

How Europe Supports Short Food Supply Chains: A Cross-Country Look at Advice, Training and Practical Opportunities for Farmers

Problem encountered and objective

Across Europe, farmers interested in Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) face uneven access to knowledge, advisory services and practical support. Although SFSCs are increasingly promoted as tools to improve farm income, resilience, and consumer trust, support systems remain fragmented and vary significantly across countries. Farmers often encounter regulatory complexity, limited time, lack of business planning support and difficulties in accessing markets or scaling up initiatives. This abstract provides a cross-country overview of how farmers access SFSC-related advice, training and practical opportunities. It highlights differences between structured public advisory systems and more informal knowledge networks, while identifying the types of support that are most useful for farmers and practitioners.

Main results / outcomes

Countries with well-developed public advisory systems (e.g. Austria, France, Estonia, Czech Republic) provide farmers with structured guidance, targeted training programmes and demonstration activities, facilitating entry into direct sales, supporting the development of viable business models and improving compliance with food safety and administrative requirements, thereby reducing uncertainty and risks. In contrast, in countries where formal advisory services are less developed (e.g. Croatia, Ireland and Malta), SFSC-related knowledge is mainly shared through informal peer networks involving farmers, consultants and civil society organisations. While this highlights the importance of peer-to-peer learning and local innovation, limited access to official advice can slow entrepreneurial development and make regulatory compliance more challenging. Across countries, farmer organisations, cooperatives, NGOs and EU-funded projects play an important complementary role by offering coaching, webinars, marketing support and access to local markets. Support is most effective when regulatory guidance, business planning and marketing advice are combined in a practical, farmer-oriented approach. Advisory services that save time and translate complex rules into practical guidance increase farmers' willingness and capacity to engage in SFSCs.

Practical recommendations

To strengthen farmers' engagement in SFSCs, support measures should focus on combining clear regulatory guidance with hands-on business and marketing advice. Advisory services are particularly effective when they translate complex food safety, labelling and administrative requirements into simple, step-by-step actions adapted to small-scale producers.

Farmers are encouraged to actively participate in local networks, cooperatives, CSA groups and producer organisations, as these structures facilitate knowledge exchange, joint marketing initiatives and collective problem-solving. Peer-to-peer sharing of best practices is a low-cost and highly effective way to build confidence, reduce risks and accelerate learning.

Where available, training courses, demonstration events and coaching programmes should be used to strengthen skills related to direct sales, logistics, pricing, digital marketing and customer relations. In contexts with limited formal advisory services, reinforcing links between informal networks, NGOs, and public institutions can help scale up successful local initiatives. Strengthening coordination between public advisory systems, farmer organisations and informal knowledge networks can significantly improve the reach and effectiveness of SFSC support across Europe, ensuring that available knowledge is accessible, relevant and action-oriented.

Further information

More information will be available at https://eu4advice.eu/knowledge_hub/publications/

About this abstract

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EU4Advice aims to lay the ground for effective capacity building of Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC) actors, by supporting advisors as catalysers of the knowledge flow from research to practice within an EU network of

