



SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS

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Introduction

Short food supply chains (hereinafter SFSC) are a multifaceted phenomenon that is associated with local food production, food consumption and the benefits of its supply to both the local community and society as a whole. Recent years in the context of COVID have shown that access to local food allows consumers to discover and get to know local food producers / farmers, while producers / local farmers have more opportunities to promote and sell their products. Recent insights show that SFSC is an important element of sustainable development, especially in relation to the social dimension. Analysis of good practice examples (GPE) enable to identify key social aspects which enhance and support the activity of SFSC.

The aim of the research is to characterize the features and elements of the social dimension of SFSC. *The research object* - social dimension of short food supply chains.

Methodology

Methods used for the research: analysis and synthesis of scientific literature and practical reports, analysis of good practice examples. Analysis of good practice examples is applied in a variety of contexts (FAO, 2016) and is defined differently, but has common characteristics: 1) good practice can include both evidence-based and value-based practices; 2) good practice is an empirically based practice tested in a variety of geographical conditions and populations (it is a practice based on the cultural and other values of a particular family farm, community, locality, organization that has enduring value that can be described and measured); 3) good practice can be applied broadly or to a specific field, discipline and country; 4) good practice must show that it has not only been experienced, adapted or survived somewhere, but must also be transferred - it can be repeated for similar purposes in different situations/cases.

GPE were selected by convenient sample – 9 selected cases from different European countries, which are combined with several common features: they reflect the experience of different countries in organizing SFSC; one economic activity (specialized farm) or several activities (diversified farm) are combined; cultivating and producing one or more products combined into a wide range; the cases include both natural and legal persons; the duration of participation in the SFSC (according to the duration of farming) differs; The experience of organizing SFSC can be applied to the other SFSC. All GPE cases were coded like A1, A2, A3 etc.

The criteria for describing social dimension were identified following scientific literature and practical reports, but they also acknowledged in many European countries as criteria of social sustainability (Malak-Rawlikowska et al., 2019; SKIN, 2020).

Results

Social dimension of sustainability is one of the dimensions of sustainable development. SFSC GPE of various foreign countries helps to reveal how foreign farmers adhere to their activities, seek to establish the principles of sustainable development related to the social dimension (Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1. Manifestation of social dimension criteria in the GPE of SFSC*

CRITERIA	Subcriteria	Cases of good practice examples									In total	
		A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9		
SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	Reconnection and relationships										+	1
	Connection between producers and consumers		+	+	+	+	+	+	+			7
	Trust, sense of community	+	+	+				+	+			6
	Community pride & animation		+						+			3
	Community education				+				+			3
	Recognition of producers		+						+			2
	Consumer empowerment	+					+		+		+	4

*Note: made by author following SKIN (2020).

- The identified criteria of the social dimension are essential for the establishment and successful functioning of the SFSC. It is up to farmers / producers to determine how they will reach consumers, and consumers, in their interactions with farmers, reveal their consumption priorities, their confidence in local farmers / producers and their products.
- An analysis of 9 cases revealed that not all social dimension criteria are equally important. The analysis of the social dimension criteria of GPE revealed that in most cases (even 7) the focus is on the connection between producers and consumers.
- The least attention in the analyzed cases was given to reconnection and relationships. This suggests that farmers / producers tend to network and develop with current or future consumers rather than past ones. Reconnecting is more up to the consumers themselves, as it shows their priorities of the products they consume (e.g. they will choose local or imported products) and farmers / producers can take their needs into account.
- Social aspects of SFSC can be various in different farms, depending on how long the farm has been in existence, what traditions are being nurtured, or whether the availability / accessibility of local food is easy.

Table 2. Characteristics of social aspects in the GPE of SFSC

GPE	Country	Products	Characteristics – social aspects
A1	The Netherlands	Organic vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to cooperation with local farmers, cooperation with several (about 10) permanent volunteers, trainees During vegetable harvest periods, customers help farmers.
A2	Switzerland	Milk processing, other imported cheese from the small dairy mountains of the canton of Zurich is for sale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed social relations allowed for a continuous expansion of production. Customer loyalty / trust is high, but attracting new customers is quite difficult as supermarkets also promote regional products, it is necessary to compete with supermarkets.
A3	Ukraine	The production of dairy products is its main activity; grows fruit and vegetables, raises free-range pigs, geese, ducks, cows and free-range hens for egg and meat production, maintains hives for honey and has its own dairy line.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The farm is open, accepts groups or individual customers to visit, offers visitors a taste of farm products on site. There is a group of solidary buyers.
A4	Great Britain	Beef processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cooperative creates opportunities for local farmers to forge closer links with retailers and other sellers. Farmers benefit from cooperation and the opportunity to come together. It is understood that in order to survive, one must unite.
A5	France	Fresh meat, vegetables, fruits, bakery products, dairy products, cheeses, eggs, honey, cider.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one of the farmers is always in the store to improve the exchange of product knowledge with consumers. Photos of farms are displayed in stores. Product quality control is carried out through consumer audits.
A6	Poland	Carp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carp growers are aware of the need to ensure constant communication, strengthen existing and create new links between producer and consumer, and inform consumers about the sources of the product.
A7	Italy	Fruits, vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social networking with customers and with small local producers, helping them sell their products. Farmer's openness, willingness to meet consumer needs and honesty in business-customer relationships. The mission is to help raise consumer awareness, strengthen the need to change shopping and food consumption habits.
A8	Czech Republic	Traditional cereals, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, other vegetables, herbs, vegetable sprouts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indirect relationships are created, a circle of loyal consumers is created. Products are shipped to the same points of sale every week.
A9	Belgium	Vegetables and berries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In developing SFSC activities, people who find employment on the farm, shop and provide services - gain knowledge, trust, feel part of the community.

Main conclusions

The dominant criterion in assessing GPE is the relationship between producers and consumers; it is about building mutual trust and promoting loyalty; recognition and awareness are important for farmers, and consumers have the opportunity to enjoy local food, have regular sources of food and a way to participate in farm activities (e.g. on-farm / cooperative traineeships, on-farm empowerment, volunteering, etc.); this reflects the various forms of social interaction involved in maintaining and strengthening the relationship between producers and consumers.

References

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