

Consumer Involvement in Food Production: Demand as a Driver of Sustainable and Competitive Food Systems

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Key Points

1. Shoppers are broadly interested in supporting sustainable and ethical food production.
2. People don't just interact with food systems as **consumers** but also as **citizens**.
3. Some food systems enable citizens to have a direct involvement with local sustainable farming and value chains.
4. There are different ways to understand and measure sustainability – this adds to complexity of messages and confusion about what citizens should do for the best.

General Trends

“Consumption in 2015 is increasingly being driven by the **heart**: consumers are making choices defined by their positive impact on the world and community through cause-linked buying, the thriving “sharing economy” or the “can-do” attitude that Millennials have in common.”

Euromonitor International: Top 10 Global Consumer Trends 2015



Consumers Influencing Sustainable Food Systems: #1 Buying Organic and Local

- Steady growth in **organic food sales** (IFOAM 2014)
- Persistent interest in buying **local food** (JRC 2013).
- Growth in **short food supply chains** (EIP-AGRI 2015)
- But these behaviours are driven by a range of considerations (e.g. health, taste, quality) – not only sustainability issues
- Local food and global food chains are blurred, and also deliver different sustainability impacts – see www.glamur.eu

Consumers Influencing Sustainable Food Systems: #2 Climate Friendly products

- Eurobarometer 2011: 68% of respondents see climate change as a serious problem (= increase from 2009).
- However, links between food and climate change not clear in consumers' minds e.g. studies from Finland, UK and Netherlands show:
 - Confusion about what a Carbon footprint is
 - Recognition that other environmental and ethical issues as important – so which to prioritise?
 - Not clear how to compare products
 - Scepticism about effectiveness of labelling
 - Environmental attributes compete with other characteristics e.g. organic, local, healthy, affordable, tasty

(Sources: Hartikainen *et al* 2014; Spaargaren *et al* 2011, Gadema & Oglethorpe 2011)

Labelling is important, but not the only way to enable citizens to drive sustainable food systems

Context, routines and prices are highly influential in food purchase decisions:

- Consumers often don't read labels (no time!)
- Consumers may be skeptical about labels
- Ability to purchase according to personal values is not evenly distributed in markets
- Social and food justice issues need to be tackled too

“Consumers may have increasing preferences for ‘greener’ products, but the reality of the modern food shopping experience is that consumers can ultimately only buy what retailers offer to them....” (Gadema and Oglethorpe 2011: 821)

Citizens Getting Involved in Community-Led Initiatives and Short Food Chains

- Respondents growing their own food rose from 9.61% in 2003 to 15.5% in 2007 (European Quality of Life Survey reported by Church *et al* 2015).
 - London Harvest-o-meter estimate: community food growers produced £1.4 million worth of food over the course of a year
http://www.capitalgrowth.org/big_idea/the_harvestometer/.
- Rise of ‘civic’ food networks and short food chains (Renting *et al* 2012)
- **Social innovations** – new relationships, business models, use of social media and web platforms



Citizens Directly Influencing Farming Systems: Community Supported Agriculture (GAS, AMAP)

- About 4,000 CSA groups in 16 countries in 2014 (Source: URGENCI)
 - 465,000 consumers, 6,300 farms
 - mutual assistance and democratic process – <http://urgenci.net/principles-of-teikei/>
 - Supporting organic / agroecological farm systems
 - Delivering economic + social benefits

Citizens Involved in the Governance of Food Systems

- Rise of food policy councils (global)
- Partnerships between local authorities, NGOs, community-led initiatives, academics
- Tackling sustainability, health, food justice...
- Reconnecting cities and regional farming
- 'Reflexive governance' of food systems (e.g. Marsden 2013) – facilitates learning and adaptation



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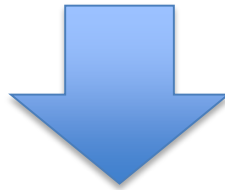
About Sustainable Food Cities

Across the globe, communities at every scale have recognised the key role food can play in dealing with some of today's most pressing social, economic and environmental challenges and are taking a joined up approach to transforming their food culture and food system.



Summary

Transparency and reliable labelling in food systems are essential requirements for demand-driven sustainability



- BUT, they are **not** enough on their own....
- there are barriers to behaviour change e.g. access, affordability, routines and habits...
- and there are also ‘open doors’

Conclusions and Discussion Points



- Push at 'open doors' – consumer (Citizen!) interest in local, organic, ethical and short food chains....and align these with sustainability improvements in food systems.
- Use public sector procurement to support sustainable food systems – for 'captive consumers'
- Do more research and societal engagement on the question of what a sustainable food system is and how progress can be measured.
 - Diets need to be sustainable, not just certain foodstuffs

Conclusions and Discussion Points (cont'd)

- Identify the most powerful levers of change in the food system e.g. business-to-business relationships.
- Enable and provide opportunities for citizens to be involved:
 - Experiential learning - direct reconnection with farms and farming – more likely to lead to greater understanding and better decisions.
- Support citizen involvement in food governance



Thank you

Any questions?

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