

The machine ring stands for solidarity and friendship. Especially when we successfully established the idea of a peasant self-help organisation in Sweden with help from machine rings in Germany and Austria, those values were noticeable. Dalarna was the first Swedish ring to see the light of the world, soon to be followed by further rings in all parts of the country.

At that time, Sweden has not yet been a member of the EU, and the agricultural sector was under extreme economic pressure. I used to work in the agricultural department of a cooperative bank back then and was facing the challenge of establishing the machine ring in my home country. We wanted to provide a system of reciprocal support for the local farmers, which had already proven itself in Germany and Austria.

Travelling educates

In order to increase the attractiveness of the machine-ring idea, we organized study trips to Germany and Austria. Swedish farmers and their consultants were able to get to know the machine rings in practice and discuss them together. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, more than 600 farmers and agricultural experts joined those travels. After that, hundreds of information events about the machine ring took place back home in Sweden and the fellow travelers became ambassadors of the machine-ring idea, true to the motto „If someone travels, he's got stories to tell“. The willingness to establish machine rings increased due to the appearance of its economic and social advantages. Numerous organizations in the agricultural sector joined the movement and supported working groups all over the country, which were preparing the establishment of machine rings. Eventually, MR Dalarna served as a model for further ring foundations. In 1993, 32 machine rings have already been established, which then teamed up to the national organisation „Maskinringar Sverige“.

1994 was a historic milestone; when Sweden hosted the convention of the international Machine Ring Organization for the first time. The tenth World Congress took place at the agricultural university in Uppsala and gathered around 500 delegates from more than 20 countries. The congress ended with a banquet in the Golden Hall of the Stockholm City Hall, where the annual Nobel Prize Ceremony usually takes place as well. This international meeting caused a sensation in the mass media and as a result helped the machine-ring idea in Sweden to a break-through beyond just the agricultural sector. Among the guests and speakers of the congress were the EU Commissioner for Agriculture at the time, René Steichen, as well as the founder of the machine ring, Dr. Erich Geiersberger.

Self-employed cultivators in the ascendant

Today, there are approximately 67,000 farms in Sweden. The average farmland per farm is about 40 hectares. For the majority of them farming is only a sideline, earning livelihood mainly through non-agricultural activity in rural areas. For the numerous small farms, cooperation as well as independent entrepreneurship are of great economic importance. The main turnover in Sweden is achieved by the production of wood, followed by dairy farming.

Currently, an enormous restructuring is taking place in Sweden's agricultural sector.

The number of dairy and pig farms is falling dramatically, while the number of self-employed farmers is increasing. They are using their know-how and their workforce in various fields of activity.

The machine rings thereby play an extremely important role as facilitators. They open up new business fields - both in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors - and ensure that farmers are able to earn enough money from their self-employment.

Success factor Leadership quality

In the first few years of Maskinringar Sverige there were many small rings which, over time, merged into larger units. Out of 32 small rings, 17 larger ones were created with a respectively higher number of members. Experience shows that a high number of members and a relatively large turnover are needed, in order for the machine ring to work well and profitably. The decisive factor for a prospering ring is a competent leadership, which for their part has to find competent people for key positions - for example as head of the various business areas. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Swedish rings received government funding as start-up funding to establish their business. A look at the rear-view mirror shows that not those rings receiving the most funding, but rather those that appointed the most competent leaders became the best.

When the Swedish machine rings started to work, the classic model of solidary peasant cooperation dominated. By now, the "machine ring entrepreneurs" dominate the sales-rakings. The rings generate most of their earnings outside the agricultural sector, which is a benefit for all ring members. Compared to Austria and Germany, the third branch of the machine ring - the provision of personnel - is still in the early stages of development. Nevertheless, it has already acquired highly interesting business. For example, a ring was commissioned to take over the safety inspections of a small airport - because you can rely on the farmers.

Sweden is currently undergoing a process of environmental and quality certification in accordance with the Swedish ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 standards. The goal is to strengthen the organization through value orientation and certification for larger and more profitable missions in a competitive market.

Machine ring ambassador on the road

The attractiveness of the machine-ring idea is unbroken, despite - or maybe even because of agricultural restructuring. The cooperation and support requests that have recently been sent to the European machine ring from Africa, South America, China, India, and so on also prove this statement.

On behalf of this umbrella organization of 13 national machine ring organizations, I am on the road as a source of inspiration in different parts of the world, eg in China (see photo). Wherever I go, the basic idea of the machine ring as a brilliant way for the economic and social development of rural areas convinces people.

Because: If people in the countryside can no longer provide for themselves, they migrate to the cities or to other countries. The machine ring encounters this movement with a clear foundation of values and a high ability to act.

Pictures:

The Presidium of the European Machine Ring Organization at a conference in Stockholm: Hanspeter Werderitsch, Leonhard Ost, Göran Abrahamsson (from l.

Maschinenring-employees during the planting of new beds on behalf of a Swedish municipality. Green spaces also provide people with valuable recreation areas in urban areas.

Göran Abrahamsson in an interview with Chinese Television (2014)

Optimized machine application in agriculture

Machine ring in municipal application: Mowing of road bumps

The author

Göran Abrahamsson (* 1952)

Agricultural Economist (Master of Science, University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala)
Initiator and founder of the first machine ring in Sweden and the Swedish umbrella organization

Vice-President of the Association of National European Machine Chains (EMR) with about 320,000 members in 13 states

Ambassador of the EMR to countries interested in the machine ring
goran.abraham@telia.com www.emr.maschinenringe.com

Facts about agriculture in Sweden

Number of holdings: ~ 67,000

dairy farms: ~ 4,000

pig farms: ~ 1,000

farmland areas: ~ 2.6 million ha

Pasture: ~ 0.4 million ha

Average operational size: ~ 45ha

Facts about MR Sweden

1990: MR Dalarna as the first machine ring of Sweden

1993: Foundation of the Maskinringar Sverige as umbrella organization of the Swedish rings

1994: Tenth international machine ring conference in the Swedish Capital Stockholm

2010: Annual meeting of the Euro-Machine ring in Sweden

Number of machine rings: 17

members: over 5,000

Number of machines: approx. 35,000

Sales: 600 million SEK (approx. € 70 million)