



Food Teams

A direct link between producer and consumer





A Food Team is

- A group of 15 to 25 families
- who jointly buy fresh food produce
- on a regular basis
- directly from local farmers
- at a fair price.





Who makes up Food Teams?

- About 100 local teams
 - concentration in one region: 50% of the local teams around Leuven.
- 1800 households participate
- 80 farmers
- Food Teams are based on personal contact and confidence between farmers and consumers





Produce

- Vegetables: box schemes, the whole year
- Fruit: only local fruit (apples and pears)
- Dairy products
- Meat
- Bread
- Fair trade products





Farmers

- Mostly but not exclusively organic farmers: especially for vegetables and fruit.
- Also small-scale, mixed farms, producing in a sustainable way.
 - Dairy products made on the farm
 - Free-range or small-scale production for cattle breeding





Prices

- Food Teams want to pay the farmers fair prices. This includes the following costs:
 - Production
 - Distribution
 - Fair wages for the farmers and their workers
 - Investments in sustainable production methods





The long-term objectives

- Ecological objectives:
 - To promote sustainable agriculture
 - To decrease food miles
- Economic objectives:
 - Fair prices for local food
 - To promote a local economy: buy locally what is produced locally





The long-term objectives (2)

- Social objectives:
 - Establish face to face contact between farmers and consumers
 - Social networks in neighbourhoods and villages
- Political objectives:
 - Changing food policy in the long term
 - Political support for sustainable agriculture





A bit of history

- Food Teams started in 1996:
 - Different food scandals made consumers very suspicious about food;
 - Farmers got low prices;
 - Small farms could not survive;
 - Farmers were discouraged to produce quality because of low prices.





A bit of history (2)

- Three organisations (Vredeseilanden a.o.) started “Food Teams” and supported it the first 5 years.
- Food Teams became an independent organisation in 2001.





Functioning of a local Food Team





In general

- A local Food Team normally has 3 to 5 suppliers (local farmers): one for each type of produce.
- Families join a Food Team for at least a year.
- Deliveries are made every week to a local distribution point.





Practical functioning

- Families place their orders in advance for a whole month, since recently it is possible to order weekly by internet.
- Every group has a bank account: families pay to the local group account; per month.
- The treasurer from the local group pays the farmers.





Voluntary work in a local group

- Members of the group
 - collect the orders and place a group order for the farmers, via internet orders can be made individually,
 - take care of payments,
 - run a local distribution point,
 - sometimes take care of transportation of produce.

- Members do this on a voluntary basis.





Extra work for farmers

- Part of the distribution tasks are done by the farmers:
 - Preparing the orders, per team; sometimes also per customer.
 - Transportation to the local distribution points.
 - Administration: payment is afterwards, this creates a lot of additional administration.





Benefits





Benefits for consumers

- Good quality for your money
- Fresh produce
- Buying in confidence
- Direct link to the farms
- Easy and nearby





Consumer testimony

“I’ve been volunteering for quite a while in a fairtrade organisation. Fairtrade is guaranteeing producers in the South a fair price for their produce... A beautiful principle that Food Teams, also makes possible also for local producers here in Belgium. Food Teams is offering consumers a model to deal with food in a conscious way and to make our ideals concrete.”

Food Teams Consumer Ann Deketelaere





Benefits for producers

- Fair price: producer can set the price according to production costs
- Direct marketing: surplus value remains with the farmer
- Long term involvement of the customers
- Regular market
- Appreciation for their work and produce





Benefits for society

- Reduction of food miles
- Survival of small farmers
- Commitment of consumers towards sustainable agriculture
- Consumers get interested in the problems of agriculture





Sustainability





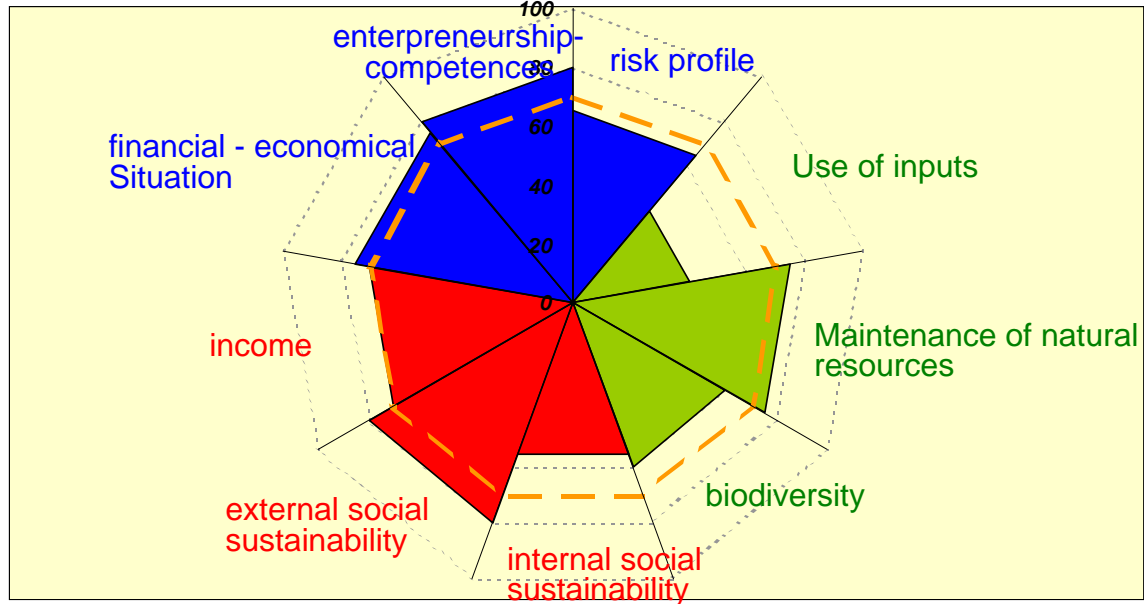
Sustainability

- Food Teams will be participating in a pilot project, testing a sustainability self-evaluation tool (ecological, economical, social sustainability),
- at farm's level,
- in partnership with a university center.





Sustainability self evaluation



Sustainability star: the orange line gives score 70, arbitrarily chosen; the coloured blocks give the evaluated farm's performance.





Weaknesses and problems





In general

- Expensive distribution due to small-scale.
- Regular contact between producer en consumer is difficult to realise.
- It started out as a way to change food production and consumption but proved most succesful as a distribution system for organic food.
- Low participation of poor people.





Voluntary work in the local teams

- Sometimes difficult to find volunteers.
- Their work is often not valued by the others.
- Burn-out after a few years and difficult to find a replacement.
- Sometimes teams cease to function when one or two persons end their commitment as a volunteer.





Workload for the farmer

- Availability of labour is limited on small farms
- Hiring labourers is very expensive
- Too much administration





The “Food Teams” organisation





Food Teams Organisation

- Participants in local Food Teams become member of the Food Teams organisation (and pay a fee).
- Tasks of staff ($\frac{1}{2}$ FTE x 4):
 - Supporting volunteers in the local teams
 - Problem solving between teams and producers
 - Helping new groups to organise themselves
 - Finding farmers for new teams or existing teams
 - Representation
 - Educational activities for Food Team members
 - Sensibilisation activities towards larger public.





Funding

- First five years: no external funding, only support from the founding organisations.
- Financial autonomy through membership fee and % on the turnover of produce.
- 2002: first grant from Ministry of Agriculture (for 1 year).
- Allocation of subsidies for 5 years for Food Teams as a socio-cultural movement.
- Partnership with Vredeseilanden, mostly infrastructural.

