

# How to stimulate the development of short food supply chains and farmers' markets through digital platforms?



## The challenge

The use of **new digital tools** like social media, ICT platforms, and applications for mobile devices is playing an increasingly crucial role to boost the development of Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) and Farmers' Markets (FMs). The **Covid-19 pandemic** demonstrated that these solutions are increasingly important to strengthen urban-rural interlinkages, fortify the connections between producers and consumers, and avoid disruptions along the agri-food value chain in times of crises (FAO, 2020).

To foster the development of SFSCs and in particular of FMs, Coldiretti, the main farmers' organization at the Italian and European levels, developed and promoted the use of a **smartphone application called "Campagna Amica"**, aiming at raising consumers' awareness about the benefits associated with FMs. SFSCs are characterized by the presence of **trust relations** among the different actors of the chain, built on the knowledge and awareness of its mechanisms and advantages.

## The pilot action

Led by Coldiretti, with the support of the University of Parma, the pilot action aimed at **exploring the effectiveness of the mobile application "Campagna Amica"**. The application - named after Coldiretti's [Foundation](#) promoting SFSCs - aims at **stimulating consumers' interest in FMs in Italy**. In particular, the action took the form of a **communication campaign** promoting knowledge and use of the application among consumers from **economically disadvantaged areas of Italy**, identified in four regions of Southern Italy.

The communication campaign was conducted through a **multi-faceted strategy**, including a blend of online and offline activities. The outbreak of the **Covid-19 pandemic** and the social distancing measures imposed in Italy from March 2020 had a heavy impact on the campaign, which had to be re-shaped into a digital promotional campaign. Despite these challenges, the pilot action produced interesting insights about the **potential of mobile applications and ICT to support SFSCs** and generated new insights about the role of this type of tool in times of food insecurity and crises.

## Key recommendations

### For practitioners (both organizations and farmers):

- Foster cooperation among farmers via joint initiatives and collective management systems
- Promote the establishment of indoor, strategically located FMs
- Cultivate resilience and adaptive capacity
- Contribute to consumer food education
- Promote the use of digital platforms and tools for communication and marketing
- Improve professional marketing skills

### For policy makers and public authorities:

- Increase the number of FMs and food fairs in urban areas
- Promote public food procurement procedures that favour the use of agricultural products sourced locally
- Encourage the use of indoor public areas for new FMs
- Promote educational initiatives for citizens on SFSCs
- Provide support and visibility to SFSC initiatives
- Offer financial support to agricultural producers and FMs through national and EU funds

## Main findings

Findings from the pilot initiative show that the application "Campagna Amica" contributed to **increasing consumers' knowledge** about several themes linked to agriculture, e.g. nutrition, sustainability, SFSCs, origin, and food quality. It also enabled consumers' learning about **local and traditional recipes**, fostering a sense of cultural identity and belonging to a territory. The application was particularly appreciated by consumers, especially urban ones, as a tool to feel closer to farmers and to **enable trust in farmers' products**.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the application played a crucial role in re-strengthening the **bonds between consumers and producers** despite the social distancing rules and the closure of FMs, and was used as a pathway for expressing solidarity to local producers. It also fostered **increased local consumption**, thanks to facilitated access to information on the nearest FMs and local farmers, as well as to the possibility of **direct interactions between consumers and producers**, which notably led to the development of home delivery features.

## Recommendations for practitioners (organizations and farmers)

- **Foster cooperation among farmers via joint initiatives and collective management systems**

Joint initiatives allow producers to exchange knowledge, share costs, and increase the range of products sold in FMs, thus increasing their bargaining power. Through collective management systems, joint initiatives become easily identifiable and recognizable and work as guarantors towards consumers.

- **Promote the establishment of indoor, strategically located FMs**

Indoor FMs have the advantage to facilitate consumer visits in the winter months, and an easier organization of educational or cultural activities. They also enable better storage and increased offer of perishable products. The strategic location of FMs nearby other shops enables consumers' purchase from different channels.

- **Cultivate resilience and adaptive capacity**

The Covid-19 emergency has highlighted the importance of being able to react in challenging times, by identifying opportunities and developing new skills and strategies. To work in FMs, producers are required to adapt to the requirements of the EU Farm to Fork strategy relating to the range of products sold, marketing and communication, as well as waste reduction measures.

- **Contribute to consumers' food education**

Producers are recommended to make FMs places of socialization and food education, where consumers can learn about food, healthy eating, and sustainable diets.

- **Promote the use of digital platforms and tools for communication, marketing, and sales**

Producers are recommended to use digital platforms and tools to inform/educate consumers. Engaging in digital communication activities enables producers to reach new consumers and foster consumers' retention, thus making FMs more economically attractive. Digital platforms and activities can also be a key instrument to support responsible tourism in rural and economically disadvantaged areas. In addition, producers are recommended to invest in the development of digital platforms and tools that allow consumers to buy food online, such as e-commerce platforms, which enable the development of new sales channels.

- **Improve professional marketing skills**

Producers are recommended to invest in improving their professional marketing skills to be able to analyse consumer needs, identify new opportunities, and communicate the distinctive characteristics of their product (i.e. taste, territory, company history).

## Recommendations for policy makers and public authorities

- **Increase the number of FMs and food fairs in urban areas**

Increasing the number of FMs initiatives and food fairs in urban areas is crucial to boost consumers' knowledge of agricultural products and promote urban-rural linkages.

- **Promote public food procurement procedures that reward the use of agricultural products sourced locally**

It is recommended to develop food procurement procedures that reward actors sourcing local agricultural products. This in turn will support and strengthen SFSC initiatives.

- **Encourage the use of indoor public areas for new FMs**

Using indoor public areas to establish new FMs makes the markets more attractive and convenient, for both consumers and farmers.

- **Promote educational initiatives for citizens on SFSCs**

Promoting public educational initiatives targeted to citizens is crucial to raise awareness on SFSCs-related themes, and to encourage citizens to choose local and seasonal food.

- **Provide support and visibility to SFSC initiatives**

Policy makers are recommended to create a permanent observatory on SFSCs. This would allow learning about all the regional and territorial SFSC initiatives, monitoring local markets, and collecting data to increase participation in FMs. It is also crucial to give SFSCs greater visibility, not only on a national scale but also within communities and on an international level, to include FMs among the tourist circuits in large and small urban centres. SFSCs should also be supported in the context of broader employment policies in rural areas.


- **Offer financial support to agricultural producers and FMs through national and EU funds**

Policy makers are recommended to increase the financial support to agricultural producers and FMs, as well as to promote existing initiatives, via national and EU funds.

### More info

Gentili R., Coppola E., Veneziani M., Discetti R., Filipović J., Kuc V. (2021) "Report evaluating the pilot initiative on food fairs and farmers' markets", Strength2Food, Deliverable n. 9.6.

<https://www.strength2food.eu/2021/03/08/report-evaluating-the-pilot-initiative-on-food-fairs-and-farmers-markets/>

 This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 678024.

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Strength2Food is a five-year, €6.9 million project to improve the effectiveness of EU food quality schemes (FQS), public sector food procurement (PSFP) and to stimulate Short Food Supply Chains (SFSC). Lessons from the research have been applied and verified in 6 pilot initiatives that brought together academic and non-academic partners.



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