

OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS IN USE OF LOCAL AND ORGANIC FOOD

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CONCLUSIONS

Identifying simple concrete activities seem to be a good way to start bringing about the desired changes. Because they are easy to understand and it is also easy for others to join in and support them. Complicated structures are often unapproachable. Because the situation in each country (and indeed in each community) differs, the needs, opportunities and ideas for promoting the use of local organic food vary greatly. Despite these differences there also seem to be some common aspects. One of the basic problems in local organic food systems seems to be connected to food chains. In Sweden and Finland local food chains have often been replaced by complex international centralized industrial systems. The challenge in these countries is how local chains can be revived. In Lithuania, Latvia and Poland, on the other hand, many of these local food chains still exist. In these countries the question is how they can be supported.

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Finding a way to begin to act for local and organic food is difficult. Where to start? What to do? The cases in this report show that almost all of them have single persons as initiators in the background. That goes for the Polish eco museum as well as the Swedish bag of groceries and the Finnish local food purchasing development in the Kauhajoki municipal kitchen. Talking about the idea and finding ways to start pushing it forward with other people can, in the end, make a big difference.

As the obstacles for development vary in different places the solutions also vary. The range of creative initiatives covers all thinkable fields: information about ecology, farmers' own activities in creating brands and labels, associations, developing ordering and delivery systems, processing, municipal help, marketing campaigns and so on. It seems to be much about connections and contacts. When an idea is born, it needs some time to develop, and for more people find out about it and support it. Active persons further develop the idea by communicating with others. Communication is important in the development phase (so that the idea will contribute to meeting the needs), a new innovation needs to find its own connections - a contact net of individuals who understand the advantages and support it. During the implementation it is important to inform different parties so that everyone knows the situation and latest development. Communication is needed also when there is an apparent lack of solutions. Most likely there is an initiative somewhere that has dealt with similar problems and can provide inspiration about how to move ahead. In other words, good communication is a prerequisite for success.

The local label in Juva and the concept Farmers' Own are also identity building projects. Alternative food systems like local organic food are competing with the large food industry. One of the differences between these is that alternative systems wish to maintain or re-establish

a relationship between the consumer and the producer whereas in the food industry this relationship is lost. These initiatives help both to build a direct relationship between the producer and consumer and to inform consumers where products come from.

All farmers do not have the time, interest or possibility to be at market places and many customers who wish to buy local organic products want to be able to purchase them in grocery stores and super markets. This goes especially for institutional units (e.g. institutional kitchens and restaurants). For such situations a middleman can be very useful. When the middleman has clear guidelines for the activities, the customers get trust and can utilise the services. Also the farmers can concentrate on their main primary tasks and leave the marketing to experts.

Local organic food can also be seen as one embodiment of sustainable rural development. Development issues are complex and involve many different aspects. All of these connections are not always easily seen but still they are there. For example, at first it may seem irrational for a municipality to spend more money to buy more expensive locally produced organic food. However when looked at in its entirety, the investment may pay back in terms of increased employment opportunities, more tax paying citizens and more profitable small scale production in the municipality.

It is important for the EU commission, for the prime ministers in Europe and other top-level decision makers to understand that a real grass-root process for sustainable development in Europe is under way. Exchange and information sharing projects such as BERAS can create positive dynamics making local initiatives more visible and speeding up the positive changes needed for an ecologically, economically and socially sustainable society.

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