

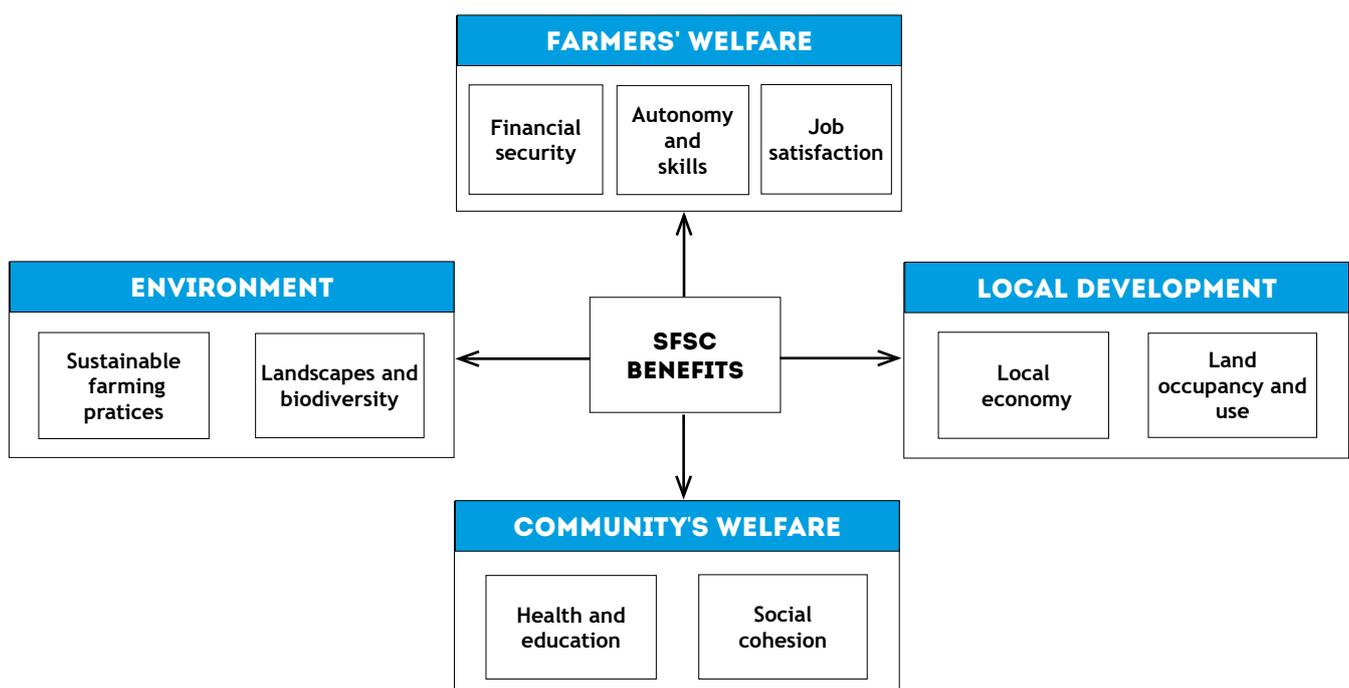
SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT



In the last decade, Quebec has seen a rapid development of short food supply chains (SFSC), hence drawing the interest of producers, consumers as well as state authorities. If many virtues are attributed to these initiatives, a review of the existing literature shows that their viability is still questioned, and debates remain on their economic, social and environmental benefits. Faced with sparse knowledge on SFSC in Quebec, this study has tried to evaluate their contribution to territorial development and to grasp how they develop, coexist and organize in three regional county municipalities (RCM) of Quebec: Brome-Missisquoi, Lac-Saint-Jean-Est and Lotbinière.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the benefits attributed in the literature to SFSC have been organised around four dimensions: producers' welfare, local development, community's welfare and environmental protection. This classification, as opposed to the three classical dimensions of sustainable development, allows interactions between classes of benefits to be highlighted. Each dimension has been characterised with qualitative and quantitative indicators in order to assess the SFSC contributions to each territory (RCM).





MAIN RESULTS

The study conducted across three RCM in Quebec has shown that:

FARMERS' WELFARE

- Farms operating SFSC are generally smaller in size (gross income < \$100 000) and have a profit margin inferior to the average farm in Quebec even though high variability between types of production have been observed.
- Farmers selling through SFSC are, on average, satisfied with their job and indicate that SFSC contribute to their personal and professional fulfilment. They however recognize that SFSC bring a heavier workload and a complex work organization.
- SFSC are associated with a higher proportion of farmers who are university graduates. Beside, many of these producers practice agriculture as a second career.
- Women are more represented as farm operators in SFSC and work longer hours than their counterparts in an average Quebec farm.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

- Full time equivalent employment is higher in farms engaged in SFSC. Nonetheless, our data show that farms using SFSC, but for which the major part of their turnover comes from long food supply chain, create more employment. These farms are also larger.
- In the three territories considered in this study, the economic contribution of SFSC to total agricultural gross income would slightly exceed 2% and would represent nearly 3% of household food expenditures.
- The majority of farms engaged in SFSC are new businesses, a much higher proportion than for Quebec overall where family transfers prevail.
- Farms selling through SFSC are generally smaller in terms of total cultivated areas and livestock, than the average Quebec farm, which is recognized as favorable to land occupancy and use.

COMMUNITY'S WELFARE

- If on-farm prices are, on average, lower or equal to those found in supermarkets, it seems that physical accessibility and the lack of cooking skill and knowledge remain important obstacles to a stronger contribution of SFSC to communities' food supply.
- Almost all farms selling through SFSC dispense educational activities, such as hosting visits at the farm.
- Actors involved in SFSC's development still have difficulty assessing their impact on local social cohesion, except for collective projects, such as farmers' market and fairs, which often involve both producers and citizens.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

- A higher proportion of farms are certified organic in SFSC. Farms selling through short chains also incorporate more sustainable farming practices such as windbreaks and green manures.
- On average, farms operating SFSC have lower fertilizer and pesticide expenditures per hectare. The exception is fruit growers who spend more than the average Quebec farm on both inputs.



- In general, farmers consider that SFSC prompt them to foster diversity on their farms. In fact, market gardeners operating SFSC grow, on average, thirty different species of vegetables.
- The impact of farms selling through SFSC on landscape is complex to assess. Nonetheless, a number of indicators are in their favor: the presence of windbreaks, the frequent use of abandoned land and the large number of small cultivated parcels that could induced more landscape diversity.

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS, OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

- Strong coordination between actors involved in territorial development and the local food system appears to be a favorable condition for the development of SFSC, particularly when it is organized around structuring initiatives incorporating a variety of actors such as the Wine Route in Brome-Missisquoi and Goûtez Lotbinière.
- Different types of SFSC exist and are not all equally attractive for producers: if farm stands and community supported agriculture are generally popular, virtual and farmer's markets are less so, since they can require more work and transportation for usually small or uncertain sales.
- Farmers selling through SFSC still struggle to find relevant marketing expertise in Quebec.
- The proximity of rural territories to urban centers supports the establishment of farms using SFSC. Farmers indicate that urban centers show a higher concentration of consumers inclined to buy local food. In order to stimulate the development of SFSC on a local scale, actors recognize that they have to develop better knowledge about local demand.
- Multiple funding programs, originating mostly from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of Quebec, have been central to the establishment and consolidation of farms operating SFSC. However, there are concerns about the impact of financial cuts imposed on local development centers (CLD) and regional conferences of elected officers (CRÉ), which are considered as key project leaders as well as essential management advisors for producers.
- The standards and existing laws on the sale of craft alcoholic beverages and on slaughter and meat processing are seen by many as obstacles to the development of SFSC in those sectors.

REFERENCE

Mundler P., & Laughrea S. (2015) *Circuits alimentaires de proximité. Quels bénéfices pour le développement des territoires ? Étude de cas dans trois territoires québécois*. Rapport final de recherche remis au CIRANO. Québec : Université Laval. 124 pages + annexes.

Full report is available in french online : www.cirano.qc.ca



FOR INFORMATION

Patrick Mundler, professor
Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences
(418) 656-2131 poste 2760
patrick.mundler.1@ulaval.ca

