

Directed Study S5

Benchmark in English

Authors GRANDGIRARD Louis ERRAES Mehdi – BUT INFO 3

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Introduction

The Jardins de Cocagne network in France is a social and agricultural initiative promoting organic farming, sustainable development, and social inclusion. Its main mission is to help individuals facing unemployment or social exclusion reintegrate into society through work opportunities in community gardens. The harvested organic vegetables are distributed via local markets or vegetable box schemes, supporting both local consumption and ecological awareness.

Similar initiatives exist abroad, combining sustainable agriculture with community support. This benchmark analyzes and compares several foreign organizations with similar goals, but with different cultural and social dimensions.

The selected initiatives are:

- Green Gulch Farm (USA – California)
- Incredible Edible (UK – Todmorden)
- Soul Fire Farm (USA – New York)
- Food Not Bombs (USA – International)
- Organopónicos (Cuba)
- Detroit Urban Gardens (USA – Michigan)

Jardins de Cocagne (France)

Location: France (national network)

Objectives: Organic farming, social inclusion, local development

The Jardins de Cocagne are non-profit gardens employing people who are socially or professionally excluded. These gardens produce organic vegetables, delivered through subscription baskets or sold in local markets. In addition to job opportunities, participants receive training programs, helping them acquire skills in agriculture and sustainable practices.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides employment and training for vulnerable people• Strong focus on sustainability (100% organic production)• Reinforces local food networks• Promotes community participation and solidarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High dependence on subsidies and funding• Physically demanding work may not be suitable for everyone• Limited to agricultural activities (restricted professional scope)• Impact mainly local or regional, not national in visibility

Green Gulch Farm (USA – California)

Website : [Green Gulch Farm](#)

Location: San Francisco Bay Area, California (USA)

Objectives: Organic farming, mindfulness, ecological education

Green Gulch Farm is an organic farm run by a Zen Buddhist community. It combines sustainable agriculture with meditation retreats and educational workshops. The initiative emphasizes not only ecological production but also spiritual well-being, promoting a holistic view of food, environment, and human development.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unique combination of organic farming and mindfulness• Provides high-quality training and retreats• Strong community spirit and volunteer participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Niche audience (spiritual communities)• Not directly focused on social reintegration• Participation often limited by costs



<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attracts visitors and tourists, increasing awareness of sustainable farming	
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Incredible Edible (UK – Todmorden)

Website : [Welcome to Incredible Edible Todmorden - Incredible Edible Todmorden](#)

Location: Todmorden, West Yorkshire (UK)

Objectives: Community empowerment, free access to food, urban sustainability

Incredible Edible is a grassroots movement that transforms public spaces into edible landscapes. Fruits, vegetables, and herbs are planted in streets, parks, schools, and community areas. The produce is free for everyone, promoting food sharing, urban resilience, and civic engagement.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promotes free and accessible food in urban areas• Strong community involvement and volunteerism• Raises awareness of food sustainability in everyday life• Simple and replicable model worldwide	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impact depends heavily on local volunteers• Small-scale farming cannot meet all food needs• Limited institutional recognition



Soul Fire Farm (USA – New York State)

Website : [SOUL FIRE FARM – Ending racism and injustice in the food system](#)

Location: Grafton, New York (USA)

Objectives: Racial justice, food sovereignty, ecological farming

Soul Fire Farm is a community farm led by Black and Latino activists. It aims to fight racism and injustice in food systems by empowering marginalized groups with land access, training, and ecological farming practices. The farm combines food production with activism, education, and leadership programs.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promotes food sovereignty and sustainable practices• Inspires similar initiatives worldwide	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Niche audience (mainly racial and activist communities)• Limited production capacity• Highly dependent on external funding and donations

Food Not Bombs (International, started in USA)

Website : [THE FOOD NOT BOMBS STORY](#)

Location: International movement (origin: USA)

Objectives: Anti-poverty, anti-waste, political activism

Food Not Bombs is a global grassroots network of volunteers who recover food waste and cook free meals, usually distributed in public spaces. The initiative denounces food waste, militarism, and social inequality while providing direct support to vulnerable populations.

Strengths	Weaknesses
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raises awareness of food waste and inequality• Provides free meals to people in need• Grassroots, volunteer-based, highly adaptable model• International presence with hundreds of chapters worldwide	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strongly political, which may limit institutional support• Reliant on volunteers with varying commitment• No long-term employment or training dimension
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Organopónicos (Cuba)

Website : [Organopónico, la star de l'agriculture urbaine à Cuba – Les Agro'nautes](#)

Location: Havana and other Cuban cities

Objectives: Urban food security, resilience, ecological farming

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Cuba faced a severe food crisis. The country developed urban organic farms called *Organopónicos*. These farms use vacant lots, rooftops, and city spaces to grow vegetables without pesticides. The system became a model of resilience in urban agriculture worldwide.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Large-scale, systemic response to food insecurity• Promotes ecological farming without chemicals• Strengthens local food autonomy in cities• Internationally recognized as an urban agriculture model	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dependent on political and economic context• Limited technological innovation due to embargo• Physically demanding work, sometimes with low productivity



Detroit Urban Gardens (USA – Michigan)

Website : [Detroit's Greener Side](#) | [Detroit Urban Farming](#) | [Visit Detroit](#)

Location: Detroit, Michigan (USA)

Objectives: Community resilience, urban farming, food justice

In response to economic decline and the collapse of local industries, Detroit residents created urban gardens on abandoned lots and industrial ruins. These gardens provide fresh food in “food deserts” where supermarkets are scarce, while also rebuilding community ties and urban resilience.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reuses abandoned spaces for productive purposes• Provides fresh food in underserved neighborhoods• Strengthens community ties and resilience• Symbol of post-industrial renewal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited resources and funding• Results vary depending on community engagement• Small-scale production cannot fully solve food insecurity

Comparative Table



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Initiative	Strengths	Weaknesses
Jardins de Cocagne (FR)	Employment for excluded people, 100% organic, strong local solidarity	Dependent on subsidies, limited to agriculture, physically hard
Green Gulch Farm (US)	Combines farming + mindfulness, strong community, tourist appeal	Niche audience, costly, not focused on reintegration
Incredible Edible (UK)	Free food in public space, strong civic engagement, replicable model	Small-scale, volunteer-dependent, limited recognition
Soul Fire Farm (US)	Focus on racial justice, empowers marginalized groups, food sovereignty	Limited production, niche audience, funding-dependent
Food Not Bombs (Intl.)	Global network, anti-waste, free meals, strong activism	Political image, no job training, unstable volunteer base
Organopónicos (Cuba)	Large-scale urban farms, resilient system, ecological and low-cost	Dependent on politics, low productivity, physically demanding
Detroit Gardens (US)	Uses abandoned land, provides food in deserts, community renewal	Limited resources, small-scale impact, uneven engagement

Conclusion

All these initiatives share the same broad goals: promoting sustainable agriculture, fighting food insecurity, and reinforcing community bonds. However, their strategies and identities differ:

- **Jardins de Cocagne** focus on social reintegration through agricultural jobs.
- **Green Gulch Farm** integrates spirituality and ecology.
- **Incredible Edible** emphasizes free, public, and accessible food in urban areas.
- **Soul Fire Farm** promotes racial justice and empowerment through farming.
- **Food Not Bombs** challenges waste and inequality with direct activism.
- **Organopónicos** demonstrate large-scale urban resilience in a crisis context.
- **Detroit Urban Gardens** show how communities can rebuild themselves after industrial decline.

This comparison highlights that while France prioritizes professional reintegration through agriculture, other countries explore complementary paths: spirituality, activism, food justice, or massive urban resilience. The Jardins de Cocagne could benefit from integrating some of these innovative aspects, such as free urban food access, stronger activist communication, or broader community education programs.

