

Towards More Sustainable Policy Measures Supporting Local Food Systems in Latvia

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Abstract

The local food system (LFS) is a set of interconnected processes and social agents involved in food production, distribution, consumption and disposal (e.g. line ministries, local municipalities, scientific and research institutions, non-governmental sector). The role of local food has been emphasized by international organizations such as Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, European Food Safety Authority, and Council of Europe. According to the UN, the world's food diversity is declining and the EC estimates that 20% of food in the EU is waste leading to more rapid climate change and declined biodiversity. Local food and its production technologies are part of national bioeconomy, country's unique cultural heritage and identity. Public policies and programmes are needed to develop and support LFS infrastructure through investment, research, and training. The focus on LFS is greatly in line with the environmental measures of the EU Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy emphasizing environmental, food and health safety. The aim of the presentation is to analyse current policies and measures supporting LFS in Latvia, particularly focusing on aspects relevant to rural communities and local businesses. According to the project research results, sustainable food security in Latvia requires maintaining different food chain models, especially the local food chain model suitable for the involvement of small farms and artisan food producers. Strengthening local food consumption traditions and revitalizing the rural environment, as well as raising awareness and knowledge of societal groups about food production processes, transport and environmental impact at all stages of the food chain, plays a key role. Environmentally friendly practices in all stages of food chain must be included as an important policy: reducing the tax burden on local food, including support for organic farming and the processing of organic products. It is also important to implement the principles of circular economy leading to reduced food and packaging waste. LFS policy documents must focus on fair cooperation in food chains ensuring food traceability and verification process (e.g. development of digital solutions). At national level, defining the production of small local food businesses and artisan food producers, and their role in the sustainable development policies of the territories is crucial. Changing food systems is not just a matter of agriculture. The attractiveness of the countryside as a living space for the urban people and young families is increasing in Latvia, thus the number of people with their own small farms but with the main income source not related to the agriculture, will increase. These people will contribute to the development of the rural cultural environment and the long-term viability of rural areas. Thus, the interests of this population group must also be included in the development of the LFS and rural policy.

Key words: local food system, food production, policy recommendations, artisan food.