

English summary – SFC specialist report

The potential and role of Local Action Groups (LGD) in promoting Short Food Chain systems (SFCs) for the purposes of the Campaign on Short Food Chains ‘Eat Wisely, Know what you Eat!’

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In Poland, rural areas are increasingly the focus of non-agricultural housing developments, production and services. This is an ongoing trend and it is difficult to work against this. One thing is clear, however, if agriculture disappears from rural areas they will lose their rural character. One of the key processes that is driving this de-agriculturalisation is decline in the economic viability of agricultural production in small farms. To some extent this situation can be changed through development of various kinds of short food chain initiatives and creating a demand for locally-produced food products. What is needed also is awareness-raising among consumers as to the value of food produced using traditional and environmentally-friendly methods.

Local Action Groups have an important role to play and this report presents how LGDs are already promoting SFCs and locally-produced food products.

Many LGDs have accumulated many interesting experience in relations to promoting SFC systems and local products. In the previous programming period, LGDs focused a great deal of attention on animating rural areas through development of tourist products and local products. As part of the support permitted in the IV Category – LEADER – in the Program for Development of Rural Areas in the years 2007-2013: diversifying in the direction of non-agricultural activities, LGDs supported creation and development of agro tourism, whereas through ‘small project’ grants and their own funds supporting activities of the LGDs themselves, provided support for identifying and promoting local products and culinary heritage. All these initiatives are worthy of note on account of the role they played in mobilising and developing local community action.

Selected examples are presented in this report. They can also be seen as good practices and recommended as sources of inspiration for other organisations taking on similar challenges. Many of the activities initiated in the previous programming period are being continued in the current programming period. There are also those, which on account of changes in the instruments of support available to LGDs, do not have their continuation and must now ‘live their own lives’.

An analysis of the history of LGD initiatives relating to promoting SFCs and local products, suggests that many Associations have focused on action without being concerned about legal, organisational or financial constraints. What is important is that many LGDs have “learnt” how to raise funds from many different external sources, but the funds have tended to be too small. This is the result not of lack of competencies, but a desire and aspiration to take on new challenges.

The report presents a selection of examples of LGD actions related to building SFCs and promoting local products. The examples presented were selected in somewhat arbitrary fashion by the author as being particularly relevant forms of LGD actions. Analysis of the presented materials leads to the following conclusions:

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1. LGDs should be included (invited) to participate in efforts to build SFC systems for distribution of locally-produced food. Those, which are interested in pursuing their own initiatives, should be encouraged to cooperate with other organisations active in this field.
2. Closer collaboration between LGDs and Agricultural Advisory Centres should be considered as part of efforts to build networks of SFCs. This should also be the case, where LGDs are acting on their own to develop food product distribution channels. This will require encouragement from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development most probably.
3. Consider special support for LGD, which are interested in creating in creating SFCs through Operational Groups for Innovation.
4. The Government should consider pursuing systematically promotional activities in the mass media aimed at raising consumer awareness concerning the value of buying local food products through short-food chain systems.
5. There are numerous examples of LGDs using their own funding resources available in their Local Development Strategies (LSR) to promote short-chain food systems and local products. It is worth considering the possibility of making such activities easier to include in own LSR operations, which would release the LGD from obligation to announce the intention to realise the activity as an own activity and wait for organisations other than the LGD to register their interest.
6. An interesting solution might also be to interest the national and regional networks of LGDs to promote SFCs and local products and to create in KSOW or in another organisation a mechanism for financing such activities.
7. As part of the activities of the national LGD network, a system should be created for identifying and inventorying good practices played by LGDs in promoting SFCs and local products, building also a system of disseminating these practices. This system should operate in concert with the existing database of good practice administered by KSOW.

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