



Youth and young farmers' workshop

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Group 11

Rural cooperatives managed by local inhabitants
to maintain retail activity in rural areas

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Main issues and challenges identified

The main issues and challenges discussed were as follows:

- ✓ It is often difficult to keep shops open in rural areas. What is the right model for local products?
- ✓ Lack of commitment of local inhabitants in the development of rural areas; individual and not collective thinking prevailed.
- ✓ Defining/targeting needs of local inhabitants in rural areas.
- ✓ Higher price of local products, e.g. organic farming products.
- ✓ Efforts by decision-makers to support the process of keeping shops open are not sufficient in itself: it should be combined with an analysis of the local consumers' real needs.
- ✓ Buying food products should be made easy and convenient. Often this is not the reality.



Main obstacles identified

- ✓ It would be ideal to produce and consume food locally. Yet, people end up buying food grown outside the local area from supermarkets.
- ✓ Financial support is important but not sufficient. How to motivate and organise the support of the local community?

Support needed

- ✓ Start from the people, define local needs and expectations, e.g. what is attractive for the young people in rural areas?
- ✓ Take into account the local demography and the diverse financial capacity of population groups, e.g. old people, youth.
- ✓ Promote the reliability of products produced locally. Is it viable to expect people to pay higher prices, e.g. during an economic crisis?

Lessons learnt

Communication and community-building

- ✓ Re-educate consumers regarding the benefits of buying and eating local produce and of participating in rural civic life;

- ✓ Encourage the community approach and commitment of people to sustainable development of their rural areas.
- ✓ Better communicate the added value of living in rural areas.
- ✓ Support initiatives focused on social profitability.

Promotion of local production and products

- ✓ Bring products close to consumers at decent prices (encouraging short supply chains).
- ✓ Develop local/territorial branding.
- ✓ Reinforce cooperation between local producers.
- ✓ Develop a system of fair taxes to motivate/reward sellers and/or buyers of rural food produced and sold locally.

Possible actions

Multiply the model of community enterprises/cooperatives powered by the commitment of local producers, inhabitants and local authorities based on existing successful experiences in EU, such as the French *'co-operative companies of collective interest'*, which have the following features:

- It allows all types of actors to commit to a common initiative: users, public bodies, companies, associations, private individuals, etc.
- It produces all types of goods and services which meet the collective needs of a territory with the best possible mobilisation of its economic and social resources. The social utility is guaranteed by the fact that it promotes dialogue, democratic debate and citizenship formation.
- It respects co-operative rules:
 - power is distributed on the basis of 'one person, one vote' involving all participants in the life of the company as well as in its management;
 - income produced is invested to guarantee future autonomy and sustainability;
 - based on the ideology of local and sustainable development, it is fixed in a territory and it promotes the connections between actors from the same economic region.

