

Towards sustainable, fair, and participatory food systems: the CICERO project

*(Citizens & Communities for European Right
to quality and local Food)*



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This final booklet is the result of collaboration between the CICERO project partners:

Italy – Fondazione Campagna Amica - www.campagnamica.it

Netherlands – Stichting Rotterdamse Oogst - www.rotterdamseoogst.nl

Poland – Fundacja Targ Pietruskowy - www.targpietruskowy.pl

Croatia – Association of Croatian Markets - www.uht.hr

Denmark – Grønt Marked - www.groentmarked.dk

*We dedicate this work to **Carlo Petrini**, knowing that the products we see today are the seeds sown by dreamers like him.*

Context

European agriculture has undergone profound changes in recent decades, driven by the globalization of food supply chains, access to international markets, and the increasing industrialization of production processes. This evolution has led to efficient and profitable food production, often dominated by large-scale operations and a system heavily dependent on imports and exports. However, this model has also revealed its limits and negative effects. The food industry is responsible for over 10% of greenhouse gas emissions in Europe, and intensive agriculture significantly contributes to biodiversity loss, soil

degradation, and water pollution. Furthermore, 68% of Europe's agricultural land is used for livestock farming, with substantial environmental and climate impacts. The COVID-19 pandemic and recent geopolitical developments have exposed the vulnerabilities and dependencies of this globalized food system, highlighting the urgent need to ensure food security, environmental sustainability, and social justice. Even today, many people in Europe lack access to sufficiently nutritious food, while health problems caused by unbalanced diets are rising.

CICERO PROJECT

The CICERO project was born in this context, aiming to foster a transition towards more sustainable, fair, and inclusive food production and consumption models. The key to this change lies in the ability of citizens, farmers, local authorities, and policy makers to actively and knowledgeably participate in the functioning of the food supply chain,

from production to distribution. The concept of “food democracy” supported by CICERO emphasizes the direct involvement of communities and small producers in decisions affecting their local food system. Through concrete initiatives, the project aims to strengthen food sovereignty by promoting local production that protects biodiversity,

guarantees decent working conditions, and offers healthy and accessible food. Equally important is the role of short supply chains, which reduce waste and environmental costs and valorize local territories, creating networks of more supportive and resilient social and economic relations. Over two years, through five events organized across different European countries — Croatia, Italy, Poland, Denmark, and the Netherlands — CICE-RO actively involved citizens, farmers, families, and local authorities in a process of knowledge exchange, good practices, and innovative ideas. Through workshops, guided visits, tastings, and debates, the project has built a European community committed to shared engagement for a sustainable food future.

CICE-RO is based on a strong European partnership made up of five organizations, each focusing on specific topics that together comprehensively cover the different dimensions of sustainable local food systems.

Fondazione Campagna Amica (Italy) is the coordinator of the project. Founded in 2008, it is dedicated to promoting the value and dignity of Italian agriculture, protecting the environment, territory, biodiversity, and cultural traditions. It supports direct sales, rural tourism, and sustainability, providing tools for conscious and healthy consumption accessible to everyone. In Denmark, **Grønt Marked** organizes weekly markets connecting organic, biodynamic, and regenerative producers with the citizens of Copenhagen. These markets are true democratic spaces where people reconnect with the origins of their food, learn about seasonal availability, and discover new ingredients, offering a transparent alternative to the dominance of supermarkets. **Rotterdamse Oogst** in the Netherlands strengthens local food systems through events and markets in the heart of the city and surrounding rural areas, blending countryside and urban innovation. Their products are grown, processed, and traded within a 50 km radius, promoting an authentic, inclusive, and sustainable food culture. **The Association of Croatian Markets** is a national network managing markets in 37 cities, serving over 2.3 million inhabitants. It provides direct access to fresh, locally produced agricultural goods and promotes markets as vital cultural, social, and economic spaces, ensuring transparency and training for all supply chain actors. Finally, the **Targ Pietruszkowy farmers market** in Kraków, Poland, orig-

inated from a grassroots initiative to provide residents with access to fresh, healthy, and sustainable food. It features producers selling directly within 150 km from the market, fostering food education and community engagement, supported by Slow Food and sustainability-focused programs.

This diverse and complementary partnership has enabled CICE-RO to effectively address the challenges of food sustainability, biodiversity preservation, social justice, and citizen empowerment, building a European network capable of impacting local and transnational levels towards a healthier and more democratic future. Within the partnership, professionals from the sector contributed their experiences and knowledge to promote a shared project. Thanks to the coordination by Campagna Amica, carried out through regular calls and meetings during the last days events, the activities saw the active participation of the entire partnership, ensuring that the project was advanced with awareness and commitment from all parties involved. In order to monitor the results achieved for society, participants of the 5 CICE-RO events were administered a short questionnaire on lifestyle and consumer choices. The results can be found in the appendix.

During the project, 5 events were held in the 5 cities involved, identified by 5 Work Packages:

Work Package 1:

Osijek, Croatia - Local food from the markets - preserves our health and the natural and cultural heritage of the community (October 2024)

The first event in Osijek focused on the contribution of local food to citizens' health and the community's natural and cultural heritage. The initiative included conferences, tastings of local products, guided market visits, and an interactive workshop that strengthened the connection between healthy eating and local food production.

Work Package 2:

Rome, Italy - Sustainable food for biodiversity and a greener lifestyle (February 2025)

In Rome, the event promoted local food as a tool for protecting biodiversity and a more sustainable way of life. Activities included participatory conferences, awards for biodiversity-conserving farmers, workshops on family ecological footprints, and tastings of locally sourced products, as well as visits to farms committed to nature conservation.

Work Package 3

Krakow, Poland - Local food and tourism (May-June 2025)

In Krakow, the project demonstrated how farmers' markets are true drivers of the "farm-to-table" strategy. The event combined guided market tours, live cooking demonstrations featuring local products, family workshops, and a visit to a traditional cheese factory, strengthening collaboration between citizens, farmers, and tourism operators.

Work Package 4:

Copenhagen, Denmark - Local food as a custodian for biodiversity (September 2025)

The fourth event, held in Denmark, highlighted how local food is a key pillar of biodiversity. It organized visits to biodynamic and regenerative farms, thematic workshops, a biodiversity festival with markets, cultural performances, and public discussions, involving citizens, producers, and climate activists.

Work Package 5:

Rotterdam, Netherlands - Local food as an engine for the community (May 2026)

The final event in Rotterdam was conceived as a moment of reflection and innovation, highlighting the

role of farmers' markets as drivers of change in the local food supply chain. The planned activities included an introductory tour of Rotterdam's peri-urban cultural landscape with businesses committed to environmental protection and local biodiversity, a seed exchange workshop to teach the value of food, biodiversity, and environmental care, a tour of a rooftop farm, and a final meeting, extended to the European network of the World Farmers Markets Coalition and featuring MEP Dario Nardella, among the partners, to analyze the results and define future prospects with the signing of a memorandum of understanding.

Results

These events saw the participation of thousands of citizens (1,651 signatures collected, 937 female, 703 male and 11 non binary, just a little part of the participants), who were able to see firsthand how, through food produced by farmers and sold at farmers' markets, it is possible to adopt new lifestyles that are more environmentally and health-conscious and that can build a new model of society by involving local communities. The events saw the participation of local administrators committed to the issues discussed. After each event, the hosting part-

ner published an internal report for the partners (5 reports in total) detailing the project progress and the issues to be resolved.

For each of these documents, a proposal for future action is described to increase the attractiveness of sustainably produced food. In Osijek, in particular, interest has arisen in exploring the aspects related to the support that farmers' markets provide to the local economy. In Rome, the question of "what food will we feed the citizens of the future?" appears urgent, given that by 2050, 70% of the world's population will live in cities (FAO data). In Krakow, communicating the benefits of local food has emerged as important. In Copenhagen, the theme of inclusion has emerged strongly. Finally, in Rotterdam, particular attention is focused on strengthening local communities, short supply chains, and transparency. The presence on social media was high with approximately 335,000 views on the approximately 200 posts produced on Facebook, In, Ln. The project also received press coverage through television appearances and articles on government websites and blog. The CICERO project achieved important short-term results through the international three-day events:

Enhanced capacities and awareness: citizens, farmers, and

local administrators gained skills to engage in sustainable agriculture actions, integrating knowledge about short supply chains and food democracy into their daily habits, while promoting gender and generational equality.

Strengthened democratic processes:

interactive event formats enabled participants to express views on EU policies, fostering active citizenship and a stronger sense of belonging to the EU, documented in final publications.

Boosted local economy and consumer awareness:

the project raised awareness of the impact of purchasing local products, triggering a virtuous cycle benefiting citizens, farmers, the environment, and quality of life.

Increased visibility of EU values:

through media, websites, and social campaigns, CICERO demonstrated how EU values support grassroots action and civic engagement.

Promoted long-term transnational cooperation:

A cooperation agreement was signed to sustain dialogue and collaboration beyond the project lifespan.

Improved local policy frameworks:

Results and best practices were widely shared to support more resilient and sustainable food policies.

The project's ambition translated into lasting impacts:

For citizens, greater access to local and sustainable food, tools to make healthy and environmentally conscious choices;

For farmers, opportunities for fair sales and income, support for sustainable practices, and breaking down social stereotypes;

For local administrations, data and models to build resilient supply chains that are also culturally and touristically attractive;

For the environment, a concrete contribution to carbon emission reduction and climate change mitigation through promotion of local food systems.

The CICERO project thus represents a significant step towards fairer, more sustainable, and participatory European food systems.

Policy recommendation

Based on the findings highlighted in the CICERO project documents, here are 5 key recommendations for policymakers to support and strengthen farmers' markets and their ecosystems:

1. Guarantee economic accessibility and social inclusion

While the overall perception of these markets is highly positive among citizens, concerns frequently emerge regarding high prices and a certain perception of elitism. Policymakers should actively intervene to ensure these spaces are accessible to all income groups. To achieve this, it is essential to support

the implementation of price-controlled options, such as solidarity boxes and loyalty discounts tailored for different income levels, while simultaneously promoting the availability and visibility of affordable, entry-level seasonal products.

2. Provide dedicated spaces, logistics and institutional backing

The research findings demonstrate that farmers' markets play a fundamental role in strengthening the local economy and building united communities. To tangibly sustain this ecosystem, local public administrations need to actively facilitate

market operations by collaborating directly with organizers. This support should manifest as the concession of suitable official spaces, essential logistical backing, and the provision of targeted incentives, while also fostering the creation of networks between similar markets to stimulate collaboration and the replication of successful models.

3. Integrate Farmers' Markets into Public and Urban Policies

Survey participants emphasized that the long-term impact of farmers' markets risks remaining limited without the backing of adequate public policies and structural interventions. It is therefore necessary for policymakers to formally integrate the role of these markets within broader environmental and health strategies, recognizing producers not merely as vendors, but as true guardians of the environment and biodiversity. Institutions must accompany community sustainability efforts with structured public policies to amplify the social and ecological benefits of short supply chains.

4. Fund and support targeted institutional communication and outreach

One of the main problems could be the poor diffusion and insufficient communication, factors that heavily limit the reach of these impor-

tant local initiatives. Public backing can bridge this gap by funding the strengthening of institutional communication across both social media and local news channels, effectively promoting the advantages of a fairer, healthier, and more sustainable food system. Furthermore, policymakers should facilitate targeted collaborations to engage schools and less central or marginalized neighborhoods, thereby expanding the market's social impact.

5. Co-finance educational programs and non-sales activities

There is a near-unanimous consensus, exceeding 95%, that projects like CICERO are absolutely essential for spreading good practices and healthier lifestyles throughout society. Policymakers should therefore finance the educational and non-commercial side of farmers' markets by supporting specific educational programs such as guided tastings and interactive workshops for children, which are highly useful for building early awareness about seasonality and regenerative practices. Finally, it is important to allocate resources to regularly monitor accessibility and to disseminate clear data regarding the environmental and public health impacts tied to citizens' consumption choices.

Farmers Markets and lifestyle

How European citizens perceive farmers markets



Introduction

This research was conducted as part of the CICERO project (Citizens & Communities for European Right to quality and local Food), funded by the European CERV (Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values) program, with the aim of promoting sustainable practices and community building through the strengthening of local farmers' markets.

The project ran from June 1, 2024, to May 31, 2026, during which the opinions of various participants in several European cities were collected and analyzed through dedicated survey days.

Over the course of this two-year period, a total of 294 responses were collected online and at the market from visitors and regulars of farmers' markets. The aim was to investigate frequency of participation, perceived social and environmental commitment, and the perceived contribution of each individual to improving society through their consumption choices. This research offers a compelling overview of the dynamics of sustainable consumption and the central role that farmers' markets play in strengthening informed and responsible communities. The sample analyzed includes citizens from various European cities, with responses from Rotterdam, Krakow, Copenhagen, Osijek, and Rome. This brief document presents the initial results.



Results

Overall, participants showed a high level of engagement with local markets, visiting them frequently, often weekly or several times a month (64% of responses). The majority of respondents believed that the market plays an important role in building community, with over 85% responding positively to this statement. Similarly, a large proportion believed that shopping at the

market can contribute to improving society (96%), although a minority expressed skepticism, mainly due to factors such as high prices, perceived elitism, and the need for more effective public interventions. In this regard, Table 1 groups the responses to the question: “Do you think you can contribute to improving society by shopping at the farmers’ market? Why?”

MAIN CLUSTER	ESTIMATED ATTENDANCE (%)
COMMUNITY	50 - 60%
SUSTAINABILITY	55 - 65%
LOCAL ECONOMY SUPPORT	60 - 70%
HEALTH	40 - 50%
TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST	30 - 40%

TABLE 1



Among the most recurring themes in the open-ended responses were positive elements such as human connections, trust, education on seasonality, product quality, short supply chains, reduced packaging, and support for the local economy through a sort of “vote with your wallet.” However, problems were also highlighted, such as high prices, perceived elitism, limited impact without adequate public policies, poor dissemination and communication, and the need for greater socioeconomic inclusion.

When considering ratings on a scale of 1 to 5 (Table 2), generally very high scores emerge across various aspects. For example, the perceived positive impact on public health stands at around 4.4, while the promotion of biodiversity and a more sustainable lifestyle reaches even higher values, around 4.7. Respondents also recognize the fundamental role of farmers as custodians of biodiversity (around 4.5) and see the market system as fairer, healthier, and more sustainable (around 4.6).

TOWN	PUBLIC HEALTH	BIODIVERSITY	FARMERS, GUARDIANS OF THE ENVIRONMENT	SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM	COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING
ROTTERDAM	4.2	4.5	4.2	4.3	4.4
KRAKOW	4.7	4.6	4.2	4.4	4.3
COPENHAGEN	4.3	4.5	4.2	4.3	4.3
OSIJEK	4.0	4.2	4.0	4.1	4.0
ROME	4.4	4.5	4.3	4.4	4.4

TABLE 2

Even greater appreciation is expressed for non-sales activities and the effectiveness of projects like CICERO in spreading good practices. To the question “Can projects like this (CICERO) serve to spread good practices and better lifestyles?” more than 95% of responses were affirmative, confirming the need to increase initiatives on these issues, including through European programs. Across cities, some differences in perceptions are observed. In Rotterdam, particular attention is focused on strengthening local communities, short supply chains, and transparency, although concerns about prices and social inclusiveness emerge. In Krakow, consensus on health,

awareness, and the direct producer-consumer relationship is very high, although some concerns are raised about costs and the need for better communication. In Copenhagen, support for sustainability, biodiversity, and local food sovereignty is particularly strong, with an awareness of the importance of accompanying these efforts with public policies, even if some perceive the market as elitist. In Osijek and Rome, support focuses on the local economy, health, and the protection of rural areas. Rome, on the other hand, shows a particular attachment to biodiversity, although a minority expresses concerns related to globalization and the scale of markets.



Conclusions



Based on the data collected, several operational recommendations are proposed. These include improving accessibility and inclusion by offering price-controlled options, such as “solidarity boxes” and loyalty discounts for different income groups, as well as accepting various payment methods and promoting entry-level seasonal products. It is also important to strengthen communication through social media and local channels, collaborate with schools and less central neighborhoods, and tell stories related to seasonality and regenerative practices. It is also recommended to engage with public administrations to obtain space, logistics, and incentives, creating networks with similar markets to encourage replication. Finally, it is recommended to develop educational programs such as guided tastings and workshops for children, accompanied by information on environmental and health impacts, and regularly monitor accessibility, participation, and environmental impact through periodic surveys.





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