

THE ROLE OF SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN STAKEHOLDERS IN IMPLEMENTING THE MODEL “BUSINESS - TO - GOVERNMENT” (B2G)

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Abstract

Short food supply chains (SFSC), which have started to develop in parallel to conventional food chains, play a key role in the emerging food networks that are continuously emerging as an alternative to globalised agri-food supply chains. One of the business models that can create the greatest multiplier effect in SFSC is Business-to-Government (B2G). The study focuses on a narrow application of the B2G model, namely the provision of children's meals with local products in public institutions using a SFSC strategy. The aim of the study is to identify the potential for participation of actors with an interest in the provision of children's meals with local products in public institutions when a short food supply chain strategy is applied. The research problem is investigated using literature analysis, systematisation, case study, synthesis, synthesis, mapping and other methods.

The study identifies factors that motivate SFSC stakeholders and the barriers that hinder their participation in local product markets, to address the problem of organising children's meals with local products in public institutions. It also identifies the actions needed to organise children's meals in public institutions through a short food supply chain development strategy.

Keywords: *Business-to-Government (B2G), Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC), Stakeholders.*

JEL Codes: *Q24, Q57, L66.*

Introduction

The increasing influence of external environmental factors and the rapidly evolving unfavourable geopolitical environment (ageing population, the Covid 19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, intensifying climate change, depleting natural resources, the slow transition to renewable resources) have highlighted the challenges of sourcing bio-valuable, health-friendly food products and the need for new sustainable business and regional development strategies. The development of short food supply chains (SFSCs) in parallel to conventional food chains is playing a key role in the emerging food networks that are continuously emerging as an alternative to globalised agri-food supply chains (Jarzębowski, Bezat, 2018; Lankauskienė, Vidickienė & Gedminaitė-Raudonė, 2022) and helps to provide the population with biologically valuable products.

There are many different forms of SFSCs, but they have in common the reduced number of intermediaries between the farmer or food producer and the consumer. From the point of view of the customer, SFSCs convey more detailed information about the origin of the food, and for producers, SFSCs help them to retain a higher share of added value. The merging of conventional food supply chains with agribusiness transforms both from a commodity system into a coordinated food system that includes more processes-production, consumption and waste management (Jarzębowski, Bezat, 2018) and already operates according to the principles of the circular economy. The local food system is one of the key organisational structures for sustainable regional development, helping to generate economic, social and environmental benefits. Kneafsey et al. (2013)

define it as a collaborative network that integrates sustainable agricultural and food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of an area. Such collaborative networks provide an alternative to the globalised structure of the agri-food sector, allowing to “connect” the two extremes of the supply chain and meet the needs of both consumers and producers, while making an important contribution to the concept of sustainable development (Jarzębowski, Bezat, 2018). Lankauskienė, Vidickienė & Gedminaitė-Raudonė (2022) in their research identified this as an innovation - a shift from a SFSC to a network concept, with a two-way network in which two parties are in direct cooperation: (1) farmers and other service providers and (2) consumers. This network characteristic increases the capacity of the food supply system to generate network effects and triggers the need for a variety of new business models. The market for public sector sales, i.e. the Business-to-Governance (B2G) market, is large and relevant (Morcov & Puiu, 2023). The Business-to-Governance (B2G) model is one of the models with the highest multiplier effect in SFSC (Short Food Supply Chains..., 2020; Atkočiūnienė, Vaznonienė, Kiaušienė & Pakeltienė, 2021; Morcov & Puiu, 2023). However, the discussed trends of change and the introduction of new strategies and models require new knowledge and research in order to adapt old or develop new food business and food market models, and to disseminate SFSC models and innovations. It is also essential to identify the roles of stakeholders, as revealed through the motives and barriers to participation, and the actions required for successful model adoption. *The research problem is formulated by the question: what is the role of SFSC stakeholders in the implementation of a Business-to-Governance model?*

The aim of the study is to identify opportunities for the involvement of actors who have an interest in feeding children with local products in public institutions when a SFSC strategy is applied.

Research methodology. The methods used to investigate the scientific problem include analysis of scientific literature, systematisation, case study, synthesis, comparison and other methods. The research data was collected using the snowball method. The data were collected from secondary scientific sources. The empirical study is used to relate the existing theoretical patterns to the state-of-the-art of short food supply chains using the B2G model. One narrow application of the B2G model is the provision of children's meals with local products in public institutions when a short food supply chain strategy is applied. A case study, which is a qualitative, exploratory research method, was carried out in the Rokiškis district. The case study helped the researchers to build an initial understanding of a new area such as B2G, which is an under-researched and under-understood area. The case study research methodology used included data collection through two focus group discussions, data systematisation and analysis, and evaluation. 15 participants took part in the focus group discussions. Of these, 7 were farmers developing short food supply chains, 5 were from the public sector and 3 were from local government organisations. Due to the small size of the paper, the evaluation of the research data is presented in more detail, i.e. the conditions of participation of actors who are interested in feeding children with local products in public institutions when applying the SFSC strategy. Discussions, especially through open-ended questions, with stakeholders involved in child nutrition in public facilities when a SFSC strategy is in place helped to reveal new insights and clarify terminology. The discussions paid equal attention to negative and positive responses and feedback.

Theoretical Insights Into Short Food Supply Chain and Model Business – to – Government (B2G)

The implementation of the SFSC concept involves many stakeholders who can benefit from a shorter path to the consumer.

Almost all of the good practices identified by Jarzębowski, Bezat (2018) involve producer contact. A third of the examples analysed include agri-food processors and retailers. In the case of short chains, laboratories, agri-food stores and wholesalers play a minor role.

Researchers (Christopher, Ryals, 2014; Lankauskienė, Vidickienė & Gedminaitė-Raudonė, 2022), who have tried to answer the question “*Who plays the key role in the post-industrial food system?*”, have emphasised the need to reorient the food supply chain from a supply-driven one to a demand-driven one. As a result, all chain activities and facilities should be oriented towards meeting the needs of buyers, because consumption plays a key role in the demand chain and buyers become the main actors in the food system. In the latter study, the Business-to-Government model broadens the range of buyers to include direct (children, schoolchildren, the sick, day-care centre users, etc.) and indirect groups of consumers (public sector bodies, children attending nurseries, schools and day-care centres, parents, adoptive parents and guardians of children).

The different motives of the stakeholders for pursuing a common goal encourage cooperation (Morris, Buller, 2003). Martikainen et al (2014) highlight the need to strengthen cooperation in the chain not only between producers but also between consumers. According to the authors, closer cooperation between different local food producers would lead to a better use of resources and improve the reliability and cost-effectiveness of supply, while active cooperation between customers and suppliers in the chain would lead to improved development of new products and a better understanding of customer needs. However, Van der Meer (2006) believes that negative experiences and memories of unsuccessful policies that have initiated or supported public sector cooperatives contribute to negative attitudes towards cooperatives among farmers and others.

Researchers (Kneafsey et al., 2013; Short Food Supply..., 2020; Atkočiūnienė, Vazonienė,

Kiaušienė, Pakeltienė, 2021) have highlighted public (collective) procurement as one of the forms of sales in SFSC.

Public sector procurement, or Business-to-Government (B2G), is the marketing and sale of products, services and works to public sector organisations (Morcov & Puiu, 2023). B2G is similar to, but different from, other markets such as retail, consumer, Business-to-Consumer (B2C) or Business-to-Business (B2B) (Kenton, 2021). The public sector sales market has not yet been analysed, researched or formally defined clearly. Even the terminology is still being defined. Various alternative names are used, e.g. Public Sector (PS), Public Procurement (PP), Business-to-Government (B2G), Business-to-Public-Administration (B2PA) or Business-to-Public-Sector (B2PS) (Morcov & Puiu, 2023).

The choice of the form of sale depends on various factors, such as the territorial (geographical) level, which can be local, regional, national, international, as well as factors such as seasonality, production method, consumer needs, etc. One of the organisational systems that bring together producers and consumers in the food system, creating the conditions for consumers to subscribe to the harvests and food products of a particular farm or group of farms, is *community supported agriculture* (Hanson, Concepcion & Volpe, 2024) and *food cooperatives* (Gaitan-Cremaschi et al., 2019). These are direct marketing strategies that bring together food consumers (e.g. households) and local buyers (e.g. public sector institutions such as kindergartens, municipal administrations, hospitals etc.). Consumers (and buyers) subscribe and thus commit to supporting the farm's activities, aiming to make the farmland a farm that meets the needs of the local community. Public institutions and local consumers are involved in the selection of varieties, the planning of cultivation and production volumes, pre-ordering (e.g. in the spring) certain agricultural and food products, making advance payments and sharing the risk of harvest losses. This saves resources, builds

relationships with high levels of trust and commitment, and creates democratic value chains that are embedded in local communities (Gaitan-Cremaschi et al., 2019). Growers, producers and consumers (buyers) provide mutual support to each other, share the risks of food production and co-create the benefits, systems and network thinking, social innovation, but with a strong focus on the optimal size of the organisation and on sustainable development. A certain number of actors, both farmers and consumers, is necessary to meet consumer expectations (e.g. supply, affordability of products), but when such organisations become too large, there are downsides, increased risks, and a rapid decline in consumer motivation due to a lack of personal interaction and a lack of a shared consumer experience (Kump & Fikar, 2021).

The traditional SFSC concept is based on linear thinking, with little reliance on network and system thinking (Kump & Fikar, 2021; Lankauskiene, Vidickiene & Gedminaitė-Raudonė, 2022). Farmers involved in alternative supply chains should collaborate and increasingly apply networking and systems thinking approaches to build regional and national local food systems as two-way or multi-stakeholder networks/platforms (Thomé, Cappellesso, Ramos, Duarte, 2021; Kump & Fikar, 2021). This approach and more innovative solutions help to generate larger volumes of local products, a wider range of products, and a cooperative economy of scale. They also promote cooperation between network actors. Lankauskienė, Vidickienė & Gedminaitė-Raudonė (2022) point out that platform (one form of networking) based cooperation between farmers and customers helps to align the interests of buyers and suppliers, they transact directly with each other using the platform resources and usually experience two-way network effects. Platforms promote network effects directly through platform services and indirectly through shared value creation activities.

Bashir and Verma (2017) argue that competitive advantage in the near future will go

beyond product and process innovation. How a business or entity competes, i.e. what its business model is, is a very important aspect. Because it is the innovation of the business model that can help a business or an entity to reduce its costs, reduce business risks and even customer retention costs (Donner & de Vries, 2023). A business model is the way in which a company structures its resources, partnerships and customer relationships to create and attract value. Business models classified according to the type of consumer are increasingly important: Business-to-Consumer (B2C), Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Government (B2G) (Donner & de Vries, 2023). The Business-to-Government (B2G) model helps to define the business relationships that a farmer or company can establish with public authorities. The latter would guarantee small producers stable orders and income, as the buyer of the products would be the state or local authorities, and the farmers' products would be offered to local kindergartens, schools, hospitals etc. However, it should be noted that signing a contract with a public body requires a number of procedures and high standards. The complexity of the sales procedure depends on the value of the contract, the specific nature of the goods or services and the Public Procurement Law (Viešųjų pirkimų agentūra, 2021)¹. Operators wishing to sell to public authorities or public undertakings must participate in public procurement tenders. Local farmers can also be involved in the development process by the municipality through a community supported agriculture organisation system. Community supported agriculture is a localised system of food production and consumption, the organisation of which is characterised by the sharing of farming risks between producer and consumer, the practice of organic food production methods, and the clear understanding of the farm processes by members of the public as stakeholders in the farm (Kniūksšta, 2015).

¹Viešųjų pirkimų agentūra (Public Procurement Agency). Access via the Internet [2021 11 10]:

<https://viesujupirkimu.lt/viesieji-pirkimai/viesieji-pirkimai-verslui/>

The Business-to-Government (B2G) model implementation conditions in Rokiškis district

Rokiškis District is located in the north-eastern part of Lithuania, bordering Latvia. Rokiškis is equidistant from the major Lithuanian cities of Vilnius and Kaunas by 174 km. According to the 2021 Lithuanian census, the population of Rokiškis District Municipality was 28 715 inhabitants. In 2020, Rokiškis had 18 general education schools and pre-school education institutions, educating 4028 children, and the Rokiškis Elderly Care Home, with 43 inhabitants.

According to the data of the Rokiškis District Municipality's Agriculture Department, in 2024, 2 919 agricultural operators in Rokiškis District will declare 86 221 ha of agricultural land. The dominant activity of farmers in the district is crop farming. The declared crops include 22 000 ha of winter wheat, 7100 ha of winter rape, 4200 ha of buckwheat, 103 ha of potatoes, 123 ha of vegetables, 142 ha of gardens, 123 ha of berry-growing, as well as nuts, sea buckthorn, Shiitaki mushrooms and other crops. Small and medium-sized farms dominate in the district (2023): 1 226 subjects declared up to 5 ha of land, 1180 between 5 ha and 30 ha, while only 10 declared more than 500 ha. According to the data of the Register of Legal Entities of the State Enterprise “Centre of Registers”, until 2019, only one farmer cooperative “Rokiškutis” was established in the Rokiškis District to carry out agricultural activities. Data on the activities of the cooperative for 2020-2023 have not been submitted to the Centre of Registers, it can be assumed that the activities are inactive.

In 2023, the Rokiškis District Municipal Administration started centralised public procurement for all kindergartens and day-care centres in the district. In 2023, the local farmers' cooperative 'Ūkio ratas' was set up with the aim of „...meeting the economic, economic and social needs of its members by providing the means of production, services, production, processing and marketing of products, as well as by engaging in other productive, economic and commercial activities, representing and defending the interests of members before the various institutions“ (Kooperatyvo “Ūkio ratas” įstatai, 2022, p.1)². The purpose of the cooperative is formulated in a broad and abstract way in the statutes, which can be assumed to have been intended to apply to all possible cases of the cooperative's activities, in order to avoid the additional administrative and financial burden of amending the statutes. The lack of a specific objective may complicate the future operation of the cooperative. In such a case, the initiative and responsibility lies more with the leader - the manager of the cooperative. In August 2023, using the exemption³ provided for in the Public Procurement Law of the Republic of Lithuania⁴, the cooperative concluded a contract with the municipal administration of Rokiškis district to supply local food products (vegetables, fruit, dairy products) to kindergartens and day-care centres in the district. Since then, the main activities of the cooperative have been to strengthen the bargaining power and administrative capacity of its members, and to provide take-out services.

Representatives of three groups of farmers in Rokiškis district - dairy producers, potato and vegetable growers, and berry and fruit growers

² The statutes of the “Ūkio ratas” cooperative, approved in 2 of December, 2022, item 5, p. 1.

³ Lietuvos Respublikos viešųjų pirkimų įstatymas (Public Procurement Law of the Republic of Lithuania) Nr. I-1491, priimto 1996 m. rugpjūčio 13 d., suvestinė redakcija nuo 2024-06-21 iki 2024-10-17, 71 str. 6 p. 19 d. Access via the Internet [2024 08 06]: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.30614/asr>

⁴ Lietuvos Respublikos viešųjų pirkimų įstatymas (Public Procurement Law of the Republic of Lithuania) Nr. I-1491, priimto 1996 m. rugpjūčio 13 d., suvestinė redakcija nuo 2024-06-21 iki 2024-10-17, 71 str. 6 p. 19 d. Access via the Internet [2024 08 06]: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.30614/asr>

(2021, 2022) - were interviewed, who apply short food supply chain strategies - selling their grown and processed produce directly to consumers.

They were found to sell only part of their produce to local consumers at the market or in a

specialised shop. They sell part of it in Kaunas and Vilnius, the other major cities in Lithuania, and the rest to intermediaries or processors (Table 1).

Table 1. Places of sale of products of farmers in Rokiškis district who apply short food supply chain principles

Order No.	Products produced and marketed	Outlets/production volume, % of sales				
		On the Farm	On Local market	In Local shop	In Kaunas or Vilnius	For the processor
1.	Dairy products (milk, cottage cheese, sour cream, cheese, butter, cream, yoghurt)	0	90	10	0	0
2.	Dairy products (milk, cottage cheese, sour cream, cheese, butter)	1	99	0	0	0
3.	Vegetables (carrots, beetroot, potatoes, cabbage, herbs, radishes, lettuce)	10	55	5	30	0
4.	Vegetables (carrots, beetroot, potatoes)	30	40-60	0	0	10-30
5.	Vegetables (carrots, beetroot, potatoes, cabbage, lettuce)	25-30	70	0	0	0-5
6.	Fruit (apples, pears)	10	50	0	30	10
7.	Fruits (apples, plums, blueberries)	50	50	0	0	0

Local farmers do not participate in public tenders organised by district caterers (kindergartens, schools, old people's homes, etc.) due to the terms of the public tender, which do not correspond to the capabilities of local food producers - very narrow product range, unattractive delivery schedule. The contracting authority needs a wide range of products and does not have the capacity to store the products, requiring two to three

deliveries per week, which increases the cost of the products and the labour time.

In order to clarify the role of stakeholders in the organisation of children's meals in public institutions when applying the SFSC strategy, two focus group discussions were organised in Rokiškis district (Table 2), involving 7 local farmers, 5 representatives of the municipal administration and 3 representatives of the farmers' self-management organisation.

Table 2. Focus group discussion characteristics

Method	Qualitative research, Focus group discussion
Number and duration of discussions	2 discussions of 95 min + 83 min.
Date and place	18 of November, 2021 (95 minutes); 20 of January, 2022 (83 min.); remote mode using the MSTeams platform.
Criteria for selecting participants for the focus group discussion	Farmers who apply a short food supply chain strategy;

	Representation of all groups in Rokiškis district interested in feeding children with local products in public institutions when applying the SFSC strategy: local farmers, consumers of local food, local authorities; Convenience sampling principle.
Questions for discussion	What are the motivations for organising children's meals with local products in public establishments when applying the SFSC strategy? What are the disincentives to organise children's meals with local products in public establishments when the SFSC strategy is applied? What needs to be done to remove barriers to the provision of locally produced meals for children in public establishments when the SFSC strategy is applied?
Course of the study	The group discussions took place in a friendly and open atmosphere; participants were sufficiently insightful and interested in the issues of the study and expanded on each other's ideas.

Three main stakeholder groups were identified - local farmers, local food consumers, local authorities - and an analysis of the factors

influencing stakeholder participation was carried out on the basis of the data collected (Table 3).

Table 3. Conditions for participation of actors interested in feeding children with local products in public institutions when applying the SFSC strategy

Stakeholders	Incentives to participate in local product markets	Barriers to participation in local product markets	Required actions
Local farmers	Increased consumption of local products could lead to more sales of locally produced food. Selling directly to consumers would increase their income and make them more competitive and independent from the global market, i.e. their sales would be significantly less affected by geopolitical events. By cooperating and communicating directly with consumers, they would be able to develop a range of products that is more in line with their needs and reduce food waste.	No single farmer in the district can provide the full assortment of food needed to feed children. There is a lack of specific (public procurement) knowledge, extra time and motivation to acquire this knowledge. Unattractive delivery schedule. The size of purchasing lots is often not uniform and regular.	Produce and market a wider variety of healthier food products through collaboration. Develop cooperative SFSCs. Promote co-creation and cooperation processes through social and managerial innovation.
Consumers of local food products	Local produce is healthier and more biologically valuable than imported produce: farmers in Lithuania are less likely to use plant protection products against diseases and pests than those in warmer climates, and local food does not need to be treated with chemicals to ensure its marketability.	There is a lack of knowledge about the quality of local food, the health benefits, the benefits of reducing “food miles” and food waste in contributing to GHG reduction and climate change mitigation.	A preference for locally produced, seasonal, fresh food. Support the development of local SFSCs through active participation and care of children's meals in public educational institutions. Consult nutrition experts, initiate health-friendly

	<p>Consuming locally produced, healthier, seasonal and fresher food would be healthier for the population, contribute to boosting the local economy, strengthening rural vitality and reducing GHG emissions.</p> <p>They would contribute to the development of the local food assortment and quality control in cooperation with local producers and experience a sense of community.</p>		<p>menus in children's educational establishments and cooperate with local food producers.</p>
Local government	<p>It promotes the local economy, strengthens the resilience of local farms, maintains the diversity and vitality of rural economic activities, promotes healthier, higher quality diets, which in the long term will reduce the need for health services, and contributes to reducing GHG emissions.</p> <p>Communicate with, inform and advise stakeholders through the coordination and implementation of the procurement of local products.</p> <p>Building a local food system and strengthening community resilience.</p>	<p>Lack of mobilizing leadership.</p> <p>There is no collaborative network that connects sustainable agricultural and food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management in a given geographic area.</p> <p>Relationships between local producers and consumers are episodic and very fragile.</p>	<p>In order to reduce the administrative burden on public catering organizers, centralize public procurement.</p> <p>The conditions of public procurement should be adapted as much as possible according to the needs and possibilities of the procuring organization and local food producers.</p> <p>Arrange for catering organizers' menus to be adapted according to the range of local food products and its seasonality.</p> <p>To organize the education of the local consumer community about the quality and benefits of local food products, reducing the contribution of "food miles" to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the mitigation of climate change.</p> <p>Support the development of local SFSC by organizing public procurement for children's meals, informing and advising interested persons.</p> <p>To promote cooperation between SFSC developers by implementing the “Business-to-Government” model.</p>

The supply of local products is formed by local producers and processors of agricultural products. And the demand is formed by the

municipal administration that organizes meals in public institutions (Rokiškis district municipal administration), children attending kindergartens and

day care centers, children's parents, adoptive parents and guardians. It was also possible to single out additional or potential groups of stakeholders - public institutions that provide meals (kindergartens, schools, hospitals, day care centers), local community organizations, public health offices. They were not examined during the investigation.

Conclusions

Business-to-Government (B2G) model can usually be applied at a certain territorial (geographical) level. Public procurement is carried out by municipalities, NGO institutions and state enterprises at various levels: national, regional, local. Public procurement of local food products is an opportunity to ensure high quality of service provision and protect the public interest in terms of supply of biologically valuable products, food quality, positive impact on the natural environment and population health. The abundance of local food products can be used to support low-income households and ensure their healthy nutrition and food security.

Stakeholders have not disclosed all the advantages and disadvantages of the Business-to-Government (B2G) model, so they only partially understand their role. The cooperation of agricultural entities helped to reach a new market for the sale of food products in the Rokiškis district - public catering organizations (kindergartens, day care centers, schools, nursing homes for the elderly, etc.), but the share of locally produced and consumed products is still too small to have economic levers against the sellers of imported products and for the sustainable development of business and regions by self-sufficiency in food

products. The relationship between the local producer and the consumer is episodic, very fragile, slowly transitioning into a co-creative process.

The cooperative can provide logistics organization services for food products, strengthens bargaining power and reduces the administrative burden of farmers by participating in public procurement, which stimulates the local economy, strengthens the relationship between producers and consumers.

In the Rokiškis district, the market for the sale of local food products is underutilized, there is room to expand the range of products provided by the existing cooperative and the services provided to members, to develop local product markets in cooperation with local product consumers and public sector organizations. A network of support for short food supply chains based on shared values, which connects local farmers, businesses, food communities and public institutions in a process of co-creation and cooperation, could be a more advanced organizational structure for the sustainable development of the region.

Local farmer cooperatives, as a prototypical food system innovation, can be inclusive and functional, but it is important to monitor and constantly analyze how the needs of customers and cooperative members are being met. Therefore, we conclude that policy makers and public sector organizations should focus on the activities of food cooperatives in different regions and on measures to facilitate mutual learning and knowledge transfer. The roles of stakeholders in the short food supply chain are similar in implementing the Business-to-Government model, with collaborative leadership, collaborative planning, joint agricultural and marketing planning, and innovation.

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