

The food short supply chain: socioeconomic perspective



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Introduction

The present agrifood sector is particularly connected with the theme of the degrowth. The approach of the gastronomic sciences, that is a mix of humanistic and scientific points of view (Scaltriti, 2009), proposes a different pattern of development for the agrifood system in the future. The present food system can be defined a system that create a world "stuffed and starved" (Patel, 2008). The first challenge is the transformation of the food supply chain into a short (and local) supply chain. What are the reasons that can be force farmers and consumers to participate in a farmers market? First of all individualistic advantages (higher revenues for farmers and lower prices for consumers) (Vecchio, 2009), but a few studies try to answer whether the farmers market can become a virtuous framework, where alternative practices of food production can survive and develop. Or in other words if the farmers market helps to add social contents to acts (purchasing and selling) become now merely economic (Polanyi, 2001).

Aim

The aim of this study is to highlight the function of the farmers market to select best practices in the agriculture system and to connect aware consumers and producers.

The output of this virtuous relationship is the development of some degrowing agricultural practices such as:

- less miles for food
- less agricultural inputs (pests and fertilizers)
- social agriculture (job opportunities and activity for disabled people)
- female occupation in agriculture and food production

Method

It's a case-study method.

A personal in-home interview was gathered from 9 out of 35 producers who sell in a Farmers Market of Parma, a medium town (180.000 in.) placed in Pianura Padana (Italy).

The Farmers market has no ideological framework, as other Farmers Markets in Italy, because it's only a "commercial" activity of the Economic Development Department of the town. The name of the farmers market is "Il mercato della Corte" (The market of Courtyard) and is made of 35 farmers and artisanal producers (e.g. cheese makers) coming from the province of Parma (NUTS 3), and the region Emilia Romagna (NUTS 2). The average distance of the farms from the market is 35 ± 22 km, due to the fact that the "alternative" farms are usually placed in hills or mountains (Apennines).



The place of the Mercato della Terra: an area in the centre of the town occupied by the market each Saturday morning.



The logo of "Il Mercato della Corte". It's not affiliated to other networks. It's a consequence of the new Italian regulation on agricultural activities (DM 20 novembre 2007 and Legge n.296 27 dicembre 2006)

The logos of other Farmers' markets network:
Mercati della Terra is a network of markets promoted by the Slow Food movement with a strict regulations in terms of origin of products.
Campagna Amica is the network of markets promoted by Coldiretti, one of the most important Italian association of farmers.

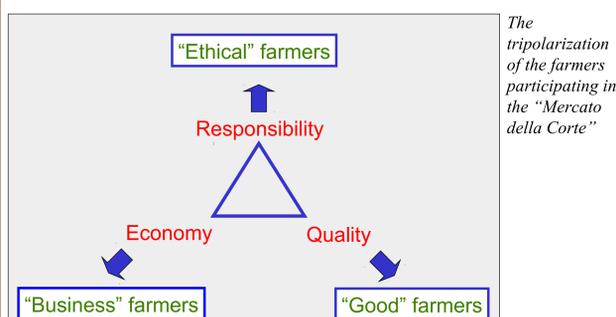
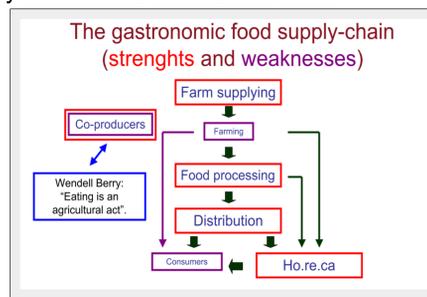


Results

The main output of the survey is to classify the farmers in 3 big categories:

- 1) **"business" farmers:** they are the farmers who come and sell in the market, only because the revenue is higher and the payment is not delayed. Sometimes they sell products coming from other farms etc.
- 2) **"good" farmers:** they are very satisfied by selling their own products and they are satisfied by their devoted customers. They are proud of the quality of their products and they varied their production to satisfy the customers of Farmers Markets.
- 3) **"ethical" farmers:** they believe in what they are doing. Usually they were not farmers, but they started to farm because they feel better and they would like to make people happier at least. They are organic farmers or they have social activities or both.

The gastronomic supply chain. The presence of co-producer (consumers directly connected with producers) give strength to the food short supply chain.



The tripolarization of the farmers participating in the "Mercato della Corte"

We selected two case studies belonging to the third category (the "ethical" farmers):

Case Study Number 1

The social farm "Terra e Sole" is an horticultural farm (SAU = 3 hectares) with organic productions. It's a social farm because it hosts activities in favour of disadvantaged people; among the other project, two disabled people works a day per week in the farm. From an economic point of you, the farm is gainful for the holder (age = 46), farmer full time, and his family (wife + 2 sons). All the production is sold directly to the consumers:

- direct farm sale
- GAS (purchasing group)
- local weekly market
- two farmers markets



The farmer of "Terra e sole" with some daily hosts of the farm.

Case Study Number 2

The Farm "Il Tartarino" is an horticultural farm (SAU = 2 hectares) held by a woman (age = 45) who is a full time farmer. She left is previous occupation to change "her rhythm of life". She inherited the farm by his father and she changed the cultivation starting with horticulture and non heated greenhouses. From an economic point of view, the farm is gainful for just one person. All the production is directly said to consumers via:

- GAS (purchasing groups)
- direct sale
- Farmers Market "La Corte"

Conclusions

The food short supply chain has positive aspects:

- the profitability, due to the higher added value of the products directly sold.
- the human interactions between consumers and producers that can drive the "virtuous" changes in the productive model.
- the stimulation of alternative agricultural practices sustained by the demand of aware consumers
- the supply of fresh food products coming from an area of an average radius of 35 km with less "food miles" (less CO₂, less fuel consumption, less packaging) and less preservatives.

On the other side the presence of "degrowing" farmers is due usually to the personal attitudes of single entrepreneurs; but the farmers market represents a positive framework where virtuous behaviours can take place. The question if **always and everywhere** a Farmers market stimulates degrowing or agroecological practices is not yet answered, but some suggestions deriving from this first case-study will be the base for the next studies that will try to answer to that fundamental question.

References

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