

**SUPURBFOOD** is a research project funded by the European Commission's 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Program. It aims to contribute to the development of sustainable modes of urban and peri-urban food provisioning.

## About the project

Until recently, short food supply chains and multifunctional agriculture were considered to be part of the rural development realm. However, this project looks at these topics from the perspective of urban rather than rural development. Short food supply chains have been advocated as a means to reduce the environmental impact of the agro-food system. However, to improve the ecological performance of the agro-food system, other flows (e.g. nutrient, water, and urban waste) need to be considered as well. In the current context these aspects are usually treated separately. This project will treat them in an integrated manner.

## Approach

Research will be carried out in seven European city-regions (Rotterdam (NL), Rome (IT), Ghent (BE), Vigo (ES), Bristol (UK), Zürich (CH) and Riga (LV)) in collaboration with a diverse group of SMEs to further innovate in urban and peri-urban food provisioning, nutrient, water and waste management, and multifunctional use of urban and peri-urban space. Finally the project will also establish links with researchers, policymakers and SMEs in these domains in developing countries. This will be organised through a process of dialogue, sharing of experiences, exchanging of best practices and joint learning.

## More information

[www.supurbfood.eu](http://www.supurbfood.eu)



## What is Direct Buying?

Direct buying is a consumer created form of relations between consumers and farmers. In its general characteristics direct buying is similar to box schemes yet some differences can be observed. In a typical direct buying group consumers are allowed to choose products they want to order from farmers. Once a week orders are collected and passed to farmers who then deliver goods to a distribution point and receive payment. Variation of goods sold / bought this way tends to increase and it is typical that consumers in this way can order vegetables, dairy products, meat products, a variety of preserved fruit and vegetables.

The first group of direct buying emerged to supply goods to citizens concerned about food quality and the origin of produce. The list of aims has become longer over time and now group members consider that it is also important to educate its members, to support organic farmers, to exchange information, and to build a self-sustainable organizational structure.

## Who is involved?

Currently there are three active groups of direct buying in Riga Region. One of these groups (Miera Street group) claims that it has reached a limit of participants and that it cannot accept any new members. Other groups claim that the number of participants is growing. However, it has not reached the critical level yet. It is known that several other groups both in Riga and in other cities are being organized (in Riga districts – Agenskalns and Plavnieki and outside of Riga – in Jurmala, Sigulda, Ikskile, Ogre). These new and just emerging groups are closely related to their predecessor groups. This allows them to use information and resources accessible in the old groups.

From its first days the group has paid close attention to farmers it is collaborating with. At first it has been hard work to convince farmers to collaborate. However, now farmers in order to widen their offer are searching for new partners themselves. This has helped to create an expanding network of farmers within which members share knowledge and learn how to produce new products.

None of the direct buying groups is a legal entity and as groups they exist only informally. Groups are concerned that communication with governing institutions would introduce restrictions that in one way or another would harm their system.

## Development peculiarities

The first group that started the movement called itself Ka'dzi. Group was founded by a devoted young mom who searched for ways to supply her family with organic food. In her search she gathered likeminded people and established links with farmers from Gulbenes district. This first group elaborated a specific collaboration structure that with some modifications is used for next groups of direct buying as well. In the case of Ka'dzi it turned out that this structure required complicated organizational work therefore it was too dependent on its core members who were involved in planning. As a result too many tasks were executed by the group's central members while other participants were just enjoying the benefits. This led to conflicts within the group. However the obtained experience and latter attempts to organize a sustainable direct buying group have given some of these people knowledge that allows better understanding of the whole process. Nowadays core organizers are encouraging participants to create their own spin-off groups and these groups receives their full support. This means that main representatives have a well-documented overview of the best ways of managing a direct buying group and the main pitfalls that can occur. They are sharing their farmer contacts as well and by doing so encourage farmers to create their own chains that could help to satisfy the needs of the growing number of customers in the city.

## Which activities are carried out?

At the first step of development the group was mainly concerned with the need to supply itself with organic food. However, during time scope of aims has broadened. Already from first interaction with farmers group is supporting certified organic farmers. From food supply structure groups has grown to ideological entities claiming its support to all organic movement, rural society, information exchange, sustainability education, etc. Also groups have managed to create strong linkages with other civic initiatives.

## Lessons learned from Direct Buying:

- Direct Buying is an example of the shortening of foodchains. .
- It strengthens links between urban and rural areas.
- The initiative has proved that it can be easily replicated. The number of Direct Buying groups is growing.
- Direct Buying groups have mobilized farmers to create their own networks. These networks of farmers are more competitive and are able to supply consumer with a greater variety of goods.

## For more information on Direct Buying

<http://www.tiesapirksana.lv/>  
<http://www.kadzi.lv/>

## Contact details of SUPURBFOOD

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## Location in Riga:

