

# FARMINFIN



**Farming concepts and innovative  
funding/financing**

## **CASE STUDY**

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**Kathrin Goebel,  
Thomas Goebel,  
Silke Kunkel**



# INTRO

Today, about as many people work on the Demeter farm Hofgut Oberfeld as did a hundred years ago and the farm is proud of that. Hofgut Oberfeld and its people are convinced that really good food is not created by “saving” labour but by putting it in the right place and meeting other people’s needs in the process.

Originally, the estate was a Hessian state domain, which was taken over by a citizens’ initiative in 2006. The Initiative Domäne Oberfeld e. V. was the nucleus of the project. It was founded as a citizens’ initiative in 2003 for the preservation and conversion of the Hofgut Oberfeld. Today, the association is a forum for supporters and activists and works closely with the farm community. With the support of a foundation based in Darmstadt, the specially established Hofgut Oberfeld Foundation was able to buy the farmstead and lease the land. The citizens’ initiative also gave rise to a citizens’ company for agriculture, which now has 176 shareholders, mostly citizens from Darmstadt, who have meanwhile contributed around 1.8 million euros in capital. Hofgut Oberfeld Landwirtschaft AG (HOLAG) has taken over parts of the farmstead on hereditary lease and the agricultural land on sublease. On the leasehold land, HOLAG built a cowshed with milk processing and haymaking hall, a bakery and the farm shop.

HOLAG is a small public limited company with a six-member supervisory board. In this organisational form, which has so far been rare for organic farming, the three board members Kathrin Goebel, Thomas Goebel and Silke Kunkel, appointed by the supervisory board, work very successfully with around 60 employees.

## 1. PERSONAL DATA OF THE FARMER



- ▶ **Name:** Kathrin Goebel, Thomas Goebel, Silke Kunkel.
- ▶ **Birth year:** 1974 / 1972 / 1972.
- ▶ **Gender:** Female/ Male/ Female .
- ▶ **Education:** Kathrin Goebel farmer and veterinarian, Thomas Goebel farmer Dipl.Agrar / Silke Kunkel orthoptist and Dipl. Herb. Med. ).
- ▶ **Occupation:** Full-time farmer and full-time farmer. Full-time entrepreneur and full-time woman entrepreneur.

## 2. FARM DATA

► **Farm location:** Hofgut Oberfeld Landwirtschaft AG, Erbacher Street 125, 64287 Darmstadt.

► **Farm Area in ha:** 161 ha.

► **Farm description:** Hofgut Oberfeld is a largely rounded-off mixed agricultural farm with subsequent processing and direct marketing, including on-farm catering and seasonal gardening.

Cattle and poultry are kept on the basis of sustainable management of the agricultural land (115ha arable land, 46ha grassland).

The company focuses on economic and material cycles and extensive value creation within the company. There is an own seed propagation, the offer of seasonal gardens for the local citizens, a farm bakery, a farm dairy, a farm shop and a farm café.

With versatile biodynamic agriculture, the natural space is shaped in an ecologically valuable way and food full of vitality is produced. These are processed with craftsmanship into a variety of distinctive products.

The people at Hofgut Oberfeld ensure the original character of the products through transparent and clear processes.

All their actions grow out of the needs of the natural and social environment and strive to satisfy customers and partners.

On the Hofgut, the areas of living, working and recreation are combined to form a comprehensive living space. The aim is to enable and promote the encounter of different people and a lively community.

With farming, and the direct offerings on the farm and the seasonal gardens, people who come to the farm are offered a variety of experiences with the living environment and are given differentiated insights into the nature of food production.

Due to the consumer-oriented farm concept, Hofgut Oberfeld has become an agri-cultural centre within only ten years, which has a great appeal for the urban population. Since the citizen shareholders involved will continue to have a say in the farm's development in the coming years, it is guaranteed that the estate will remain an exciting destination for consumers without an agricultural background in the future.

### 3. FINANCING AND ACCESS TO FUNDING

Since the foundation with 30 shareholders and 280,000 euros share capital, capital increases for upcoming investments have been carried out again and again. With the money from the shareholders and loans from various banks, it was possible to rebuild the farm in all areas, including completely new cultivation and marketing concepts. To this end, investments were also made in development, a local heating network with wood chip heating and photovoltaics. HOLAG now has a balance sheet total of about 3 million euros and an equity ratio of about 60%. Public investment support programmes were used for the agricultural buildings and renewable energy production.

The former conventional arable farm with a focus on cereal production was gradually transformed into a highly diversified, organically managed mixed farm with various livestock species. For example, milk production was completely rebuilt with 40 dairy cows, partly of the Red List species Black and Brown Lowland Cattle. All calves remain on the farm and the meat is marketed exclusively through the farm shop. In addition, about 1,250 laying hens, 250 fattening geese and 100 broilers now belong to the farm.

Keeping all farm animals as species-appropriate as possible is a top priority for the farm management. The best examples of this are mother-bound calf husbandry, which was awarded the Hessian Prize for Animal Welfare in Agriculture in 2015. A generously designed cowshed especially for horn-bearing cows and natural jumping by the farm's own breeding bulls are also part of this. The laying hens live in mobile houses that allow them to roam freely in different places.

In addition to their financial support, the shareholders can also get involved in other ways. Their cooperation is expressly desired in matters of operational development, financing, controlling or public relations.

The Hofgut Oberfeld Foundation is the "umbrella" for the projects and initiatives of the cooperation partners active in the overall Oberfeld project.

Numerous people have shown solidarity with the idea of saving the last farm in the core city of Darmstadt and preserving the Oberfeld as open land and a local recreation area and enhancing it through ecological management.

The following was achieved with the financing via a public limited company:

- Contribution to the financing of the Court
- Broad citizen participation
- Customer loyalty
- Further external impact and attention

Each of the shareholders stands for 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> of land with 100 tonnes of humus in the topsoil, as well as two fruit trees and three seasonal gardens, ten chickens, one cow and two geese.

“If you want to build up a similar farm organism, we advise you to keep an eye on the farm and the social environment and their interactions at the same time. Many developments, and e.g. cultural initiatives, but also know-how came from the environment. At the same time, the people were “taken along” by the development of the farm. They have learned a lot about agriculture, have become involved in it, have taken over shares in the farm or have become customers who form the economic basis of the current farm. Ultimately, success lies in this interaction between the environment and the farm.

“An important success factor for us in general and also for the financing of the project within the framework of the public limited company and the foundation was that we developed step by step. In this way, all those involved in the project, but also all those from the environment, were able to understand the development, get to know each other and build trust, although there were also crises during this development.”

## 4. TRAINING NEEDS AND CONCLUSION

► **Training experiences and gaps:** Important competences:

- Physical and mental stamina and a reflective attitude
- Understanding of a holistic farm organism
- Living cooperation and community
- Patience, openness, cooperation, transparency and communication with regard to both the business and its key economic figures.

► **Final considerations:** Strength, know-how and long-term investments are necessary to build up a diverse biodynamic farm with processing and marketing. In order to achieve this, initially about 30 citizens founded a small joint-stock company with the farmers: a citizens' initiative thus became a citizens' enterprise.

The shareholders not only contributed equity capital, but also their knowledge from a wide range of professions. In the meantime, about 176 people participated in the joint enterprise, which, with an equity share of about 60%, has a stable basis also for future developments.

Our shares are “registered shares with restricted transferability”, so they can only be sold with the approval of the supervisory board, and the respective owner is always known. Once a year, the annual financial statements are presented at the general meeting of shareholders; it decides on the appropriation of profits, on amendments to the articles of association and elects a supervisory board every three years. The supervisory board in turn appoints the executive board for five years at a time. The executive board manages the company and coordinates long-term decisions and major investments with the supervisory board.

The basis for reaching and convincing more than 100 people with a farm concept is a high quality standard in dealing with people, nature and animals as well as great transparency towards the outside world and joy in communication and customer relations.

At Hofgut Oberfeld, the exchange with customers and colleagues is sought, new solutions are developed and experiences are passed on with pleasure.

Through biodynamic farming, Hofgut Oberfeld is developed into a holistic farm organism where one can experience home and draw vitality. Colourful and lively agricultural culture can be experienced through events related to agriculture.

The culture of this community enables identification, personal responsibility, creativity and development of the individual and the enterprise.

All important and long-term agreements between HOLAG and SHO or other landlords are laid down in proper contracts, which is time-consuming until all issues are clarified and agreements reached on disputed points. After that, however, the clarity leads to room for manoeuvre and planning security and thus a good basis for larger development steps such as construction measures and the opening of new operational areas.

The organisational form as an AG requires some administration and a lot of transparency, which is certainly only “worthwhile” as a general rule when a certain size/financial framework or complexity is reached. The AG is particularly suitable for the inclusion of many partners or for networking with partners. The legally required transparency also leads to internal trust and clarity.



# PARTNERS

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**HOF UND  
LEBEN**

Hof Und Leben (HuL), Germany  
[www.hofundleben.de](http://www.hofundleben.de)



On Projects Advising (OnP), Spain  
[www.onprojects.es](http://www.onprojects.es)



Folkuniversitetet (FU), Sweden  
[www.folkuniversitetet.se](http://www.folkuniversitetet.se)



Agricoltura E' Vita (AéV), Italy  
[www.agricolturavita.it](http://www.agricolturavita.it)



Asociace soukromého zemědělství ČR  
The Association of Private Farming of Czech Republic (APF CR), Czech Republic  
[www.asz.cz](http://www.asz.cz)



Union de agricultores y ganaderos - jóvenes agricultores de Jaén (COAG-Jaén), Spain  
[www.coagjaen.es](http://www.coagjaen.es)

## Social media

Facebook: [@farminfin](https://www.facebook.com/farminfin)  
Twitter: [@farminfin](https://twitter.com/farminfin)

## Project webpage

[www.farminfin.eu](http://www.farminfin.eu)

## PROJECT COORDINATOR

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The European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA), Belgium  
[www.ceja.eu](http://www.ceja.eu)



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