

## PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL MARKETS WITH AN EXCLUSIVE FOCUS ON SHORT SUPPLY CHAINS IN SUCEAVA COUNTY

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### Abstract

This research focuses on efforts to promote the development of local markets in Suceava County, with an exclusive focus on the use of short supply chains. The main purpose of the research is to examine how this approach can influence economic development and sustainability in the region. Through a detailed analysis, the paper explores how local producers and consumers in Suceava County collaborate directly, eliminating intermediaries and reducing the distance between producers and consumers. The benefits of this approach are examined, including increased income for producers, the promotion of local products, and support for the local economy. Additionally, the paper examines the challenges faced in successfully implementing short supply chains in the specific context of Suceava County, such as infrastructure, regulations, and the education of both consumers and producers. The impact on community development and sustainable growth is also analyzed, including aspects related to reducing the carbon footprint and promoting sustainable agriculture. This research highlights the importance of promoting economic development and sustainability through local markets and short supply chains in Suceava County. Through analysis and evaluation, the paper provides significant insights for the ongoing development of these markets and for supporting local producers and agricultural communities.

**Key words:** short food supply chains, local producers, agri-food sector, benefits

In the current era of globalization, profound changes in food supply chains have attracted attention and sparked intense discussions within academic communities and society at large. The continuous development of global food chains has propelled the exploration and promotion of alternative models such as short food supply chains and local food systems. These paradigms represent an attempt to reconnect producers and consumers, offering them the opportunity to collaborate directly and leverage local resources in a more sustainable, socially responsible, and environmentally friendly manner. (Aguilar L.C. *et al.*, 2018)

Alongside the evident challenges and opportunities presented by short food supply chains, it is crucial to highlight their impact on social and economic changes. For instance, direct interactions between producers and consumers have the potential to strengthen trust and social relationships within communities, contributing to the creation of local identity and a sense of belonging. Simultaneously, these systems can yield economic benefits by supporting local agriculture and regional economies, positively influencing

employment and sustaining economic activities in rural areas.

However, it's essential to acknowledge that short food supply chains are not devoid of challenges and critical aspects. Elements such as excessive localism, difficulties in ensuring affordable prices for all consumers, or the possible consequences on the sustainability of these systems in the face of economic demands and pressures are aspects that require attention and thorough research.

This study focuses on analyzing local markets based on short food supply chains in the Municipality of Suceava, providing a relevant and detailed perspective on the evolution and challenges of these systems. (Brumă I.S. *et al.*, 2021) Furthermore, it will explore the feasibility of implementing a common labeling system at the national level for products marketed through these local markets, addressing an essential theme for the development and sustainability of these short food supply chains.

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## MATERIAL AND METHOD

Given the continuous expansion of global food chains that has led to the exploration and promotion of alternatives such as local markets and short food supply chains, this study focuses on analyzing the strategies and initiatives adopted by local actors in Suceava County to develop these activities. The research methodology applied in this study was structured in distinct stages, starting from the conception of the analytical plan to formulating conclusions and proposing solutions in this specific domain.

This research was conducted based on case studies carried out at three currently active local markets in Suceava County. The methods employed included investigative-type interviews to assess the attitudes and preferences of the involved stakeholders, along with comparative analysis of suggestions and recommendations provided.

To shed light on consumers' perceptions regarding these local food systems and to identify their key characteristics, along with their developmental challenges, we examined a broad spectrum of research and similar initiatives conducted in various geographical contexts (Zahraturrahmi Z. *et al*, 2021). A systematic review of existing literature was conducted regarding local food systems and short food supply chains, aiming to identify and evaluate information from existing research using a consistent and robust approach (Tanasa L. *et al*, 2022).

Regarding the adopted research method, we opted to employ statistically based surveys using in-depth structured interviews, given the advantages this method offers in obtaining relevant and detailed information tailored to the objectives proposed within this investigation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Throughout this research, a dual purpose was pursued: firstly, to identify the specific discrepancies and differences among various local food systems developed in Suceava County; and secondly, to collect relevant data and information to assess the feasibility and opportunity for implementing a national labeling system for products associated with short supply chains. Employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study aimed at evaluating the socioeconomic impact of these alternative local markets in Suceava County on the agricultural sector and rural communities.

For the achievement of these objectives, the following goals were outlined:

- Conducting a comparative assessment of the performance of three existing local markets, namely Nord Natural, SNOP, and Farmers Market

"Din drag de Bucovina," aiming to identify their distinctive features and the impact generated on the involved stakeholders, with a focus on farmers capable of offering processed products for sale.

- Analyzing consumer perceptions regarding the opportunity to purchase products from short supply chains in comparison to acquiring products from small local processors.

In this scientific endeavor, we started from the premise that a local food system refers to a complex where food production, processing, and distribution processes are concentrated in a precisely defined geographic region, exemplified by farmers' markets, direct sales from producers to consumers, vegetable box distributions, community-focused agriculture, and public procurement programs exclusively sourcing food from a specific geographic location.

This study examined three notable initiatives in Suceava County - Nord Natural, SNOP, and Farmers Market "Din Drag de Bucovina" - which adopt a multi-local perspective, yet significantly differ in terms of dynamics and interaction between producers and consumers.

Nord Natural: Open Fields Food Hub - represents an integrated concept for promoting local food products managed by the Open Fields Foundation. This project encourages support for the local economy by channeling profits obtained from commercial activities into social and community development projects. Through a diverse range of accessible Romanian products sourced from small local businesses and families in the agro-food sector, Nord Natural supports and highlights the local economy.

Multiple ordering channels such as online stores, email, and phone numbers offer consumers various options for purchasing products. The rigorous process of preparing and dispatching orders highlights the attention given to quality and efficient delivery management.

SNOP: Innovation in Short Supply Chains - is a new initiative emerged in 2021 in Suceava County, representing an association between 7 farmers, proposing an innovative approach within short supply chains. This system focuses on developing a local market for sustainably sourced food products, connecting local producers directly with consumers.

Similar to the Nord Natural initiative, SNOP promotes fresh and high-quality products from local farms and households. The emphasis on direct relationships between producers and consumers aims to reduce food waste and support small local production.

This initiative focuses on building a responsible community that encourages healthy

and sustainable consumption. By adopting a multi-local approach, SNOP respects local traditions and practices, thus contributing to promoting responsible nutrition and developing the local market.

In conclusion, our study highlights that both Nord Natural and SNOP represent successful initiatives in promoting short supply chains and local food in Suceava County, significantly impacting the region's economic and social development.

Farmers Market "Din Drag de Bucovina" represents support provided by the Suceava County Agriculture Department for promoting local food producers, offering them a platform for showcasing and selling their products. The primary objective is to facilitate access to Romanian products, supporting their sales through a weekly mobile market.

Unlike the previous initiatives that targeted individuals using online platforms for shopping, this time we refer to a physical market where continuous producer-consumer contact is established. This mobile market serves as a promotion channel for local products, providing a solution for their promotion and distribution. This effort contributes to the economic stimulation of rural communities, promoting healthy and sustainable eating habits.

Upon analysis, the results underscore that the primary segment of the marketed products is dominated by animal-based items, especially processed meats. None of the involved producers fall within the concept of short supply chains as it's impossible to establish the exact route of raw materials used, as well as the identity of the farmer who raised the animals. This lack of traceability compromises the direct link between producer and consumer, crucial within short supply chains.

The origin of these foods can often be challenging to track, and the process of identifying raw material suppliers remains incomplete. Bakery and pastry items are also obtained in small manufacturing workshops, but the lack of detailed information about the exact origin of raw materials poses a challenge in establishing a transparent connection between producers and consumers.

This situation highlights the challenges in implementing a clear short supply chain strategy, where product transparency and clear traceability are key elements to support the direct relationship and trust between producer and consumer. Special attention needs to be given to this issue to facilitate the development of more transparent and responsible supply chains in the future.

It's noteworthy that there is a strong trend of product range diversification offered by small

producers who manage to market their production through these local markets, and in some cases, begin to expand the distribution of products over considerable geographic distances. This practice, supported by the need to publicize culinary-specific events, contradicts the values shared by the local system, such as ecological, artisanal, or those supporting fair trade principles.

However, on another note, consumers highlighted the relevance of relationships built on the concept of "trust" in small producers. Their purchase decision was not influenced by the fact that some products sold in the local market came from geographic distances similar to those of products available in traditional retail stores. Furthermore, producers from Farmers Market "Din Drag de Bucovina" positively responded to PROFI supermarket's invitation to sell their products as part of the Raftul cu Bunătăți Locale PROFI campaign.

This decision to expand the market may generate some long-term negative effects, creating confusion among consumers. Integrating local products into retail distribution chains may lead to ambiguity in their identity, disrupting consumers' initial trust or perception regarding the authenticity and origin of these products. Thus, consumers might be exposed to a wider variety of products, but this surplus of options could lead to a misunderstanding or even difficulty in identifying and genuinely supporting authentic local products. As such, this market expansion might, to some extent, dilute or blur the specific identity of local products, creating ambiguity in consumers' eyes regarding their authenticity and value.

Data collection regarding consumer awareness was challenging due to the low level of education among consumers, reflected in the lack of coherence in responses regarding the reasons motivating them to opt for an alternative food system. Despite these challenges, it is essential to highlight that we identified two predominant consumer categories: the first includes individuals interested in finding products similar to those they used in their youth, before these became available in traditional stores, while the second category comprises those seeking a healthy dietary alternative, in line with current trends, without a clear understanding of the attributes and qualities these products should have. This discrepancy in consumers' food preferences highlighted the complexity and diversity of factors influencing their choice of a particular food system.

A common weakness among the first two initiatives relates to weak promotion and communication, despite a well-organized structure, the total annual marketing budget being relatively

small compared to supermarket chains. Regarding Farmers Market "Din Drag de Bucovina," this problem is less evident, especially because it uses alternative methods to reach the local media for promotion. (Krasnyuk I. *et al*, 2020)

The weak point shared by the first two initiatives refers to their marketing and communication aspects, which, despite their well-structured approach, face limited resources allocated annually for marketing compared to supermarket chains. In contrast, Farmers Market "Din Drag de Bucovina" resolves this issue by adopting a distinct strategy, continuously present in the local environment through various promotion means, without having an official budget exclusively allocated for marketing.

Regarding the potential implementation of a national labeling scheme to identify agricultural products from short supply chains, both producers and consumers have expressed a wide range of pros and cons. Advocates for this scheme emphasize the potential benefit of greater product visibility and possible reinforcement of consumer trust. However, opposition to this scheme focuses on the fear that it could generate confusion, given the recent proliferation of multiple optional quality labels and consumers' insufficient understanding of these.

## CONCLUSIONS

The detailed analysis of the three studied initiatives has provided a comprehensive view of short supply chains and local markets in Suceava County. Despite the individual differences between these initiatives, several significant conclusions can be drawn from this detailed comparison.

One evident aspect across all three cases is the presence of project initiators as "social innovators." These figures stand out due to their professional experience that extends beyond the boundaries of their current workplaces. Their capacity to innovate and develop initiatives in the realm of short supply chains is a crucial factor in the development of these projects.

A notable similarity was observed in the profile of consumers purchasing products offered by these initiatives. The typical consumer is characterized as urban, middle-aged, predominantly female, with an above-average level of education and income. This shared characteristic among consumers can influence the marketing and communication strategies of these initiatives.

Another evident aspect in all three cases is the acute need for education among the involved producers. Entrepreneurial skills, communication abilities, and marketing knowledge have been identified as essential domains for the sustainable development of these initiatives and for enhancing the efficiency of the entire production and commercialization chain.

Overall, this case study has highlighted not only the importance of short supply chain initiatives but also the necessity to support and develop them through education, effective communication, and continuous innovation.

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