

Policy Lab 3 - Orientation Paper: Alternative Food Systems in Europe

Orientation paper by the IPES-Food Secretariat to support the Policy Lab on 'Alternative Food Systems in Europe' on March 29, 2017, co-hosted by IPES-Food and Anneli Jäätteenmäki MEP at the European Parliament.

Building a 'Common Food Policy' that supports sustainable food system alternatives

The round-table meeting on March 29 represents the third in a series of five 'policy labs' that IPES-Food will convene over the 2016-2019 period. These policy labs are the central tenet in a 3-year process of research and reflection to identify the tools needed to develop a 'Common Food Policy'¹ vision for the EU, co-constructing a reform vision for sustainable food systems in Europe by building coalitions of interest and shared visions. Rather than offering a comprehensive plan, IPES-Food offers a platform, and a reflection process, for such a plan to emerge from the inputs of Policy Lab participants.

The findings of Policy Lab 3 on Alternative Food Systems will be published in a briefing note following the round-table discussion. It will draw on meeting discussions and provide further insights from alternative food systems literature not covered here. The briefing note will map out what tools and measures are needed to support alternative food systems in Europe, as the second instalment of IPES-Food's Common Food Policy vision.²

The need for alternative food systems in the EU

The European Union has inherited a food system designed in the 1950-60s to increase production through the industrialization of the agricultural sector. While this food system has provided large volumes of food commodities and reduced food insecurity in Europe, the logic of industrialization and liberalization underpinning it has led to significant environmental, economic, and social costs: small-scale farms are disappearing³, soil degradation, water pollution, and biodiversity losses persist, obesity

¹ The full concept note 'Towards a Common Food Policy for the EU' can be found at http://www.ipes-food.org/images/Reports/CFP_ConceptNote.pdf

² IPES-Food's first policy brief drawing on Policy Labs 1 and 2 will discuss a Common Food Policy that promotes healthier diets. It is scheduled for publication in April 2017.

³ In the EU, 1 out of 3 farms disappeared between 2003 and 2013. Eurostat (2015), Newsrelease 206/2015 – Farm Structure Survey. See also Friends of the Earth Europe (2015). *From Farm to Folk: public support for local and sustainably produced food*; Vía Campesina (2013). *Small farms and short supply chains in the European Union*.

and diet-related diseases are increasing in both children and adults, while power and decision-making fall into the hands of a diminishing number of food systems actors – namely large agribusinesses and retailers.⁴

In response, alternative food system initiatives have been emerging across Europe, with the promise to produce, process, sell, and encourage the consumption of more sustainable food than their traditional counterparts. These initiatives stress the need to transition from an opaque food system focused on increasing production and yields towards more sustainable and democratic alternatives that promote healthy diets and wellbeing. Through different organizational structures and agricultural priorities, they often circumvent traditional power relations, or erode them all together, allowing for greater participation in food system decision-making.

The potential for these alternatives to offer a transition towards sustainable food systems is evident, making it crucial to better understand which obstacles currently hold back their development, and which policy structures and governance supports could help them flourish. In sum, the purpose of this orientation paper is to guide the discussion of Policy Lab 3 around the following two questions:

- What type of initiatives and policies are being developed at local, national, and EU levels to support alternative food systems in Europe? Are these relevant to a majority of farmers (e.g. small-scale, living in remote areas) and consumers (e.g. low income, urban), and if not how may this be addressed?
- What further policies and incentives (at and between local/regional, national, and EU-levels) are needed to better support sustainable food system alternatives? How may policies be better integrated between multiple levels?

Understanding alternative food systems initiatives in the EU

While the aims of alternative food systems are many, they are generally characterized by a degree of opposition to conventional food system practices⁵. These systems seek to engage with public concerns over social justice, health, and environmental

⁴ See Marsden, T. (2013), From post-productionism to reflexive governance: Contested transitions in securing more sustainable food futures. *Journal of Rural Studies* 29: 123-134; Lang, T. and Heasman, M. (2015). *Food wars: The global battle for mouths, minds and markets*. Routledge; Goodman, D. (2004). Rural Europe redux? Reflections on alternative agro-food networks and paradigm change. *Sociologia ruralis*, 44(1): 3-16.

⁵ This relationship can be more complex than simple opposition. See Sonnino, R. & Marsden, T. K. (2006). Beyond the divide: rethinking relationships between alternative and conventional food networks in Europe. *Journal of Economic Geography* 6 (2): 181-199.

sustainability.⁶ To do so, alternative food systems frequently draw on the concept of re-territorialization, or rescaling, of food systems. In this context, “territories” are not merely understood as static, political units but as community-centered governance spaces that enable greater citizen engagement and participation in food policy processes.

It is difficult to present a unified definition of alternative food systems for all EU countries; initiatives vary greatly in their activities and their degree of opposition to mainstream trends, with many working in parallel or within existing structures. Yet the initiatives in question have enough common characteristics to merit a discussion around the collective potential of – and obstacles to – alternative food systems.

These systems can be broadly characterized by elements of community control and cooperation, as well as by more direct interactions between rural and urban areas and between producers and consumers. The relationships of proximity and trust created within alternative food systems are believed to support greater democratic control over food systems – understood as the opportunities for all food system actors to actively participate in how their systems take shape. Alternative food system initiatives also strive to improve environmental conditions by promoting on-farm biodiversity, natural resource conservation, carbon footprint reduction by minimizing ‘food miles’, while promoting greater consumer awareness on the origins and quality of their food. They also often aim to improve rural development and food security by promoting access to healthy, fresh diets for consumers while supporting small producers and local economies.⁷

Seeking to understand initiatives beyond the proximate and small-scale, attention has also increasingly been given to ‘value-based supply chains,’ a term used to capture alternative supply chain organization and prioritization. Value-based supply chains create a role for medium and large-scale actors to participate in food system alternatives and can be coordinated at any scale from the local to the international⁸. Within these supply chains, emphasis is placed not only on the values inherent to a particular food quality (e.g. production method), but also on the values associated to the interdependent relationships developed between supply chain actors; standards are applied throughout the entire supply chain; and value-based commitments are made out of mutual interest for the benefit of all actors involved. Drawing from globalized

⁶ Gottlieb, R. and A. Fisher (1998). “Community food security and environmental justice: Converging paths toward social justice and sustainable communities,” *Community Food Security News* (Summer): 4–5.

⁷ Kneafsey, M., et al. (2013) Short food supply chains and local food systems in the EU. A state of play of their socio-economic characteristics." *JRC Scientific and Policy Reports. Joint Research Centre Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, European Commission.*

⁸ Chiffolleau, Y., et al. (2016). From Short Food Supply Chains to Sustainable Agriculture in Urban Food Systems: Food Democracy as a Vector of Transition. *Agriculture* 6.57.

arrangements, examples of value-based supply chain initiatives can include the use of labelling and certification schemes (e.g. Fair Trade), amongst others.

Table 1 presents a typology of main alternative food system initiatives. These have been categorized by the degree to which they bring food system actors closer together, particularly by reducing the intermediaries between producers and consumers.⁹ These initiatives are, by their nature, highly innovative and locally-specific. It is therefore difficult to provide a comprehensive up-to-date picture of these initiatives; a key goal of the Policy Lab is to help to complete the picture by sharing examples of the most promising emerging initiatives.

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⁹ This categorization was first offered by the Committee of Region's study, 'Marketing on Local Markets' (2010): <http://cor.europa.eu/en/documentation/studies/Documents/Marketing-on-local-markets.pdf>

Table 1 - Synthesis of alternative food system initiatives

Type of Initiative	Description and benefits
Community gardens/Urban agriculture <i>(consumer as producer/actor model)</i>	Citizens collectively cultivate and harvest food on shared private or public land, generally in urban or peri-urban areas. Benefits include food systems' awareness and education, health benefits ¹⁰ , community-building, and increased urban green spaces.
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) <i>(producer-consumer partnerships)</i>	Direct partnership between a group of consumers and producer(s) whereby the risks, responsibilities and rewards of farming activities are shared (typically) through long-term agreements. Generally operating on a small and local scale, CSAs aim to provide sustainably-produced quality food, with benefits both for access to healthy diets of 'eaters' ¹¹ and more stable and higher incomes for farmers ¹² .
Short supply chains: Farmers' markets, farm-gate and/or internet sales <i>(direct sale from producer to consumer model)</i>	Consumers purchase food directly from local producers on-farm or in communal spaces, according to seasonal availability. Benefits can include higher revenues for producers, access to local, quality foods for consumers, and community development.
Direct to retail/institution schemes <i>(direct third-party purchasing model)</i>	Direct purchasing from producers by private retailers/restaurateurs to support local sourcing or meet consumer demand, or by public authorities for use in public institutions through public procurement programs (e.g. schools, hospitals, prisons, etc.). This involves a more direct interaction between public and private actors by removing intermediaries for storing, processing, and/or transporting food, and promote healthy, local and seasonal diets.

¹⁰ See for example J.S. Litt, et al. (2011), The Influence of Social Involvement, Neighborhood Aesthetics, and Community Garden Participation on Fruit and Vegetable Consumption, *American Journal of Public Health* 101.8, pp. 1466-1473.

¹¹ See for example, J.E. Allen IV, et al. (2016). Do Community Supported Agriculture programmes encourage change to food lifestyle behaviours and health outcomes? New evidence from shareholders, *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*. DOI: 10.1080/14735903.2016. 1177866

¹² Urgenci, European CSA Research Group (2016). *Overview of Community Supported Agriculture in Europe*. p. 8. <http://urgenci.net/the-csa-research-group/>

<p>Organic, Fair Trade, Quality (e.g. PDO, PDI) <i>(quality certification model)</i></p>	<p>Marketing scheme to assess quality of food product(s) based on specific characteristics, e.g. geographic origin, method of production, processing or purchasing following government-defined or third-party standards; consumers can recognize food characteristics and benefit for greater choice.</p>
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Multi-level governance of alternative food systems: barriers and policy priorities

Policy-makers, from the local to the EU level, are beginning to recognize the crucial role alternative food systems can play in the transition towards sustainable food systems. Alternative food systems not only provide public goods such as maintaining ecosystems, local culture and community traditions, but also support higher farm incomes and improve the viability of rural spaces. These alternatives also contribute to food system innovation by promoting a competitive, vibrant, and more sustainable agricultural sector, while also strengthening rural-urban linkages, and addressing the increasing demand for traceable, high quality foods. Further, alternative food system initiatives are also most frequently sustained by younger farmers and consumers – crucial players in the transition towards long-term sustainable production and consumption¹³.

Already, the EU has increased its support for alternative and local food systems initiatives. Regulation (EU) No 1305/13 on Pillar 2 of the CAP encourages member states to consider short and local supply chains as means to promote economically, socially and environmentally-viable rural development. To date, Pillar 2 programmes include:

- The LEADER programme (*'Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale'* or 'Links between rural economy development actions') outlines a method for local actors to collaborate in the design and implementation of local development strategies, decision-making, and resource allocation in various forms since 1991. Through LEADER, member states have the option of channeling Pillar 2 funding towards community involvement in rural development approaches (e.g. local development strategies). From 2000-2006, LEADER+ enabled the creation of 893 local action groups over the EU, covering 1,577,386 km² through 2.1 billion euros of funding¹⁴. Over the 2007-2013 period,

¹³ CEJA (2015), Young Farmers Manifesto. <http://www.ceja.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/CEJA-Young-Farmer-Manifesto.pdf>. See also IFOAM (2016), Transforming Food and Farming: An Organic Vision for Europe 2030. <http://www.ifoam-eu.org/sites/default/files/413-ifoam-vision-web.pdf>.

¹⁴ European Commission (2006), The Leader Approach: a Basic Guide. http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/publi/fact/leader/2006_en.pdf

all rural development programmes had to dedicate a small portion of their funding to LEADER approach activities.

- The General Renewal programmes seek to promote vibrancy within the farming sector and encourage young farmer entry. e.g. The Early Retirement Schemes (ERSs) offer farmers between 55 and 66 the opportunity to transfer their farms to younger farmers through an annual fixed-term pension.
- Rural development measures proposed under Reg. 1305/2013 relevant to alternative food system also include: Knowledge transfer and information actions (Art. 14), Advisory services, farm management and farm relief services (Art. 15), Investments in physical assets (Art. 17), and Animal welfare (Art. 33).¹⁵

Further, the 2013 CAP reforms made short food supply chains and local markets an explicit element of the EU's rural development policy for 2014-2020, with member states and regions benefiting from a wide range of allowances to support alternative projects along the food supply chain. For example, in 2014, the French government modified its rural Code (L. 2014-1170) on the basis of supporting national food security, environmental protection, and diverse and nutritious diets. In particular, Article L-1. III of the French Rural Code encourages the development of short supply chains, with actions designed to increase public procurement, support seasonal production, and promote labelling signs of quality and origin as well as organic labels.

However, support for alternative food systems are not limited to the CAP. While not exhaustive, further EU-level policies and frameworks affecting alternative food systems include:

- Regulation (EU) No. 2092/91 establishes the organic labelling scheme, based on harmonized production.
- Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 sets the quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs including Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Speciality Guarantee (TSG), providing a marketing tool for producers to sell their products on the basis of regional origin, authenticity, and/or traditional production methods. The Regulation stipulates the drafting of a report on a possible new 'local farming and direct sales labelling scheme to assist producers in marketing their produce locally' (Article 55), focusing on the 'ability of the farmer to add value to his produce' and, among others 'the possibilities of reducing carbon emissions and

¹⁵ For more information and a complete list of relevant policies see European Parliamentary Research Service (2016). *Short food supply chains and local food systems in the EU*.

waste through short production and distribution chains’, and, if necessary, ‘accompanied by appropriate legislative proposals’.

- The EU Green Public Procurement (GPP) scheme provides a voluntary framework to encourage public bodies to sustainably procure goods and services. In the context of sustainable food procurement, GPP policies generally support demand for organic and/or local foods and products meeting higher animal welfare standards. The Legal framework of the GPP is provided by the Public Procurement Directives 2014/24/EU and 2014/25/EU.
- Regulation (EC) 854/04 exempts small farmers selling products directly to consumers from the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system for food safety. The flexibility of rules, defined at the member state level, accounts for the challenges faced by small local farmers to adhere to costly criteria, while guaranteeing food safety and hygiene. However, not all member states capitalize on these allowances.
- The EU Council conclusions on ‘Strengthening farmers’ position in the food supply chain and tackling unfair trading practices’ of 12 December 2016 emphasizes that relationships between all food system actors must be balanced, that added value must be fairly distributed among them, and that consumers must have access to information to make informed choices. It further emphasizes facilitating access to local products.

Member state policies can also serve to support alternative food system initiatives at the domestic level. These policies can involve land market regulations to manage land sale and price, taxation exemptions (e.g. some family farms may benefit from exemptions on property or inheritance tax), or support for alternative farm business models (e.g. joint ventures), amongst others.

However, it is at the local and regional level that many of Europe’s most innovative food system initiatives are emerging. These strategies take various shapes and forms, from municipally or regionally-driven food strategies (e.g. Food Policy Councils¹⁶, the Amsterdam Food Strategy, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact), collaborative initiatives between state and civil-society (e.g. Biovallée initiative in the Drôme Valley of France), to wholly civil society-based alternative food networks (e.g. Transition Network).

Certainly in the multi-level governance context of the EU, the complexity and interconnectedness of alternative food system actors and practices require a coherent

¹⁶ Examples of municipally-based Food Policy Councils in the EU include [Malmö](#) (Sweden), [Turin](#) (Italy), [Cork](#) (Ireland) or (in progress) [Barcelona](#) and [Valencia](#) (Spain)

integration of policies across different levels and sectors to succeed. The question remains on the complementary roles the European Union, individual member states, and sub-national authorities can play in supporting alternative food systems.

While an impressive number of initiatives continue to emerge and flourish, they may be doing so in spite of – not because of – the policy frameworks governing food systems. Table 2 presents some of the main limitations experienced by alternative food system actors in the EU. It draws on ethnographic research conducted by the authors with local initiatives in Europe; participant observation at Nyéléni Europe 2016; and synthesizes obstacles identified in key European Commission documents¹⁷. The aim of this table is to serve as a starting point for discussion rather than to provide an exhaustive catalogue of the current challenges faced by alternative food system actors. Its purpose is to highlight whether existing policies are sufficient to support alternative food system initiatives, whether further policy tools are required, or even, whether more transformative structural changes are required for a sustainable food system transformation to occur. Further, a great number of the challenges below apply to actors operating in both conventional and alternative food system structures, and speaks to the broader issues of rural livelihood and the viability of small-scale producers in Europe.

¹⁷ European Commission (2013), Commission Staff Working Document on various aspects of short food supply chains. Accompanying the document Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the case for a local farming and direct sales labelling scheme. Brussels, 6.12.2013; Kneafsey et al. (2013).

Table 2 - Synthesis of obstacles faced by alternative food system actors

Challenge	Main obstacles
Access to public procurement programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Required certifications/taxes can be too costly for small farmers; - EU non-discrimination principle can prevent access by small local producers when there are bigger and/or non-local contenders; - The terms of public tenders may not be compatible with the seasonal, diverse outputs of small-scale farms, and it may be difficult to compete without a collective offer/approach; - Sourcing local/sustainable foods often costlier for public institutions
Administrative burden in developing short supply chains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Documentation and costs required to comply with food safety legislation often too high for small farmers;
Infrastructural & logistical issues for direct sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small farmers may lack adequate facilities to sell directly on farm; - Potential need to invest in buildings and selling facilities; - Inability for producers in remote areas to access common processing facilities or distribution points;
Political representation and levels of association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low representation of certain groups (e.g. remote farmers, low-income, urban populations, fisherfolk, pastoralists) in relevant policy fora; - Levels of association of 'alternative' farmers lower in some member states or regions; - Cooperative models, despite strengthening farmers' position in markets, may be difficult to implement;
Fair revenues/pricing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Current price matching policies encourage productivity as opposed to social and environmental sustainability; - Prices scales based on supply and demand may ignore farmers' real income/needs and increase their dependence on private insurances - Local/sustainable food schemes (e.g. CSA, farmers' markets) may be pricier for consumers than similar purchase through mainstream retail
Knowledge, training, and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing and selling of products require different knowledge and skills from those required for production; - Training is often necessary but farmer-to-farmer exchanges are not facilitated by public policies;
Access to land and credit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New and young farmers face more difficulties in accessing land; - Farmers find it difficult to set up new selling and marketing activities because of cash flow difficulties or limited access to credit;
Development of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some markets are not very responsive to changes, while others see

local markets across Europe	<p>increasing interest and demand for local products;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing short food supply chains can be a challenge depending on conditions of the local market (e.g. remote community, low-income areas);
Consumer behaviour, information and promotion activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supermarkets offering all food all year round, and predictable, homogenous produce has led to unrealistic consumer expectations; - Knowledge of locally and seasonally produced products may be low, including farm animals and fisheries; - Public support/spaces to provide information on how to access local seasonal products is often lacking; - Religious and nutritional/dietary concerns of consumers may make it difficult to meet the demands of certain local markets

The breadth of challenges identified here stress the need for a range of national, regional and local policies and tools to redress them. They also suggest the necessity for coherence between policy levels, not only to promote alternative food system initiatives through an integrated strategy, but also to support food systems' most marginalized actors, whether alternative or conventional. These concerns and the questions raised at the start of this paper will serve to guide the meeting's discussion.

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