

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 & S Middleton

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 Berlin

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 M Erhart

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

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