



### 3. Local food economy and access to fresh food

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### Unit 3. Local food economy and access to fresh food

People have eaten local food for most of human history, but in recent decades, food travels from fields farther and farther before it reaches the plate.

An increasingly globalised industry is leading to broader sourcing, imports and exports, of more exotic food products – with a smaller number of large companies offering pretty uniform products a year-round supply, resulting in a large drop in local food outlets and weakening the local food economy. Such trends cause a loss of employment opportunities, skills and social ties, together with a long-term decline in the farm gate value of production, jeopardising the viability of many small farms and significantly impacting food culture. At the same time, encouraging small farmers, diversifying farms, developing microbusiness and improving access to local markets allow consumers access to healthier, fresher and less processed foods.

Local food is a truly bright spot in any local economy. Rural communities can benefit uniquely from a vibrant local food system - it can be an economic, social and healthful opportunity for them.

The increased development of a local food economy offers immense potential.

It can contribute to:

- the economic multiplier effect, more comprehensive local and economic development and benefit the local economy
- improving the health of the population through access to fresh and more nutritious food
- building social and cultural capital
- sustainable development, biodiversity and landscape values
- providing valuable jobs and generating significant economic activity in rural areas
- consumers paying and local producers getting a fair price (cutting intermediaries out of the loop)



To reverse ongoing trends and rebuild a dynamic local food economy, concerted actions, including educational work, are needed.

#### How to Build (Rebuild) Local Food Economy?



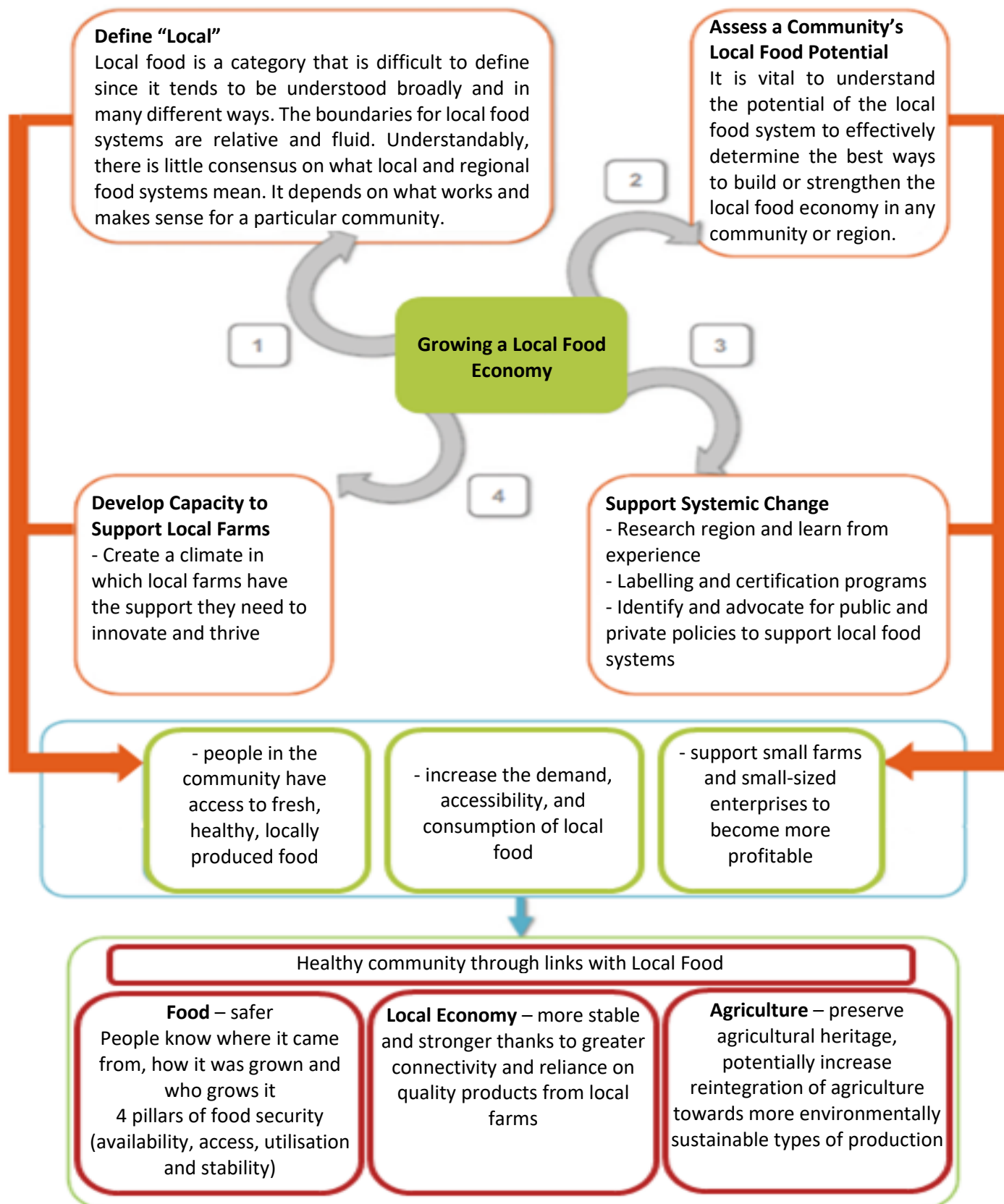
**Question:** What is the geographic area that represents “local”, and how do you define it?

Questions that can help for further thinking:

- What are the existing farming production methods in the defined scope of “local”?
- What types of companies exist within a defined scope of “local”?
- What other characteristics can be included to define “local” food and farms?



**Growing a Local Food Economy - core components of developing a strong Local Food Economy:**



### Define “Local”

There is no absolutely accurate definition of local. When considering the concept of local food systems, researchers use different terms, each with a slightly different emphasis.

According to geographical proximity, LFS refers to an area "in which foods are produced, processed and retailed within a defined geographical area<sup>1</sup>". Depending on the sources, it covers within a radius of approximately 20 to 100 km.

According to a foodshed framework, LFS implies the flow of food from areas in which it is grown to places where it is consumed. So that, the local food system can be quite small or encompass a wider area.

Determinants of define local can be the way people define local for themselves, main market areas for local farms and capacity of the organisation or entity to operate within a defined local food system, depending on how much food is produced in a particular area.

Consumers usually interpret the term “local food” in the context of a distance travelled by food from the place of its production to the place of its sale or concerning administrative borders such as states, provinces, regions or duchies.

Local food includes products that consumers in a region identify with and remind them of a place that — from their local perspective — are common and ordinary. Such products are produced by local farmers from local raw materials using, for that purpose, local methods and are obtained in a non-industrial, non-mass and environmentally-friendly way. They are burdened with lower transport costs and have a positive impact on the environment, while at the same time being specific to people from the region.

The terms “local production” and “local food” indicate to consumers a specific combination of product-related attributes (such as freshness, seasonality, naturalness, territoriality) and the socio-economic environment that benefits from the development of such food production concepts and distribution. From the consumer’s perspective, local products stand out for their unique taste values, as a combination of specific characteristics of raw materials, processing and origin that in turn determine the authenticity of this food category. For them, the term “local food” also evokes a specific emotional context and the idea of building social relations.

Although definitions of local food systems differ in terms of geographical boundaries or distances, they are guided by common goals. These include strengthening the economic well-being of communities, improving access to fresh and healthy food, creating market opportunities for novice farmers and those unable to sell in wholesale markets due to their smaller size, limited resources or unusual products.

Consumers, farmers and entire local communities benefit from local food systems.

Growth of supply and buying locally produced and processed food builds stronger, healthier and more self-sufficient communities. It brings an awareness to consumers about where their food comes from and who produces it. When more consumers purchase locally, a larger share of food money remains in the community. In turn, farmers obtain increased profits and are more equipped to create jobs and revitalise communities through increased meaningful employability.

**Discussion topic:** Potential benefits of Local Food System (“health and well-being”, “social”, “economic” and “environmental” benefits)

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC), Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, Scientific and Policy Report: “Short Food Supply Chains and Local Food Systems in the EU” (Report EUR 25911 EN), ISBN 978-92-79-29288-0 (pdf), ISSN 1831-9424 (online); Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013; <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d16f6eb5-2baa-4ed7-9ea4-c6dee7080acc/language-en>





### **Community's Local Food Potential**

- Identify the highest obstacles and opportunities for building a thriving Local Food Economy
- Map the wise progression of steps to take to build LFS at a scale that will work for a given community

Assessing a Community's Local Food Potential is a powerful tool that increases understanding of the current local food system, helps engage crucial community organisations and stakeholders across a broad spectrum and helps identify potential markets.

Things that are useful to consider for local food assessment in any region:

- Primary economic drivers in the local economy
- Demographics of the community (total population, poverty rate, education levels, middle income, etc.)
- Relationship between rural and urban areas
- Primary agricultural products produced/sold
- Current share and value of produced/sold agricultural products
- Current demand for local food
- Main trends in agricultural production
- Farms data: size, number, land in farms, average size, crops produced, trends, etc.
- Ways of food distribution
- Chief obstacles to the development of local food markets
- Market development for local agricultural products, such as CSAs, farming markets, independent food distributors, Farm-to-School activities, organised groups of farmers, etc.
- Currently existing support for farmers and local markets

Community case studies and assessments conducted by community stakeholders can serve as examples and tools alongside assessing and planning and help the community to begin planning and working to create cohesive Local Food Systems.

### **Support Systemic Change**

Consider institutional support options for LFS/SFSCs at the EU, national, regional or local level:

- Summarise institutional activities that directly support LFS/SFSC
  - Identify and advocate active public and private policies, programs, and organisations to encourage the development of local food and farming
- a) Financial incentives (Examples at EU level: the CAP 2nd Pillar, European Fund for Rural Development, LEADER programme – through Local Action Groups – involve many local food initiatives, etc.)
  - b) Rules in place (hygiene regulations, public 'green' procurement, trade rules, etc.)
  - c) Other policy areas (such as access land issues, legal frameworks for cooperatives and other collective models, external communication and promotion tools, public-private partnerships, extension services, agricultural education, etc.)
  - d) Existing tools and support models that can be adapted to the needs of small local farmers and producers
  - e) Quality policy – certification programs and territorial labelling measures

**Quality labels** offer great opportunities for food producers to improve the visibility of their products and communicate to consumers about the quality and origin of their products.

Quality Labels protect and promote the origins, traditions and unique characteristics of products. These labelling and certification programs permit local farmers to highlight the quality dimension and origin of their products.

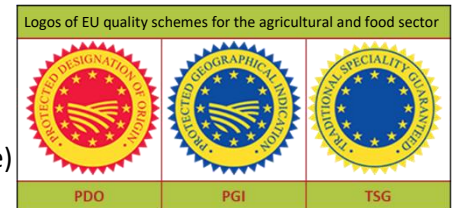


- Organic regulations, as small local farmers are often organic growers
- Geographical indications<sup>2</sup> highlight qualities of products specifically linked to the area of production. These labels offer valuable information about products' traceability and assure that consumers know that a product is genuinely made in a specific region of origin, using know-how and techniques embedded there.

European Union protects its gastronomic heritage by highlighting the diversity and quality of origin-related products.

Geographical indications in the EU agri-food sector:

- PDO – Protected Designation of Origin (food, agricultural products and wine)
- PGI – Protected Geographical Indication (food, agricultural products and wine)
- GI – Geographical Indication (spirit drinks and aromatised wines)



The principal difference between PDO and PGI relates to how many raw materials come from a particular area or how much of the production process has to take place within the specific region. PDO-labelled products have the most rooted links to the place in which they are made. Each part of the process of production, processing and preparation must take place in the specific region.

These certification schemes allow producers to sell products at a higher value and consumers to identify products of authentic origin (for which they are willing to pay a higher price).

They are easily recognisable based on the logo and ensure that the product name is protected against imitation, fraud and forgery.

- TSG – Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (food and agricultural products)

Traditional Speciality Guaranteed emphasises traditional aspects, such as the way of production or its composition, without linking to a specific geographical area.

EU Quality Labels are relatively strictly regulated, and obtaining a quality label is sometimes a long and resource-demanding process. In addition, not all food products are applicable for the quality label, and there are also differences between countries in how active public authorities and food producers have been to apply for the labels.

Some countries have national food quality labels that offer distinctive visibility and guarantee the origin and quality of products from that particular country.

There are also voluntary certification schemes established at the national level or run by private operators that help consumers be confident in the quality of the products they choose.

### ***Develop Capacity to Support Local Farms***

Building a Local Food System needs support for capacity-building and multi-component development.

A critical component is building partnerships between diverse community members and interests.

CONSUMERS, BUSINESS OWNERS AND OTHER stakeholders within communities are integral contributors to and beneficiaries of local food systems. For the Local Food System to function, consumers must demand locally sourced products, communities must work together to establish the infrastructure needed to support the Local Food System, and farmers must listen to and work with distributors, consumers and each other.

Local Farm Capacity Development is a principal challenge to respond to changing circumstances and is very important for the survival of small farmers. It refers to a process of change in which farmers improve their performance and refine, strengthen and adapt their capacity over time. Efficient design and implementation of

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/food-safety-and-quality/certification/quality-labels/quality-schemes-explained\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/food-safety-and-quality/certification/quality-labels/quality-schemes-explained_en)

agricultural education programs to Local Farm Capacity Development should be highly adaptable and context-specific, including individual and collective learning.

Although farmers are generally knowledgeable on how best to grow a wide variety of agri-products, they need to periodically upgrade in knowledge, skills and attitudes to keep up with the emerging challenges and dynamics of changes. Providing support to farmers in capacity building and acquiring different knowledge and skills increases the likelihood that they will produce higher yields, cultivate the land available to them more efficiently and sustainably, and be able to sell their products at higher prices. In addition to tools to grow crops, farmers need tools to build a strong business that capitalises on local sales opportunities. So, they wear many hats - from crop production to business management to marketing.

Capacity building methods may include information dissemination, training, workshops, on-the-job training, consultations, teaching, facilitation, mentoring, study tours, exposure visits, demonstration plots, conferences, networking, participatory research and extension, feedback to promote learning from experience, development of teaching tools (public sphere), such as textbooks, manuals, toolboxes, local food and farm guides, etc.

Various methods ensure an explanation of different aspects of the central theme, allowing participants to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Combining different methods, carried out back to back within one educational cycle, ensures a more diverse and dynamic program of activities. By engaging and offering practical exposure and work-based learning, participants are in a position to better understand, apply and adopt it. Also, it is significant to build on the capacities of other farmers in a given region. These exchanges between farmers allow for a horizontal capacity transfer and best practices.

A brief overview of some of the methods to strengthen the Capacity of Local Farms:

- Training and workshops

Training and workshops are the foremost and frequently used capacity building method. They are significant capacity-building activities in the field of agriculture. It is also crucial to provide follow-up support for farmers upon completion of the training.

- On-job training and different exchange methods

The work-based learning and learning-by-doing approaches are a vital part of education to develop capacity. They ensure insight into a broad range of settings and rapid application of new knowledge to the benefit of individuals, farms and community goals. Different exchange methods involve, among other things, practices where a manager from one organisation interns in another organisation, sending an experienced manager or expert from one organisation to a weaker organisation, etc. These forms of knowledge and skills transfers can be applied to empower farmers to adopt the know-how and experience applicable to their farms.

- “Farmer-to-farmer” and “Farmer Field School” (FFS) approaches

Farmer-to-farmer (FFE or F2F) extension system is a training method where smallholders share their experiences and knowledge with others. FFE approach contributes to strengthening the information flow and enhancing agricultural production, sharing knowledge on agricultural innovations or other farming aspects within their communities. Farmer-to-farmer learning, through exchange visits and field days, brings in more practical aspects and leads to faster replication of innovations.

Farmer Field School<sup>3</sup> (FFS) is a people-centred learning approach with hands-on field exercises and participatory methods, using direct observation, discussion and decision making that encourages learning-by-doing. FFS activities, led by a trained facilitator, are field-based and include problem-solving experimentation, reflecting a specific local context. Community-based problem analysis is the entry point so that local knowledge and outside

<sup>3</sup> Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Global Farmer Field School Platform. <https://www.fao.org/farmer-field-schools/overview/en/>



scientific insights are tested, validated and integrated, in the context of the local ecosystem and socio-economic settings.

The FFS approach empowers farmers in various aspects through strengthening technical skills, building self-confidence and enhancing decision-making capacity. FFS strengthens community relations, the ability to listen to the opinion of others, formulate and express personal views and jointly find a collective solution through the process of communication and learning. FFSs have proven to significantly impact the community but also intra-households dynamics.

The advantages of FFS are that both farmers and facilitators can gain knowledge, skills, good relationships, communication skills and experiences.

- Demonstration plots, cross visits, exposure visits and study tours

Demonstration plots, cross visits and study tours are useful methods for transferring information and technology to farmers, especially in remote areas. Demonstration (demo) farms are powerful educational tools and provide an opportunity for smallholder farmers to demonstrate and teach appropriate technologies. Demo plots can be venues to test new methods side by side with traditional methods. Although they require considerable time and effort, payback comes when farmers adapt more willingly to practices they perceive effective and appropriate under local conditions.

Exposure visits allow farmers from different regions to interact with and learn from each other, letting them see practical examples of successful integration of sustainable practices in farming communities like theirs.

Study tours, designed as a visit to other local farms with good practice and impact on the local community, can give excellent results and enhance and expand the learning experience. That can also be a series of “field trips” or itinerant workshops linked to a specific and general theme.

Capacity development activities to support local farms also include:

- Research for farmers, teachers, decision-makers and consumers, including some existing tools that could be better adapted to the needs of small local farmers and producers

Sources can be: textbooks, expert literature, peer review, manuals, toolboxes, guides (international or state/national), own research, cooperation with farmers and participatory research, work-based learning, internet use and others (e.g., many sources, friends, facilitators, advisers and consultants)

- Pilot initiatives, trials or demonstration cases for testing of potentially successful initiatives or showcasing of good practices

Replication and dissemination allow the up-scaling of successful interventions.

- Development of educational resources (for internal use or public sphere), such as: teaching tools, manuals, toolboxes, local food and farm guides, etc.







## Worksheet: Growing a Local Food Economy

### Growing a Local Food Economy – help make that happen

How can you support local communities to bring about change?

How can you do this in your community?

Start with what's there and be creative!

Explanation:

The created worksheet follows the previous section and is designed to help adult educators delve deeper into the topic. By filling out the form, adult educators individually develop the scheme “Growing a Local Food Economy” according to the conditions in their local environment. That will improve their understanding of how they can organise educational activities and contribute to Growing a Local Food Economy.



Short instructions for filling in:

- In what geographic area will you focus your efforts?

1. Define “Local”
2. Assess a Community’s Local Food Potential
3. Support Systemic Change
4. Develop Capacity to Support Local Farms
5. Planned activities – describe the activities you would undertake and how to organise them.
6. Expected results and impact – state what you expect to achieve and desired impact on farmers, local people and the community.

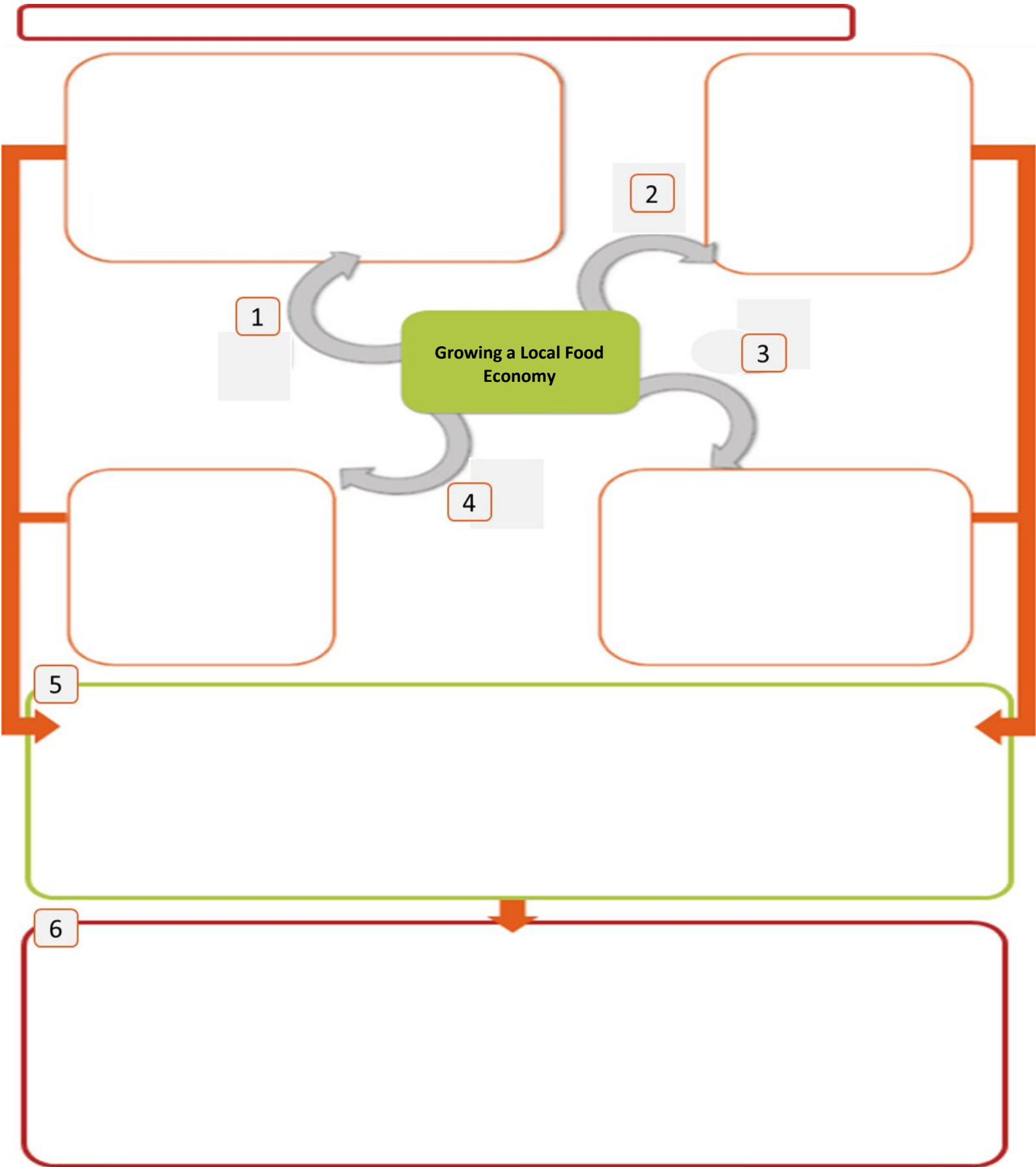


**Recommendation for group work:** let adult educators work in pairs so that both participants are from the same local community.

After filling out the form “Growing a Local Food Economy”, it is desirable that participants demonstrate their scheme to the entire group.



**Discussion topic:** Encourage participants to comment and develop discussion in terms of presented schemas.





### Suggestions for further consideration

To start developing (rebuilding) a Local Food System, keep in mind the following:

- Gain a full understanding of the current Local Food System – have relevant conversations and gather basic data
- Start from wherever you are – a clear picture of the current situation gives ideas for appropriate steps
- Make a clear plan – so that everyone knows where they are going and what they want to achieve
- Build different partnerships – involve organisations in the community that have a vested interest in a thriving Local Food Economy
- Take targeted initiatives and activities – think broadly and creatively
- Consider diverse sources of funding (potential funding from not only agricultural sources but educational, economic and community development, tourism and other entities)



### Research task

Local Food Systems – What does policy change have to do with this?

Explore which policies, regulatory changes and incentives can foster greater innovation on local farms that deliver on the bottom line – so that locals can benefit from a thriving, sustainable local food economy.



### A step forward

- task development to work on further elaboration and application of lessons learned in working with rural women  
(Proposals for organising and developing a teaching unit)

#### Mirror games – or walking in someone else's shoes

→ **The local food concept greatly vary – try to define it according to the needs of consumers**

Introduce participants to enter the role of consumer: If they are wondering if a customer would respond to something or not, put them in customers' shoes. Bring them to think about what makes them trust someone enough to buy from them or what has caused them to abandon a purchase before they complete shopping?

We are all consumers and know what customers want. Let them face it. Let them think outside the supermarket. What can they put on the stand and offer to consumers that supermarkets or even local food co-ops cannot?

Each of them has piles of cucumbers, loads of zucchinis, heads of romaine lettuce and a bunch of beets. What will they offer that is different or unique? Is it rare lettuces, microgreens, heirloom tomato or uncommon herbs and value-added products such as elderberry syrup, dried herbs and mixed roots bags with instructions/ideas for cooking them?

→ **What are the success stories and innovative ideas shaping the future of local food?**

Look for such examples and present them to trainees. A more striking effect will be if you encourage the participants themselves to look for a good example and ask them to think about how to apply it themselves. Have them present their findings, observations and conclusions to the other participants in the group.

