



SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

THEME "Environment"

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Collaborative Project

**Project acronym: FOODLINKS**  
**Knowledge brokerage to promote sustainable food consumption and production: linking scientists, policymakers and civil society organizations**

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## 1. Introduction

This policy brief presents the objectives and achievements of the FOODLINKS project. More information may be found on the project website: [www.foodlinkscommunity.net](http://www.foodlinkscommunity.net). We also invite the reader to join us on [FoodNet](#), a new communication platform on sustainable food that serves as a meetingpoint for multiple food related projects.

Chapter 2 summarises the project objectives, the work performed and results achieved. Chapter 3 presents recommendations for the implementation of Communities of Practice as a tool for science-society collaboration. More recommendations for knowledge brokerage may be found in the deliverable D7.3 on the FOODLINKS website. Recommendations on how to support sustainable food systems are presented in the guidelines produced by the communities of practice for the implementation of short food supply chains, sustainable public procurement and urban food strategies. We briefly introduce the guidelines below. They may be accessed through our website.

## 2. Project objectives and outcomes

FOODLINKS is a EU funded project, that developed new modalities for collaboration across science, society and policymaking to support their joining up in the promotion of sustainable food consumption and production. Experimenting with three Communities of Practice constituted the main part of the project. In these communities scientists, policymakers and civil society representatives discussed about the creation of sustainable food systems, while trialling different tools for knowledge brokerage. We monitored and evaluated their outcomes and experiences, and formulated recommendations on how to enhance collaboration across science and society. The three Communities of Practice developed guidelines on how to embed short food supply chains, public procurement and urban food strategies in sustainable food policies. These guidelines are already put to use in policy and practice. The project results confirm our expectation that interaction and collaboration across science, policy making and civil society importantly expands our understanding of sustainable food and opens up new views on how to accelerate change towards more sustainability.

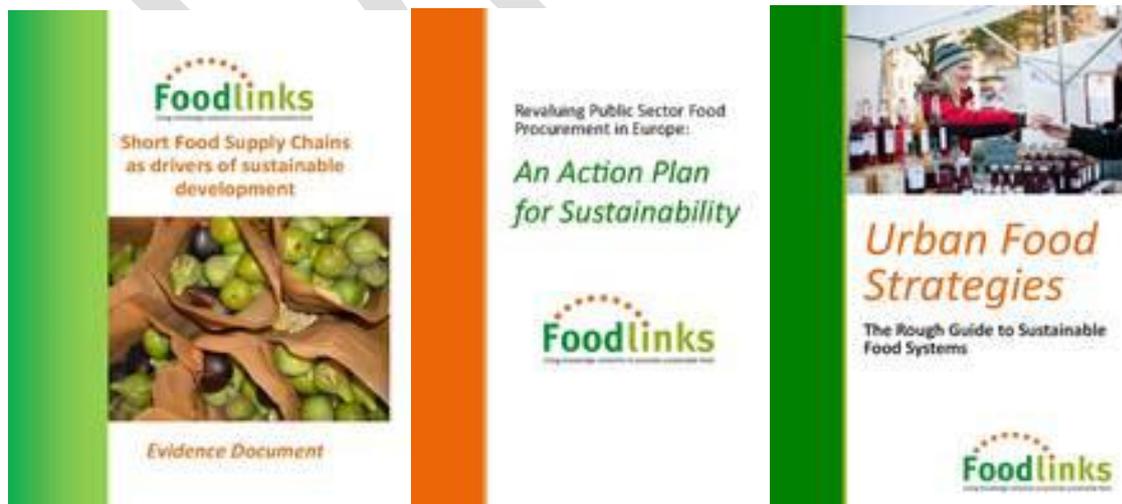
The project started with the collection of promising knowledge brokerage tools and activities. We then initiated three Communities of Practice, focusing on (1) short food supply chains, (2) revaluing public procurement, and (3) urban food strategies. The communities started off with project members as sole participants, but gradually expanded by inviting new members to sign up to the 'Knowledge Hub', a public on-line platform (see [www.foodlinkscommunity.net](http://www.foodlinkscommunity.net)). The knowledge hub is still existing but as its continuity is uncertain due to budget cuts, we opened a new channel of conversation on [FoodNet](#).

The communities experimented with various knowledge brokerage tools and evaluated their usefulness. The project monitored and evaluated their collaboration through questionnaires, reflexive group discussions, (video)interviews and web-statistics.

The establishment of the three Communities of Practice is among the most important results of the project. Establishing lively communities required intensive facilitation. Members needed to develop trust and a sense of community, for which face-to-face meetings proved essential. Many members needed also time to get familiar with online communication. And there were technical barriers to overcome, such as severe firewalls preventing policymakers to use certain software.

Linking up with local actors engaged in sustainable food matters Vitoria-Gasteiz, Rennes, Malmö, London, Edinburgh and Vienna greatly enriched our knowledge base and generated new insights. It also attracted new community members. Besides, most project-members collaborated with local initiatives in their own country. This was crucial for feeding the project with real life experience, and supported the direct use of project outcomes. To give just one example: The Latvian team of policymakers and scientists used the project as an opportunity for developing and implementing urban food policy in the municipality of Tukums. Similar developments took place in Vitoria-Gasteiz and Pisa where the FOODLINKS team intensively collaborated with local policymakers and civil society initiatives.

All three Communities of Practice decided within the first year to focus their collaboration on the production of a common document. This gave purpose and direction to their engagement and fuelled ongoing engagement. It fulfilled the need of members to produce something tangible, that effectively contributed to building a more sustainable food system. It enabled actual co-production (shared writing, exchange of case-studies, interviewing each other, participatory lay-out and design), and hands-on learning of what it means to develop a common languages and to accommodate different approaches and interests. Through joining up forces the communities produces guidelines and action plans for short food supply chains, public procurement and urban food strategies that are already put to use in policy and practice. We include a brief summary of the documents below; the complete documents may be accessed through [Foodlinks -Home/News](#).



## 3. Recommendations

### 3.1 How to implement Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice are a valuable tool for organising knowledge brokerage between policymakers, scientists and civil society organisations. They should be organised around an issue of mutual concern, that requires collaboration between the three groups to be adequately addressed.

#### Membership

A diverse membership including the right key actors representing the relevant aspects and perspectives enhances the relevance of knowledge brokerage. An ex ante stakeholder mapping helps to identify the key actors.

#### Facilitation

Communities of Practice need facilitation especially in the beginning to engage members in regular communication.

A good facilitator needs experience in managing group dynamics and in organising knowledge brokerage online and face-to-face. S/he needs to understand the different languages spoken among the community members and be capable of bridging the differences in background.

A facilitator needs to be able to dedicate considerable time to the management of the community. Online communication needs daily maintenance.

In order to encourage a sense of ownership within the community it is important to regularly assign specific tasks and responsibilities to community members.

#### Goals and outcomes

Communities of Practice need to invest time in a problem defining phase, where goals and objectives are clarified and a common understanding of aims is reached.

Collaboration should result in tangible outcomes as they give direction to community activities and encourage contributions especially when the products support the members' work outside the community.

Producing tangible outcomes provides an instrument for recognising and integrating the variety of knowledge and experience present in the Community of Practice.

## **Knowledge brokerage tools**

Face to face activities are important for developing trust and a sense of community and affinity, and to nurture the willingness to get actively involved.

Online interaction offers an un-costly opportunity to follow up on face-to-face meeting, maintain regular interaction, and to expand participation and membership.

Communities of Practice that rely heavily on on-line communication, need to choose an online platform that is easy to use, with software that is accessible for all community members.

Using different tools produces cumulative value as the outcome of one tool can feed into another tool. When selecting knowledge brokerage tools their iterative use should be considered.

When selecting specific knowledge brokerage tools it is important to consider the pleasure derived from their application as it importantly drives effective knowledge exchange.

In international communities it is important to choose tools that do not require language proficiency and help overcoming linguistic barriers (for instance visualisation tools such as mind mapping).

## 3.2 Ho to use Short Food Supply Chains as a policy tool



### Short food supply chains as a policy tool

Short food supply chains (SFSCs) are an alternative to long globalised food chains and play an increasingly important role in food supply networks.

SFSCs are very varied in nature and practice and exist all over the world in a wide variety of forms, in both commercial and non-commercial settings.



Photo by T.A. Riddiman

SFSCs are increasingly taken into consideration by policy and decision makers in government, industry and civil society organisations.

#### Examples of policy areas in which SFSCs can be a useful tool

- Local and regional development
- Integrated food strategies (incl. urban and regional strategies)
- Public procurement
- Business development and entrepreneurship
- Food democracy

Examples of SFSCs include box schemes, farmers' markets, on-farm sales, consumer cooperatives, direct Internet sales, community supported agriculture, community gardening, Grow Your Own and wild food foraging.

"Short" can only be fully defined within each particular policy context.

#### Characteristics of short food supply chains

- „Short" refers to both **physical and social distance**.
- Social distance refers to the opportunity for the producer and the consumer (where they are not the same person) to **interact** and share information. There are no or **very few intermediaries** in SFSCs.
- **Information** exchanged includes details about the origin, production method and sustainability of the product, but also about the identity, values and ethics of both the producer and consumer.
- Physical distance covers the **distance a product has travelled** between points of production and sale. Its limitation varies and depends on each particular policy context and situation as well as consumer expectation.
- There is **openness** by the supplier about both the social and physical distance of the product.



Photo by K. Bello

Short food supply chains (SFSCs) can act as a driver of change and a method to increase sustainability, trust, equality and growth in agricultural, food, business, social, health and rural policy areas.

### Short food supply chains can increase sustainability in all its dimensions



Examples of how SFSCs have increased sustainability:

**Environmental:** Many SFSCs have minimised the use of fossil fuel or packaging, and/or use less polluting methods of production.

**Health & wellbeing:** Some SFSCs have increased knowledge and concern about food amongst consumers and led to the adoption of healthier diets.

**Social:** The direct relationship between producer and consumer has ensured fairness and trust in many SFSCs .

**Economic:** SFSCs to which consumers are committed long-term have reduced economic uncertainties that result from varying production and sales volumes.

### Short food supply chains can increase food supply resilience

- They complement longer food chains and diversify food supply networks.
- They are based on a wider range of producers.
- Traceability can be more easily checked.
- They are generally more flexible and adaptable to new situations and consumer needs.



Photo by W. Blain

### Policy support mechanisms for short food supply chains

- Flexible regulation (e.g. on hygiene)
- Local facilities (e.g. storage, processing)
- Financial and political support
- Research, knowledge, skills and training

This policy brief is based on a wiki evidence report with references and case studies which can be publicly accessed at:  
[https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=ba5c39b7-c158-43bf-9bbb-7121a3fb6fa5&groupId=6122532](https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=ba5c39b7-c158-43bf-9bbb-7121a3fb6fa5&groupId=6122532)

This is an output from the FOODLINKS project supported by



### 3.3 How to enable sustainable public procurement

#### Key action points

The Sustainable Procurement of food and drink will not happen without intervention at both the corporate and operational levels. By adopting and taking the following key actions, public bodies maximise the opportunities to revalue public sector food procurement and help build a more sustainable food system for all.

- **Good Governance**  
It is vital that key Sustainable Development Objectives are identified corporately and reflected in each public organisation's strategy for procurement. This should include wider engagement with Civil Society.
- **Identify Sustainable Food as a Priority**  
Public bodies should specifically identify Sustainable Food Procurement as part of their Corporate Objectives. This is a key area where major sustainable development gains can be achieved across a range of policy sectors.
- **Sustainable Menus can deliver Multiple Dividends**  
Menus and recipes should be prioritised for health, carbon reduction, seasonality and for a capacity to promote biodiversity, animal welfare, sustainable fisheries, good employment practices and training opportunities.
- **Account for Sustainability**  
Public bodies should have a recognised methodology in place for evaluating contracts that applies a whole life cycle costing approach. This accounts for social, environmental and economic benefits which accrue through sustainable food procurement and should also include an assessment of regional impacts.
- **Help Create the Market for Sustainable Food**  
A diverse and sustainable agri-food sector is essential. Procurement Organisations should actively work with foodservice contractors and suppliers to source sustainable food. Each public organisation should ensure measures are in place to include participation from small businesses (SMEs). This will develop a sustainable and more competitive supply base.
- **Ensure Contracts Strengthen Competition**  
Public Sector Organisations should give a high priority to geographic and product lotting of contracts to allow for the inclusion of SMEs alongside larger businesses whether for food purchased through its own contracts or through a foodservice contractor on behalf of the organisation.  
For example, food and drink procurement can divide contracts into smaller lots and segment food categories into geographic lots of a suitable scale to allow a range of

businesses to participate. Contracts should also be offered in separate lots for: soft drinks, milk, cheese, eggs, fresh meat, fish, poultry, fruit, vegetables, cereals, groceries or any suitable configuration.

- **Stimulate Demand for Sustainable Food**

A strategy to stimulate more sustainable practices by suppliers in the food sector should be prioritised by each municipality, province and region. This includes strategic support for food production and carbon reduction, food safety and quality accreditations, reformulation of processed food, and tendering for public contracts, including electronic tendering mechanisms and capacity building.

- **Work with Suppliers**

Procurement processes, ease of access to contracts, public and product liability insurance requirements and quality assurance accreditations should be proportionate to manage risk but not too onerous. They should not act as a disincentive for SMEs to tender or be a disproportionate cost in their tender price.

- **Plan for Sustainability and the Seasons**

Lead times for production are critical in the food sector to allow for seasonal production planning. A Prior Information Notice (PIN) should be used to notify of the intention to advertise a food tender a minimum of 18 months in advance of the contract being advertised.

- **Skill Your Staff**

Creating impetus for the sustainable purchase of food is essential at a corporate level. Inspire commitment and ensure knowledge and skills are firmly established within the procurement and catering functions, where the facility to implement change is found.

## 3.4 How to develop urban food strategies



### Urban Food Strategies: The Rough Guide to Sustainable Food Systems

#### Food integrates sustainability dimensions

Food plays an important role in a wide range of policy areas at national but also regional and local level: from land-use planning to infrastructure and transport, from environmental protection to housing and socio-economic development. Food can function as a vehicle to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability, and to address justice and health issues in cities.

#### Placing food on a city's agenda

Developing an Urban Food Strategy enables cities to envision a turn towards more sustainability and to plan for concrete action. Urban food strategies place food on the urban agenda, link different stakeholder groups in their efforts to push for more sustainable food production and consumption.

#### Urban food strategy: a holistic approach

Ideally, urban food strategies take a holistic approach to the food system of a city. They embrace various policy domains, including health and wellbeing, environment, economy and community development, social and cultural development, and education. They also consider different stages of the food system: production, processing, storage, transport, retail, consumption and waste.

Changing the food system requires the collaboration of different actors, from public and private agencies among which policymakers, citizens, entrepreneurs and civil society organizations.

#### Steps to develop an urban food strategy

1. **Organizing participation processes and governance**  
It is important to identify all relevant stakeholders, to understand their motivations, and communicate with the wider audience.
2. **Assessment of the current food system**  
Assessing the current food systems helps to identify issues and challenges faced by consumers and producers, and provides citizens and decision makers with the information needed to set policy goals and establish baseline data and indicators for monitoring.
3. **Formulating joint visions and goals**  
A shared vision and common goals give guidance to specific actions. Discussing objectives offers an opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience, and develop a common sense of understanding and direction
4. **Defining an Action Plan and concrete Actions**  
Based on a common plan, specific actions can be designed and prioritized in order to address the main challenges identified in step 2. It is paramount to decide which actors will take the leadership to deliver the actions as well as define resources and what tools to apply.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation**  
Monitoring is important to reconsider participation, goals and action plans; opening new windows of opportunity and building on earlier actions and achievements.

[www.foodlinkscommunity.net](http://www.foodlinkscommunity.net)



### Recommendations for local governments

- Promote urban food strategies through various targeted communication strategies, such as good festivals, local good food award competition, workshops and other educational activities.
- Provide financial support for food related projects and activities, such as farmer markets, community supported agriculture, urban agriculture, and the start of sustainable food businesses.
- Make sure that the different municipal departments dealing with local food coordinate their activities.
- Allocate time of key civil servants to engage in the development of urban food strategies.
- Make sure that you re-orientate your public procurement of food towards more sustainable food, choosing for more healthy food, more organic food, more vegetarian food, more local food, or more culturally-appropriate food.
- Designate land for (peri)urban agriculture and gardening in current and also future development plans.
- Designate areas for farmers' markets and sustainable food shops, assuring easy access and excluding competing chains.
- Revise legislation where necessary to support the proliferation of small producers and independent enterprises.
- Designate exclusion zones for unhealthy food hubs near sensitive areas such as schools.
- Create facilities that support short food supply chains, such as local slaughterhouses, processing facilities, storage facilities, and wholesale markets.