The issues related to local food systems and their wider social, cultural, economic and environmental implications have flourished amongst scholars and policymakers over the last decades. The hypothesis of study, which this paper is based upon, is that local (alternative) agrifood or food systems will be a suitable tool for further development of sustainable agrifood sector, as well as development of rural communities and rural areas. The tasks of study are: to clarify the concept of local food systems; to investigate the food system relationship with further sustainable development of rural communities; and to review initiatives and activities for developing the local food systems in Latvia. The used research methods are mainly qualitative: analysis and synthesis, logical and abstract constructive and expert, etc. Although there is no consensus among scholars regarding the definition of the local food system, nevertheless, the local food systems or alternative food networks are no less important and suitable tool for solving environmental, economical (farmers’ and rural inhabitants’ income increasing) and social issues, and they facilitate further sustainable development of rural areas and communities. Some activities and projects as examples of development and implementation of local food systems in Latvia are explained and results of projects’ implementation are given, for example: Project “Local Identity Product” Project „Local Products Development in Middle Baltics”; Project “Marketing Campaign for Development of Rural Tourism Products in all Regions of Latvia and their Promotion” etc.

Key words: food, Latvia, local food, rural, system.
JEL codes: Q13, Q18, M29, R11.

1. Introduction

Starting from the 1960s, the European Union’s (EU) Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) has been applied to facilitate a viable agricultural sector and this was done through production subsidies and mechanisms for guaranteed prices for agricultural commodities. The CAP has changed a lot since it was established and continues to change today. The June 2013 CAP reform focuses on three priorities: viable food production; sustainable management of natural resources; and balanced development of rural areas throughout the EU; encouraging the small farmers to sell their products and produce higher-quality foods using more sustainable, environmentally-friendly farming methods (European Commission, 2013).

According to Eurostat (European Commission…, 2011), there is strong tendency for the reduction of the share of persons working on the small farms. The development of innovative local food systems is the tool for further rural development via strengthening of small farms’ viability and rural population’s busyness and employment diversification.
The aforementioned issues established the hypothesis of this study – local or alternative food systems will be a suitable tool for further development of sustainable agrifood sector, as well as development of rural communities and rural areas. The aim of the study or overview is to evaluate possibilities of further agrifood sector development, taking into account published research results, policy statements and social activities oriented to sustainable local food systems. The tasks of study are: to clarify the concept of local food systems; to investigate the food system relationship with further sustainable development of rural communities; to evaluate the development processes of local food systems in Latvia. The principal materials used for the studies are as follows: different sources of literature, research papers and the reports of institutions. The research methods used in the study are mainly qualitative: analysis and synthesis, logical and abstract constructive and expert, etc.

2. Local food systems

Although there is no consensus among scholars on the definition of the local food system, nevertheless, there is a worldwide acceptance that globalization’s negative effects could be solved by re-localization policies and activities, and support of local food systems (Melece, 2012). Many scholars, inter alia European, argue that alternative or local food systems or networks are innovative, important and suitable tools for solving environmental, economical (farmers’ and rural inhabitants’ income increasing) and social issues, and they facilitate further sustainable development of rural areas and rural communities (Ibid.).

The issues related to local food systems and its wider social, cultural, economic and environmental implications have flourished amongst scholars and policymakers over the last decades. The factors, presenting the foundation for the idea of local or alternative food systems, are the following: the concept of sustainable development; the concerns of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from agrifood chain and climate change; human health problems caused by unhealthy, mainly industrial, food, earnings of farmers and rural inhabitants through value-added products (Maxey, 2007; Hinrichs, 2010; Martinez, 2010; Nicholson, 2011). The development of local food systems is the tool for further rural development via strengthening of small farms’ viability and rural population’s busyness and employment diversification (e. g. Pearson, 2011; Diamond, 2012; Aubry, 2013). Even though there are many proponents of local food systems, some of scholars, mainly human geographers and sociologists, are critical regarding them. C. Nicholson et al. (2011) describe that researchers are turning their attention to the ability of supply chains to meet consumer demands for increased localization, where the ‘food-miles’ concept is often employed to measure the degree of supply chain localization because this concept is easy to communicate to consumers. According to E. Bendfeldt et al. (2011) the potential outcomes of a vibrant, community-based food system could be sorted in four groups, which have positive influence on the whole community, particularly rural community in all aspects: health of inhabitants, wealth of farmers and rural citizens, connection of different groups of
community and society, and capacity of different improvements on local or region level.

The local food movement has grown significantly, and the value of local food systems has become almost common sense for those working in the alternative agri-food movement and the context for local food systems has been constructed by longstanding historical material and cultural practices (Allen 2011). In relation to economics, one of the more direct benefits of local food procurement is the increased financial resources that remain in the local economy. That is, the more money is made by farmers, the more money they can spend at local businesses and employ others in their communities and the money spent on local food stays within the local economy to generate further benefits (Scott, 2010). The benefits of local food are summarized and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of type of benefit from local food

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of benefit</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>Reduction in food miles as a result of shorter supply chains</td>
<td>Food miles as a concept increasingly being challenged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduction in green house gas emissions</td>
<td>Costs of freight transport include greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, infrastructure construction and maintenance costs, operational costs, and other social costs such as accidents, pollution, and congestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduction in packaging/waste</td>
<td>Waste reduction contribute to sustainable consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Local economic benefits from buying food locally</td>
<td>Evidence on economic benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farms</td>
<td>Viable farms and farm businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship-based economic activity</td>
<td>Integration of farm businesses with other businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local jobs</td>
<td>Employment is a significant benefit of sourcing food locally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting small and medium sized enterprises</td>
<td>Highlights the role of procurement in accelerating the SME economic engine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Social health outcomes (reduced future health conditions)</td>
<td>Uncertainty over how much can be attributed to local food initiative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Type of Benefit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher nutritional value</td>
<td>Higher nutritional values of local food uncertain. Higher quality ingredients.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food security</td>
<td>Greater bioregional food self-reliance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food sovereignty</td>
<td>Food shortages if there is a disaster that cuts off food supplies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social benefits</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial energy, work ethic, mentorship, mutual reliance, relationship-based economic activity, and maintenance of farming communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community viability</td>
<td>Social capital – with respect to rural development processes – could be defined as the capacity to get things done collectively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: based on McKibben, 2007; Rural…, 2009; Scott and Colman, 2008; Weber and Matthews, 2008; Messely et al., 2009; Pascucci, 2010; Scott and MacLeod, 2010; O’Hara and Pirog, 2013

Besides, one of the main driving forces for local food systems’ development is the consumers’ demand for local or alternative food and many scholars worldwide argue that consumers’ preferences for local food are high (Melece, 2012; Jensen, 2013).

### 3. Development of local food systems in Latvia

Some initiatives and activities have developed in the recent years encouraging and developing of local food systems, including short supply chains in Latvia. As examples of development of local food systems in Latvia, the development of local brands is given below. The brands, which characterised food quality, *inter alia* origin, are very popular across the globe and throughout Europe. Scholars stressed importance of brands, *inter alia* regional (Allison, 2010; Asociace…, 2011; Knight, 2013) in the food chains. Moreover, A. Knight (2013) argues that regional labels offer a means to increase awareness and knowledge that surrounds locally produced food, help creating new opportunities for producers, promote benefits of buying local food.

**Project “Local Identity Product (LIP) – sustainable support systems for communities in Europe”**

Latvian Rural Forum (2013) has implemented (2011–2012) the project “Local Identity Product (LIP) – sustainable support systems for communities in Europe”. The aim of the project is to identify and explore the values and self-identity criteria of local communities in rural areas, in order to build on these foundations local identity product (LIP) recognition, development and promotion model based on local community traditions, reflecting its traditions and identity, and providing economic benefits to the community. The established brand “Local Identity Product (LIP)” (Fig. 1) is assigned to products, associated with certain area in which the product is made and meets certain criteria of quality and taste. Any entrepreneur is able to ob-
tain this brand for his product, if the local society has acknowledged this product as its Local Identity Product, which has to be produced in certain geographical territory from resources existing in this territory, as well as meets requirements of the quality and contributes to balanced development of territory.

![Brand of Local Identity Product](image)

**Fig. 1. Brand of Local Identity Product**

Source: adapted from Latvian Rural Forum, 2013.

Until now 14 products in 14 municipalities located in all regions of Latvia have been awarded the brand “Local Identity Product”.

**Project „Local Products Development in Mid-Baltics”**

In Latvia’s Zemgale Planning Region, the project “Local product development in Middle Baltic (Local Product)” (2012–2014) has been implemented in line with Programme: Latvia – Lithuania Cross – Border Cooperation Programme. The Aim of the project is to strengthen entrepreneurship development in rural areas of Latvia and northern Lithuania as well as to improve competitiveness and accessibility to local home producer’s products. This shall be done by establishing currently underdeveloped “green markets” infrastructure in six municipalities (three in each Latvia and Lithuania) and common networks and marketing strategy of local homemade products in Middle Baltics. Project’s target groups are rural entrepreneurs (farmers, family and micro-entrepreneurs, individual homemade product makers), customers (local and foreign), municipalities, regional development agencies and NGO’s. During the project, 540 rural entrepreneurs from five municipalities from Zemgale and three municipalities from northern Lithuania will gain the knowledge and experience on technologies, marketing and legislation. The following results will be reached at the end of project: in six municipalities of Zemgale and northern Lithuania “green market” infrastructure with all the necessary equipment will be created and bought, thus strengthening regional entrepreneurship and rising competitiveness and availability of local products. In order for future “green markets” to have similar concept, a single technical project will be made; to stimulate popularity of local “green markets” project partners in Zemgale and northern Lithuania, seven training sessions incorporating topics about local food products, components, development and marketing activities will be organized; as a result specific local products that are characteristic for area will be chosen.
Society „Artisan food producers”

Society, whose logo is in Figure 2, was established in 2012 in a municipality of Jelgava and aimed to support artisan food producers cooperation and to facilitate the sale of products; to promote popularization of local products; and to facilitate sustainable and environment friendly agricultural production, and rural development.

![Logo of society „Artisan food producers”](image)

Source: Lauku tīkls, 2012

This society represents small and medium-sized food producers, where the family participates in producing of local products and the supply on the market. The special value of these products shall be granted by hand-made and does not support industrial production. At present artisan food producers from other municipalities join this society and every week sell own produced food products in the “Food Artisan” markets in different municipalities and in capital of country Riga. Moreover, such type of societies are being established in other regions and municipalities, e.g., Kuldīga (News.lv, 2014). Society has received funding for the projects from the European Agricultural Fund for both production and trade equipment and trailer purchases. Project “Marketing campaign for development of rural tourism products in all regions of Latvia and their promotion (2013–2014)”

Project is aimed at implementation of rural tourism marketing campaign, developing and promoting rural tourism products based on rural resources and traditional values: local and regional food, culture and rural crafts, rural production; and developing new products: ~250 „Countryside Bounty” farms – open for visitors; 100 establishments, offering national cuisine; 1 thematic route „Culinary Route Latvia”; and 6 touring routes „Get to know country life”.

A brand or logo “Country Goodies” (Fig. 3) was created to represent all kinds of farms and companies in the countryside; and they operate to various sectors – hospitality business, products, etc.

![Brand “Country Goodies”](image)
The map and information is offered at website www.countryholidays.lv, with information on traditional taverns, farmers’ markets and open farms. The map shows the tastes of Latvia and encourages tasting typical food and drinks during the travel. The structure of food related goodies shows (Fig. 4) that food producers offer main part of all goodies (26%); and animal origin food is dominant in the offer of local farmers and producers.

Fig. 4. Structure of offered local food by producers in Latvian countryside, 2014
Source: author’s calculations based on data of Country Holidays, 2014

Countryside goodies are divided in several categories, including craft and artisans. Total number of holdings (farms/producers) is 283, and more are welcomed. Food-related countryside goodies, food offering farms and small enterprises are summarized and presented in Table 2.

As seen in Table 2, most offers are related to farmers/producers, offering animal origin products (136 farms), and catering service (125 enterprises). Other kind products have proposed by smaller number of farms/producers.

Activities and projects of local food system development and promotion are mostly cases created by Local Action Groups (LAGs), which are the mainstay of the implementation of the LEADER approach. Their responsibilities in general include the development of local strategies, supporting stakeholder networking and the appraisal and approval of individual LEADER projects, which are aimed at diversification of rural economy and improvement of life – quality in the territory covered by local development strategy.
Table 2. Countryside food related goodies in Latvia, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of offers</th>
<th>Offers</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animals and birds</td>
<td>Deer gardens, stables of horses, safari parks, wild horses and cows, exotic birds (peacocks, ostriches, etc.) and animals (camels, llamas, alpacas, chinchillas, etc.), domesticated animals and birds (rabbits, goats, sheep, geese, ducks, chickens). Many farms offer rides on horses or ponies, as well as products such as eggs, goat cheese, ornaments made of ostrich feathers etc.</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bees</td>
<td>Tours of beekeeping operations to learn about bees, with tastings of honey and production of wax candles. Beekeepers also offer honey for sale.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mushrooms</td>
<td>Shiitake, mushrooms, oyster mushrooms, wild mushrooms, mushroom picking and tasting, purchase of mushrooms, and provision of recipes for mushroom dishes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berries, fruit, vegetables and grains</td>
<td>Strawberries, large cranberries, blackberries, watermelons, grapes, tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbages, potatoes, grain, hemp and other seeds</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish and fishing</td>
<td>Fish ponds, fishing, trips in fishing boats, casting of nets, lamprey eel weirs, drying and smoking of fish, degustation and purchase of products</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food producers</td>
<td>Bread bakers, pastry makers, manufacturers of homemade cheese, meat products, sausages and other treats. These facilities offer high-quality food that is produced in small volumes and therefore is not sold at supermarkets.</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverages</td>
<td>Refreshing beverages such as birch, sea buckthorn, etc. Homemade wines, beers, liqueurs, and other hard beverages from licensed manufacturers.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>Saloons, cafes and other places in small towns and the countryside which offer tasty dishes made of local products and on the basis of traditional Latvian recipes – ones which differ from region to region.</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicinal plants and herbal teas</td>
<td>Medicinal plants are grown on small areas of land or in gardens, but also at industrial levels.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmsteads</td>
<td>So-called household farms offer a look at traditional management procedures and a chance to take part in country life. Many farms offer milk, bread, cheese, fruits, vegetables, honey and berries during the appropriate season.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: based on Country Holidays, 2014

In line with the new CAP and Rural Development Programme, it is necessary to conduct more detailed investigations of local food issues in Latvia, inter alia restrictive factors, aimed at clarifying the potentialities of state support. The state research grants should be allocated for implementation of some particular investigations.
4. Conclusions

1. Local or alternative food systems are solutions for rural development, particularly for small farmers’ viability and income increasing through business activities’ diversification. Even though there is no consensus among scholars on the definition of the local food system, nevertheless, there is worldwide acceptance that globalization’s negative effects could be solved by re-localization policies and activities, and support of local food systems.

2. Many scholars, inter alia European, argue that alternative or local food systems or networks are important and suitable tools for solving environmental, economical (farmers’ and rural inhabitants’ income increasing) and social issues, and they facilitate further sustainable development of rural areas and rural communities.

3. Besides, one of the main driving forces for local food systems’ development is the consumers’ demand for local or alternative food. Interest in local food has exploded over the past few years. Although much of this interest has been expressed in direct marketing enterprises, such as farmers’ markets and community-supported agriculture, recent efforts have addressed broader aspects of restructuring the food system to have a more local or regional focus.

4. Some fruitful initiatives and activities have been realised, which support local food system’s development in Latvia, e.g., implementation of brand local identity product; development of local food markets and local food baskets; and development of food related countryside tourism. These development activities are performed mainly on project bases and under initiatives of LEADER.

5. However, the activities and projects of local food system development and promotion are mostly cases created by Local Action Groups (LAGs), which are the mainstay of the implementation of the LEADER approach. Thus, it is necessary to conduct more detailed investigations of local food issues in Latvia, inter alia, restrictive factors, aimed at clarifying the potentialities of state support.

References


VIETINIO MAISTO SISTEMOS IR JŲ PLĖTRA LATVIJOJE

Ligita Melece

Latvijos valstybinis agrarinės ekonomikos institutas

Įteikta 2014 05 16; priimta 2014 06 06

Santrauka

Vietinio maisto sistemų ir jų platesnio socialinio, kultūrinio, ekonominio ir aplinkosauginio poveikio klausimai pastaruoju metu tampa vis svarbesni moksliniose tyrimuose ir politiniuose sprendimuose. Tyrimo hipotezė teigia, kad vietinės (alternatyviosios) žemės ūkio maisto, ar maisto apskritai, sistemos yra tinkamos instrumentas darniam žemės ir maisto ūkio sektoriaus vystymui, taip pat kaimo bendruomenių ir kaimiškų vietovių plėtrai. Tyrimo uždaviniai: atskleisti vietinio maisto sistemos koncepciją; apžvelgti iniciatyvas ir veiklas, skatinančias vietinio maisto sistemos plėtrą Latvijoje. Tyrimo daugiausia naudoti kokybiniai tyrimo metodai. nors mokslininkai nesutaria dėl vieningo vietinio maisto sistemos apibrėžimo, ši įmonė neabejotinai prisideda prie kaimiškų vietovių ir bendruomenių plėtros, jų socialinių, ekonominių (pajamų augimo), aplinkosauginių klausimų sprendimo. Straipsnyje apžvelgiamas veiklos ir projektai, skirti vietinio maisto sistemų kūrimui.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: maistas, Latvija, vietinis maistas, kaimas, sistema.

JEL kodai: Q13, Q18, M29, R11.