

# The story of Community Supported Agriculture



Our love to landscapes goes through our tummies

*“The food we eat significantly affects the face of agricultural landscape.”*

CooLAND



# The story of Community Supported Agriculture

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is the relation between people who relish quality food and people who can tend such food. Thanks to CSA, you know exactly who is responsible for the good taste of your meal, where your fruits and vegetables were grown, and which animals provided the meat and milk in your fridge. Healthy food originates in healthy land, cultivated responsibly, and mostly ecologically, by farmers who respect the nature and countryside. That's also why the fields and meadows which yield these riches are so full of diverse life.

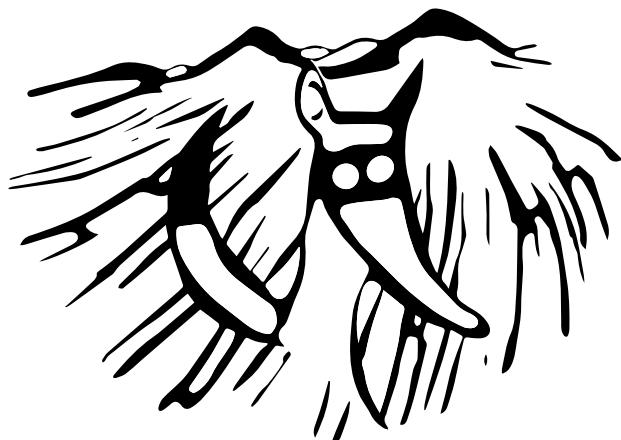
The idea of CSA is simple. All you need is a group of friends who are excited about responsible and high-quality food production, and some local farmers who can fill your empty tummies. The resulting relationship is almost like a romance – full of trust, joy and mutual communication. At community parties, everyone shares their experience, both successful and unsuccessful, with cooking the vegetables, as well as stories of visits at the local farmer, where at times the shareholders can help with field work. Does that sound like science-fiction to you?



Kevin V. Ton's documentary photo collection, with its distinctive black-and-white expression, tells the story of one of the farmer-supporting communities in the Czech Republic. The example of CooLAND CSA proves that the idea of CSA really works.

The first part of this booklet presents an exhibition of documentary photographs called "Our love to landscapes goes through our tummies".

The second part shows a collection of snapshots taken in different locations over a period of more than a year (2015 - 2016), accompanied by messages from the members of various CSAs. These include producers, subscribers, coordinators, as well as managers of the pick-up points where the products are delivered to the community – cafés and other friendly institutions.



## Our love to landscapes goes through our tummies



The basis for success of any CSA  
is to find common ground with the farmer.

Karel Tachecí from Budyně nad Ohří arranges the terms of cooperation with CooLAND CSA.



The motivation for joining a CSA is different for everyone – protection of the land, availability of fresh vegetables, the opportunity of being at the origin of something new or getting together with a good bunch of people.



The CSA sets its rules,  
like the pick-up point and day of the week when the members can come and take their shares.  
The pick-up can even become a pleasant social event.



The CSA members sign an agreement with the farmer, making a commitment to take his products throughout the entire season, and at the beginning they also pay in advance for all their shares. Common subscribers become shareholders who help the farmer sleep calmly.



CSA is not just a dispensing window.

It also contributes to education. It is a direct way of food between a farmer and a shareholder, and a demonstration of how to treat land and farmland responsibly and simply.



Fresh harvests arrive in due time to eager shareholders.  
The composition of the share is always a bit of a surprise, since the availability of fruit  
and vegetables depends on the season and the weather.



CSA members do not meet only when they pick up their shares;  
occasionally, they have their fling, too.  
Concert for the mid-season celebration, played by Bára Reiterová.



CSA members also participate in community  
and neighborhood activities  
that give rise to interesting ideas and dialogues.



Part of CSA membership can also consist of helping with field work when it's needed.  
There is nothing better than personal experience to become aware  
how our lunch comes to existence.



Ecologically cultivated fields  
and their surroundings are full of life, and a healthy environment also enhances  
the quality of the products themselves.



The range of products grown is wide

and even gourmets will get their money's worth.

Moreover, products of ecological farming are full of nutrients without unnecessary chemicals.



Another advantage of CSA is the familiarity with the environment where the food originates and the traditional practices the farmer uses to get his crops. In this way, one realizes the value of agricultural land for oneself.



*"Correct functioning of a CSA is based on correct communication."*

Šárka Krčílková  
/ CooLAND CSA coordinator



Šárka Krčílková  
/ CooLAND CSA coordinator

What is correct communication? We send emails with the latest news; we use social networks; we write blogs and reports; we organize meetings and trips to the farms; we meet at the pick-up point. Sometimes I wonder what more can one do? Recently, I was very pleased by a new and nice way of communication brought to the CSA by our farmers – in every cheese package they added a message for the shareholders saying:

Dear shareholders,  
we are pleased that you have become regular purchasers

of our sheep milk cheese packages :-) In today's package you will find curd, which has been declared this year's regional food of the Liberec Region, yoghurt, hard cheese, fresh cheese, also flavored with tomatoes and chilli, and our unforgettable bryndza. Some of you have been asking us about plastic packaging – yes, it bothers us, too. We try to minimize the packaging, but it is not yet in our financial and storage capacities, also due to the overall package-delivery organization, to use better, more environmentally friendly packaging for customers in Prague. However, we will try to improve this gradually. The good news is that you can return washed and dry boxes and cups and we will use them again, we can pick them up at your supply point.

Yours sincerely  
Jana and Martin from the Lukava farm

*"I'm delighted that I do not swim alone against the current of common consumption"*

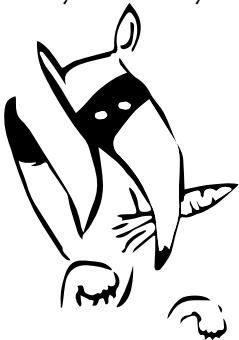
Bára Chutná  
/ florist, Domácí květinářství, Byšice



**Anna Plošková**  
/ Ostrava CSA coordinator

The idea of setting up a group that would support its own farmer has come quite spontaneously and was inspired by lucky coincidences and meetings that directed me to the CSA concept. The first time I bought vegetables from a local farmer was during my Erasmus exchange in Barcelona. An encounter with Alena Malíková in Ostrava led me to the Šelongs, farmers from whom I buy vegetables now. It is – despite the last year's extreme drought – a great joy. Joy of the fragrant vegetables, and of the fact that we know people who can do all this work for us and we can, in return, support them in sustainable care of the land. Joy of going every other week for a vegetable

box to a place as friendly as Milk Bar Naproti undoubtedly is. The farming-supporting communities, in my opinion, are the future of the approach to the land and represent the restoration of the relation with the land. That's why I recommend it to everyone – find your farmer and go for it!



## **Martin Rosenbaum**

/ farmer, Family farm Lukava, Dětřichovec,

Jindřichovice pod Smrkem

The concept of CSA has met our expectations and brought another dimension into our farming. The feedback from our subscribers is very positive, which is important to us. Most of our production goes directly to the shareholders. As a result, we could quit the voyages to the markets with uncertain earnings, while there was a lot of work at home. Apart from the operational and financial benefits for us as farmers, it is undisputable that CSA brings an impulse to the rural areas and to food production – and especially small farms – to help us survive in the agro-industry environment. Also, it is characteristic that the whole thing is not an invention managed from above, but it emerged from below without unnecessary complexity.

## **Karel Tachecí**

/ ecological farmer,

Budyně nad Ohří

I came by the CSA concept “by accident”. Honza Valeška from PRO-BIO LIGA invited me to Toulčův dvůr, where we met French ladies who were involved in a CSA in France and brought a short film about their CSA along with other information. They seemed to me a little bit like prophets of a new faith ...

I liked the idea of CSA because I often lacked the certainty of selling the vegetables I had grown. Often they would overripe and rot, just because we had nowhere to deliver them. I decided to try it, but I did not really believe that people would pay for their shares in advance. Great help came from Honza Valeška, who collected the money with care. Not for the whole season at once, but gradually, and he also explained a lot to



prospective buyers, which is, by the way, very important for a CSA.

Finally, the CSA got under way, some people stayed for a few months, some take our vegetables till now. Those who stay for several seasons are a proof to me that our efforts are on the right track. It is not in our interest to ruin our shareholders financially and annoy them in the very first season. We prefer long-term cooperation, so that we do not start every year from scratch with unknown people. I also feel responsible for making our “veggie box” as varied, tasty and affordable as possible.

## An example of email correspondence with CooLAND CSA:

Hello,

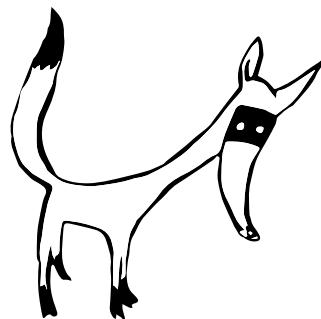
I will really try, if possible, to make balanced shares to avoid angry looks. Last week, Suchdol received two cauliflowers per share, which I perceive as a stunner in organic farming. Because cauliflower is very difficult to grow without chemicals. The gardener must do his best, but also good weather is a necessity. Broccoli is even more finicky. Its core is not clad with leaves and any beetle can take a bite. When it is big, it quickly dampens and rots from the inside. Then it stinks. I don't know how it will go with the broccoli, when such hot weather is coming. In some seasons broccoli or cauliflower just do not grow at all.

The fruit for the veggie box is harvested only on Tuesday morning to be fresh. It's necessary so that it does not go bad. I have bad experience with storing fruit, even for one day. Planning fruit for the veggie box is then a bit of an adrenaline business. "What if we

do not manage to harvest enough fruit in time? What if it rains? And so on."

Strawberries have already finished bearing fruit. There will be no more. They have a lot of weeds in them, they need weeding and aerating to be strong for the next season. This weekend is supposed to be tropical, though, so it is no use calling a work team. In case someone volunteered to check the strawberry patch:)

Karel



### Bárbara Chutná

/ florist, Domácí květinářství, Byšice

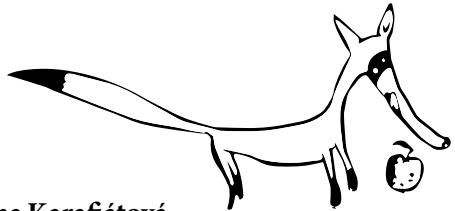
The connection of our flower shop and CooLAND CSA came by coincidence and I appreciate it very much. For me, the CSA is an amazing, energetic group of people who do not just talk about the problems of our agricultural landscape but who really do something for the land and also educate the people around them. I enjoy their interest and enthusiasm for my flowers. It gives me the energy, strength and joy for my work. The feeling that the toil of cultivating flowers in the field and garden is understood and appreciated by somebody.





*"When I pick up my vegetables in the cafe, I always meet some nice people and we have a coffee together – you just do not get this in a supermarket."*

Petr Bašta  
/ CoOLAND CSA shareholder



Alena Karafiátová  
/ organic vegetable grower, Dvůr Vyšínek

Although collaboration with a CSA has various drawbacks, I still consider it the best way of selling, I prefer it to anonymous vegetable box schemes or local markets. I regard the CSA as a meaningful activity, since it allows a direct relationship between the consumers and the farmer, which is, among others, what food sovereignty should be about.

#### Fragments of Alena Karafiátová's email correspondence with Ecumenic Academy CSA:

On July 12, 2016 Alena Karafiátová wrote:

*Subject: Summer job*

*Good evening Markéta,*

*How many of you are coming and what work should I prepare for you? Is there a strong man with you fit for harder work? Today we planted potatoes. Our two girls insisted on digging the furrow with a tiller. The machine, however, got stuck in the ground in the middle of the line, and the girl went over the handlebars and ended up in the ditch. For some jobs, I simply do not have workers in*

*"For me, being a member of the CSA means to feel a sense of belonging to a whole."*

Tereza Gertnerová  
/ Ostrava CSA shareholder



*the corresponding weight category.*

*Have a good time, I'm sending my greetings to everyone and looking forward to seeing you.*

Alena K.

On July 20, 2016 Alena Karafiátová wrote:

*Subject: After the summer job – vivat the white collars from the city!*

*Your help in the garden was nice and welcome – at least you showed my temp workers that even white collars from the city can do a lot of work well and carefully in a short time.*

*Thanks.  
Alena K.*

On August 8, 2016 Alena Karafiátová wrote:

*Subject: Summer be praised, but...*

*Good evening Markéta.*

*Summer be praised. Whatever it is like. It's the time of ripening and harvesting and it's cucumber time. The harvest will come, be it dry as last year or rainy as this year. Most vegetables mature at this time, although most members of the CSA leave on vacation and there is a shortage of stand-ins to take over the shares. Farmers are looking at the abundance that covers their fields, and they are anxious to get all the crops in right in time. The rest of the world does not care a bit and lolls around on the beach.*

*Martinka shovelled about 3 tons of tansy into the bags to be taken tomorrow to Pro-bio. Her hand hurts a little, so she bandaged it. I think of those hordes of bodybuilders in Prague fitness centers, who drag pointlessly the weights from one side to the other to decorate their bodies with shiny muscles. In a week, there will be about 50 tons of barley, possibly quite wet, which will need shovelling so that the barn does not catch fire. If only they came to help us. Instead of an ionic drink I'd offer them a good slice of head cheese with vinegar.*

*As far as barley is concerned, however, it does not go that well so far, because all who have a harvester have not yet cut their fields, and therefore they cannot come to cut ours. The days when it is possible to harvest are so damn few this year because it's raining so often and it's cold. So we have to wait and hope that everything will not be marred as the lower part of the field, where the grain already*

*lies in mud and is lost. When the grain is harvested wet and put into a pile in the barn, it becomes damp and starts to heat up at the bottom. The higher the pressure and the moister the grain, the higher is the temperature. If the pile is high, it may cause self-ignition. Then both the grain and barn burns down. Therefore, the grain must be spread to a layer as low as possible and it has to be shovelled and aired all the time. The first 2–3 days are critical.*



*So wish us luck.  
Alena K.*



### **Šelengovi / ecological farmers, Pustějov**

Above all, CSA means assurance to us. The assurance that our work is not in vain, that it is meaningful. Everything that we can grow is harvested for people who are not indifferent to what they eat. If the season is successful, we are pleased that the people who take the vegetables from us are happy. If it is not that successful (because of drought for instance), we are glad they are "with us" and share the risk of crop failure. We

appreciate their trust. CSA is a for us – a small family farm – a unique and, actually, the most reasonable way to make a living. We do what we enjoy, and along that we meet people of the same mind.

**Lenka Reichová**  
**/ manager of Milk Bar Naproti, Ostrava**

It is definitely beneficial for us that our Milk Bar is a supply point for farmers – many of their shareholders are our regular guests and those who come for the first time often become our guests. There were also popular lectures on community-supported agriculture that took place in our bar.

We in the Milk Bar support local suppliers ourselves, in the preparation of meals and drinks we use not only dairy products from local farmers but also their vegetables, which are of high quality.

**Gábina Hrdinová**  
**/ CooLAND CSA shareholder**

I'm glad the Hrdina family is a part of the CSA, although it's sometimes a bit of yawn when you eat zucchini all week. Then there is mostly pumpkin, or you find a green piece of something that you don't even know how it is called, let alone how to use it for a meal for the children!

This was a big challenge to learn to use only seasonal fruits and vegetables and prepare different kinds of dishes from them. In addition, to pass this skill on to kids, in a world where you can have anything at any moment, if you just have the money. Being part of the CSA is also a challenge in how you are able, in today's busy times, to meet deadlines and not to forget. You are one bunch and one is dependent on the other.



**Tom Trinh**  
**/ owner of Havran Café, Praha**

I would recommend cafés to not be afraid of letting CSA in. Even though I sometimes have mud on the floor, that bustle is worth it. I enjoy the energy of the people around the CSA, the pick-up day always brightens the premises of the café and the boxes full of vegetables and fruits attract new visitors. In addition, shareholders often leave various pieces of vegetables in the café, during the summer even their whole shares, which I can use for cooking soups.





*"It's sometimes a bit of yawn  
when you eat zucchini all week"*

Gábina Hrdinová  
/ CooLAND CSA shareholder



### Jan Šlemr

/ CooLAND CSA shareholder

During the first year of pick-ups, the expression "I'm going for vegetables" has settled in my mind. What might seem commonplace to an ordinary consumer of vegetables (and fruits), might not be so common for a member of a CSA. As for me, during the first months of pick-ups I developed a sort of hard-to-define emotional state of affection for the vegetables I take. It's something a supermarket client simply cannot get to know, it can only be experienced by a subscriber. It starts with the shivers as you approach the café where the pick-up point is, and you don't know what's there waiting for you. Then you say hello to the per-

son on duty and it's on. You scoop, weigh, praise, assess, compare and, in the meantime, you have a coffee and an hour passes before you leave for your tram with a full shopping bag. No wonder that after a few similar pick-ups, and I do not even mention the joy of cleaning, preparing and eating, I got into such a special state of mind that I started calling the vegetable my brother. Brothers leeks and sisters cucumbers begun to appear in the crates where I store vegetables at home. Not that it isn't tiring sometimes to travel over the city for your share of vegetables. Not that it wouldn't be more comfortable sometimes to buy vegetables in the supermarket. But with vegetables and fruit from the supermarket, this kind of affectionate relationship is somehow not present. An anonymous tomato that travelled over half a continent, locked up in a steel container in nitrogen, simply cannot become your brother ...

*“With vegetables and fruit from the supermarket, the affectionate relationship is not present.”*

Jan Šlemr  
/ CooLAND CSA shareholder



**Petr Bašta**  
/ CooLAND CSA shareholder

I still remember how I learned for the first time what CSA is. That is, CSA in the sense of community-supported agriculture, because the Confederate States of America are probably known to everybody since school. We drove in a car and my friend Vraťka, now one of CooLAND CSA coordinators, just returned from a business trip to Germany and, full of enthusiasm, she began to tell us about some Agronauts. It sounded cool and our CooLAND CSA was born.

And why did that actually interest me? Of course, it would not be enough that Vraťka presented it so “cool”. The whole idea appealed to me mainly because of its philosophy. It's

not just about consuming something “bio”, which may seem trendy nowadays, especially in big cities. I must admit that I am rather reserved about shopping for bio-foods in supermarkets – I do not buy them at all. But since I studied landscape engineering and I like traveling and taking pictures, I am really close to the Czech landscape. And the philosophy of CSA says that you support a responsible farmer and thus the local economy, and at the same time, you do something for the landscape, because the small diverse fields of a local farmer have a much better impact on the landscape than hundred-hectare rape fields. And as a reward, you get tasty, high-quality vegetables and fruits. Another great asset is that you actually save money.

I started to cook from fresh vegetables, which I did not really do until then – actually I was never a big fan of cooking. But the constant supply of fresh vegetables forced me to do so, which brought another bonus: I learned to cook.

**Šárka Krčílková  
/ CooLAND CSA shareholder**

I never cared about the weather and never followed the forecasts. Whether it's raining, snowing, there is ground frost or it's hot ... I didn't give a damn, unless we were just getting ready for a hike, a bike trip or for skiing. But it has changed since a certain moment.

The crucial moment came when we founded our agriculture-supporting community, and I learned, thanks

to our Karel, what it is like to be a farmer. His way of work does not need excessive chemicals or large agricultural machinery, but it needs good knowledge, experience, relationship to the land, it needs people, and also a bit of luck with the weather.

Now, when torrential rains or hail sweep over our country, I think of Karel. When I see arid lawns in the park, and I am dropping from heat myself, I remember Karel. And also the crop, which Karel, regardless of the weather, tends every day.



**Tomáš Hajzler  
/ Modřany CSA shareholder**

My attitude might be extreme in 2016. But based on what I have learned about today's agro-food system, I honestly cannot understand how anyone can still go to the supermarkets. And how can we tolerate the whole system. If I do not want to develop cancer and, apart from that, to devastate nature, I need to know how and where my food originates.

**Tereza Gertnerová**  
**/ Ostrava CSA shareholder**

For me, being a member of a agriculture-supporting community means to feel a sense of belonging to a whole. In this case, to a whole made up of people who are nice, similarly inclined, smiling, not indifferent.

I am glad to support the honest work of someone who contributes to traditional Czech agriculture and farming. Since some time ago, I wanted to buy vegetables somewhere where I know the origin, the grower, the conditions and the local environment.

I'm always looking forward to the new batch, looking forward to new pieces I do not know, looking forward to the new recipes I have to find. I am looking forward to the smell of freshness. My attitude to food has changed to a seasonal affair. You simply cook just what is now naturally growing out there.

**Aleš Kocourek**  
**/ formerly Modřany CSA shareholder,**  
**now CooLAND CSA shareholder**

For me, being a member of CSA means to have the good feeling that you are doing something right. I think this is just how it should work. It just seems unnecessary to wait for apples to arrive from the other end of the world when they grow "in our backyard". From the beginning, I am surprised by the variety, every week something new. So it's not only that the vegetables make me happy, but also, as a native Praguer, I learn how some vegetables look. Parsnip, for example. I must have been absent the day we were taught about it, so after a thorough research one learns that this vegetable was largely cultivated in our country and could be found in every cottage. Above all, CSA saves my time. I do not aim to



save and remake the world, so without torture I admit it's my laziness. There is nothing better than just coming and taking a bunch of vegetables, without pondering what to buy and spending long time in a big store. And on the other hand, it also makes me eat more healthily, because once you have vegetables at home, you have to eat it. My attitude to food has changed in the sense that you have to get used to cooking and eating what you have at home, or rather what grows in the given season. You do not plan your shopping according to your momentary appetite.





*"Even though I sometimes have mud on the floor, that bustle is worth it."*

Tom Trinh  
/ owner of Havran Café,  
Praha



**Katerina Zimová  
/ CooLAND CSA shareholder**

As an environmentalist I am concerned about the protection of nature and landscape. Most of the Czech landscape has an agricultural character, so when we want to protect it, it's not just about protection in the reservations, but above all in the fields and meadows. At the forefront is then the environment in which our food grows. This creates a natural connection between food and nature conservation. Now it is the farmers and the people who buy their food from them, who take over the reins to our country.

The system of farming-supporting communities in-

volves environment-friendly farmers, whose fields and meadows often give home to protected species of plants and animals. It's great when the field becomes a table set for animals and people alike.

**Honza Valeška  
/ member of Kuchyňka community garden**

Why am I enjoying being part of the CSA? It's mainly because we change from consumers to creators, we take responsibility not only for the food we eat, but also for the conditions where the food comes from. We can actively advocate for such conditions in agriculture or food production which do not harm people or nature. And even more fun is that we do

*“Planning the content  
of the veggie box is a bit of an  
adrenaline business.”*

Karel Tachecí  
/ ecological farmer,  
Budyně nad Ohří



not remain as atomized units sitting in front of a TV screen, but we join into communities, bunches of people who can together take over this responsibility more easily. Moreover, it is a multifaceted relationship, the aim of which is to benefit not only its participants but also the surrounding society and the environment.

**Vratislava Janovská**  
**/ CooLAND CSA shareholder**

Responsible farmers, who tend their land in a way that leaves enough space in the countryside for wild plants and animals who are also here at home, certainly deserve our support. Even in the comfort of your home you can root for

responsible farmers who have established a partnership with the farmland, or support animal and plant homes such as lawns, ponds, solitary trees or tree alleys, which also help maintain the good condition of the landscape. It does not matter whether you live in a city or in the countryside, or what age you are. With your everyday behavior, you can significantly influence not only the return of rye to the fields, to catch in again, but also of other original crops without excessive chemicals. The food you eat significantly affects the face of the landscape. Our love to landscapes goes through our tummies.

# Do you also want to take part in the Community Supported Agriculture?



**For more information in Czech on CSAs and the protection  
of agricultural land in the Czech Republic, please visit:**

**Community Supported Agriculture in the Czech Republic**  
• [www.kpzinfo.cz](http://www.kpzinfo.cz)

**AMPI – The association of local food initiatives**  
• [www.asociaceampi.cz](http://www.asociaceampi.cz)

**CooLAND – The organization for healthy agricultural  
landscape protection**  
• [www.cooland.cz](http://www.cooland.cz)

**Nadace Pro půdu – The foundation for healthy, living  
and rich land**  
• [www.nadacepropudu.cz](http://www.nadacepropudu.cz)

**For more information in English on CSA and the protection  
of agricultural land in Europe, please visit:**

**URGENCI – The international network for Community  
Supported Agriculture**  
• [www.urgenci.net](http://www.urgenci.net)

**ACCESS TO LAND – The international network for sharing  
experiences and promotion the significance of access to land for  
agroecological farmers in Europe**  
• [www.accesstoland.eu](http://www.accesstoland.eu)



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Kevin V. Ton is one of “street” photographers. The long-standing theme of his pictures is the ordinary life on the street – its “laughing and sunlit” side, but especially its dark side. People on the edge of society often appear in his photos. Kevin perceives his street photography primarily as a social documentary. Almost every day, you can meet him with a camera on his neck, walking the streets, capturing stories that city life in its infinite forms offers. He became a member of CooLAND CSA because of his interest in food with a story.





*“It’s great when the field becomes a table set for animals and people alike.”*

Kateřina Zímová / CooLAND CSA shareholder

