

Attracting Consumers towards SFSCs

Overview

Collecting consumer attitudes, values, expectation and purchase behaviour in relation to SFSCs improves the understanding of the choices made by consumers and often the reasons behind that decision. Where applicable the information can be utilised by SFSCs in practice to help to improve consumer awareness towards the benefits to SFSCs, with the end goal to improve overall sales, economic viability and social benefit to rural areas

Challenges

Questionnaires, interviews and focus groups were held with European consumers to understand their behaviours to SFSCs. The top three reasons consumers provided for not buying from SFCS include:

Price

Accessibility

Lack of promotion of SFSCs

Many consumers perceive the price of SFSC products as too high. The general location of selling points like farm shops are not conveniently located, and there is a lack of promotion and understanding of SFSC benefits

Key Recommendations

- Improved accessibility of SFSCs
- Increase marketing activities
- Awareness raising amongst consumers
- Understanding the need and demand of consumers
- Facilitate knowledge transfer between farmers and scientific community

Main Findings

During the evaluation of consumer behaviours and perceptions, there were some common grounds across the countries surveyed, as well as preferences to products bought through SFSCs. In all countries, the consumers were more likely to purchase fresh food items more often than processed ones from SFSCs. It was also highlighted that customers these customers were also inclined to prefer organic, locally produced or traditional products. The preferred products purchased through SFSCs include: vegetables, fruits, eggs, honey and bread. Many consumers perceived products from SFSCs and SFSC in general as more environmentally friendly than conventional supply chains.

Despite the positive outlook towards SFSCs and the quality of products. The convenience provided by conventional supply chains such as supermarkets with their readily available products and other conveniences such as longer opening hours, hinder the attractiveness towards SFSCs.

Recommendations

SFSCs practitioners

- **Marketing and communication**

Communication and marketing is an important aspect for SFSCs. It provides consumers with information about the products as well as the SFSC business. Consider highlighting niche elements of your business.

- **Improve accessibility**

Accessibility is key to increasing the uptake of SFSCs as an alternative purchasing channel. This includes looking at opportunities to bring the products nearer to consumers and adjusting the opening days or hours to for optimal sales.

- **Promote the products available**

According to the results of the SMARTCHAIN project, consumers value the naturalness and freshness of food from SFSCs. As well as the provenance and production of the products.

- **Highlight the advantages of SFSCs**

There are a number of benefits of SFSCs for consumers, yet this is often not understood. Consumer confidence needs to be improved, as well as understanding for the higher prices. Information campaigns and promotion by SFSCs can alleviate this barrier and improve sales.

- **Understand your customers**

Customer preference varies, not only across Europe but also within countries or regions. Consider conducting market research with your customer groups, or at least observing their purchasing habits.

Policy makers

- **Provide a common definition of SFSCs**

An EU applicable definition for SFSCs can assist in removing any unclear parameters surrounding SFSCs, as well as avoiding a narrow definition that could leave relevant examples out of the scope

- **Facilitate Farmers involvement in SFSC**

Improved farmer involvement is needed to support the success of SFSCs. Through Rural Development programmes, EU countries have the potential to support SFSCs, farmers' market, etc. In addition, novel farmer co-operation and co-ordination, like food innovation hubs can be reinforced

- **Quality Assurance Schemes**

Territorial development programs may establish regional quality assurance systems that will stimulate local sourcing and connect the HoReCa sector with local producers. The HoReCa industry can then serve as an important gatekeeper for SFSCs

- **Facilitate knowledge transfer**

Knowledge transfer is an important aspect to success of research and businesses. Improved measures are needed to bring together farmers and the scientific community to work together

- **Develop public campaigns**

Regional and local public campaigns are a great way to inform local citizens about the benefits provided by SFSCs to them as consumers and to their local community or region. Campaigns would also increase awareness of local actors in SFSC and improve consumer trust.

More Info



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@SMARTCHAIN H2020 Project

The central objective of SMARTCHAIN is to foster and accelerate the shift towards collaborative short food supply chains and, through specific actions and recommendations, to introduce new robust business models and innovative practical solutions that enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the European agri-food system



Horizon 2020
European Union Funding
for Research & Innovation

SMARTCHAIN project has received funding from the European Union Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 773788

Working Definition

SFSCs are co-operative systems that include very few intermediaries, increasing sustainability, transparency, social relations and fairer prices for farmers and consumers. Such supply chains usually involve local producers working together to promote local food which, in many cases, only travels a short distance, so farmers and consumers can communicate with each other