

From Field to Fork to Field (F4)

Potential for innovation – A review in 4 questions

There is much interest throughout Europe in local food and short food supply chains (**SFSC**). Consumers like the idea of 'local' food, although they do not always know what it means. A short review delivers a huge amount of projects focussed on short food supply chains.

Before starting to prepare a transnational project under the INTERREG 5B Programme, we wanted to be sure the issue is actually as innovative as we thought at first sight. We therefore searched through a series of publications (see the references at the end of the paper), which delivered the answers to 4 main questions.

1st question: What is meant by F4 en what not?

In most of the cases a short food supply chain is defined by three criteria:

1. Proximity between producer and consumer
2. As few as possible intermediaries involved in the supply chain
3. Understanding and communication between the producer and consumer.

It is linked to farm shops, farmers' markets, farm based hospitality, roadside sales, pick-your-own schemes, etc.

This is not meant by F4

This is not the topic of the F4-project. When speaking about short food supply chains, we have in mind the characteristics as listed here below:

1. Production, processing, trade and consumption of food occur in a defined reduced geographical area (depending on the sources and reflections, of about 20 to 100 km radius). (JRC)
2. Responds to regional characteristics, differences and needs – encourages regional approaches and place-based solutions
3. Includes waste recycling
4. The number of intermediaries is minimised,
5. Complex collaborative networks (in urban or peri-urban areas), including cooperatives
6. Social enterprise, but not per se a non-profit approach.
7. May involve intra-regional and inter-regional transactions

This is meant by F4

2nd question: is there any EU-policy context on the topic?

Yes, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) says that:

→ Support for horizontal and vertical co-operation among actors in the supply chain (...) should catalyse the economically rational development of short supply chains, local markets and local food chains.

Therefore one of the the Union priorities for rural development is to

→ Promote food chain organisation and risk management in agriculture, with (amongst others) a focus on better integrating primary producers into the food chain through quality schemes, promotion in local markets and short supply circuits, producer groups and inter-branch organisations.

3rd question: what are the impacts of SFSC according to recent research?

Socially

- Interaction and connection between farmers and consumers,
- Thus promoting the development of trust and social capital
- Change of behaviour → healthier

Economically

- Higher multiplier effect on local economies than long chains

- Maintaining local employment, particularly in rural areas
- Synergies with the tourism sectors

Environmentally

- 'Local' is not a sufficient feature to ensure environmental benefits.
- Better logistical arrangements needed
- In general production and processing methods are important for ensuring less environmental impact

4th question: What challenges are identified?

This is the most important question, as the answers deliver the guide lines for F4. → What should we focus on?

1. Reach a critical mass to access the market.
2. Stimulate regional networks and partnerships (connecting all members within the food chain).
3. Broaden the range of products.
4. Value and measure social impacts economically (e.g. health and well-being dividends which are generated through access to quality foods, green spaces, and better sense of community. Quantify the impact of a reduced burden on national health and social care).
5. Evaluate social and economic impacts → sustaining rural economies, managing environmental resources, improving access to quality food, developing skills and knowledge.
6. Identify the full value of the 'cycle economy' in relation to SFSCs and its potential to reuse waste.
7. Investigate whether prices actually are higher for food purchased from SFSC. If they are, understand the reasons for this, clarify the implications of pricing for SFSCs and / or find approaches towards competitive pricing.
8. Connect land-use decisions with analysis of food and water needs.
9. Find approaches to avoid high energy and CO₂ emission of short food transport (as compared to a larger systems).
10. Realise a diversity in types of farms, soils, climates (inside outside greenhouse), and crops → support flexibility and resiliency.
11. Find out how to meet food safety procedures and regulations. Are changes needed?
12. Find the relations between regional food supply chain and a regional food value chain.
13. Requirement for higher labour input with new skills (production, processing, marketing, promoting) is a difficulty at farm level, particularly for small scale producers. Yet, it is the most effective means to ensure the viability of agri-businesses. What are the skills to add value and market to the products and how to acquire them?

References

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