

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385652618>

# Food procurement in mass catering services: the relevance of short supply chains in the public and private sector

Chapter · October 2024

CITATIONS

0

READS

23

3 authors, including:



**Stefano Quaglia**

Politecnico di Milano

15 PUBLICATIONS 48 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



**Camilla Borsani**

Politecnico di Milano

1 PUBLICATION 0 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

# Food procurement and short food value chains

AN ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES  
IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE REALMS

Edited by  
Davide Fassi

# Design International series

## DIRECTION

**Silvia Piardi**

## SCIENTIFIC BOARD

**Alessandro Biamonti, Alba Cappellieri, Mauro Ceconello,  
Claudio Germak, Ezio Manzini, Carlo Martino, Promil Pande,  
Mario Piazza, Angelica Ponzio, Francesco Scullica,  
Francesca Tosi, Yingchun Zang**

## EDITORIAL BOARD

**Alessia Brischetto, Alessio Caccamo, Barbara Camocini,  
Giuseppe Carmosino, Eugenia Chiara, Andrea Di Salvo,  
Elena Elgani, Silvia Gramegna, Shashwat M. Pande,  
Gustavo Alfonso Rincon, Fabiano Scherer, Daniela Selloni,  
Davide Spallazzo, Livia Tenuta**

The Design International series was launched in 2017 as a place for cultural exchange between the different design souls. Over the years, the series has consolidated its position as a point of reference for international research, outlining a continuously updated research map. The Scientific Committee, consisting of experts in fashion, interiors, graphics, communication, product, service, social interaction, innovation and emotional design guarantees the level of the accepted texts. The Editorial Board, consisting of young experts in the different branches of design, supports the work of the scientific committee. After an initial evaluation by the two committees, the texts undergo international double revision.

# FrancoAngeli

SERIES - OPEN ACCESS CATALOG

This volume is published in open access format, i.e. the file of the entire work can be freely downloaded from the FrancoAngeli Open Access platform (<http://bit.ly/francoangeli-oa>).

On the FrancoAngeli Open Access platform, it is possible to publish articles and monographs, according to ethical and quality standards while ensuring open access to the content itself. It guarantees the preservation in the major international OA archives and repositories. Through the integration with its entire catalog of publications and series, FrancoAngeli also maximizes visibility, user accessibility and impact for the author.

Read more: [Publish with us \(francoangeli.it\)](#)

Readers who wish to find out about the books and periodicals published by us can visit our website [www.francoangeli.it](http://www.francoangeli.it) and subscribe to *Keep me informed* service to receive e-mail notifications.

# Food procurement and short food value chains

AN ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES  
IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE REALMS

Edited by  
Davide Fassi

MANAGEMENT

**Irene Bassi**

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

**Davide Fassi, Annalinda De Rosa**

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

**Eleonora De Marchi**

ART DIRECTION

**Marco Quaggiotto**

GRAPHIC DESIGN

**Giada Zoncada, Arianna Priori, Francesca Cassanelli,  
Irene Bassi**

ISBN e-book Open Access: 9788835168805

Copyright © 2024 by FrancoAngeli s.r.l., Milano, Italy

This work, and each part thereof, is protected by copyright law  
and is published in this digital version under the license  
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0  
International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

By downloading this work, the User accepts all the conditions of the  
license agreement for the work as stated and set out on the website  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

# Contents

- 7      **Preface**  
Daniele Del Rio, Filippo Arfini
- 11     **Introduction**  
Davide Fassi
- 13     **1. Public and private food procurement and short food value chains in urban areas: a case study analysis**  
Davide Fassi
- 25     **2. Food as relational practices: reflecting on alternative food networks for university campuses**  
Annalinda De Rosa
- 41     **3. The impact of Alternative Food Networks on local economy**  
Teresa Tugliani, Marianna Guareschi, Filippo Arfini
- 55     **4. LCA and ecodesign**  
Abhishek Dattu Narote, Valentina Giovenzana, Andrea Casson, Riccardo Guidetti
- 71     **5. The role of social innovation and biodiversity preservation in public and private food procurement in urban areas**  
Annalisa De Boni, Giovanni Ottomano Palmisano, Rocco Roma, Adriano Didonna, Onofrio Davide Palmitessa, Massimiliano Renna, Pietro Santamaria, Irene Canfora, Vito Leccese, Claudia Gesmundo

- 87      **6. Beyond social agriculture: rehabilitation and sustainable practices in penitentiary contexts**  
Donatella Privitera, Alessandro Scuderi,  
Irene Selvaggio, Carla Zarbà
- 101     **7. Territorial marketing in university canteens to enhance local products: a review of case studies**  
Giovanna Del Gaudio, Elena Lupolo, Fabiana Sepe
- 113     **8. Food procurement in mass catering services: the relevance of short supply chains in the public and private sector**  
Stefano Quaglia, Verónica León-Bravo, Camilla Borsani
- 125     **9. Cultivating sustainability: transforming food waste into circular economy solutions**  
Abhishek Dattu Narote, Andrea Casson,  
Valentina Giovenzana, Riccardo Guidetti,  
Giovanni Ottomano Palmisano, Annalisa De Boni,  
Irene Bassi, Carla Zarbà, Alessandro Scuderi
- 143     **10. Case studies on private and public food procurement: a transversal analysis**  
Davide Fassi, Annalinda De Rosa, Irene Bassi
- 153     **Authors**



# Preface

This book is one result of the *OnFoods* project, which represents a significant research collaboration within the Italian food system. *OnFoods* is a research project coordinated by the *OnFoods* foundation and built thanks to the substantial *PNRR* funding provided by the Ministry of University and Research (MUR) in the context of Extended Partnerships, i.e., large public-private alliances dedicated to fundamental research on specific topics.

The *OnFoods* project is made up of 26 partners, including seven private companies (Barilla, Bolton Food, CIRDOOD, De' Longhi, Sacco System, Tecnoalimenti, Confcooperative), twelve public entities supervised by the MUR (Alma Mater Studiorum Università degli Studi di Bologna, National Research Council, Politecnico di Milano, Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza, Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro, Università degli Studi di Catania, Università degli Studi di Milano La Statale, Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca, Università degli Studi di Parma, Università degli Studi di Pavia, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, Università degli Studi di Pisa), and seven universities and research institutes not supervised by the MUR (ENEA, CREA, Edmund

Mach Foundation, Mario Negri Pharmacological Research Institute, Neuromed Mediterranean Neurological Institute, Libera Università degli Studi di Bolzano, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano.

*OnFoods* aims to promote new models of sustainable nutrition and generate a tangible impact on the well-being and health of communities. It also seeks to preserve the planet, contributing to the need to guarantee access to adequate nutrition for all. The project involves more than 600 researchers across Italy, more than 300 of whom have been recruited thanks to the funding received, who work following seven specific research directives, ranging from the socioeconomic sustainability of food systems to food safety, from improving the quality of food products to the promotion of healthy diets, from the prevention of diseases to the improvement of the population's eating habits, also through the definition of public policies based on strong scientific evidence.

One of the most important research directions, led by the Università degli Studi di Parma, focuses, among other things, on food procurement and short food value chains. This book intends to discuss the relationships between food procurement and short food value chains, demonstrating how these two dimensions can coexist, creating a virtuous mechanism capable of generating spillover benefits for citizens and consumers.

The book offers a reflection on the results of the project *Public and Private food Procurement and short food supply chain in Urban areas (PPP-URB)*, which is one of the 30 projects that constitute the research activities of *OnFoods*. The set of projects developed within *OnFoods* have the general objective of providing elements to improve the efficiency of food value chains by combining productivity and sustainability, favoring technology transfer, and access to sustainable food by the weakest members of society. The slogan *Fair food market for healthy citizens* summarizes the ambition of the entire project developed within Spoke1 of *OnFoods*.

To achieve this result, the entire Spoke1 is organized into three macro-themes, each of which is articulated into twelve more specific sub-themes. The macro-themes are:

- the promotion of sustainability in food systems that produce and manage the food supply;

- the promotion of sustainability in food environments to make food more available and affordable while creating opportunities for social innovation;
- increasing adherence and compliance with more sustainable food systems.

The three macro-themes are interconnected and share a common element: the study of local food systems, short supply chains, local supply chains, and coordination mechanisms that lead to the management of food procurement by those public entities that are mandated to provide food to the various food environments within the territorial consumption basin. The activities of Spoke1 are carried out by the Università degli Studi di Bari, Catania, Parma, Pisa, Milano La Statale, Politecnico di Milano, and Roma La Sapienza. Following a unified theoretical framework, they share case studies and best practices demonstrating how different formulas and approaches exist to improve food supply and access in the interest of the community.

This book aims to be a preliminary document showcasing the wealth of experiences in the field and the methodological approaches that can be used for the development of local food policies. It is within this logic that the *PNRR* project aims to contribute to achieving its objectives in the service of citizens and taxpayers.

**Daniele Del Rio**

Chair of the Board and Scientific Coordinator,  
Food and Drug Department, Università degli Studi di Parma

**Filippo Arfini**

Scientific Coordinator of OnFoods SPOKE1 Project,  
Economics and Management Department, Università degli Studi di Parma

# 8. Food procurement in mass catering services: the relevance of short supply chains in the public and private sector

Stefano Quaglia, Verónica León-Bravo, Camilla Borsani  
Politecnico di Milano, Management Engineering Department

## ABSTRACT

In recent years, mass catering companies have increasingly engaged local producers and promoted short food supply chains to incorporate socio-environmental considerations in their food procurement programs. This strategy aims to provide sustainable alternatives and limit the externalities generated by the industrialized food system. To better understand how these companies operate in fostering local food sourcing, this chapter examines two cases: Sercar Spa, a contracting-authority providing catering services to public schools in Bergamo through La Buona Mensa project, and cirFOOD, a cooperative specialized in mass catering services for a wide-range of institutions. Aiming to highlight the benefits and challenges of local food procurement in mass catering, findings show that the engagement of local suppliers and the purchasing of organic and certified foods are mainly influenced by compliance regulations in the public sphere, while markets demand play a key role in the private sector. Although the promotion of quality food and reduction of negative impacts emerge as positive aspects of

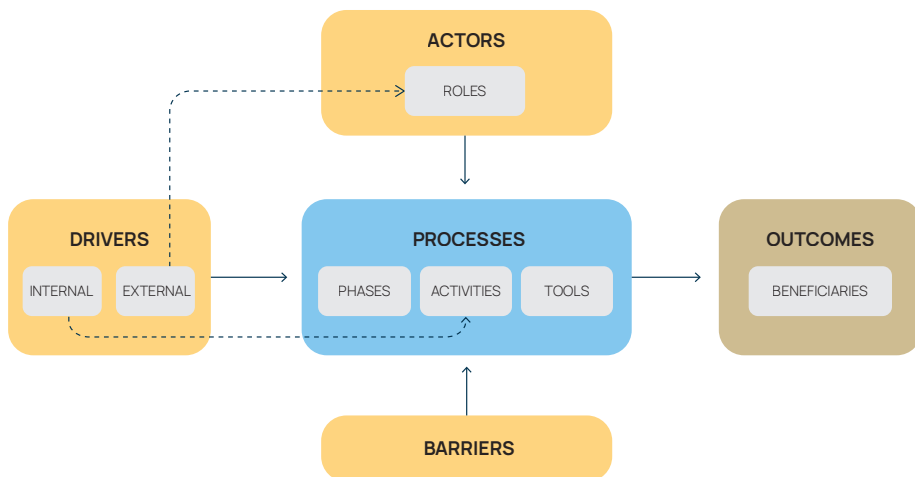
the programs, challenges such as limited production capacity of local farmers and communication issues also characterize them. The establishment of solid partnerships, use of digital management tools, and information exchanges can facilitate progress. Additionally local food policies and community engagement contribute to the adoption of sustainable procurement practices.

## 8.1 Introduction

Over the past decades the globalized industrial food system has provided greater availability and choice of food at lower prices year-round. However, these systems are also recognized as a major driver of negative externalities, including biodiversity loss, soil fertility reduction, food insecurity, malnutrition, and food waste generation (Krivašonoka & Silina, 2015; Holden *et al.*, 2018; Paciarotti *et al.*, 2022). In response, many consumers are increasingly turning to local food systems and short food supply chains as more sustainable and equitable alternatives. The local dimension of the food systems emphasizes reconnecting with local farmers, promoting organic and healthy foods, and supporting local businesses and communities (Duram & Cawley, 2012).

In this endeavour, companies are reshaping their supply chains by integrating social and environmental considerations in supplier management practices (Zimmer *et al.*, 2016; Paciarotti *et al.*, 2022). Engaging local suppliers through procurement programs promoting short food supply chains (SFSCs) is one effective strategy to address sustainability issues for food companies. While several food companies have successfully implemented such programs, further research is needed to understand their benefits and challenges for different actors in the supply chain.

To conceptualize food procurement involving local suppliers as a strategy towards sustainability in food systems, an analytical framework can be adopted. It includes the most relevant variables shaping these programs: actors involved; the effects of drivers and barriers; key phases, activities and tools of the process; and the-outcomes achieved (Figure 1). Actors involved in these processes can



**Figure 1.**  
**Conceptual scheme of**  
**the sustainable food**  
**procurement's analytical**  
**variables.**

be classified into three main categories: supply side, intermediaries, and demand side.

On the supply side, the primary actors are food producers, primarily farmers and other food processors (e.g. fishermen, aquaculturists, cheesemakers). Producers and transformers are essential in providing the raw materials needed for the food supply chain. Despite SFSCs aiming to minimize middlemen, intermediaries are often present to foster the process (Berti & Mulligan, 2016). They typically include local food hubs, mainstream retailers as wholesalers and supermarkets, and non-conventional retailers such as e.g. farmers' cooperatives. These intermediaries play a crucial role in connecting producers with consumers and ensuring the smooth flow of goods. The demand side is primarily composed of food service organizations, such as restaurants, catering companies, and agritourism facilities that decide to procure food locally, and public institutions which are increasingly integrating local food products in their procurement programs (Raj *et al.*, 2022).

Barriers and drivers for local food procurement include several key aspects. Price is a major barrier, as locally produced foods are often more expensive due to small-scale production, regulatory constraints, and certification costs (Harrison *et al.*, 2019).

However, food service companies can target niche markets willing to pay a premium for high-quality, sustainably sourced food, where quality, often associated with better taste, outweighs cost concerns

(Török *et al.*, 2022). Logistics pose another challenge, with small, frequent orders and high transportation costs (Harrison *et al.*, 2019). Buyers often need to invest in delivery infrastructure and cold storage (Duram & Cawley, 2012). Seasonality and limited local suppliers make it difficult to ensure a consistent variety and quantity of products, especially for companies relying on pre-processed foods (Harrison *et al.*, 2019; Török *et al.*, 2022). Local food hubs can aid information flow and transparency, but the risk of relationship termination is significant, especially for farmers without a diversified customer base and for food hubs excluded from the supply chain (Harrison *et al.*, 2019). Nonetheless, food service companies opting for local procurement can attract clientele willing to pay a premium for locally sourced ingredients, offering an opportunity for differentiation in a competitive market through innovative cooking methods as well.

Regarding practices, food service companies can adopt two strategies to support SFSC: the relational approach and the metrics-based approach (Barlett, 2017). The former refers to building personal ties with local farmers and cooperatives, favoring direct deliveries, cooperative deliveries, and traditional distributors. Direct relationships between farmers and buyers facilitate knowledge exchange and create sales opportunities. Trust and effective communication between producers and buyers are crucial. Forming farmers' cooperatives or local food hubs can consolidate freight and reduce costs while maintaining quality. Expanding *local* to national boundaries can also help by using centralized distribution systems. Maintaining strategic intermediary roles is essential for the stability of the local food system. The relational approach also emphasizes seasonal products and value-added goods to expand regional economic activity. Seasonal availability can spur culinary creativity, and encouraging farmers to diversify crops can enhance supply. This strategy supports new ventures and guides growers through crop adaptation, potentially scaling up to regional impact by involving other businesses and organizations. It often includes social concerns about farmers' working conditions and may extend beyond local boundaries. The latter, instead, focuses on purchases that meet sustainability criteria verified by third-party certifications. It requires the buyer to adopt an effective tracking system for and advanced sus-

tainability metrics. Nowadays, those metrics focus on environmental concerns, with fewer certifications addressing labor justice issues.

A relevant aspect lies also in the outcomes achieved through local food procurement programs. They can foster farmers' development by increasing sales and cash flow, enabling land purchases and infrastructure improvements, and encouraging sustainable practices and organic certifications. Furthermore, also environmental sustainability improved through food procurement by increasing organic production, reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions through shorter transportation distances, and enhance crop diversification (Harrison *et al.*, 2019). Shorter distances can also reduce the need for packaging, processing, and refrigeration, with high-quality standards prompting organic and sustainable practices, leading to a lower carbon footprint. From a social perspective, these programs enhance transparency, especially in public sectors, and emphasize local collaboration and cooperation. They can improve farmers' skills and abilities through training, positively impacting human capital. Additionally, social inclusivity can be improved through job opportunities (Cervantes-Zapana *et al.*, 2020).

Adopting these variables (see Figure 1), this chapter investigates the local food procurement strategies of two mass catering companies to highlight the main similarities and differences between private and public domains. To exemplify this, we used two case studies from the *OnFoods* project: Bergamo's *La Buona Mensa* and CIRFOOD's food procurement strategy.

## 8.2 A hybrid local food procurement model: Bergamo's *La Buona Mensa*

In recent years, the municipality of Bergamo has demonstrated increasing sensitivity towards the strengthening of the sustainability of its food system, exemplified by signing the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) in 2019. This commitment led to the establishment of the Food Policy Council (FPC) in 2020 aimed at promoting urban agriculture, tackling food waste, strengthening relationships between local farmers and city markets, and raising citizens' awareness on food-related issues. Further advancing these goals, the municipality



partnered with the Cariplo in 2021 to develop the Bergamo Food Policy emphasizing sustainability across food production to waste management (City of Bergamo, 2023).

In this context, among the various initiatives implemented, one of the most significant was the launch of a new food procurement tender for the period 2021-2025. It focuses on outsourcing and innovating the management of public canteens serving primary and secondary schools, kindergartens, and nursing homes. In this regard, the municipality decided to entrust food provision for schools to a private company, thus depicting a hybrid structure. This process was fostered by the municipality's involvement in the EU project *Food Trails*<sup>1</sup>, which provided the required economic and knowledge resources and allowed to launch a pilot project called *La Buona Mensa* (The Good Canteen) (City of Bergamo, 2023). This pilot was developed to achieve a twofold objective. Firstly, it involves students, parents, and teachers in multiple activities aimed at raising awareness and educating on responsible food consumption. Secondly, it aims to innovate school canteen's menus with lower presence of animal-source foods while favouring local sourcing and short supply chains (Food Policy Bergamo, 2022). To achieve these objectives, in line with the National Procurement Code (L.D. 50/2016), National Guidelines for School Catering (Official Journal no. 134/2010) and the Criteria and requirements for organic school canteens (Interministerial Decree no. 1477/2017), the municipality set specific requirements to be met by the contracting authority<sup>2</sup> in order to obtain the Organic School Canteen certification:

- providing educational programs on healthy diets and quality local and plant-based food for sensitizing and informing pupils also through the engagement of teachers and students' families (art. 16);
- developing a monitoring system to measure the amount of food waste generated in providing the service, assessing the meals quality also by involving the users, and ensuring the redistribution of surplus food to the neediest (art. 17);
- promoting the purchase of organic food and Fair-Trade products through an incremental approach and in line with the Minimum Environmental Criteria (MEC) set at national level<sup>3</sup>

**Note 1.**  
Cfr. <https://foodtrails.milanurbanfoodpolicy.pact.org>

**Note 2.**  
Cfr. <https://www.comune.bergamo.it/node/359764>

**Note 3.**  
Ministerial decree no. 90. (04/04/2020) *Minimum Environmental Criteria for the Canteen Service and Food Supply*. Available at: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/04/04/20A01905/sg>

(art. 18); Fostering the adoption of food procurement models mostly relying on short food supply chains (art. 18).

Key actors involved in this hybrid food procurement model include the municipal European planning office managing the *Food Trails* project, and particularly the *Buona Mensa* pilot, municipal managers responsible for implementing the Bergamo Food Policy, and the mass catering company awarded the municipal service contract, Sercar Spa. Concerning the latter, bolstered by collaboration with the Bergamo bio-district, in the last two years it intensified ties with local organic suppliers, facilitated by a social cooperative consolidating products sourced from different suppliers and deliver them directly to the cooking center or school kitchens (Bio-Distretto dell'Agricoltura Sociale di Bergamo, 2022; IN.N.E.R. Association – International Network of Eco Regions, 2016).

Central to the procurement strategy is tailoring menus to local geography and production capacities, starting within the bio-district and expanding the search in other areas as needed. Potential suppliers undergo an on-site visit to verify the quality of raw materials, and orders are managed through a dedicated computerized system, ensuring efficiency across multiple suppliers if necessary.

However, several challenges persist in the procurement process, including small local producers' capacity limitations, often exacerbated by extreme weather events, and geographic constraints on certain products such as ocean fish and carrots.

Addressing these challenges involves strategic menu planning based on seasonal availability, sourcing supplies from multiple producers, and fostering communication with suppliers through collaborative initiatives.

Despite these efforts, user acceptance of healthier menus remains a challenge, countered by ongoing food educational initiatives and chef training supported by municipal and European partnerships.

Finally, concerning results achieved, in the initial two years of collective catering provision, Sercar Spa attained the following outcomes: serving a total of 59 local schools; conducting educational activities for 51 classes, including two meetings, a theater workshop, and a field visit; transitioning menus to significantly increase the proportion of plant-based meals in place of animal protein-based

dishes; and sourcing 50% of food locally and 95% organic products during the period 2022-2023.

### **8.3 Private procurement fostering local food sourcing: the case of CIRFOOD**

CIRFOOD is an Italian cooperative company specialized in mass and commercial catering and employee welfare services for businesses. It operates across various sectors, providing catering services to schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and corporate clients through a network of 120 establishments nationwide.

The company acknowledges the pivotal role of sustainable practices in supply chain management, driven by findings from its carbon footprint analysis revealing significant greenhouse gas emissions originating from raw material purchases. In this regard, CIRFOOD has implemented food procurement strategies aimed at minimizing environmental impact, with a particular emphasis on sourcing practices involving local food producers. Procurement decisions rely primarily on client specifications, whether from public institutions subject to specific legislations or private clients. Compliance with MEC is mandatory in public tenders, shaping FOOD's definition and implementation of zero-kilometer and short supply chain strategies (CIRFOOD, 2023). However, besides regulatory compliance, CIRFOOD prioritizes sustainability, animal welfare, and the support of local businesses. Initiatives include sourcing 100% cage-free eggs, despite higher costs, and partnerships with organizations like Filiera Agricola Italiana and Federbio Servizi. The former promotes Italian agricultural producers, ensuring traceability and sustainability in the supply chain, while the latter supports organic sector businesses through growth and development initiatives. Moreover, CIRFOOD conducts risk assessments focusing on social aspects of the supply chain, verifying supplier compliance with fair working conditions.

Concerning actors involved, CIRFOOD's procurement activities are managed by the purchasing and logistics departments, with buyers spearheading supplier engagement. Procurement starts with the identification of new suppliers, driven by evolving contract

requirements, market competitiveness, or contingency planning for business continuity. Supplier qualification involves registration on a dedicated portal, where suppliers complete detailed questionnaires to determine eligibility. Successful qualification allows suppliers to join CIRFOOD's accredited roster and participate in procurement processes. Order management, handled separately, involves receiving kitchen orders and transmitting them to suppliers through an artificial intelligence-supported system. Logistics are managed through streamlined approaches, either via CIRFOOD's distribution platform for some materials or direct supplier delivery for others, balancing efficiency and sustainability goals.

Also in this case, challenges persist in procurement operations, particularly with local suppliers who may lack the infrastructure of larger counterparts. Small-scale producers pose also food safety concerns due to limited control processes, prompting CIRFOOD to tailor qualification procedures to accommodate these suppliers. Supply chain resilience is another issue, with local suppliers sometimes unable to respond to unexpected disruptions effectively. Logistical complexities arise from regional disparities in defining *local* products across CIRFOOD's expansive operational footprint. Customer preferences heavily influence menu planning and procurement decisions, where environmental considerations often compete with other factors.

Despite the above challenges, local sourcing enhances CIRFOOD's competitive edge in tender processes, aligning with environmental sustainability goals. However, quantifying environmental benefits remains challenging due to data gaps and logistical constraints inherent in assessing local suppliers' environmental impacts.

In commercial catering, CIRFOOD retains autonomy in procurement decisions, prioritizing environmental criteria despite varying degrees of local sourcing feasibility at provincial levels. We can argue that CIRFOOD emerges among the leader in promoting sustainable practices within the catering industry as it actively educates customers on sustainable choices while supporting small suppliers through collaborative supply chain initiatives. The company's commitment to shared value creation underscores its role in fostering long-term partnerships and customer satisfaction.

## 8.4 Conclusions

The study of local food procurement in mass catering highlights the complex interplay of drivers and outcomes in the transition towards more sustainable food systems. The necessity to comply with tender requirements and national regulations, coupled with local political initiatives, drives catering companies to develop various initiatives to engage local suppliers. This shift in the organization, public or private, is motivated by the complementary goals of supporting small agricultural businesses, enhance higher quality and seasonal products, and reducing environmental impact.

Key strategies such as promoting seasonal menus, encourage collaboration among multiple producers, and timely planning have proven effective, although several challenges remain. These include small producers' limited production and transportation capacity, communication issues, and even consumer's acceptance of certain variations in the menus. Despite these barriers, strong partnerships and two-way information exchanges have facilitated progress.

This research draws attention to the meaning and configuration of short food supply chains as potential alternatives towards more sustainable food systems. The mass catering service companies, at the demand side of the supply chain, demonstrate how buying local also implies to redesign their supply chain structure and get involved with producers, cooperatives, logistics providers to overcome the challenges regarding lack of capacity and limited communication. These examples evidence the need to keep a minimum number of intermediate steps in the supply chain, in the form of cooperatives or associations that can strengthen the system and ensure the minimum criteria established by norms or certifications.

This research underscores the importance of local food policies and community engagement in fostering sustainable procurement practices. It has been evidenced how, in the public and private sector, the change of policies is a crucial driver for actors in the food supply chain to adapt and develop initiatives not only enhance the resilience and sustainability of food systems but also contribute to social and economic development at the local level. By addressing these critical factors, mass catering companies can better align with consumer

demand for sustainable, locally sourced food, ultimately benefiting both producers and consumers.

## References

- Barlett, P. F. (2017). Campus alternative food projects and food service realities: Alternative strategies. *Human Organization*, 76(3), 189-203.
- Berti, G., & Mulligan, C. (2016). Competitiveness of small farms and innovative food supply chains: The role of food hubs in creating sustainable regional and local food systems. *Sustainability*, 8(7).
- Bio-Distretto dell'Agricoltura Sociale di Bergamo. (2022). *Presentazione: Bio-Distretto dell'Agricoltura Sociale di Bergamo*. Retrieved from: <https://www.biodistrettobg.it/wp/wp-content/uploads/biodistretto-bg-agg-GIUGNO-2022.pdf>
- Cervantes-Zapana, M., Yagüe, J. L., De Nicolás, V. L., & Ramirez, A. (2020). Benefits of public procurement from family farming in Latin-AMERICAN countries: Identification and prioritization. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 277.
- CIRFOOD. (2023). *Sustainability Report 2022*. Available online at: <https://www.cirfood.com/en/sustainability>
- City of Bergamo (2023). *Food Policy Bergamo*. Available online at: <https://foodpolicybergamo.it/en/>
- Duram, L. A., & Cawley, M. (2012). Irish chefs and restaurants in the geography of "local" food value chains. *Open Geography Journal*, 5(1), 16-25.
- Harrison, B., Foley, C., Edwards, D., & Donaghy, G. (2019). Outcomes and challenges of an international convention centre's local procurement strategy. *Tourism Management*, 75, 328-339.
- Holden, N. M., White, E. P., Lange, M. C., & Oldfield, T. L. (2018). Review of the sustainability of food systems and transition using the Internet of Food. *NPJ science of food*, 2(1), 18
- Krivašonoka, I., & Silina, L. (2015). Theoretical aspects of local food distribution. In *21st International Scientific Conference Research for Rural Development, 2015*. Latvia University of Agriculture.
- IN.N.E.R. Association – International Network of Eco Regions. (2016). *Bergamo (Lombardia)*. Retrieved from: <https://biodistretto.net/bergamo-lombardia/#:~:text=Il%202012%20Novembre%202016%20%C3%A8,basata%20su%20un%20modello%20sostenibile>.
- Paciarotti, C., Mazzuto, G., Torregiani, F., & Fikar, C. (2022). Locally produced food for restaurants: a theoretical approach for the supply chain network design. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 50(13), 164-183.
- Raj, V. A., Jasrotia, S. S., Rai, S. S., & Ansari, I. A. (2022). A Bibliometric Review of Organic Menus at Restaurants: Research Streams and Future Research Path. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism*.

- Török, Á., Agárdi, I., Maró, G., & Maró, Z. M. (2022). Business opportunities in short food supply chains: the economic sustainability of three Hungarian para-gastro restaurants. *Studies in Agricultural Economics*, 124(1), 22-29.
- Zimmer, K., Fröhling, M., & Schultmann, F. (2016). Sustainable supplier management - A review of models supporting sustainable supplier selection, monitoring and development. *International Journal of Production Research*, 54(5), 1412-1442.