ETH Zurich Department of Architecture
ARCHITECTURE OF TERRITORY
Chair of Architecture
and Territorial Planning
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Agritopia
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Atlas

Future Farmers

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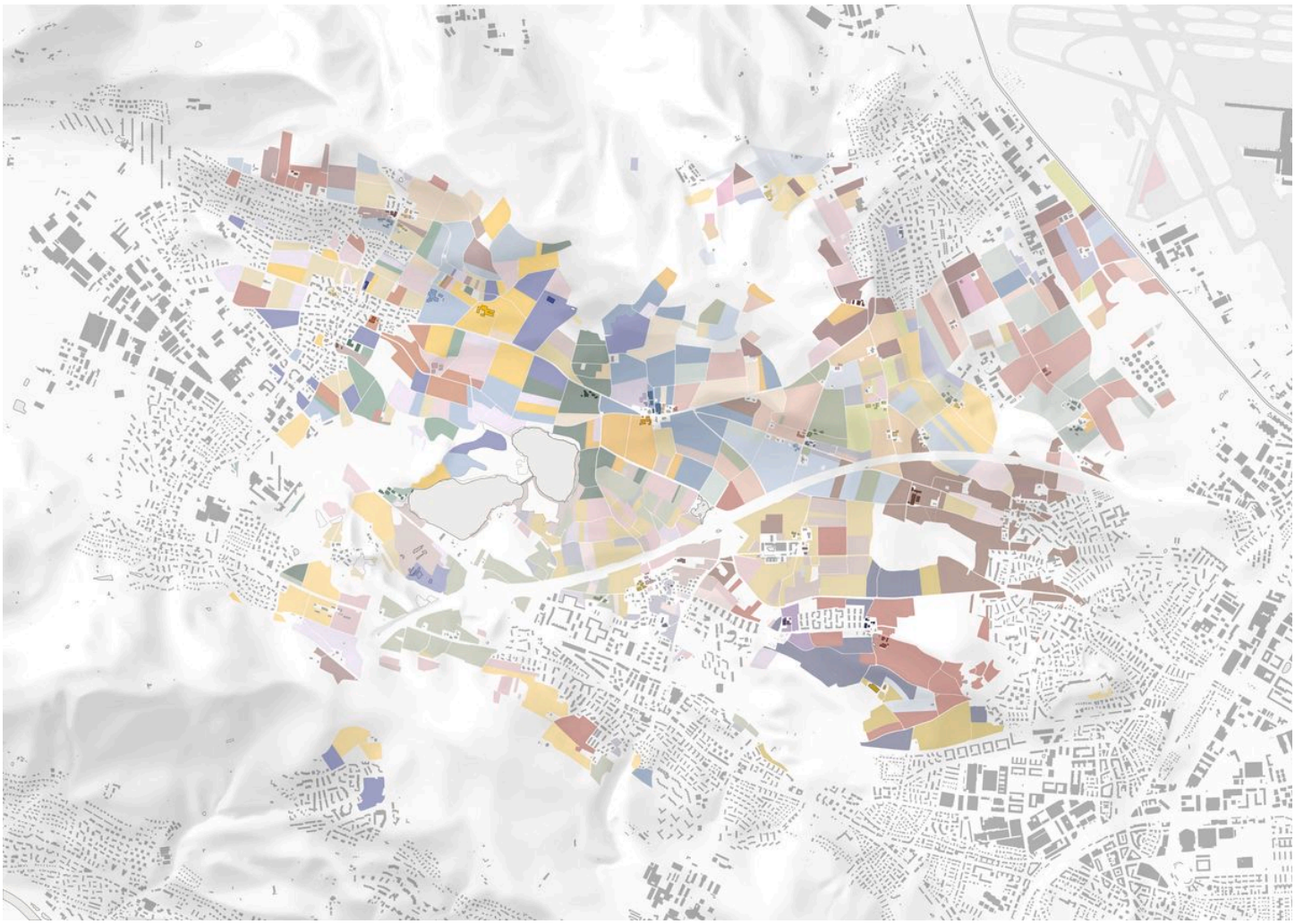
Our research focuses on labour. In order to find out more about our topic, we interviewed farmers in our study area: Zürich North. We discovered the stories of individual farmers and new models of agriculture. We asked questions about the past, present and future of agriculture. Compared to the past, the mechanisation of agriculture has led to great changes from the workers' point of view. The number of workers has decreased significantly, and thanks to the machines available, more land can be cultivated in less time. The type of farm has also changed: whereas the tradition was to pass the management of the farm from generation to generation, now some of the farmers interviewed are no longer sure of this. Moreover, new models of farming are emerging.

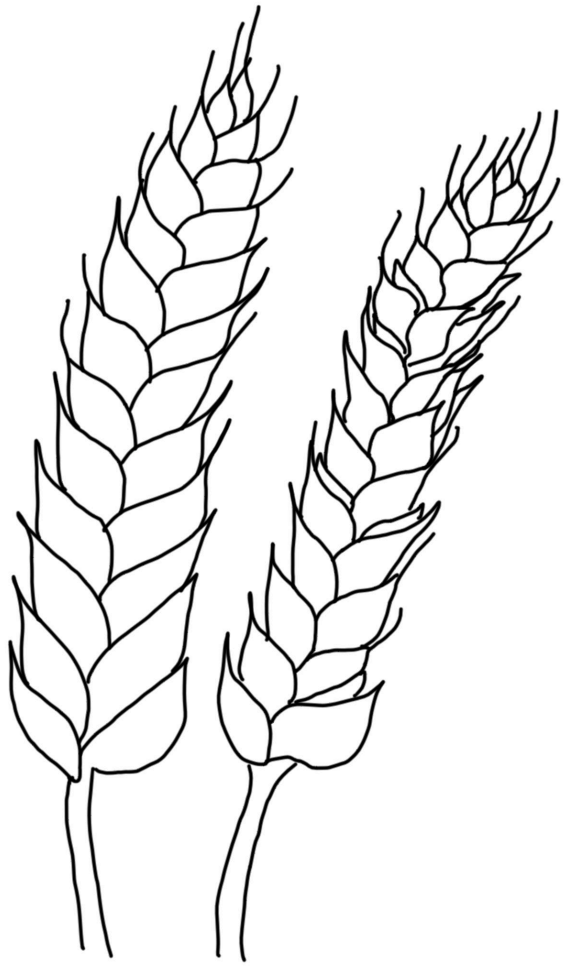
We began our research by putting on a map the main farmers and the land they cultivate. What we discovered was an extremely scattered territory.



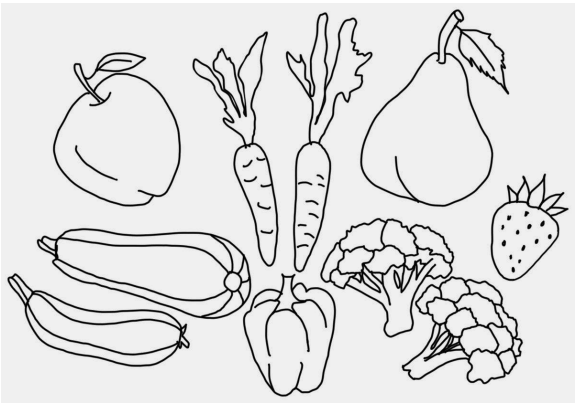
Map showing the scattering on our study area

- Schumacherhof
- Waidhof
- Riedenholzhof
- Kuhn LKA gmbH
- Ogg the Farmer
- Zollinger AG
- Marglerhof
- Seeholzhof
- Obsthaus Gujer
- Meh als Gmües
- Hofladen Frei
- Katzenrütihof

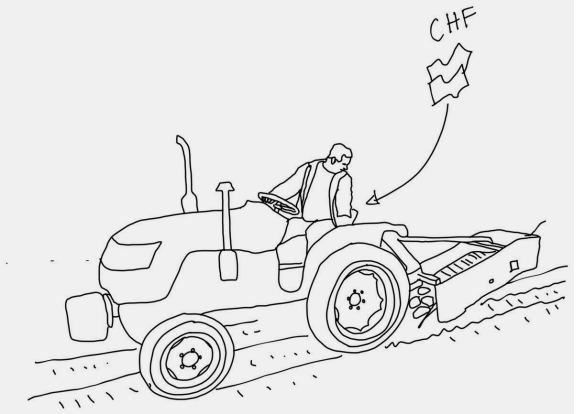
During our research, we were able to classify the different kinds of products and work: crops, fruits and vegetables, wage labour, direct selling, animal farming, viticulture, cooperative work. Through the latter categories we created a catalogue representing: amount of work per category, the amount of area per category and the amount of people working in the farm.



CROPS
Crop farming is a highly mechanized type of work, the plots tend to be big in size



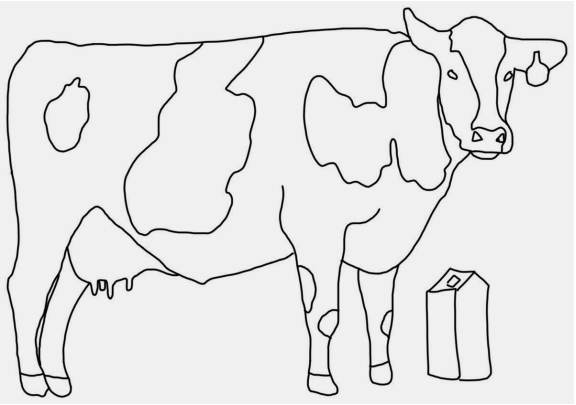
FRUITS AND VEGETABLES
Fruits and vegetable farming is seasonal work and mostly manual,requires extra workers



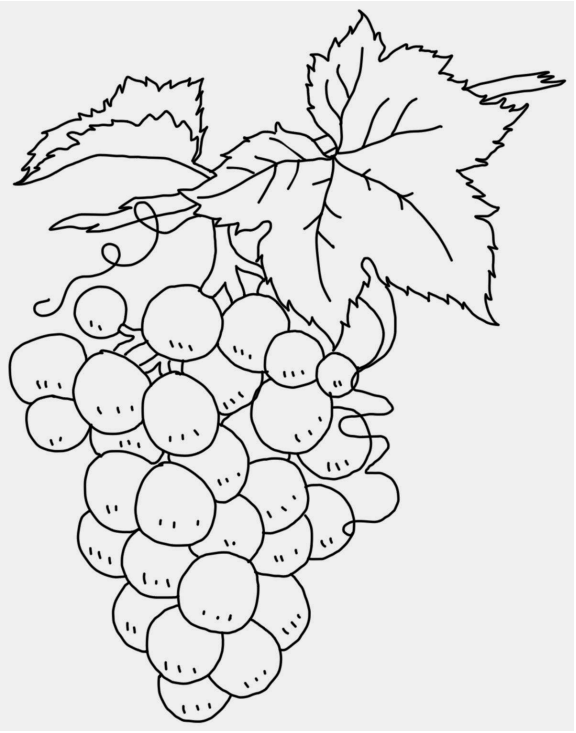
WAGE LABOUR
Some farmers are service providers, it is mostly mechanized



DIRECT SELLING
Direct selling in the Hofläden means direct producer-consumer connection but with a lot of manual work involved



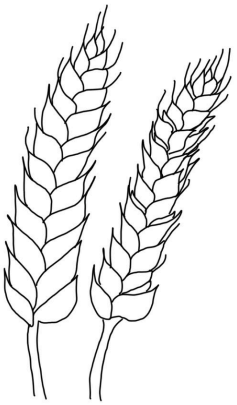
ANIMAL FARMING
Is very mechanized, land use only for grazing and food production



VITICULTURE
Is seasonal and mainly manual, recent technologies allow
a certain degree of mechanization



COOPERATIVE WORK
New emerging type of agriculture, very social and manual



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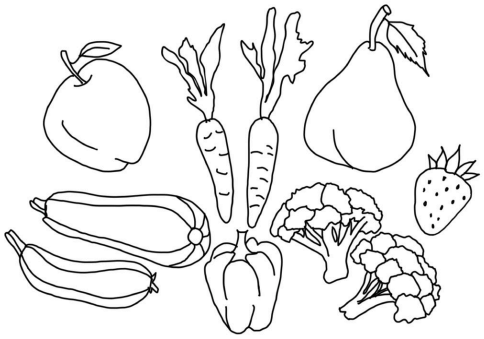

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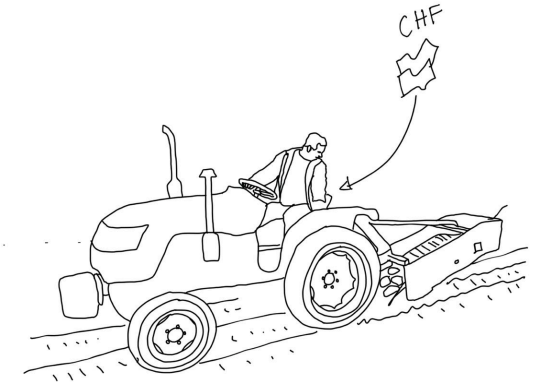

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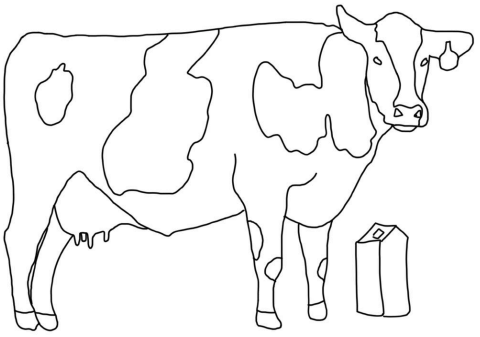

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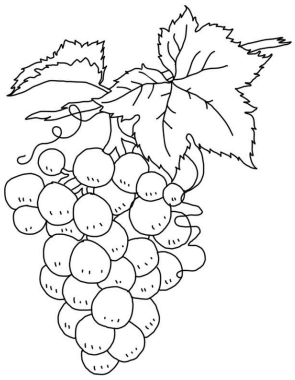

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COOPERATIVE WORK
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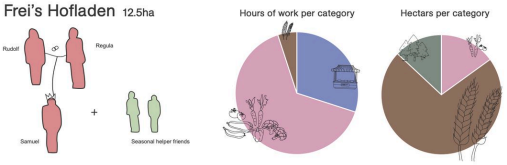
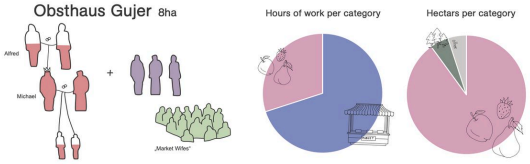
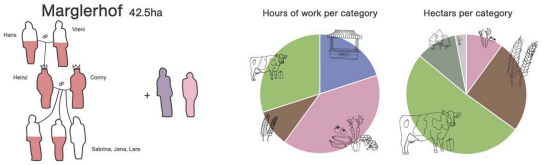
During our research we found out about the organisation of farms or cooperatives and discovered that except for the latter, all are family-run. so we asked ourselves, what will become of this structure 50 years from now?



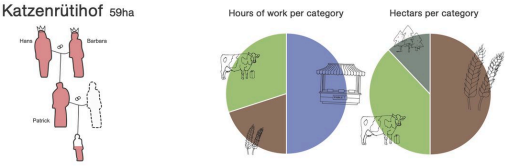
The Family rules in this case. The farm is rather small and the main work is spent on the fields with crops, vegetables and fruit. Two friends of the family occasionally help out on the farm, especially in summer and autumn. The farm shop is run by Regula.



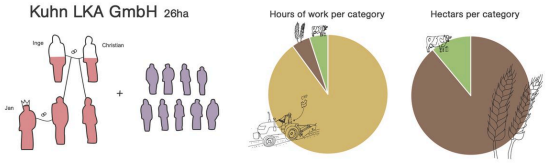
Michael Guier is one of the few last fruit producers in the region. Together with some employees, Michael and his wife cultivate a wide range of fruit and some vegetebles. Their products are sold by a „pool of houswifes" on regional markets and in their farm shop. Will his kids want to continue the family business?



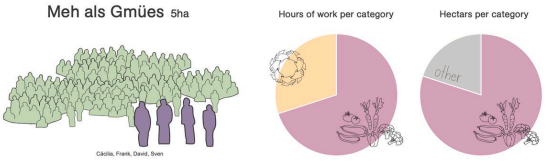
Heinz and Conny and their three daughters are running the farm traditionally. They have 50 cows for milk production cattle for meat. They produce their fodder on the fields around the farm. Sabrina will take over the farm. What will she do with it?



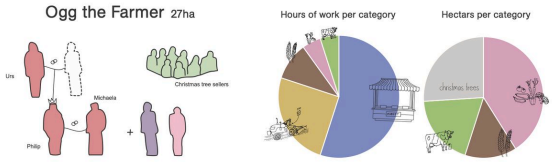
The Katzenrütihof has been run by the family ever since. They specialize in animal farming with milk and meat production and the production of fodder. In their farm shop they sell milk and potatoes, cheese, bread and seasonal extras like strawberries. They even offer party services and from time to time organize dinner events.



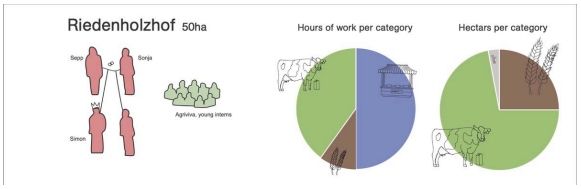
Next to traditional farming, the family Kuhn has built up a second business, a service farm. They have a large machine park and do all kinds of services for their customers. They have many employees who enjoy their regulated work with fixed salaries and hours.



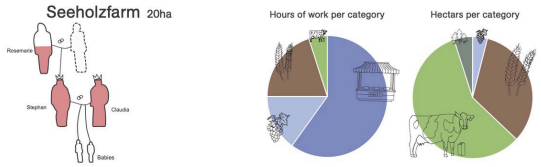
The cooperative farm Meh als Gmües is a project for community-supported agriculture (Solawi). It is based on direct cooperation between farmers and consumers and the desire for more self-determination in food production. The 300 cooperative members each work 20 hours a year and recieve a weekly vegetable basket.



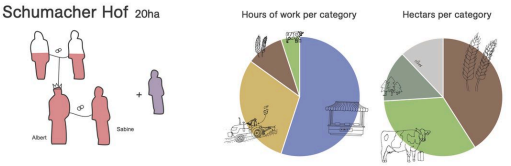
The family of Philip Ogg is specialized in selling diverse products in their farm store. Hemp, potatoes, fruits and vegetables, honey and many other things are produced on their farm. They also provide woodworking services and snow plowing, in winter they sell christmas trees.



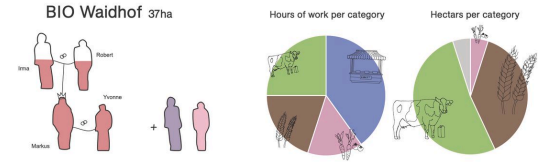
The family Küchler is running a farm with water buffalos. Young interns from a program called Agriviva will come to help on the farm, each for a few weeks. In their farm shop they sell buffalo milk, buffalo joghurt, buffalo cheese such as feta, camembert or mozzarella. They also sell seasonal vegetables and fruit.



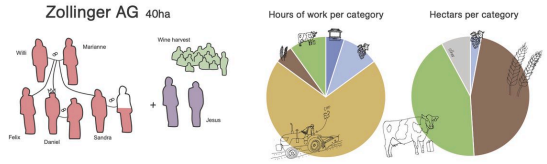
Stephan and Claudia are running the farm with almost no additional help. They cultivate crops and fruit trees and a vinyard, they keep suckler cows for meat production. Their products can be bought in a farm store or online. They also have a Besenbeiz and two small children. The work oftentimes pushes them to their limit.



Albert has taken over the farm from his parents. He and Sabine run the farm with a farm shop, where they sell eggs from their chicken and seasonal vegetables. Next to this they also offer services for farmers in the region. The two love animals, which is why they also keep horses, goats and a dog.

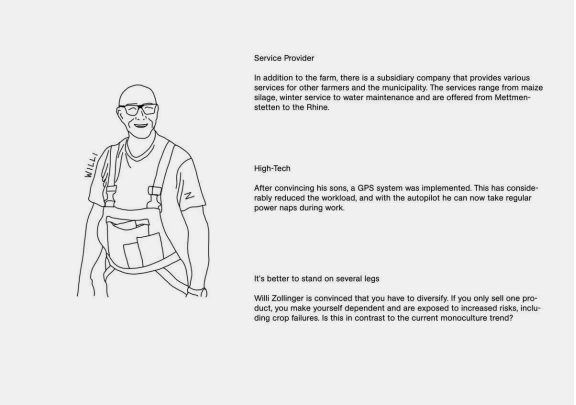


The property of the farm is owned by Grünstadt Zürich. The farm is run by the family Götsch since 1984. Markus is passionate about his job which is why he accepts long workdays. The products of the farm are sold in their farm shop and in vending machines around Zurich. Which influence will the city have on farms on their ground?

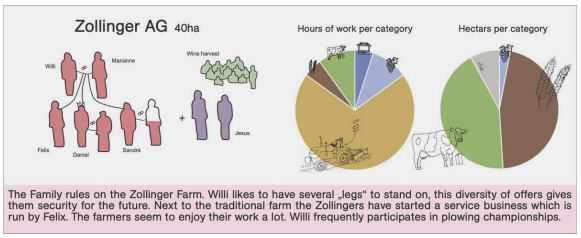


The Family rules on the Zollinger Farm. Willi likes to have several „legs" to stand on, this diversity of offers gives them security for the future. Next to the traditional farm the Zollingers have started a service business which is run by Felix. The farmers seem to enjoy their work a lot. Willi frequently participates in plowing championships.

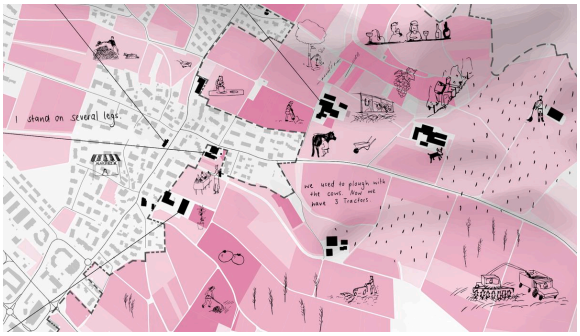
When we interviewed farmers, we asked them specific questions about their work, their person, their products, the use of machines and their opinion about agricultural policies. We also asked them about the problematics and the possible future of their work.



Interview with Willi Zollinger from Zollinger AG



Catalogue of Zollinger AG

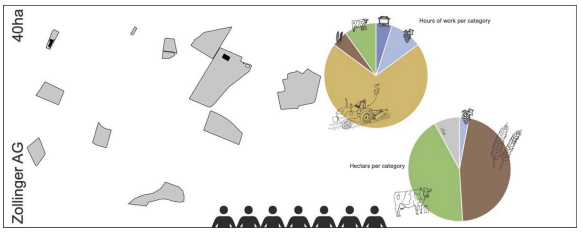


Narrative Layer





In addition to Willi Zollinger's farm, there is a subsidiary company that provides various services for other farmers and the municipality. The services range from maize silage, winter service to water maintenance and are offered from Mettmenstetten to the Rhine. After convincing his sons, a GPS system was implemented in his work. This has considerably reduced the workload and with the autopilot he can now and then take power naps during work. Willi Zollinger is convinced that diversification helps the business. When only selling one product, you depend on and are exposed to increased risks, including crop failures. For this reason it is better for him to "stand on several legs".



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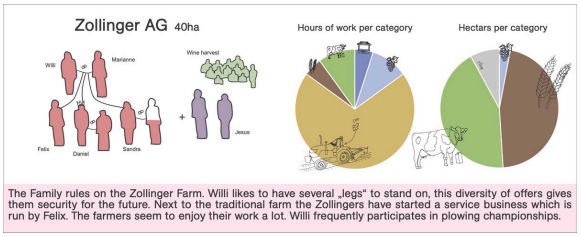

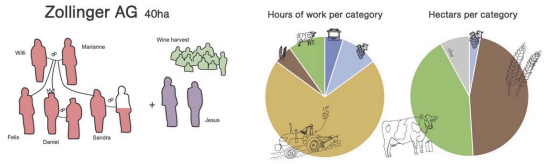

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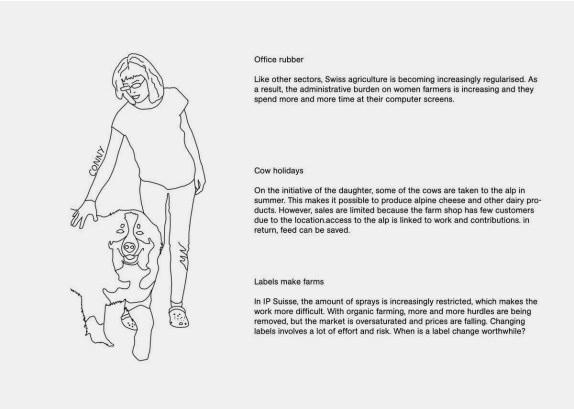
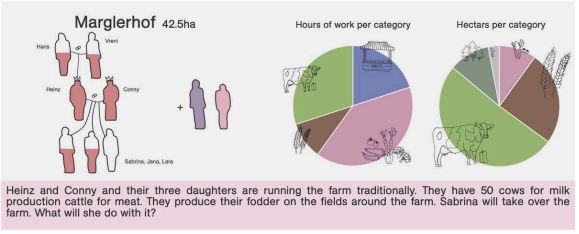


Interview with Conny Margler from Marglerhof

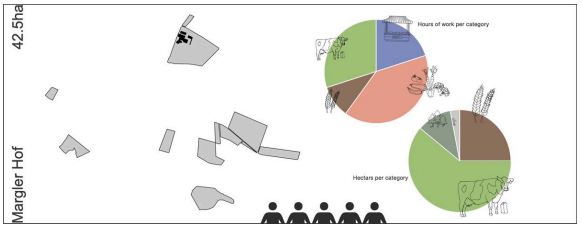


Catalogue of Marglerhof





Like other sectors, Swiss agriculture is becoming increasingly regularised. As a result, the administrative burden, especially on female farmers, is increasing. Conny explained that they since tend to spend more and more time at their computer screens.
On the initiative of the Conny's daughter, some of the cows are taken to the alp during summer. This way it is possible to produce alpine cheese and other dairy products. However, sales are limited because the farm shop, due to its location, has few customers. In IP Suisse (food from fully sustainable Swiss agriculture), the amount of sprays is increasingly restricted, this makes the work more complex. Organic farming is becoming more accessible and economically attractive, for this reason the market is oversaturated and prices are falling. When a farmer cultivates land owned by the city of Zürich, labels are imposed.



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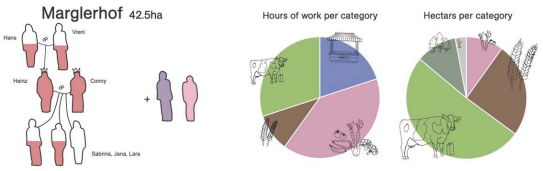

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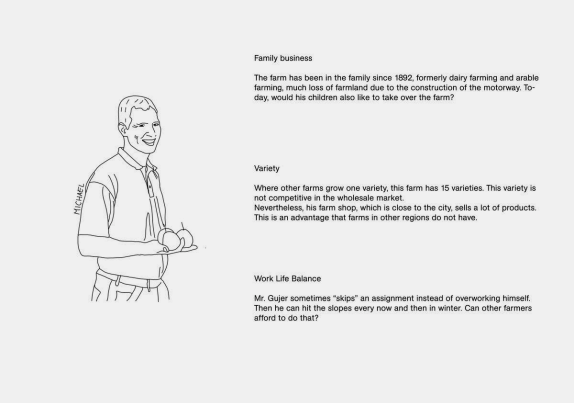
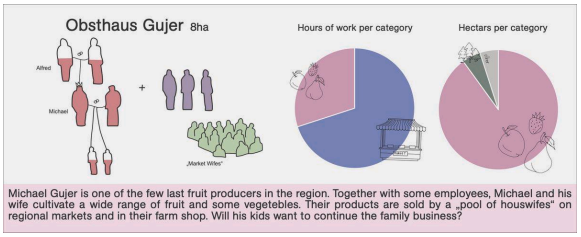


Interview with Michael Gujer from Obsthaus Gujer



Catalogue of Obsthaus Gujer

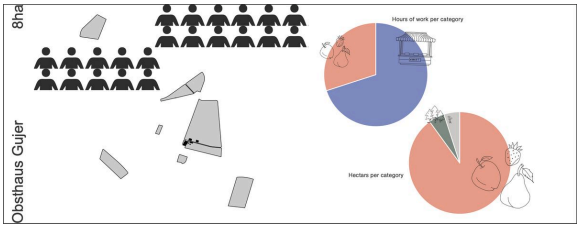


Narrative Layer

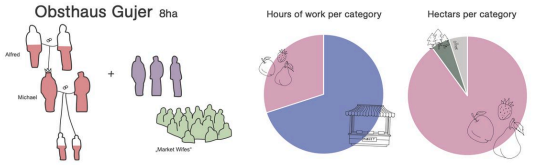




The Obsthaus Gujer farm has been in the family since 1892, it was formerly dairy farming and arable farming. But due to the construction of the motorway, they had a big loss of farmland. Today, it is not sure if his children would like to take over the farm.
The farms grows 15 varieties, even if variety is not competitively relevant in the wholesale market. Nevertheless, his farm shop, which has the advantage of being close to the city, sells a lot of products.
Michael Gujer sometimes prefers to skip a task rather than overworking himself. This way he can hit the slopes every now and then in winter. Can other farmers afford to do that?



Michael Guier is one of the few last fruit producers in the region. Together with some employees, Michael and his wife cultivate a wide range of fruit and some vegetebles. Their products are sold by a „pool of houswifes" on regional markets and in their farm shop. Will his kids want to continue the family business?



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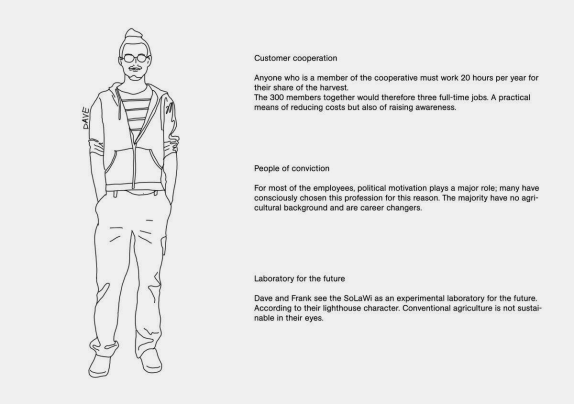
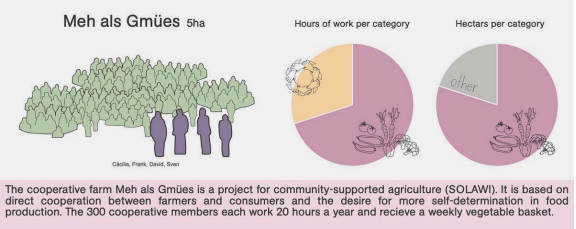
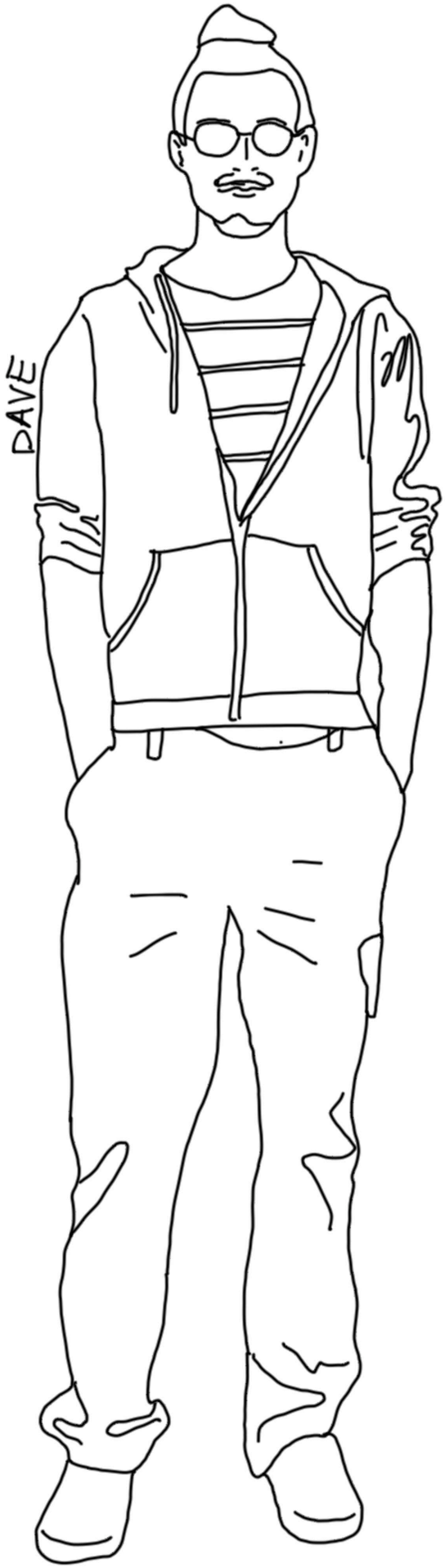


Interview with David from Meh als Gmües



Catalogue of Meh als Gmues





David from the cooperative Meh als Gmües explained that anyone who is a member of the cooperative must work 20 hours per year for their share of the harvest. This means that 300 members together would therefore translate in three full-time jobs. This is a practical means of reducing costs but also of raising awareness.
For most of the employees, political motivation plays a major role, this is why they chose the profession. The majority of them have no agricultural background and are change career.
Dave and Frank see the Solawi as an experimental laboratory for the future. According to them, conventional agriculture is not sustainable anymore.
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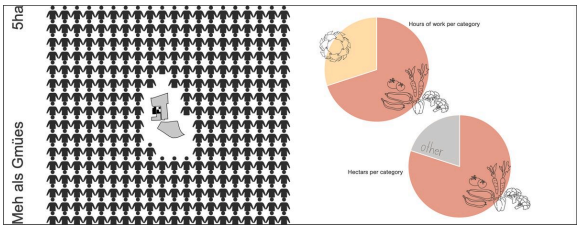
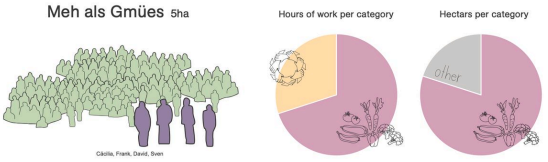


The cooperative farm Meh als Gmües is a project for community-supported agriculture (SOLAWI). It is based on direct cooperation between farmers and consumers and the desire for more self-determination in food production. The 300 cooperative members each work 20 hours a year and recieve a weekly vegetable basket.



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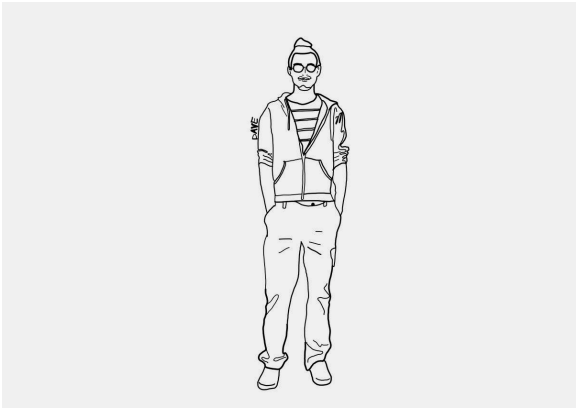

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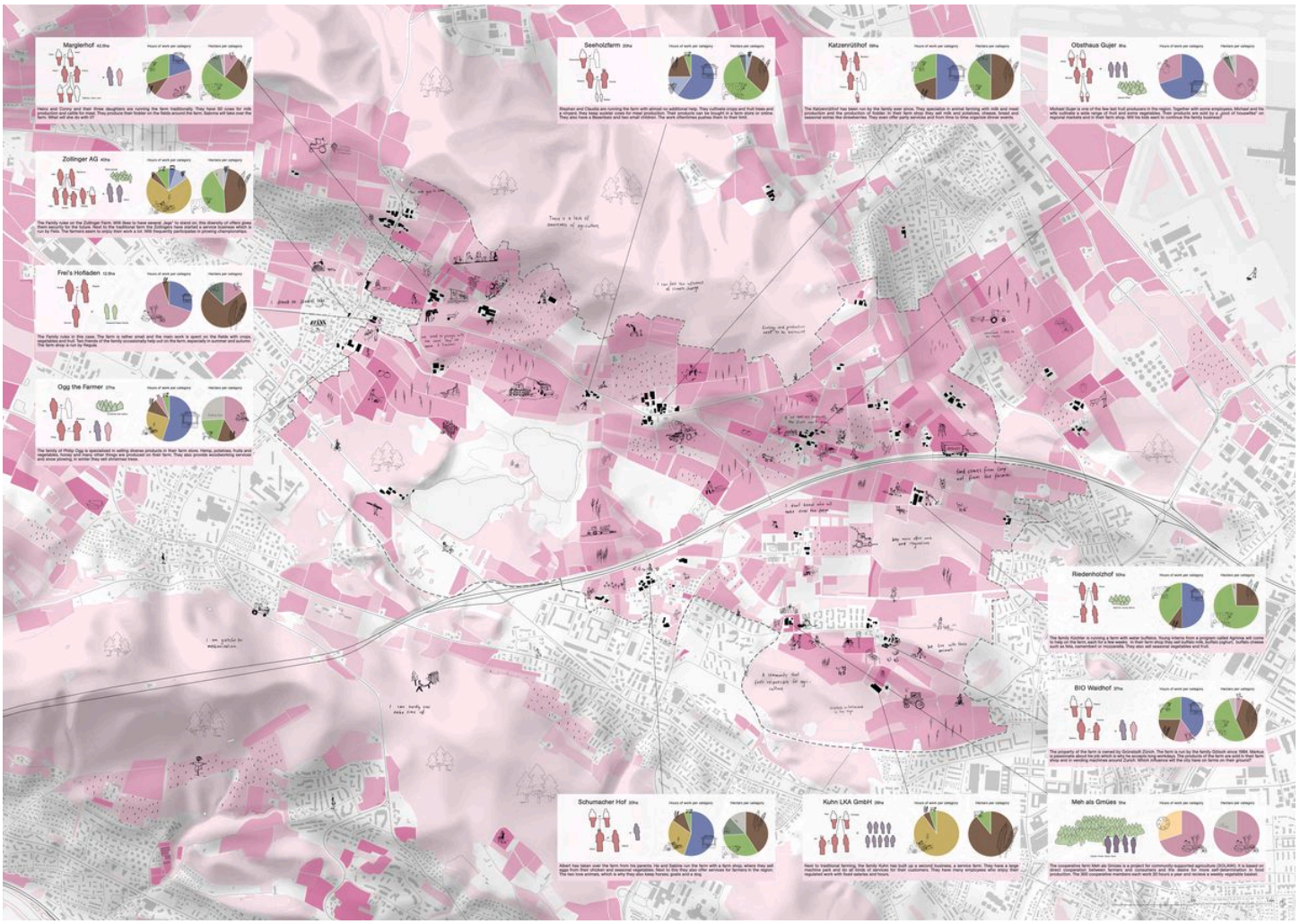
By investigating we found out that different kinds of farming require differents amounts of work. The majority of the work is concentrated in the minority of the area.
The opinions of the farmers are captured in the narrative layer.



Narrative Map

- Direct selling, farm shop, market
- Animal farming, meadows
- Crops
- Fruits and vegetables
- Wage labour, Machine rental
- Viticulture
- Cooperative work
- Forest
- Biodiversity areas, christmas trees, etc.
- Part time/seasonal helper
- Apprentice
- Employee
- Family Member and partially involved family member (Half)
- Low work intensity
- High work intensity

SOURCES

- “Über uns” *Kuhn LKA gmbH* website https://www.kuhn.ch/uber-uns/
- “Über uns” *Meh als Gmües* website https://mehalsgmues.ch/ueber-uns/
- “Über uns”*Obsthaus Gujer* website https://www.obsthaus-gujer.ch/index.php/ueber-uns/
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This work by Fabian Perner, Michelle Ciorciari, Cara Steiner, and Maria Wenzl was created as part of the design studio Agritopia at ETH Zurich in Fall 2023. The PDF is intended for educational purposes only. Its commercial distribution is strictly forbidden.

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