



**PRACTICE ABSTRACT NR. 32**

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**The role of formal and informal advice in farmers' direct marketing in Latvia, Pierīga region**

Farmers' markets and other forms of direct marketing - selling products without mediation - are a major distribution channel for small farmers and food processors in Latvia. Direct marketing represents a continuously evolving practice, combining old and new knowledge. It involves a broad spectrum of market, organisational and technological innovations, use of e-commerce, logistics and other services. The AgriLink project's case study on direct marketing in Pierīga, a predominantly urban region near the capital city, shows that the success of this practice is contingent upon a productive application of knowledge that is obtained both formally (e.g. from advisory organisations) and informally (e.g. via peer-to-peer learning). Yet, in this domain traditional advisory organisations are considerably less significant than in ones relating to more technical aspects of agricultural production. The role of advisory organisations is more prominent in relation to general farming and management issues, while peer-to-peer and other informal learning practices such as consulting with relatives are more important in the context of assessing and implementing direct marketing. Familiarity with successful examples, appropriate material and infrastructural conditions, use of social networks, and familiarity with the practice as such are also important factors for stimulating the uptake of new trading forms in short food supply chains (incl. online sales, direct purchasing groups). The practice of direct marketing (see e.g. <http://straupestirdzins.lv/en/>) involves a mix of knowledge and skills that depends on local synergies between social ties and advisory resources, allowing it to evolve despite limited institutional support.

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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Access to conventional market channels is challenging for small holders because of specific requirements regarding the quality, amount, supplies, etc., and these unfavourable market conditions and specific requirements can act as triggering factors. Many farmers and producers search for alternatives and develop individual market strategies, while some operate in the “grey” market. Direct marketing is also of relevance for certified organic producers because of underdeveloped full-cycle organic food chains (lack of infrastructure, processing lines). While farmers’ stands at open town markets are traditional in Latvia, local farmers’ markets are a more recent phenomenon (or can be considered as a retro-innovation). Direct purchasing groups are also quite a recent phenomenon, especially in bigger urban centres due to growing public interest in healthy diets and locally sourced food. Many of these new initiatives learn by doing and often operate based on trial and error; some may profit from examples found abroad. All the involved parties (farmers, consumer groups, local municipalities, controlling bodies) have considerable advice needs regarding how to establish and successfully manage these new market initiatives. Direct marketing has been left on its own in terms of institutionally based and formally organised advice provision. Lack of knowledge and poor governance lead to many unresolved issues (lack of clarity with permits, taxes and certificates, high costs for farmers, lack of control, management constrains, etc.), and specialist advice would allow tackling these issues.



## ABOUT AGRILINK

Agrilink is a multi-actor project funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. It brings together 16 partners from 13 countries, including universities, applied research institutes, advisors and consultants from public organisations, private SMEs, a farmer-based organisation and specialists in communication and distance learning.

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