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## FARMERS OF TOMORROW: THE TRANSFORMATIVE STRENGTH OF SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS

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### Abstract

*The objective of this paper is to explore the experience of farmers and institutions with short food supply chains as a tool towards food sovereignty. Our research question focused on finding the advantages and obstacles of short supply chains (SSCs) which could help in directing future civil and institutional engagement and support of SSCs. We also considered the policy context through a brief overview of actual policy documents regarding SSCs. A mixed methodology was applied with data collected through an online survey and semi-structured interviews. The research was carried out in November and December 2020. The survey included two subsamples, farmers and institutions, while the semi-structured interviews were carried out among members of the "Najbolje lokalno" SSC. The online survey results showed that our participants – farmers and institutions – are highly interested in SSCs but lack educational courses which would help them establish more SSCs or support them in a more adequate manner. Farmers were found to be highly satisfied with their participation in SSCs as they gained new skills, valuable feedback, and fair prices for their products through participation in SSCs. The semi-structured interviews revealed a more in-depth farmers' experience with specific SSCs. Institutional participants hold SSCs as essential for social, economic, and environmental viability. Food sovereignty in Croatia has been developing mostly through civil society, and more recently institutional support is also emerging. In striving to make the food system more local and suitable to the needs of local farmers, citizens, and local communities, these same institutions should address the weak points of administrative obstacles to make food sovereignty values become more than just an exotic example of alternative practice but also a part of the local communities' systems.*

**Keywords:** farmers, food sovereignty, local agriculture, short supply chains, Croatia

## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Today, more than ever, food has become a political and economic issue that is being considered by more and more social actors. The right to adequate nutrition in a fair and sustainable system, the preservation of peasant economies and local economies around the world, and organic agriculture together with the socioeconomic and socio-political fair distribution of food are ideas that for decades have inspired alternative practices in food production, distribution, and procurement (Kay et al., 2018).

Practices aimed at alternative food systems are numerous and diverse, and they are most often bottom-up initiatives, such as community supported agriculture (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007), urban gardening, civic agriculture (Lyson, 2004), and counter-hegemonic food systems (Renting et al., 2003). These initiatives are based on and sometimes even preceded by ideas such as food sovereignty or food system literacy (Kimmura, 2011). The importance of such an approach to a food system is recognized at the level of university education and within the framework of agroecology approaches uniting the above-mentioned initiatives are studied as well as within the academic initiative on emancipatory rural politics (Scoones et al., 2018). These initiatives are often embedded in more comprehensive movements for global justice or solidarity economies. For all initiatives and their conceptual counterparts, it is essential that a food system achieves all three main levels of sustainability – namely environmental, social, and economic sustainability. It is equally important to protect biodiversity, endangered by a monocultural method of production, and to ensure social cohesion and provide a dignified life for both producers and consumers.

Reducing food miles and keeping money as much as possible within local communities as well as subsidiarity are some of the ways to begin the transition towards achieving these goals. Nevertheless, the efforts of bottom-up actors, even initially marginal, showed benefits and resonated more widely. Today, numerous features of the once alternative way of producing, distributing, and procuring food can be almost regularly found in various public policies<sup>2</sup>. In Croatia, such an approach in supporting the local economy through short supply chains (SSCs) is also increasingly being promoted.

The definition of food sovereignty was first formulated by Via Campesina in the Food Sovereignty Declaration from 1996. It was revised in the following years (Patel, 2009),

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1 This paper is based on the activity “Analiza institucionalne podrške prilikom osnivanja dvaju tipova kratkih lanaca opskrbe (model osnivanja odozdo i odozgo)” [Analysis of institutional support in establishing two types of short supply chains (bottom-up and top-down models)] conducted by the University of Zagreb Faculty of Agriculture under the 2020 Annual Action Plan of the National Rural Network. The published report (Bokan, 2021) includes some of the data published here, but additional analyses were carried out for this paper and the content and conceptual scope of the work was significantly modified.

2 Changes to the social climate in the last thirty years have led corporations and the business sector to also legitimize themselves through the logic of social responsibility and through environmental protection. Similarly, the study of supply chains, as an important topic in organizational and economic sciences, underwent a similar process. In addition to the usual profit criterion, short supply chains are studied and evaluated taking into account the carbon footprint criterion, and the social responsibility criterion (Feng et al., 2017).

however, the main idea is still based on advocating for the right of peoples to food and water, emphasizing the right to choose an adequate (in every sense, from nutritional to a culturally acceptable one) food system, the right to production resources, the right to regulate domestic agricultural production and trade with the aim of achieving sustainable development, i.e. giving priority to local communities in management and usage of water resources.

The belief from which food sovereignty arises that the right to healthy food is one of the basic human rights (Schanbacher, 2010:IX) is what distinguishes the concept of food sovereignty from that of food security. They both aim to eliminate world hunger, but with quite different means. Ensuring food security aims, in a broader sense, at solving the problem of ensuring enough food for the growing population, and more narrowly, at solving the problem of hunger in the world. Food security seeks to find the solution in small farmers, but with their efforts focused on achieving global competitiveness, which means being oriented more towards conventional agriculture, and relying on chemicalization and neglecting the nutritional value of food. Food sovereignty, on the contrary, emphasizes local production and consumption of food (which is good for both farmers and consumers, and in the long run brings benefits to the entire community). Activists advocating for food sovereignty also believe that small farmers play a key role, namely those producing food in an organic and moral manner, without harming the environment. Food sovereignty is primarily aimed at solving two layers of interconnected issues: “on the consumption level, to the access of individuals to locally- and sustainably-grown and processed foods [...] and, on the production level, to the issue of resistance of small-scale farmers and food producers, who are facing increasingly adverse market conditions threatening their opportunities for economic reproduction within the current food economy” (Matacena and Corvo, 2020).

SSCs have a key role in achieving these goals, connecting the producer with an end user, bypassing intermediaries. In this way, at the same time, farmers can secure a higher product price for themselves and a lower one for end users. However, SSCs are still not a ubiquitous phenomenon partly due to a number of organizational issues. Using the example of SSCs organized as bottom-up initiatives, several studies have indicated how the organizational burden often falls on the backs of a few, how customers stop ordering during the summer months, and other hindering practices (Orlić, 2019). Nevertheless, the concept is recognized as appropriate for supporting local farmers, and SSCs are increasingly being discussed in public policies.

In this paper, we will present the research results on SSCs from the perspective of institutions and farmers – two different actors relevant in establishing of the food sovereignty system. We will also present attitudes about the SSC established in a local community of the Medimurje region. We will observe the experiences of both farmers and institutions with SSCs and possible difficulties in establishing and maintaining them. In addition, we will analyze the place and role of SSCs in EU development strategy documents, aimed at outlining food, environmental and rural policies for the countries of the European Union.

Here we will consider the context of the existing development of food sovereignty in Croatia and set out recommendations suggesting and emphasizing the weak points SSCs' development, and (in general) the processes of achieving food sovereignty, as well as ways of overcoming them.

## 2. WHY HAVE SHORT SUPPLY CHAINS SUDDENLY BECOME A TOPICAL ISSUE? LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The broad and multi-layered topic of food sovereignty is presented here using the example of short food supply chains as one of the successful strategies directed towards local and fresh food, restoration of the relationship between farmers and their local communities and increasing choices for citizens referring to decisions on what and whose food to buy, and what economies and technologies to support.

Changes on the food market, especially in the context of climate change, have been evident in the last decade or two and noted by numerous scholars. We particularly highlight those investigating SSCs as the main expression of the need for safe food, perhaps even as the simplest way of transitioning towards more climate-neutral food (Levermann, 2014; Sarkis et al., 2020; Morkūnas et al., 2022; Doernberg et al., 2022). In this way, awareness of climate change shapes the consumer climate, and in this context, SSCs have a market advantage due to their lower greenhouse gas emissions compared to conventionally distributed food (Bokan, 2021). SSCs are especially important for the “survival and revitalization of family farms, for supporting organic and economically sustainable agricultural production and for revitalizing local rural communities” (Bokan, 2021:3).

The discussion around SSCs receives a completely new dimension after studies indicated that not only are they models for achieving a reduction in food miles – the distance from producer to consumer – but that they can also be generators of sustainability and connectivity of rural and urban areas and their local communities (De Fazio, 2016). Thus, SSCs have become a model by which agriculture realizes its multifunctional role. Namely, the establishing of SSCs is often applied in order to promote certain models of community (cooperation or partnerships between producers and consumers that would transcend their narrow interest connection), as well as certain value concepts such as quality, locality, environment, certain forms of justice, equality and even democracy (Chiffolleau, 2009). In order to achieve more sustainable agriculture responding to the crises of our time, it is necessary, besides technological innovations, to introduce social and organizational innovations (Pešak, 2021). An example of such social partnership is community-supported agriculture (Orlić, 2014, 2019; Sarjanović, 2014; Slavuj Borčić, 2020; Ruganec and Bokan, 2021; Vukić et al., 2020; Bokan and Menardi, 2022).

The goals of the new European Union agricultural policy are addressing the issues of climate change and that of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the policy is directed towards searching for sustainable solutions through the development of environmentally more suitable models of production, distribution, and consumption. Such aspirations

are reflected in the European Green Deal (Fetting, 2020), the “Farm to Fork Strategy” (European Commission, 2020a), and the EU Biodiversity Strategy until 2030 (European Commission, 2021) which represent the basic starting points in the creation of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union.

The European Union development strategies for the upcoming period emphasize the improvement of local models of food provision (Pešak, 2021). Thus, the European Green Deal (EGD) sets as a goal neutralizing the impact on climate change, as introduced in the “Farm to Fork Strategy”. “It addresses comprehensively the challenges of sustainable food systems and recognises the inextricable links between healthy people, healthy societies and a healthy planet” (European Commission, 2020a:2).

In this section we will provide a brief overview of these policy documents from the aspect of the development of SSCs and answer the question of how SSCs are recognized and valorized in these documents.

The “Farm to Fork Strategy” sets out three basic goals. The first is to achieve a neutral or positive impact on the environment, since the current food system relies on production, processing, retailing, packaging, and transportation that have a significant harmful impact on the environment due to emissions of harmful gases and disturbance of biodiversity. The second is to ensure the accessibility of quality food to all citizens and to reduce social inequalities. This should result in a change to practices resulting in the fact that on the one side “33 million people cannot afford a quality meal every second day [...] while about 20% of the food produced is wasted, [and] obesity is also rising” (European Commission, 2020a:3). One of the most vulnerable groups in this system are primary producers whose income is on average lower than the income in other activities. The third goal is to achieve a system with the most sustainable food that is also the most affordable.

Yet the text of the Strategy rarely makes any mention of SSCs. In the proposed measures, SSCs are indirectly mentioned in the section on “legislative initiatives to enhance cooperation of primary producers to support their position in the food chain and non-legislative initiatives to improve transparency.” The only recognized model is green public procurement in the context of promotional campaigns aimed at increasing consumer trust and stimulating demand for organic and local products. The responsibility seems to be transferred to the individual level of the consumer, who can increase the sustainability of the food system by changing their habits, while putting any emphasis on structural changes that would facilitate and encourage green public procurement was omitted.<sup>3</sup> Leaving the transition to individuals instead of preparing a collective transition project, as a rule does not promote change, and it can trigger distrust in the institutions that are expected to provide a kind of protection against threats such as increasing market concentration or the consequences of climate change (Brimont and

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<sup>3</sup> It is too much to expect such responsibility from individual consumers who are, although aware of the value of organic and locally branded food, generally more willing to be guided by the price criterion in everyday life, which is stronger with lower economic power (Wier and Calverley, 2002).

Saujot, 2020; Pešak, 2021). The responsibility of institutions is even greater if we have in mind that the passivity of institutions in solving local problems leads to a lack of participation of citizens, as Bokan and Obad (2018) concluded in the study of development perspectives in the rural area of the city of Dubrovnik. The authors indicated that distrust in institutions and political structures leads to citizens' disappointment resulting in social apathy of the local population.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union for the period 2014-2020 recognized SSCs as one of the priorities for rural development. It emphasized the need for "improving competitiveness of primary producers by better integrating them into the agri-food chain through quality schemes, adding value to agricultural products, promotion in local markets and short supply circuits, producer groups and organisations and inter-branch organisations" (Official Journal of the EU, L347:500). The opportunity for financing the development of SSCs was open through thematic subprograms. The third (of a total nine) CAP specific objective is to improve the position of farmers in the food chain, which implies encouraging local food systems and SSCs, strengthening farmers' associations, organic agriculture, and responsiveness to changing consumer preferences (Legowski et al., 2020).

What is striking in the Strategy, however, is that some of the proposed possible solutions and further direction of development are not targeted towards strengthening of the SSCs, but towards the digitalization of agriculture, usage of satellites and new genomic techniques, which is probably more suitable for the further industrialization of agriculture rather than directing agriculture towards multifunctionality in local communities.

Still, no matter how inspiring and ambitious the new strategies are, the challenge is how to ensure they are implemented with equal political will at the national level, and to then turn them into measures appropriate to these local contexts in member states. The advantages achieved by Croatian producers in SSCs are clearly stated in the Recommendations of the Commission for the Croatian Strategic Plan within the CAP, which mentions "Croatian farmers who use SSC achieve on average 8138 Euros more added value on the farm than farmers who rely on longer supply chains [...] During the COVID-19 pandemic direct sales also increased in the Croatian agricultural and food sector" (European Commission, 2020b). The EC clearly states that various private and public initiatives have been launched in Croatia to support the establishment of SSCs, but there is still a lack of systematicity in monitoring and establishing short supply chains. For example, in Croatia official documents cite top-down SSCs initiatives as examples, while a whole series of bottom-up initiatives, initiated by citizens in partnership with producers, is not visible. This may point to a weak connection between local initiatives and institutions (Pešak, 2021), weak institutional monitoring taking place 'in the field', and thus to a failure to strengthen already existing or new initiatives.

As for the administration's dedication to the development of SSCs in Croatia, they are mentioned in the Rural Development Programme (RDP) for the period 2014-2020, in terms of the need to organize producers and strengthen their position on the market

(Official Journal of the EU, L227). Encouraging the development of working groups that would develop SSCs and be financed by rural development measures was not fully realized, since the call for tenders from the measure in question<sup>4</sup> was only published once before the end of the program period. Pešak (2021) warned of specific deficiencies or shortcomings in the manner the tender was conducted, citing, for example, deficiencies to the Croatian context in defining the local market in tenders for support SSCs or restrictions for farmers' associations.

SSCs are recognized and valorized in all strategic documents at the European and national level of the Republic of Croatia, but they are relatively weakly encouraged through rural development measures. The COVID-19 pandemic and then the war in Ukraine opened a series of issues and the need to develop greater self-sufficiency, wherein small family farms gained additional importance. The development of small family farms and the related innovative models of SSCs could thus provide answers to many challenges faced in recent times. Food produced and distributed in this way has a significantly smaller ecological footprint, and local solidarity partnerships between producers and consumers could at the same time be an incentive for the local community development. The development of this system requires institutional support, and clear, but not predetermined, definitions adapted to local conditions. Laws and strategic documents thus play a key role in setting priorities and can significantly contribute to quality implementation and response to the real needs of farmers, citizens, associations, and other actors in local communities.

The aim of this study arose from our observation that even though SSCs represent quite an important part of the European Green Deal (EGD) agenda and public policies accompanying its implementation, and a growing market niche, they are still not well spread or steadily supported in Croatia. Therefore, the objective was to investigate several aspects of farmers' and institutions' experience with SSCs in order to determine the advantages but also note the weak points or obstacles of operating SSCs which would serve as a guide for future improvement of the logistic and legislative framework for SSCs.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research design was based on mixed methodology using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Specifically, we used a survey and semi-structured interviews to collect the data. The survey format allowed us to grasp the more general aspects of farmers' and institutions' experience with SSCs. We were focused on encompassing primarily those farmers with possible previous experience in SSCs and institutions, i.e. stakeholders in local communities throughout the country. The questionnaire focused on farmers' experience with SSCs including awareness of their possibilities, satisfaction

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<sup>4</sup> Measure 16.4.

with their engagement in SSCs, and obstacles they possibly faced. Since the institutional support was recognized at the European level as crucial for the implementation of the EGD goals, we focused on understanding the role of relevant institutions in the process as well as their awareness, interest, and experience in supporting the SSCs. Furthermore, we asked about the type of support and obstacles which could enhance or prevent the successful development of SSCs. The questionnaire for institutions included experience they had with supporting both private and professional SSCs, and their attitudes toward SSCs. In addition to the quantitative data, interviews were planned with several SSC members to deepen our understanding of experienced members of one SSC in Međimurje. Intrigued by previous research (Svržnjak et al., 2018) which showed a significant unwillingness by farmers for cooperation in the Međimurje county, we intended to explain how the SSC was established and endured. Therefore, the focus of the interviews was to detect farmers' motivation for, and relevance of the cooperation for them. We obtained the participants' contacts from the management of the SSC "Najbolje lokalno" [Best local (food)], and nine out of 17 contacted farmers agreed to an interview. In order to attain a diverse sample, we tried to include both sexes and different types of agricultural products. There were seven male and two female farmers, and they had a diverse range of products (fruits, vegetables, oil, cheese, meat, wine, honey, etc.). The interviews were conducted by telephone, due to safety reasons in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. The main reason we chose the "Najbolje lokalno" SSC initiative to focus our in-depth attention was that it was established as a top-down initiative and not yet given scholarly attention in Croatia, unlike several bottom-up SSC initiatives in Croatia.

The sampling was purposeful, in order to include participants with possible previous experience or interest in SSCs, which was relevant for the research objective. The interviews followed the preliminary survey results in order to have more focused interview questions.

The surveys were launched with the help of the Association of Croatian Ecological Producers (HESP) and by using the mailing list of their members (small family farmers) and other regional farmers' associations. The institutions and other stakeholders, such as development agencies and civil sector organizations, as well as universities were contacted directly. In both samples the self-selection pattern very likely affected the structure of the sample supposing the most interested or most experienced participants with SSCs engaged in the research.

The semi-structured interviews lasted around 20 to 30 minutes and were carried out with nine participants. The names used in the analysis are pseudonyms for the purpose of anonymity. The participants gave their verbal consent to cite their words. The survey lasted for about 15 to 20 minutes and consisted of around 30 questions prepared specifically for this study. The sample was purposeful and convenient and consisted of two subsamples. Two questionnaires were used, one for the institutions relevant to support SSCs, and one for the farmers. A total of 134 participants completed the survey and were included in the analysis.

In the sub-sample of institutions, 65 employees were from organizations such as city administrations, municipalities, development agencies, local action groups (LAGs), associations, educational institutions, tourist boards, etc. Women and men are relatively equally represented in the sample, with slightly more women (36 or 55.4%), while middle-aged people between the ages of 41 to 60 prevail. The majority of participants are highly educated (62 or 95.4%). According to the educational background, the majority of participants are agronomists (16 or 24.6%) and economists (14 or 21.5%), whereby agricultural economists and those who obtained a diploma in economics, although they may have later obtained higher degrees of education in the field of economics, are classified as agronomists. Our participants come from institutions located in 20 counties, and 32 (49%) out of the total number of participants indicated which institution they came from, citing 23 different institutions, regionally dispersed from the south of the country (Dubrovnik) to the east (Osijek).

A sub-sample of farmers was created with the help of farmers' associations and SSC initiatives by direct contact with producers. A total of 69 farmers from all over Croatia participated in the survey and all of them were valid. As far as the type of agricultural production is concerned, the most numerous are vegetable producers, followed by fruit, grain, and processed products. Family farms were represented by 63 participants (91.3%) of the sample while the rest were self-supporting farms and trading companies. Two thirds of the participants have small family farms up to 5ha (66.2%), 27.9% have farms between 5-50ha, and 5.9% have more than 50ha of land. Farms with an economic size of €2,000-10,000 prevailed with a share of 52.2%, followed by farms with an economic size of €10,000-100,000 (36.2%). There are fewer very small farms up to €2,000 (10.1%) and very large ones over €100,000 (1.4%). Among the farms in the survey, 41 (60%) have an ecological certificate, and 17 (24%) have one of the labels of protected designation of origin (Croatian island product, protected geographical indication). Both sexes are equally represented with slightly more men (38 or 55.2%) than women (31 or 44.8%). The age groups from 21 to 70 are represented, with the majority of producers being middle-aged between 41 to 60 years of age. Most participants are highly educated (41 or 59.4%), and 24 (35%) have a high school education. A total of 40 participants (58%) has some form of formal or informal education in the field of agriculture, and 24 (35%) have formal education in economics. Most of them (63 or 91.3%) operate through a family farm.

The research was conducted in November and December 2020, with online access to the questionnaire using the Google Forms tool. A descriptive, univariate analysis on both samples and thematic analysis of open answers in the sub-sample of institutions were carried out. The thematic analysis was also carried out on nine interview transcriptions in order to gain a deeper insight into their experiences in cooperation through the SSC.

Conducting semi-structured interviews with farmers was relevant for this research because the top-down view and bottom-up view are often very different. For example, certain policies and processes, as well as their legitimacy, can seem very coherent when

spoken about from the perspective of legislative instances and civil servants who reproduce the ruling discourse. On the other hand, gaining insights into patterns of everyday life and business at the non-elite level can reveal aspects that are not legitimized in relation to umbrella discourses (Obad, 2012). Therefore, in this case, the interviews with farmers provide insights into the ways in which SSC function in situ, without the need to legitimize these insights according to development strategies or political / utopian goals such as fairness, community, and quality, which are often associated with food sovereignty projects.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. *Institutional experience with short food supply chains*

In this research, we tried to gain insight into the experience of two actors that were crucial for the establishment and development of short food supply chains (SFSCs), namely institutions and farmers. We analyzed the institutional framework and examined what kind of institutional support existed in establishing and maintaining short food supply chains. Regarding the institutional experience with SFSCs, we examined various organizations and institutions that participated in the implementation of agricultural policies and projects intended for rural development and were potential actors in supporting the establishment of short supply chains. This allowed us to gain insight into the information of the administrative staff around short supply chains and their experiences regarding the quality of support from institutions.

The representatives from institutions were extremely motivated in providing answers and we received an above-average quantity of answers to open questions. This indicates a high motivation and interest in the topic of short supply chains which probably took place due to self-selection pattern in the sampling process.

In their work to date, 54 out of 65 (82.8%) participants from institutions had encountered the concept of SSCs, 28 (43%) stated that their institution participated in some phase of establishing SSC, and 23 (35.3%) of them personally worked on their establishment; 20 (86%) of which indicated a specific way of their participation in establishing or otherwise supporting SSCs. The mentioned activities are very diverse, and some of the roles mentioned by the participants included advertising and connecting farmers with customers, acquiring mobile stands during the lockdown, connecting through LAGs, establishing a short chain within the local community through projects financed by the EU or by local funds, conducting education through universities and lifelong education, creating an online application for the purpose of the SSC, as well as many others. A number of projects from different parts of the country are highlighted, indicating a wide spectrum of institutional support, from which it can be concluded that SSCs are becoming an increasingly important topic of local and national public policies. However, when asked about receiving any education related to SSCs in the last five years, 44 (67.7%) of the participants answered negatively, which indicates the need

for investment and very likely better connection of institutions at different levels, based on the spectrum of diverse answers on the ways in which institutions help SSCs. In any case, it is evident from the answers that the survey involved precisely those employees of institutions who had personal experience with SSCs and who were probably highly motivated for the topic, which encouraged them to participate in the research.

Furthermore, 56 (93.3%) believe that SSCs have a perspective and need to be developed, with as many as 52 (80%) of them justifying their attitude with some kind of support for SSCs as being of importance, citing several types of reasons why (they believe the support is necessary) they support SSCs. We classified the answers into four main groups and all four types of reasons appear with equal frequency.

The first group of reasons on why they support SSCs is to support the sustainability of farmers, and some of the answers are:

*“In many aspects of agricultural production, this is the only way for Croatian family farms to survive, that is, to be able to deal with foreign competition.”*

*“In order to facilitate the marketing products of local family farms; family farms are numerous, but unorganized.”*

*“Product placement of small producers and small quantities is possible only in that way.”*

*“Otherwise, there is no development of small producers.”*

*“SSCs are a great advantage for organic producers because it is a sure way to attract customers of organic products, however they can be a good model for connecting conventional producers as well, because SSCs generally give more visibility especially in online sales.”*

The second group of reasons is the local community well-being, whereby the participants show a high level of awareness of how important farmers, especially the ‘smaller’ ones are for the vitality of the local rural economy:

*“It is necessary to support local producers in order for the economy to generate as much profit as possible and thereby help the local community.”*

*“Short supply chains develop the local economy, strengthen ties between producers and consumers, create resilient local communities, have a positive impact on consumer awareness, and create opportunities for consumer support towards producers. In short, they are necessary for the long-term development of resilient and sustainable communities, especially in rural areas.”*

*“We need to develop alternative ways of accessing the market for the remnants of Croatian agriculture and the dying out villages.”*

*“It is extremely important to develop short supply chains due to the economic, organic and social development component – the sustainability of local communities.”*

The third group of reasons is the welfare of consumers, who are certainly important actors that are also crucial in supporting and establishing the largest number of SSCs.

*“That’s the only way for a consumer to get quality food because quality food means fresh food! The shortest possible path from farm to fork.”*

*"By shortening supply chains, customers get fresher goods that are locally grown, less treated or not treated at all, since the product is fresher and does not need to be 'kept alive' until reaching its destination."*

Finally, the fourth group of reasons are the environmental or ecological advantages of SSCs:

*"Lower transport costs due to shorter distances, less emissions of harmful substances into the environment."*

*"In addition to the known origin of the product, it is important to reduce the impact on climate change (the carbon footprint)."*

The representatives of the institutions from our survey pointed out in their descriptive answers that they see an opportunity for the survival of small family farms in SSCs due to achieving more favorable prices for both the producer and the end customer, and by achieving secure placement. Institutions can be generators of the development of SSCs by implementing various programs, financing their development, but so can buyers of Croatian countryside products. As many as 46 (70.8%) of the institution representatives personally purchase products through a SSC, and 59 (91.2%) of those who have not participated so far want to join one of the SSCs.

One of the topics in the survey was green public procurement. Only 27 (41.5%) of the participants answered the question about the implementation of green public procurement within their institutions, of which only four (15%) answered positively, i.e. that their institutions have implemented green public procurement, and only one person was satisfied with the process. Other responses stated that such a procedure was not conducted either because it was not applicable for their institution or because they had no information about it.

Regarding the section of the survey with questions about the role of public institutions in supporting SSCs, 54 (83.1%) participants believe that support to SSC establishment by public institutions is necessary, and 51 (79.7%) believe such support is necessary for their successful work, too.

Further, 48 (74%) participants believe financial assistance should be expected primarily from the Paying Agency for Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development, 44 (71%) from counties, 44 (71%) from cities, and 44 (68%) from the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as 44 (68%) from municipalities. With regards to education and advice, 43 (66%) mainly expect this from the Advisory service of the Ministry of Agriculture, and 41 (63%) from LAGs.

Of the institutional participants, 53 (81.5%) consider the educating of producers, the educating of customers (73.8%), a strong marketing campaign (46 or 70.8%), subsidizing infrastructure (44 or 67.7%), and financial support for employees who run a SSC model (66.2%) to be the most essential for the expansion and continuity of SSCs.

The major obstacles to the establishment and work of SSCs are insufficient education about SSCs of employees of institutions (40 or 61.5%), and farmers' lack of interest (38 or 58.5%). Some employees pointed out that an imprecise definition of SSCs within

the legal framework (28 or 43.1%) was also an obstacle and that SSCs are not a priority of development strategies (26 or 40%).

#### ***4.2. Farmers' experience with short food supply chains***

Some forms of SSCs – such as markets – are traditional in Croatia, while the holding of themed fairs in numerous cities is more recent. New forms of SSCs that have appeared in the last decade are community-supported agriculture, the most prominent of which are solidarity exchange groups and solidarity ecological groups (Orlić, 2019). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, forms of very SSCs such as direct delivery of agricultural products from farm to doorstep performed by farmers themselves have increased (Bokan and Menardi, 2022; Ruganec and Bokan, 2021). Whereas all the mentioned forms are bottom-up initiatives, some of which have already been studied (Orlić, 2014, 2019), there are also SSCs created by top-down initiatives. In this research we included farmers from the agricultural cooperative “Najbolje lokalno” SSC of the Međimurje region as an unexplored example of establishing a SFSC through a project initiated by a development agency.

We were interested in finding out farmers' experiences of being involved in SSC, with an emphasis on the qualitative part of the research in which we investigated the experiences of farmers from the mentioned short food supply chains in more detail. The data related to the entire sample of farmers will be presented here, followed by the data on the short food supply chain from Međimurje.

Among 69 farmers participating in the research, 37 (54%) of them sell all their products within a radius of 100 km, and the rest sell their products at different distances, which includes exports from Croatia. Farmers combine different channels of direct sales, most of them sell from their doorstep (57 or 83%), through online orders (39 or 56%), at local fairs and events (22 or 32%), to organized groups of buyers (19 or 27%), to local restaurants (16 or 23%), to local shops and local markets (15 or 22% each), at roadside stands (8 or 12%), and at public institutions (6 or 9%). The data indicate that farmers usually have a marketing strategy through multiple sales channels. Every fifth farmer sells all their products on the farm, and others use multiple sales channels.

We examined some aspects of farmers' experience with the SSC in which they are engaged. We covered the financial and organizational aspects and the aspect of institutional support.

In relation to the financial aspect, 41 (59%) of the farmers declared satisfaction or extreme satisfaction with financial operations within the SSC, and 39 (57%) of them achieved a better price within the SSC in comparison to other sales channels. Furthermore, 51 (74%) claimed that customers make payments regularly and fairly through the SSC, while 40 (58%) farmers are generally more satisfied with sales through the SSC than with other forms of sales.

Regarding the organizational changes farmers adopted by entering the SSC, 30 (43%) of them stated that they had to develop new knowledge and skills for selling food through the SSC, 44 (64%) believed selling through the SSC required a lot of communica-

tion and organizational challenges; however, they consider all those changes were worth the effort. To the control claim that doing business through the SSC was too complicated for them, 52 (76.4%) of the farmers answered negatively, therefore it could be safely said that farmers did face an increase in organizational work and that they had to make a step forward in skills (communication, marketing and work organization) but that these changes did not pose substantial difficulties for them and that it had finally contributed to business. Concerning the impact of the pandemic on business, 43 (63%) declared that the pandemic had encouraged them to introduce new ways of selling their agricultural products.

The importance of the role of institutions is indicated by the fact that 53 (77%) of the farmers believe institutions should encourage farmers to sell through SSCs. Among difficulties they encountered in their SSC engagement, 18 (26.2%) of them state that they cannot get useful information from institutions, which is the third biggest difficulty in their opinion (behind the lack of agricultural infrastructure and increased organizational work related to orders). The fact of farmers needing institutional support is confirmed by 32 (46.3%) of those who state they lack institutional support. Indirectly, farmers needing the involvement of institutions in multiple activities related to SSCs are also indicated by data on the lack of customer education (44 or 64.2%), the lack of promotion of SSCs (42 or 61.2%), the lack of SSC local distribution centers (30 or 43.4%), the lack of clear legislative framework (22 or 32.8%). All these shortcomings could be addressed by institutions, from public ones, such as municipalities, cities, local committees, entrepreneurial centers, development agencies, to LAGs and other types of associations.

Only one out of 69 farmers participated in the tender for green public procurement but was not selected. Of those who did not participate, 42 (61.7%) did not know about the green public procurement or did not know how to apply, 17 (25%) stated that it was too complicated for them, to which we can add those who tried but found the administration too demanding (4 or 5.8%) and those who tried but did not have enough products (also 4 or 5.8%). This additionally indicates the need for a more active role of institutions that, in accordance with the needs of farmers, should increase the information and educational activities that are currently insufficient.

Farmers state direct communication with customers (49 or 71%) as the biggest advantage of selling through SSC, and that is in accordance with the results presented in the qualitative research conducted by Bokan and Menardi (2022), where farmers stated that feedback directly from customers is quite relevant to them. Such feedback directs them towards quality assurance and further product development. It can be concluded that SSC provide producers with usable tools for price control of their products and payment collecting. Furthermore, among other highlighted advantages of SSC, second place is shared between adaptation to small and mixed economies and higher product prices (with 30 or 43.3%), safer billing (27 or 40.3%), and lower transportation costs (23 or 34.3%). Finally, from general questions about SSCs, 47 (70.2%) of farmers believe that SSCs contribute to the survival of small family farms and 53 (76.5%) believe that SSCs have a perspective and need to be developed.

### **4.3. The view from the Međimurje region**

The SSC “Najbolje lokalno” through the Međimurski Štacun local store in Čakovec is a rare example of a SSC established by a top-down initiative. It should be noted that we classified the initiative as a top-down one due to the fact it was initiated and founded by the public administration (a development agency through a project financed by EU funds), and not by citizens; however, we note that the initiative was created at the local level, therefore it was at the same time an example of neo-endogenous development and a partially top-down approach.

We examined farmers' satisfaction with participating in the SSC as well as advantages and possible challenges they experienced within the chain.

All interviewees expressed their satisfaction of the possibility to control the final price of their products:

*“At resellers, there is no choice [...] price up – price down. As they decide. Here it is not the case.”* (Marko)

As an important advantage of participating in the SSC, the interviewed producers also point out joint promotion activities carried out in the SSC that ultimately reduce individual costs as well as efforts normally required when such activities are carried out individually. In addition, some of the participants believe that membership in the SSC in the role of producers ensured their *“status, reliability and market recognition”* (Mirko). The mentioned features are closely related to the fact that the chain insists on implementing the principle of product traceability:

*“All raw materials have traceability [...] in order to have all documentation about raw materials origin [...] This is the key issue for you and that's why a lot of producers have profiled themselves in the SSC. Some people used to joke around it – but they were made to go away. So the people who have completed the necessary documentation can participate. The ones for whom you know where the raw material comes from. This was a guiding thought important for members' selection and establishment of all that.”* (Stjepko)

Therefore, there is a perception among producers that the possibility of doing business within a SSC is a kind of guarantee of quality and safety of their products.

### **4.4. Short supply chains and marks of origin and quality**

Within this study, participants were asked about their products and the quality marks they may have. Namely, in the globalized food market, producers of food products strive to increase the competitiveness of their products through labels of authenticity and quality. At the same time, such labels can be a strategy of resisting to product uniformity and of preserving a local identity. Labels of authenticity and quality are a kind of response to the need of protecting autochthonous products; without such labels, products would cope with tough competition on the market with difficulties (Borec et al., 2017:4). Since one of the assumed motives for joining the SSC was precisely the need to increase the competitiveness of one's own products, in this study we aimed to get an idea of the status that marks of quality had for producers associated in the Međimurje SSC.

Earlier, we noted that 17 (24%) of the survey respondents stated they possessed some mark of quality, but in the qualitative part of the research, when asked whether their products had any mark of quality or authenticity, the participants were often quite uninterested, and even if they knew they had a mark, they were often not sure what mark it was. On the other hand, they emphasized participation in this short chain as proof of the authenticity, locality and quality of their products. Only membership in the association or the possibility to sell in the Štacun store were emphasized as a special guarantee of quality, and as confirmation, they emphasized the interest of buyers:

*“Customers recognize this local story. It’s getting better every month [...] It’s a little more expensive than in regular stores, but the products justify the price and customers recognize it.”* (Alojz)

The relative lack of interest of Međimurje producers in the quality marks they possess seems to be justified, taking into account that in other studies there are also indications that customers in fact find it difficult to navigate among the multitude of different quality marks, that they do not recognize most of them, and that therefore only few of these marks have an impact on their purchasing preferences (Borec et al., 2017). As already stated, what producers expect from membership in SSC is to compensate for this deficiency and highlight it in conversations as a special mark of the quality of their products. Most of the participants highlighted the fact that their products were accepted for distribution through a SSC as proof of the product quality.

Another advantage of participation in SSC, as mentioned by the participants, is the possibility of acquiring new customers. Namely, for producers who until entering the SSC were limited to direct sales at markets, doorsteps and fairs, entering the SSC represented a significant step in the direction of acquiring new customers. Some of them also emphasized an organizational advantage of the membership. Namely, all activities related to sales and searching for new customers are activities that these producers must perform personally. With the SSC having its own store, they are partially relieved of distribution activities. For these producers, the chain proved to be especially useful during the general closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Namely, introduction of epidemiological measures led to the cancellation of all fairs, which often served as an opportunity for smaller family farms to expand their market and generate additional income:

*“Štacun is our savior now. Everything has stopped working because of COVID – restaurants, hotels, no fairs were taking place.”* (Damir)

One of producers gave the following answer to the question whether sales of his product might have decreased because of COVID:

*“Not for us personally, but I think for the chain that traffic has even increased.”* (Darko)

#### **4.5. Cooperation with institutions**

One of the research objectives was to examine farmers' experiences with institutional support during the establishment of the SSC. Therefore, in conversations with the interviewed producers, their relationship with institutions was a special theme. The studied SSC is the result of a project supported by local institutions:

*"The County gave something, and the city gave something for Štacun. But Štacun [is] economically completely independent." (Alojz)*

Nevertheless, the interviews highlighted the tendency of the majority of participants to not rely on help from institutions in their business but solve problems independently. There are more examples pointing out problems of quality and timely information; here we cite a farmer's comment about the situation when he applied to the project:

*"Honestly – I'm my own master – it didn't go through the Advisory. All independently".*

Expectations towards institutions are rather modest and mainly boil down to the need of obtaining available information. Actually, that is the biggest lack of institutional support. Similar to the survey participants, the interviewed producers highlight problems with access to information. Getting information can be difficult:

*"If you know someone, then you can get something – some information [...] but at the global level [...] no one provides information on a wider basis, no one sends e-mails or letters with information about opening or sharing any useful issue – there is no such thing [...] Information is scarcely available. If you don't investigate yourself, if you don't work hard to get something – you get nothing." (Alojz)*

Interview participants emphasized that even when the information is available, its usability is questionable due to the large number of sources from which it comes:

*"There are many different sources of information and tenders from different sources, so it is not easy to follow." (Marko)*

As another problem related to institutions, under-informed and under-educated staff in the sector they work was highlighted; this often creates additional problems with information, since institution employees often cannot provide answers about changes in laws, introduction of new rules, and related permitted and prohibited practices. Some participants emphasized that engagement in an association with good communication and information dissemination among the members compensates to some extent for the lack of information.

#### **4.6. Organizational problems in the short supply chain business**

Concerning organization and cooperation within SSC, participants primarily highlighted problems with management. Namely, the SSC business depends on the synergy of a large number of members. Due to increasingly complex business operations, as confirmed by the producer who was also one of initiators of the SSC, Štacun turned from a simple limited liability company to a cooperative form of work and was registered as an agricultural cooperative. Producers who joined the SSC after it was established did not have objections regarding management. Instead, they expressed satisfaction with the fact that there was someone to handle sales issues for them. On the other hand, the producers who were also among the initiators of the SSC knew how to highlight problems related to organization and decision-making:

*"There were always problems with farmers." (Damir)*

They hoped a transition to a cooperative business would more clearly set out the rules of business and joint work.

It seems that in a situation like the one mentioned, the main problem for any SSC established through a project starts the moment the project ends. Namely, projects provide a fixed framework within which organization is determined by rules, goals and achievements of a particular project. Besides, organizations participate in the project, sustaining that which is not necessarily related to the sustaining of an already established organization<sup>5</sup>.

The moment the project is completed, and the organizational and managerial aspect of the established organization is not adequately defined, problems regarding the organization management and decision-making may arise. However, the association's rulebook cannot respond to the organizational and business challenges that the SSC inevitably faces at some point.

Also, it was interesting that the “Najbolje lokalno” association turned to a cooperative business despite the fact that preliminary analyses carried out for the purposes of starting the SSC indicated that producers were extremely reluctant to join even in cooperatives (Svržnjak et al., 2018:80). The procedure was initiated in order to achieve a dispersion of responsibilities and greater involvement of members in the decision-making. According to the authors: “producers are often passive” and it is expected that they will have greater responsibility in the cooperative, being a motive for active participation in decision-making. This answer coincides with the one of institutions' employees which stated the lack of farmers' interest as the second most common / biggest obstacle to the establishment and smooth operation of SSCs.

The question about the COVID-19 pandemic, asked with the aim of establishing whether it encouraged some farmers to change their business model or not, pointed out that most farmers declared the pandemic had encouraged them to change their way of doing business. This, in turn, indicated that the pandemic indirectly influenced the greater openness of farmers towards SSCs. Furthermore, SSCs managed to achieve quite a resistance to lockdown conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking the COVID-19 pandemic experiences into account, and the current war in Ukraine that caused the rupture of supply chains at multiple levels and particularly threatened the global food supply, it could be concluded that short food supply chains have represented one of the valuable organizational tools for food sovereignty practices and policies as a necessary response to the increasingly under-capacity of global food supply chains.

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<sup>5</sup> In this particular case, it means that the leading partner of the Agrishort project, on the basis of which the association – SSC and then simple limited liability company with the Medimurski Štacun store was established, was the REDEA development agency, which led the project activities and was responsible for the spent money received from the European Union. The association was created as a project activity, and it was founded by producers who maintained it even after the end of the project. Subsequently, the association was transformed into the agricultural co-operative “Najbolje lokalno”.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Short food supply chains are recognized and valorized in all strategic documents at the European and national level in the Republic of Croatia. However, regardless of the principle and prescriptive support, especially in the new EU 2023-2027 strategic plan, they are relatively poorly supported by rural development measures in Croatia. What attempts of institutionalized support of SSCs indicate is that in a top-down approach, the aspect of ecological sustainability is most often lost because, as a rule, local agriculture is supported but not necessarily the organic one.

The results of this research support the initial assumption that there are obstacles in supporting SSCs on both sides of the surveyed actors. The research results indicated that the existing obstacles in SSCs are not only of an institutional nature, but that they are also internal and organizational.

At the institutional level, the support to SSCs is visible in the fact that more than a third of the participants personally participated at some stages of the SSC establishment. We assume that this percentage is so high due to a self-selection sampling. However, the results indicated the necessity of pursuing much more educational programs about SSCs. Most of the participants consider the development of SSCs as necessary, and the reasons are to achieve farmers' sustainability, the well-being of the local community, the well-being of consumers, and the well-being of the environment. The mentioned arguments are almost identical to those of the food sovereignty agenda, which indicates the quite high support of participants indirectly expressed on the agenda of food sovereignty. The high level of institutional participants' support stands out in the expressed opinion that institutions should not only support the establishment of SSCs, but also provide support (including a financial one) during the regular functioning of the SSC. For the expansion and continuity of SSCs, institutional participants consider producers' education, customers' education, a strong marketing campaign, subsidizing infrastructure, and financial support for SSC initiators as being the most necessary tools. They also consider the biggest obstacles to the establishment and operation of SSCs to be the insufficient education of institutions' employees about SSCs and farmers' lack of interest. Regarding the farmers' experience with SSC, results point out that farmers are generally satisfied with participation in SSCs, that they achieve better prices through SSCs, that customers at SSC regularly and fairly pay for their products. Therefore, we can conclude that farmers' experiences are very positive. Also, participating in SSC requires the development of new skills from farmers, nevertheless farmers do not consider them as being too complicated. Furthermore, farmers believe that SSCs contribute to the survival of small family farms, which is probably at least partly conditioned by their good experience of participating in SSC. Just like the institutional participants, they believe institutions should support this form of supply chain.

Farmers' view of institutional support is somewhat less positive. In principle, they expect support from institutions, but in practice they do not have it. The noticed disadvantages concern the impossibility of obtaining useful information. Farmers also emphasize the need of customer education, better SSC promotion, establishment of local distribution

centers, as well as the presence of a clear legislative framework. Furthermore, farmers consider that SSCs have a perspective and should be developed, and they very clearly articulated the advantages they received from participating in SSCs; they also indicated areas in which they expected greater participation from institutions.

In addition, there is a difference we detected between the bottom-up SSCs which were previously studied (Orlić, 2014, 2019; Sarjanović, 2014; Slavuj Borčić, 2020) and top-down initiatives. It is evident that the necessity of organic production was lost somewhere in that transition, having the top-down process primarily focused on the economic aspect of sustainability, that is, on locally produced food and local farmers, while not necessarily on organic types of products. Local and multifunctional agriculture are certainly essential for a viable local economy, however, pursuing the organic values equally would make an even larger impact on communities and the environment.

Our results showed that food sovereignty in Croatia has developed substantial groundwork considering the value orientation and awareness about the benefits of local, endogenous, and multifunctional agriculture. In striving to make the food system more local and suitable to the needs of local farmers, citizens, and local communities, the weak points of administrative and other practices have to be considered and addressed. Some of those weak points have been indicated in this paper.

Civil engagement has showed its strengths in organizing SSCs thus creating new paths of food sovereignty which was indicated in previous research. On the other hand, policy and administrative support have made the first steps in pursuing some of the tools toward food sovereignty and now there is a place and a chance for enhancement. In striving to make the food system more local and applicable to everyone's needs, institutions and other stakeholders in local communities should address the weak points of the administrative obstacles to make food sovereignty values and practices become more than just an exotic example of alternative practices but part of the local communities' systems.

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## POLJOPRIVREDNICI SUTRAŠNJCICE: TRANSFORMATIVNA SNAGA KRATKIH OPSKRBNIH LANACA

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### Sažetak

Cilj je ovog rada istražiti iskustva poljoprivrednika i institucija s kratkim lancima opskrbe hranom kao načinom ostvarenja prehrambenog suvereniteta. Istraživačko pitanje je bilo usmjereni na otkrivanje prednosti i nedostataka kratkih opskrbnih lanaca (KOL-ova), što bi moglo pomoći u boljem usmjeravanju budućeg civilnog i institucionalnog angažmana i podrške KOL-ovima. Također se razmatra kontekstualni okvir postojećih politika kroz kratki pregled dokumenata u kojima su iznijete politike koje se odnose na KOL-ove. U radu je korištena mješovita metodologija, a podaci su prikupljeni online anketom i polustrukturiranim intervjuiima. Istraživanje je provedeno u studenom i prosincu 2020. godine. Anketnim istraživanjem obuhvaćena su dva poduzorka, poljoprivrednici i institucije, dok su polustrukturirani intervjui provedeni s članovima KOL-a „Najbolje lokalno“. Rezultati online ankete pokazali su da su naši sugovornici, poljoprivrednici i institucije, jako zainteresirani za KOL-ove, no nedostaju im edukativni tečajevi koji bi im pomogli da uspostave više KOL-ova ili koji bi ih podržali na adekvatniji način. Poljoprivrednici su vrlo zadovoljni svojim sudjelovanjem u KOL-ovima te smatraju da su sudjelovanjem u njima stekli nove vještine, vrijedne povratne informacije i poštene cijene za svoje proizvode. Polustrukturirani intervjui su pružili detaljnije podatke o iskustvima poljoprivrednika s određenim KOL-om. Institucionalni sudionici smatraju da su KOL-ovi bitni za društvenu, ekonomsku i ekološku održivost. Prehrambeni suverenitet Hrvatske razvija se ponajviše kroz civilno društvo, a u posljednje vrijeme pojavljuje se i institucionalna podrška. U nastojanju da prehrambeni sustav postane lokalniji i primjereni potrebama lokalnih poljoprivrednika, građana i lokalnih zajednica, te bi se institucije trebale pozabaviti slabim točkama kao što su administrativne prepreke kako bi vrijednosti prehrambenog suvereniteta postale više od samo nekog egzotičnog primjera alternativne prakse, već sastavni dio sustava lokalnih zajednica.

**Ključne riječi:** poljoprivrednici, prehrambeni suverenitet, lokalna poljoprivreda, kratki opskrbni lanci, Hrvatska

## LANDWIRTE VON MORGEN: DIE TRANSFORMATIVE KRAFT VON KURZEN LIEFERKETTEN

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### Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist, die Erfahrung der Landwirte und Institutionen hinsichtlich der kurzen Lebensmittelversorgungsketten, sowie der Art und Weise der Verwirklichung von Ernährungssouveränität zu erforschen. Die Forschungsfrage zielt auf das Aufdecken von Vor- und Nachteilen der kurzen Lieferketten, was zur Steuerung eines besseren zivilen und institutionellen künftigen Einsatzes und der Unterstützung kurzer Lieferketten beitragen könnte. Außerdem wird der Zusammenhang von bestehenden entwicklungs- und politischen Richtprogrammen in Betracht gezogen, anhand von Dokumenten, in denen es um kurze Lieferketten geht. In der Arbeit wurde die Mixed-Methods-Forschung angewandt und die Daten wurden durch Online-Umfragen und halbstrukturierte Interviews gesammelt. Die Forschung wurde im November und im Dezember 2020 durchgeführt. Die Umfrage beinhaltet zwei Unterstichproben – Landwirte und Institutionen, die halbstrukturierten Interviews wurden mit Mitgliedern der kurzen Lieferkette „Najbolje lokalno“ durchgeführt. Die Online-Umfrage ergab, dass unsere Gesprächspartner – Landwirte und Institutionen, sehr interessiert an kurzen Lieferketten sind, es fehlt aber an Bildungskursen, die ihnen helfen würden mehrere kurze Lieferketten herzustellen oder die sie adäquat unterstützen würden. Die Landwirte

sind mit ihrer Teilnahme an den kurzen Lieferketten sehr zufrieden und finden, dass sie durch die Teilnahme daran, neue Fertigkeiten, wertvolles Feedback und faire Preise für ihre Produkte gewonnen haben. Die halbstrukturierten Interviews haben einen tieferen Einblick in die Erfahrungen der Landwirte mit bestimmten kurzen Lieferketten ermöglicht. Die institutionellen Teilnehmer sind der Meinung, dass kurze Lieferketten für die soziale, ökonomische und ökologische Nachhaltigkeit von wesentlicher Bedeutung sind. Die Ernährungssouveränität Kroatiens entwickelt sich vor allem durch die Zivilgesellschaft, in der letzten Zeit kommt die institutionelle Unterstützung hinzu. Wenn man erreichen will, dass das Ernährungssystem lokaler und den Bedürfnissen lokaler Landwirte, Bürger und Gemeinschaften besser geeignet wird, sollten sich diese Institutionen um die schwachen Punkte, wie z.B. administrative Hürden, kümmern, damit die Werte der Ernährungssouveränität nicht nur ein exotisches Beispiel der Alternative werden, sondern ein Teil des Systems der lokalen Gemeinschaften.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Landwirte, Ernährungssouveränität, lokale Landwirtschaft, kurze Lieferketten, Kroatien