

REFRAME

TOWARDS A REGIONAL FOOD FRAME

THE HARVEST OF FIVE YEARS
WORKING TOGETHER
AND MAKING AN IMPACT

Interreg

North Sea Region

REFRAME

European Regional Development Fund



EUROPEAN UNION



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INTRODUCTION

Many food products, which you can find in the supermarket, have travelled thousands of miles before ending up on your plate. They have been imported from distant countries, causing carbon emissions. The quality is often compromised by the long-distance transport from farmers to slaughterhouses, processors and distributors. For each step that is added in the food value chain, there is a risk of reducing the quality.

In REFRAME we believe that a regional approach to food production and consumption should be taken by setting up short food supply chains.

Our objective has therefore been to develop/re-establish local infrastructures of food production, food processing, food consumption and profiling of rural communities.

For five years, REFRAME partners from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden have been working together to create better conditions for food related SMEs, social enterprises and initiatives through the REFRAME project.

To make this happen, the REFRAME approach has been to develop new skills for food related SMEs, foster regional cooperation, support transnational learning and stimulate innovation. Furthermore, focus has also been on raising awareness of regional food supply and demand as well as nudging local governments and large-scale consumers to buy food regionally.

And the approach is working. REFRAME has for instance influenced a large supermarket chain to include more products from regional SMEs in their assortment, influenced a municipality to adjust its procurement strategy in such a way that it enables more food related local SMEs to participate and organized a B2B taste market, which enables small and medium-sized producers of farm and regional products to meet potential buyers from institutional kitchens, retail and restaurants, who demand smaller quantities.

From REFRAME the message is clear: It is important to support food-related SMEs because of their potential to provide employment, to safeguard the landscape, to contribute to local communities.

Throughout the project over 75 best practices from the project partners have been gathered in the Online Resource Centre so that you can benefit from their experiences and get inspiration for how to implement short food supply chains in your own region.

On the following pages you will be taken on a tour to the 5 partner regions where we will present the major achievements in each region, share experiences and give you some recommendations if you are looking to comply with the challenges concerning more sustainable food production and shortening the food supply chain.



REFRAME IN THE NETHERLANDS

The regional pilot in Groningen consists of the municipality of Groningen, who is also the lead partner, and the Gebiedscoöperatie Westerkwartier (regional cooperative). The municipality of Groningen has focused on public procurement and producing food for the Food bank as well as supporting public initiatives such as 'Shifting kilos locally', which is an auction where local producers and restaurant owners gathered to sell/purchase local produce. The Gebiedscoöperatie Westerkwartier has worked among others on a regional beef cooperative as well as a local food agreement, together with the municipality of Westerkwartier.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE REGION

Together with dairy farmers, a slaughterhouse, a meat processor and nature managers, the Gebiedscoöperatie Westerkwartier formed the Regional Beef Coöperatie (Natuurvlees-Westerkwartier), a concept designed to produce transparent and regional beef.

The calves, which are normally sold almost immediately, are instead kept on the farm. After about three months, they are taken over by the cooperative and the animals graze on nature land. The cooperative is an extra earnings model for those involved. Focus is in on animal welfare and the environment and the money largely remains in the region.

In the Groningen region the food network *Ketennetwerk Voedsel Stad en Ommeland* was initiated, which connects actors throughout the local food chain. It has proven to be an important tool for developing the local food chain and for sharing knowledge, inspiring and helping each other. A new initiative like the *Local Food Auctions* is an example of cooperation within this network. The network will also develop a local food market inspired by the Swedish REKO Ring concept.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

A regional and sustainable food chain is a goal in itself but also a means to achieve other (policy) goals. Food connects people, projects and organizations, but it also relates to social and societal issues in terms of health, employment, biodiversity and climate.

We have learned to look at the food chain in an integrated way and to organize it accordingly. With the *Streekkantine* the municipality of Groningen started to procure more local food for their staff canteens.

What we have learned during the project is that you have to stay on top of the results. The results achieved in 2018 prove to be insufficient in 2021. As health and sustainability are today's most important issues, we are planning to improve the percentages of plant based protein in the menu, together with the caterer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Connect food to other domains and sectors. Joining forces can lead to surprising insights and this creates a joint force to possibly implement the plans earlier and better. Create a network where every part of the food chain and domain is represented, from producers, to food industry, retails, professional kitchens and chefs. Educational institutes and knowledge and governmental organisations are important in this network.

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REFRAME IN BELGIUM

Flanders has set up two regional pilots, one in East-Flanders and another in West-Flanders. EROV (Economic Council of East-Flanders) and PCG (Vegetable Research Centre) represent the pilot of East-Flanders. VIVES University College and INAGRO, which is knowledge partner of agricultural and horticultural businesses in the areas of innovation and sustainability, represent the region of West-Flanders.

In recent years, many initiatives to purchase locally have been launched in Flanders. The focus of these initiatives is mainly on selling from business to consumer. A good example of such an initiative is the introduction of the quality labels *100% West-Vlaams* (West-Flemish) and *Lekker Oost Vlaams* (Tasty East Flanders). On the B2B side, a structured approach to support business to business sales was missing. Thus, in Flanders, the focus of the REFRAME project has been on identifying the obstacles for B2B sales and on developing good practices to overcome these barriers.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE REGION

Getting to know the producers was one of the barriers food professionals identified for purchasing their products locally. This knowledge led to the organization of a variety of networking events such as:

- inspiration days for chefs of institutional kitchens introducing them to local best practices
- a networking event with large-scale distributors such as Bidfood
- the B2B taste market

During these networking events, new food deals were established. The partner organizations of the Flemish region acted as a facilitator between the local producers and food professionals. Almost all exhibitors of the B2B taste market indicated that they had made at least ten new contacts. Many of them even 20 or more. In 2020, the B2B taste market went digital due to the pandemic. However, as food professionals visiting the digital taste market could not taste the local producers' products, inspiring videos of their businesses were produced.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Facilitating and supporting local producers is of major importance to let the local economy grow. During the project, the Flemish region has focused mainly on networking and facilitating new businesses. Many other barriers need to be addressed simultaneously, such as smart logistics, innovation to facilitate food processing, food safety, etc.

An important lesson learned is that food professionals such as institutional kitchens are willing to purchase food more locally if the demand is high. Inhabitants of West-Flanders are concerned about the local economy and environment, which increases their intention to buy local food. Unfortunately, these intentions have not reached all food professionals yet.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendation is that companies should make it as convenient as possible for consumers to buy local food and to facilitate local producers. Policy makers play a major role. Simplifying procedures and re-thinking the logistic organization of our food system will be critical.



REFRAME IN GERMANY

The German regional partnership consists of Landkreis Wesermarsch, a rural district which belongs to the government agency Oldenburg (LW), Diakonisches Werk, a charity of the evangelic church (DWO) and Grünlandzentrum Niedersachsen/Bremen, an association of institutions from rural entrepreneurs, research, administration and politics (GLZ). A challenge which the region was facing, was a decline in SMEs from the agricultural and food sector, making it difficult to maintain regional value chains. Also, mainly meat and milk is produced in the region, which are challenging products to sell through direct marketing. Consequently, there is only a small number of direct marketers in the district. Furthermore, there has been little exchange and cooperation between producers. Focus has therefore been on food and environmental education, introduction of regional products in the district's own school canteens, building networks between producers and customers, and knowledge exchange.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE REGION

In 2018, Diakonisches Werk opened *Café Mitmensch*, a café located in a senior centre which works with social integration of the disabled. The café mainly uses products from the region and the goal is to shorten food chains, develop the region's business sector and raise awareness of sustainable development and healthy products. Most often the caterers have to pick up the products themselves from the farms and the surrounding shops. Once a week, the organisation delivers dairy products from a local producer, which are transported by a cooling car purchased as part of the REFRAME project. In the long run, a more cost and time efficient logistic solution for regional food must be developed.

In future, the organisation hopes to expand its product range with more regional products. However the lack of regional suppliers, a sufficient supply, efficient logistics, continuous availability and affordable prices are making this difficult.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The REFRAME project has shown that it can be difficult to rebuild structures that have once been broken down within the regional food supply chains. From a political aspect, we have learned that stringent legal regulations can be challenging for SMEs. Also, political decisions and changes in administrations takes time and requires committed leaders. The producers have many reservations concerning cooperation and they therefore need support in setting up a network from an external person. On the consumer side, the willingness to pay extra for regional food is low. Consequently people need more education about regional products and healthy food to increase their willingness to pay.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to join forces with other committed people to pursue the same goal and inspire others. Think outside the box and use good examples from other regions for inspiration and knowledge sharing. Individuals/companies should join existing networks and take advantage of advisory services. Inspire consumers and convince them of the benefits of regional products through public relations work.



REFRAME IN DENMARK

The Danish partners were Taste of Denmark (Smagen af Danmark) and the Small Island Food Network. The Danish pilot was titled *Islands of Denmark* in recognition of the fact that Denmark is a nation of islands and because:

- Islands represent natural geographical entities, allowing simple monitoring of the effects of interventions.
- Island communities often have strong senses of identity and branding of the location.
- The interface of sea and land is the living laboratory of adaptive, climate change resilient and/or sustainable food production.
- Islands and coastal areas are considered vulnerable rural areas because of challenges in terms of conventional farming and infrastructure of 'alternative' food production.

The Danish approach was bottom-up, aiming at allocating funding to activities in producer-based food networks. Focus was on implementing new solutions of marketing, sale and distribution and on accelerated development of adaptive food production in coastal areas.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE REGION

A major achievement was the implementation of FOODMATRIX/smagdanmark.com, a combined web shop, marketing platform, payment and distribution solution. It has been developed based on years of experience among food SMEs with a variety of solutions. It is suggested to be the most innovative solution, yet developed. FOODMATRIX's principal is trade directly between customers/consumers and the producer. Every producer has a shop-in-the-shop and the principle of marketing is collective impact. When launched in 2016 many producers immediately saw the benefits of the solution. As a result more than 70 producers signed up. Another activity has been research and development of adaptive and climate change resilient food production focused on salt tolerant plant production. The interest expressed by small-scale producers living in relevant locations has led to agreements on production of vegetables on five islands in 2021. The products will be sold locally on each island, based on one common brand and the same marketing narrative. Additional products will be sold under the same marketing brand and narrative in specialty food shops in the major cities of Denmark.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The drivers in Denmark of local food production, local supply and local profiling based on food production are innovative SMEs. Main challenges are infrastructures of processing, marketing and distribution - locally, nationally and globally. Solutions are developed by SMEs, but the challenges have not been solved. Critical in these efforts are principles of distribution of development funding, and the development of a code of conduct has been suggested.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To develop a sustainable enterprise based on a vision and an idea requires the right networks of enterprises of kindred spirits. Networking activities include collaboration with customers, cooperation on solving common challenges of processing and distributions, as well as developing a collective impact in marketing to change consumer perception in the direction of a demand and willingness to pay premium prices for more sustainable products.



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OSTER
JUBEL
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Porsville
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REFRAME IN SWEDEN

Partners involved in the regional pilot of West-Sweden are the two non-profit sister companies Agroväst (cluster management organisation for the farming sector) and Locally Produced in West (resource center for small-scale food producers). Also, the natural resource schools owned by Region Västra Götaland were involved.

Focus for the regional pilot in West-Sweden has been to increase the sales of regional food in grocery stores. In recent years, the Swedish consumers have shown a continuously growing interest for local food. This increasing demand has led to new policy decisions among grocery stores to increase their sales and broaden their product range of regional food. This situation created unique opportunities for the REFRAME project to make an impact by supporting grocery stores in finding suitable regional suppliers and helping small-scale food producers to be able to meet the demand from the grocery stores.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE REGION

Due to the increasing demand from consumers, the food chain ICA Maxi made a policy decision to increase their sales of local food. In 2017, nine ICA Maxi stores in West-Sweden and the Federation of Swedish Farmers started an implementation project in close cooperation with REFRAME. The supermarkets created a way of marketing, carefully drafted criteria for selection of producers and made an activity plan for introduction and implementation. The stores carried out a stock check of the product range and made a list of new types of producers they would like to connect with. REFRAME supported by finding suitable producers. REFRAME also helped small-scale SMEs to meet the demand and fulfill the requirements from the grocery stores. For example by a series of skills development networking activities, sales training, coaching and mini fairs at which small-scale food producers were invited to present their products for specially invited purchasers. REFRAME also organised farm visits to create an increased understanding among the supermarket personnel for the local producer.

The work was successful. The ICA Maxi stores increased sales of regional food with 30 percent from 2017 to 2019. An increase worth €9,6 million. The number of regional SMEs selling products in the stores increased from 164 to over 300.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Despite a strong demand from consumers and efforts made by grocery stores to broaden their product range and increase their sales, it is hard for small-scale food producers to get their products on the shelf in the stores. Ordering systems, old habits, and factors such as volumes, price and logistics are obstacles hard to overcome.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To successfully implement regional policies, aiming at restoring and setting up regional food chains, we recommend assigning non-profit intermediaries to support in the transition period.



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HOW DO CONSUMERS FEEL ABOUT LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTS?

In 2020/2021 a comparative research among the REFRAME partner regions, concerning consumer attitudes on the intention to purchase local food products in Sweden, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands, was carried out by Jesper Kwant and commissioned by REFRAME.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The current food system creates situations whereby unstable economies, environmental damage, and health issues become the norm. Therefore, many organizations and businesses explore alternatives for more sustainable food systems, of which stimulating local food markets is one.

In REFRAME Jesper Kwant, former master student of Hanze University of Applied Science, was asked to do research on the attitude towards local food and the intention to purchase local food among consumers in the five REFRAME regions: Västra Götaland (Sweden), West-Flanders (Belgium), Wesermarsch District (Germany), Denmark, and the Northern Netherlands. Jesper applied a quantitative study using a comprehensive questionnaire. Varying numbers of respondents per region took part via online means.

THE FINDINGS

The findings show that the factors 'concern for the local economy' and 'perceived quality' have the most significant effect on the attitude towards local food. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that 'perceived behavioural control' (the person's perceived ease or difficulty of carrying out a behaviour) causes the largest change in the intention to purchase local food in nearly all regions. Also, as people's attitude towards local food increases their intention to purchase local food increases, as is shown in almost all areas under study.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy makers or marketers should utilize the fact that people are concerned for the local economy and that by purchasing local food products they could support the local farmers and businesses. For instance, by communicating to consumers how the money spent on local farm products makes its way back to the local economy.

Secondly, creating a favourable context for purchasing local food. For example by clearly labelling local food so that it is easily recognizable, showing how the customer is receiving good value for money, and why the purchasing of local food products at a premium price is worth it. People in the NSR region purchase more local food when they experience a higher degree of self-efficacy or controllability. Therefore the barriers and facilitators of purchasing local food should be investigated and mapped out so that marketers can utilize these insights to promote local food consumption. For those consumers who are concerned about the environment, marketers could utilize this fact by visualising what impact the purchase of the food product has on the environment.



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DESIGN Esther Fledderman, www.estherontwerp.nl

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