

English summary – SFC specialist report

Review of the most interesting Short Food Chain (SFC) initiatives in Poland for the purposes of the ‘Eat Wisely, Know what you Eat! Campaign.

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In Poland, there are many initiatives, which can be classified as Short Food Chain (SFC) systems – initiatives which connect food producers and food consumers in a direct way. Consumers want increasingly to buy food products that are fresh, tasty and authentic – and also at competitive prices – assuming that buying directly from the producer is the surest way of assuring quality and competitive prices. In turn, producers are seeking out consumers who will value their products and buy them regularly – assuring in this way a steady income for the seller. There is no one model or recipe. But there are very many initiatives and solutions, which are seeking out ways of bringing about direct selling, and so taking control of the financial surplus arising from excluding intermediaries from the supply chain. The Short Supply Chain phenomenon is more of a social movement than an organised effort to take charge of new market possibilities.

A review of the diversity of SFC initiatives, which today function in Poland, two basic categories appear to be most prominent:

- Initiatives of individual producers, based on direct selling
- Group initiatives, which are based on collaboration of larger groups of producers and consumers (e.g. Markets, Food Cooperatives, Buyers’ Clubs, Kitchen Incubators, Culinary Trails).

It is important to appreciate the achievements of individual producers. They show that individuals can create an SFC system, which brings benefits to both producers and consumers. It is important to note that many individual initiatives, which have achieved success in the market place have also helped to shape the market for local products, which are developing so dynamically today. The initiators of many of these initiatives are pioneers, who themselves constitute brands of authenticity and quality. They show by their own example what was and what continues to be possible – even when regulations are not supportive and there is intense market competition.

More and more initiatives based on collective action have been appearing in recent years in order to achieve greater scale with respect to sales, reducing risks and costs, and contributing to local development. There are also more and more initiatives to organise systemic solutions as enablers of direct selling as a response to consumers, who are more and more frequently seeking out food products straight from the producer in a more determined way.

The phenomenon of shortening food chains through creating and developing SFC is a comparatively new social and market phenomenon. The great diversity of initiatives in line with SFC systems thinking suggests that it is worth making an inventory in a systematic way and assessing effectiveness and impact of functioning SFC systems.

The key to success of SFC undertakings lies in effective collaboration of different organisations. It means that support programmes should underscore and value partnership action.

Many functioning SFC systems were initiated by non-governmental organisations or informal groups, driven by a desire to change the industrialised food system that dominates in Poland or to programme development and revitalise rural economy. In many cases, these were supported by grants or other subventions from development programmes or from public funds (especially the Programme for Rural Development of Rural Areas). Many SFC initiatives continue to be dependent on grants and the logic of projects. This arrangement causes problems when it comes to assuring continuity

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and development in a highly competitive food market place, when the project ends and with it also financing for the SFC system. Problems appear when NGOs find it difficult not to think in terms of grant-aid, but in terms of competing in the market-place, which demands controlling costs and increasing sales.

At the same time, business-initiated SFC initiatives are also appearing in the market-place, which seek to respond to the needs of consumers for food of known-origin. In turn, over time, these exclude small farms because larger farms can assure continuity and quality of supply. This means that public support for SFC development should be directed to initiatives and undertakings, which engage small farms, often bringing them out of the so-called grey economy. Larger farms can compete in the market on the condition that they collaborate with other farms.

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