes longer time to realize.

### ***Other important aspects***

To pick up and drop students, at school or by their homes, can help to motivate the students to come, especially those who normally do not attend school. A distance between the farm and the town can prevent participants return home and is therefore sometimes a positive aspect. If the cooperation is well established it is really an advantage to get special community rooms on the farm with possibilities to cook, eat and get together. Not being forced to use somebody's home make the participants feel a sense of ownership and belonging to the farm, and for the farmer, it could help them separate work life from private life.

In none of the cases described the intention was to reach all students and to learn about farming, food production and sustainable development from an environmental aspect. But this was not grounded in a clearly stated objective, either from the farmer or from the school. There may be several reasons for that. None of the farmers is really food producers. For two of them forestry is the main source of income and in one case, the farm is mainly residence. Perhaps they also saw a more feasible approach by appealing to other target groups. Hopefully the reason was not that they thought food production is not interesting or important for the children. For most of them it is the farm environment and not the outcome of farming activities, which are the main interest and the most important value. The biology teacher, who takes her pupils out in the school's local area, mentions difficulties with schedule and lack of engagement from colleagues, as a result of a stressful work situation. She doubts the possibility of taking all students to her home, even though there would not be a matter of money for the school. Her main interest is also more traditional biology teaching. In Kristinehamn the value of farm visits accentuates for younger pupils. Our interpretation is though that the main reason was to reduce the risk of exclusion of pupils. The responsible teacher in Grums can see great opportunities in outdoor education on a farm for all students. He also mentions the importance of a higher understanding of the value of food among students, and through this create a stronger bond with nature. In this case a language teacher with no earlier connection to agriculture or rural areas was the one who raised these aspects.

It is easier to get in contact and initiate cooperation with the school if there is a problem of some kind or where the teachers have practical opportunities and have experience from other pedagogical methods. One reason for the importance of this is that, in general, the schools are increasingly focused on theoretical knowledge. That is emphasized in a survey where all teachers answered that it is important that students know where the food comes from, but only 9 % cultivated practically with the students and only 12 % made farm visits with all children (Lundstrom, 2012). Instead teaching about agriculture and food production, were carried out

as briefings, discussions or by studying books or the Internet in classroom settings. At the same time, more than 80 % of the teachers believed that one can practice cooperation, responsibility and problem solving through practical work on a farm. Half of the respondents were bred on a farm or in rural areas. Can we assume that those without personal experience or no interest in the question did not even respond to the survey? If so, this in a way reflects the most difficult problem to manage: Too few persons today, probably including teachers, have personal experiences from farming and food production, and therefore do not see the possibilities with and need for outdoor education using a farm as platform. The risk is that we are in a negative societal trend, where it will be harder and harder to redirect today's development. Because there are no doubt that farm – school collaboration could be an important way to both help young people grow, and fill the urban-rural divide in modern society.

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