

REGIONAL FOOD FUTURES

IN BRIEF

- Our current food system provides relative food security at the expense of the environment and health. It does not meet the challenges of climate change.
- Regional (direct) marketing of predominantly plant-based (organic) products can significantly promote the transition to a climate-friendly food system.
- Possible alternative futures for the promotion of regional diets show options for action and the political and social scope for action.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

The food system ensures the availability of food, increases working capacity and health, thus ensuring the preservation of our species. Since the 19th century, huge increases in production and product diversity have been achieved, increasing food security as a result, at least in industrialised countries.

However, this has only been possible by using vast amounts of fossil energy, fertilisers, pesticides, water, and long-distance transport, with disastrous consequences for the environment, society, and ultimately for human health: climate change, soil degradation, water pollution, disruption of global nutrient cycles (nitrogen, phosphate, potassium), the extinction of species, and loss of genetic diversity in cultivated plants. The displacement of small-scale farming has also led to a weakening of rural areas due to the dismantling of infrastructure and job losses.

In light of these challenges, the emerging trend towards promoting regional (organic) products through (direct) marketing represents an important approach to effectively mitigate economic, social, and environmental impacts. However, from a sustainability assessment point of view, it is necessary to adopt a differentiated view of many individual products.

Milk, bread, pasta, tomatoes, lettuce, oils, meat, nuts, etc. harm the environment very differently depending on their origin, production methods, level of processing, packaging, storage and logistics, as well as consumer behaviour and cooking methods. A comparison based on the calculation of the ecological footprint shows the advantages of shortened logistics chains, such as shorter transport routes, the elimination of intermediaries, and reduced packaging.



Regional food as an important building block on the path to sustainable consumption.

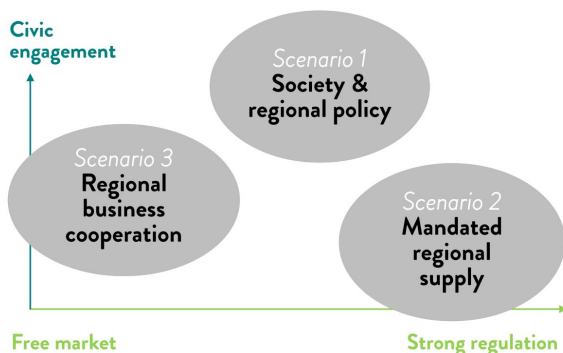
Numerous hurdles make the implementation of more climate-conscious and healthier production and diets difficult: the food system is a highly complex mix of actors, interests, products, processes, and conflicting goals. Forward-looking studies make alternative futures tangible in this context. Three scenarios, aimed at promoting regional diets, were developed with the help of a multi-stage survey. Experts then formulated transformative courses of action for policy, production, trade, and regional communities.

BASIC DATA

Project title:	CITY.FOOD.BASKET – regional shopping baskets
Project team:	Sotoudeh, M.; Gudowsky-Blatakes, N.; Kowalski, J. (in a nat. consortium)
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KEY RESULTS

Scenario 1: Civic engagement and supportive regional policies. A great need for personal connection between consumers and producers supports regional supply and mutual appreciation. There is increased local and regional cooperation, e.g. in buying groups and production associations, cooperatives or cooperative societies, with a high level of voluntary work and personal contributions by consumers. The state supports regional production and consumption through subsidies, tax benefits, and increased advertising.



Potential scenarios involving increased regional food consumption/production.

Scenario 2: Mandated regional food supply.

Regulation pursues two parallel strategies as main drivers: (1) the strengthening of regional agriculture and production by promoting organic farming, subsidies, and tax benefits for regional purchases; (2) the weakening of unsustainable forms of production, e.g. through higher transport costs, tariffs, (CO₂) taxes, carbon emission trading, removal of subsidies, and supply chain legislation. There is a convergence of prices at high levels: organic vs. conventional and regional vs. international.

Scenario 3: Regional business cooperation.

Generational change, start-ups, and the settlement of new businesses lead to the development of a new market for regional products that are easily accessible through technologised and digitalised distribution and delivery systems. Producers and retailers are increasingly forming autonomous intercompany, local, and regional associations. Regulation is gently supporting this with the introduction of quality seals, labels, and product standards. Here, too, prices are converging at a high level.

WHAT TO DO?

Regional food supply can make a significant contribution to sustainable consumption and reduce dependence on global supply chains. Options for action include:

- Making regional/organic/healthy food a tender criterion in community settings, whilst also adjusting purchasing budgets.
- Reducing food waste along the value chain. Regulation and incentives for investments in climate-conscious production.
- Improving affordability of regional food through subsidies, e.g. infrastructure costs of food cooperatives, regional vouchers or bonus payments for purchasing climate-conscious products.
- Promoting low-threshold offers for regional products, e.g. support online stores, pick-up stations, vending machines and delivery options with low-emission logistics.
- Increasing awareness of and promoting seasonal food. Stimulate production of winter vegetables, revive practices of how to store and process regional products.
- Promoting regional brands, labels, and quality seals which are transparently established and coordinated by regional actors.
- Promoting smaller regional areas of high population density and their regional supply to counteract urban sprawl and soil sealing.
- Shifting subsidies to climate-conscious practices in order to avoid climate-damaging subsidies and to remedy current distortions of competition.

FURTHER READING

Kratzer, N., Kollmann, R., Sotoudeh, M., Gudowsky, N., Seebacher, U., & Derler, H. (2023).

CityFoodBasket - Nachhaltig konsumieren leicht gemacht – Zusammenfassung Projektergebnisse.
epub.oeaw.ac.at/0xc1aa5576_0x003e3033.pdf

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