



**Friends of  
the Earth  
Europe**

# From Farm to Folk:

public support for local and sustainably produced food

January 2015



Results of an opinion poll conducted by TNS Opinion  
at the request of Friends of the Earth Europe



## Introduction

Over the past 50 years, our food system has become both more globalised and more heavily dependent on cheap raw materials, chemical inputs and mechanisation. Big business has moved in, with control of our food increasingly concentrated in a handful of multinational corporations operating throughout the food chain. The social and environmental impacts are devastating: small-scale farmers and food companies worldwide are driven out of business; a collapse in biodiversity and ecosystems; obesity and food poverty are rife; while citizens foot the bill as one food crisis follows another. Meanwhile, as consumers, we find it more and more difficult to know what we are buying, who it has been made by, and where it comes from.

Business-as-usual for the food system is no longer an option. There is clearly a need for a fundamental change.

## Farming without farmers

Current policies and support for the agro-industrial model have directly translated into the on-going destruction of thousands of small-scale farms in Europe. Three million farms, around 20%, have been lost in Europe during the last eight years, most of them small. Between 2000 and 2012, 4.8 million full-time jobs disappeared from EU agriculture.<sup>1</sup>

Family and small farmers, who have limited power or influence over the food chain, are particularly vulnerable to poor labour conditions, low incomes, and the erosion of social security safety nets. The younger generation is increasingly shunning farming as a career, resulting in the rising age profile of European farmers. In 2010, just one in three of the agricultural labour force was under 40.



## Local food: it's the (local) economy, stupid!

Instead of marginalising local food producers, we need to put sustainable local food at the centre of our food supply, with small-scale producers feeding local communities, rather than being squeezed by industrial-scale global supply chains.

Re-localising the way we produce, process, and distribute food can help shift our economy so that it addresses the problems of climate change and biodiversity collapse, as well as the rising levels of social and economic inequality. Our food systems can support local economies and the people using them to create a greener and fairer economy, building local businesses, enhancing social cohesion, and creating highly skilled jobs and craftsmanship.<sup>2</sup> Short supply chains in local markets have been shown to increase income for producers, generate greater autonomy for farmers, and to strengthen local economies by supporting more small businesses. This can improve the viability of small farms, reduce the carbon footprint from food distribution, and enhance household food security by giving people on low income access to good food and healthy diets.<sup>3</sup>



There are many different systems offering local food and short supply chains in Europe, including farmers' markets, 'farm-gate' sales, box delivery schemes, mobile shops, community-supported agriculture, consumer-producer cooperatives and collective catering and canteens.

Friends of the Earth Europe believe that control of food and farming needs to be put in the hands of local people and farmers, shifting to local and agro-ecological systems that work within environmental and equitable limits to achieve food sovereignty in Europe and the rest of the world. But what does the public think?

## Eating local makes shopping sense: the poll results



85%

buy from their closest shop

We asked consumers in eight countries across Europe about their shopping habits and about their views on local food.<sup>4</sup> Most people told us that they think local food is good for the environment and helps create local jobs. More than eight out of ten people (85%) told us they buy food from their closest shop or supermarket with half of respondents (50%) buying directly from the farmer often or sometimes.



Shopping locally can have environmental benefits, and our survey found that three out of four people (75%) agreed that rigorous environmental standards applied to “local” food. Local food isn’t always necessarily green. Farms may use high levels of pesticides, or may not comply with the highest standards for animal welfare. Low food miles do not necessarily mean a low carbon footprint, especially where vegetables are grown in heated greenhouses in cold climates or transported inefficiently. Large-scale intensive farms have high environmental costs, polluting rivers, damaging the soil and harming wildlife.<sup>5</sup> But buying directly from the producers can be a good option, especially from small and organic farmers.



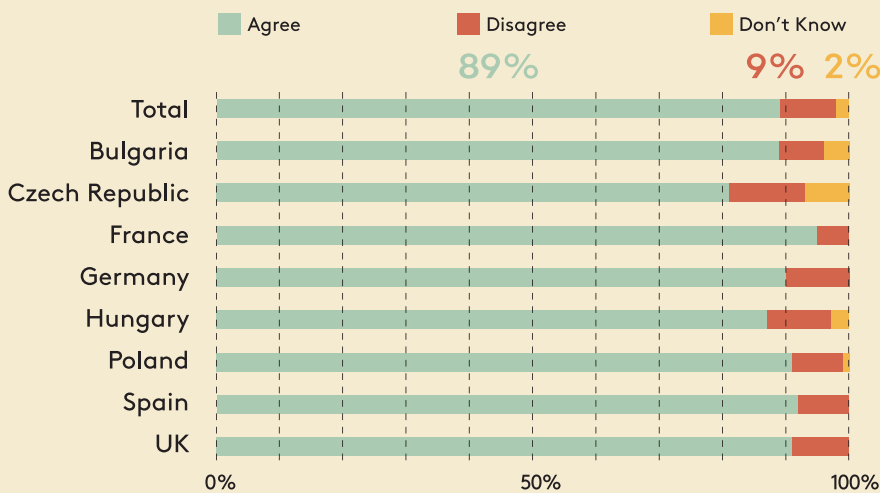
75%

say local food is green

Shopping from producers selling locally can make a big difference to local economies. As well as supporting small-scale and sustainable farmers and local food businesses, buying from the region helps keep money circulating in the local economy – benefiting everyone. So spending money at a farmers’ market benefits other local businesses, creating local jobs.<sup>6</sup> Small businesses play a key part in European economies, providing more than half of all private sector jobs in some countries.<sup>7</sup> Nearly 9 out of 10 people (89%) we interviewed saw buying local food as supporting local jobs.

Shopping for local fresh fruit and vegetables can also help support healthier diets. People are more likely to see and try seasonal produce if they see it at a farmers’ market or farm shop – creating a more varied diet – and they can also

### Purchasing locally produced food supports job creation in the region

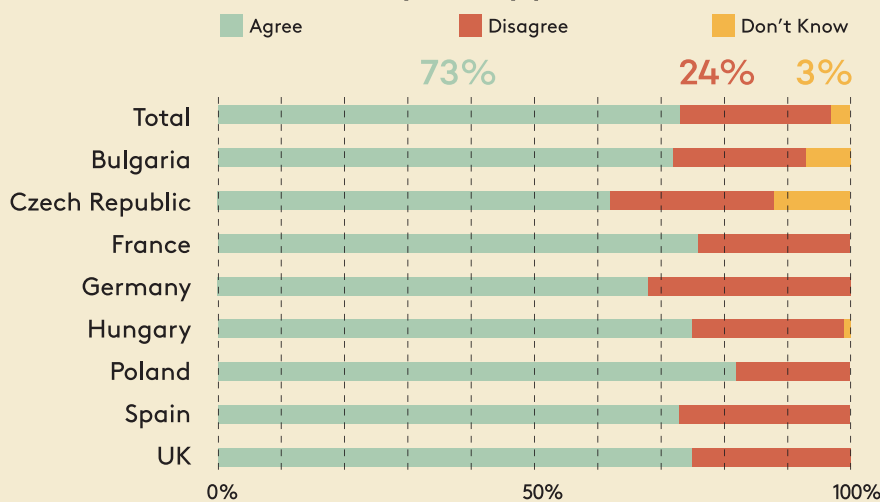


89%

think local food supports local jobs

get ideas for cooking tips.<sup>8</sup> Local food projects can be used to target particular needs – for example a scheme in Ireland provides porridge oats for local school children, providing a healthy breakfast for everyone.<sup>9</sup> The EU-funded free fruit and vegetables in schools scheme<sup>10</sup> could be used to support local producers as well as provide fresh fruit to children.<sup>11</sup>

### It is difficult to find information about where to buy locally produced food



Almost 8 in 10 people (78%) surveyed thought that locally produced food provided a balanced and complete diet.

Shopping locally can also be better value, with markets and farm box schemes providing access to fruit and vegetables when they are in season and at their most plentiful. Buying directly from the farm or from street markets can sometimes be cheaper than buying from supermarkets,<sup>12</sup> and can also help stop shoppers from buying too much and having to throw food away.<sup>13</sup>

Despite high levels of public demand for local food, there is little support available to farmers in marketing their produce locally. Instead, tax-payers' money is spent on subsidising large-scale, export-oriented farming and big food companies. This makes it difficult for small-scale, sustainable producers who want to sell their products locally to compete.



78%

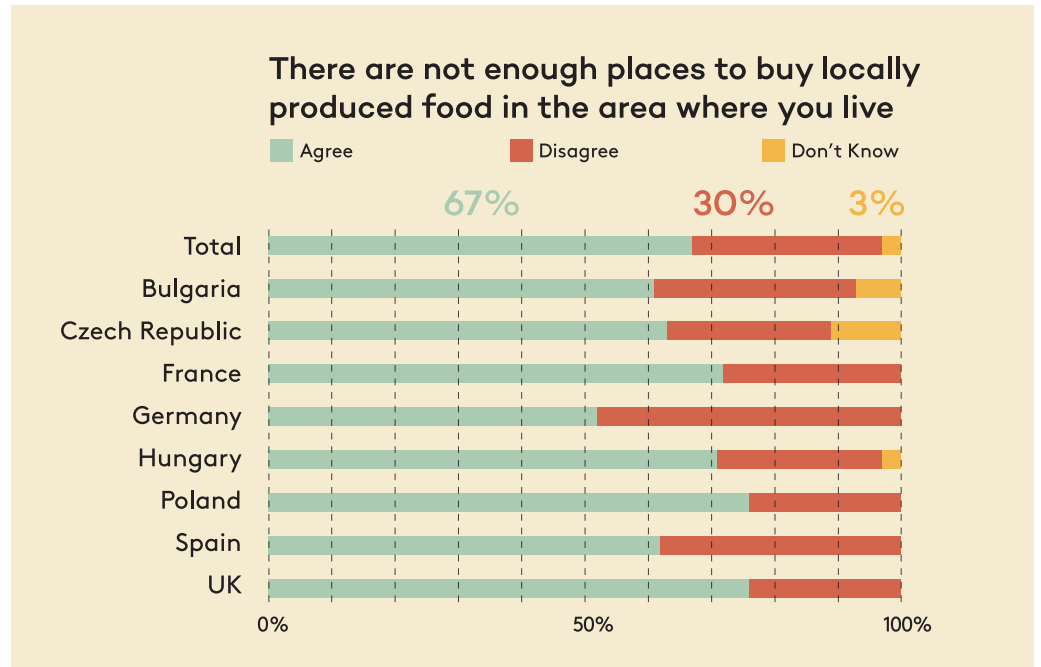
think local food provides balanced diets

In our survey, just under three out of four respondents (73%) said it was difficult to find information about locally produced food – and around two in three respondents (67%) said there weren't enough places to buy local food near them. For two in three respondents (66%) buying local food means the choice is too limited.



**67%**

say there is not enough local food available



Nine out of ten people (91%) surveyed said that their governments should do more to support production and access to local food.

**91%**

think government should do more to support local food!



## How the CAP can support more local sustainable food

The European Union provides support for farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which makes up around 40% of the total EU budget, and costs around €58 billion a year, funded by EU citizens' taxes.<sup>14</sup> This money is supposed to fund farmers and activities in rural areas related to farming. Most of it, however, has been used to support industrial food and farming, with only a small amount, less than one third of the CAP budget,<sup>15</sup> used to support sustainable farming or to help farmers with marketing.

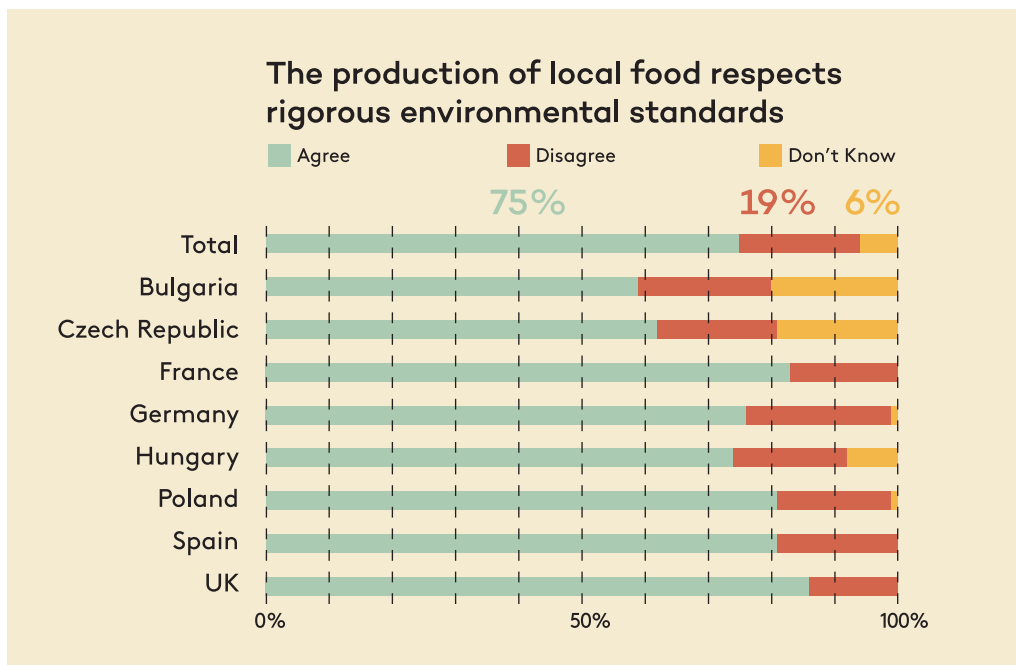
Trade policies and the CAP have so far focused on finding new markets for some products, while less has been done to support initiatives which give farmers who produce sustainably the opportunity to sell their products locally through farmers' markets, farm shops, or to schools and other public institutions, providing fresh, seasonal, sustainable food.

Friends of the Earth Europe wants to see public money spent on supporting local farmers and food companies to make sustainable, seasonal, fresh food available to local people.



# 69%

think local food is too expensive



## Political leadership is needed to support local jobs and local food

As our opinion poll shows, the demand for sustainably produced local food is high and citizens are clearly asking for more support from governments. Current measures using the existing means through the CAP are not enough. Politicians need to show leadership to put sustainably produced local food on the table.



**73%**

say there is not enough information about local food

The European Commission, which coordinates overall EU policy on food and farming, needs to:

1. Lead the debate in the EU on the need to transform the food system to put local economies at its core.
2. Introduce a sustainable food policy to encourage citizens to have more sustainable diets, thereby reducing resource use and helping maintain healthy populations – eating more plants and fresh products, while wasting less food.
3. Changes to health and safety, food hygiene, environmental health, and labelling regulations so that they do not disproportionately affect smaller producers and enterprises.
4. Create stricter enforcement mechanisms fighting abusive practices in the EU's food supply chain and close the gap between producer prices and retail prices, since workers' conditions have degraded and smaller-scale farmers are finding themselves increasingly excluded from higher value markets.

National governments need to:

1. Make best use of their CAP budgets and spend them supporting local economies through both first and second pillar measures.
2. Shift money from the untargeted direct payments budget to targeted second pillar measures to support organic farming, quality schemes, cooperation and producers groups producing and marketing sustainable food, agri-environment-climate, advisory services and agroecological innovation, in a way that funds only farmers and food enterprises delivering for the environment and people.
3. Fund European Innovation Partnership projects which research local agro-ecological production and local food economies.
4. Agree spending priorities for their budgets for supporting farm viability, environment and social inclusion, like partnership agreements with the European Commission under the Common Strategic Framework in the longer term.



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- <sup>2</sup> Short Food Supply Chains and Local Food Systems in the EU. A State of Play of their Socio-Economic Characteristics, JRC Scientific and Policy Reports, European Commission, 2013
- <sup>3</sup> European Network for Rural Development, 2011. The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Examples of Food Projects and European Network for Rural Development, 2012. Local Food and Short Supply Chains. EU Rural Review, N° 12. Summer 2012
- <sup>4</sup> An opinion poll has been conducted in 8 EU countries in the period 23.10-08.12.2014 by TNS opinion at the request of Friends of the Earth Europe. 8362 adults aged between 16-64 years were interviewed online self-completion in Poland, Spain, UK, France and Germany, and by face-to-face interviews in Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Hungary. All results of the poll can be found here: [www.foeeurope.org/local-food-briefing-full-opinion-poll-results-140115](http://www.foeeurope.org/local-food-briefing-full-opinion-poll-results-140115)
- <sup>5</sup> Short Food Supply Chains and Local Food Systems in the EU. A State of Play of their Socio-Economic Characteristics, JRC Scientific and Policy Reports, European Commission, 2013 (p.37)
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.* (p.32)
- <sup>7</sup> Trading Places: The local economic impact of street produce and farmers' markets, New Economics Foundations, November 2005
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> Short Food Supply Chains and Local Food Systems in the EU. A State of Play of their Socio-Economic Characteristics, JRC Scientific and Policy Reports, European Commission, 2013 (p.47)
- <sup>10</sup> <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/5ADAY/Pages/Schoolscheme.aspx>
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/main-topics/local-stories/nfu-welcomes-schools-cash-1-2388264>
- <sup>12</sup> Trading Places: The local economic impact of street produce and farmers' markets, New Economics Foundations, November 2005
- <sup>13</sup> Short Food Supply Chains and Local Food Systems in the EU. A State of Play of their Socio-Economic Characteristics, JRC Scientific and Policy Reports, European Commission, 2013,(p.27)
- <sup>14</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/budget/news/article\\_en.cfm?id=201401281520](http://ec.europa.eu/budget/news/article_en.cfm?id=201401281520)
- <sup>15</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/envir/measures/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/envir/measures/index_en.htm)

## Credits

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