

Open Food Network: Empowering Farmers and Strengthening Short Food Supply Chains

Problem encountered and objective

Small and medium-scale farmers across Europe often struggle to access stable markets and fair prices. They depend on long, opaque supply chains dominated by large retailers, while consumers who want local, seasonal and sustainable food find it difficult to identify trustworthy producers or to buy from many of them in one place. Research on short food supply chains shows that lack of convenience, fragmented offer and weak logistics are key barriers to their wider use. The Open Food Network (OFN) is a global, open-source digital platform created to tackle these challenges. It enables producers, food hubs, cooperatives and communities to set up online shops, aggregate products and organize distribution of local food through short, fair and transparent supply chains.

Main results / outcomes

Improved market access and income diversification. Producers can open an online shop in a few clicks, sell directly to households, catering services or buying groups, and simultaneously sell through community food hubs or cooperatives.

More efficient planning and lower transaction costs. It supports inventory management, order cycles and basic logistics.

Creation of local food hubs and cooperation between producers. OFN is especially designed for collective “food hubs”, where several farmers sell together and may share logistics, packing and delivery.

Stronger rural–urban linkages and consumer awareness. Consumers can conveniently purchase from many local producers in one virtual marketplace, while hubs often combine sales with information about farming practices and producers.

Practical recommendations

- (1) Define who will host and manage the local OFN. Clarify roles, decision-making rules, cost-sharing and data ownership.
- (2) Map interested farmers, processors, consumer groups and markets. Identify available storage, packing and delivery options.
- (3) Launch a first pilot hub with a limited number of producers and products and a simple delivery model.
- (4) Invest in training using OFN user guides and encourage peer-to-peer mentoring.
- (5) Define transparent pricing structures.
- (6) Try to link the online platform to physical events, educational activities and communication on social media.

Further information

Open Food Network global site: <https://openfoodnetwork.org>

Open Food Network User Guide (multiple language versions): <https://guide.openfoodnetwork.org/>

Best practice fiche description at EU Transition Pathways platform: <https://transition-pathways.europa.eu/pse/best-practices/open-food-network-empowering-short-food-chains-social-economy>



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About this abstract

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EU4Advice (<https://eu4advice.eu/>) aims to lay the ground for effective capacity building of Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC) actors, by supporting advisors as catalysers of the knowledge flow from research to practice within an EU network of SFSC advisors, and by promoting the integration of SFSC advisors into national AKIS.

