

Reconfiguring Food Supply Relationships for Territorial Sustainability: The Role of Local Production, Market Organization, Governance and Resilience

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Citation : Mwale, P., & Banda, D. (2026). Reconfiguring food supply relationships for territorial sustainability: The role of local production, market organization, governance and resilience. *Annals of Social & Solidarity Economy*, 1(1), 166–183.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23000832>

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Abstract

Short food supply chains have become increasingly prominent in debates on territorial development, food-system sustainability and resilience. Their potential derives from closer producer–consumer relations, improved local value retention, stronger territorial identities and opportunities for small producers to access alternative markets. Nevertheless, geographical proximity and reduced intermediation do not automatically generate sustainable outcomes. This paper examines the relationships among short supply chains, local production and territorial sustainability through a structured review of recent literature. Particular attention is given to producer participation and economic viability, consumer trust and territorial identity, collective governance, public procurement, logistical organization, environmental performance and crisis resilience. The literature indicates that short chains can contribute to territorial development when they combine viable economic arrangements with social embeddedness, efficient logistics, institutional support and environmentally responsible practices. Digital technologies, cooperative structures, food hubs and public procurement can extend market access while preserving territorial connections, provided that governance mechanisms maintain producer participation and equitable value distribution. The analysis also shows that resilience depends on diversified channels, adaptive capabilities and connections across geographical scales rather than on local self-sufficiency. Overall, territorial sustainability emerges from the interaction between proximity, organizational capacity, governance and resource conditions rather than from supply-chain shortness alone.

Keywords: Short food supply chains; Local production; Territorial sustainability; Territorial governance; Food-system resilience

JEL classification: Q13; Q18; Q56; R11; L14

Introduction

The restructuring of agri-food systems has increased scholarly and policy interest in short food supply chains as alternatives or complements to conventional distribution networks. These arrangements encompass farmers' markets, direct sales, community-supported agriculture, digital platforms and different forms of regional intermediation that seek to reduce organizational distance between producers and consumers. However, the literature increasingly rejects the as-

sumption that fewer intermediaries or shorter geographical distances necessarily produce superior sustainability outcomes. Chiffoleau and Dourian (2020) emphasize that sustainability depends on production practices, relationships and territorial circumstances, while Jarzębowski et al. (2020) conceptualize short chains through their combined economic, social and environmental dimensions. Paciarotti and Torregiani (2021) similarly demonstrate that reduced intermediation may transfer considerable logistical responsibilities to farmers, potentially generating new costs and inefficiencies. Consequently, short supply chains should be understood as specific forms of market organization rather than as intrinsically sustainable distribution models. Their territorial relevance depends on their capacity to organize viable exchanges, maintain producer participation, distribute value fairly and establish durable relationships among consumers, enterprises and institutions. This multidimensional interpretation provides a more appropriate basis for examining their contribution to local production and territorial sustainability.

Territorial sustainability broadens this perspective by connecting market organization with local economic circulation, social embeddedness, governance, environmental performance and resilience. Mundler and Laughrea (2016) associate short food chains with territorial development through stronger local relationships and economic linkages, while Brinkley (2017) stresses that territorial embeddedness results from networks and institutional interactions rather than spatial concentration alone. This interpretation also recognizes that successful local systems need not be territorially closed. Dubois (2019) shows that producers can maintain territorial roots while mobilizing external knowledge and connections, and Hyland and Macken-Walsh (2022) demonstrate that intermediary organizations such as food hubs can facilitate aggregation and distribution without necessarily undermining producer influence. Environmental considerations introduce further qualifications because transportation efficiency, production systems and consumer mobility may sometimes outweigh geographical distance in determining ecological performance (Malak-Rawlikowska et al., 2019; Majewski et al., 2020). Similarly, recent disruptions have shown that resilience depends on diversified channels, adaptive capacity and institutional coordination rather than simple localization (Béné, 2020; Thilmany et al., 2021). Against this background, this paper examines how short supply chains and local production contribute to territorial sustainability and identifies the organizational, institutional and logistical conditions under which these contributions become durable.

1. Short Supply Chains as Alternative Market Architectures

1.1. Definitions, Conceptual Development and Configurations of Short Supply Chains

Chiffoleau and Dourian (2020) show that shortening food supply chains should not be interpreted as automatic evidence of sustainability, because outcomes depend on production practices, organizational arrangements, actor relationships and territorial conditions. Jarzębowski et al. (2020) reinforce this multidimensional interpretation by conceptualizing short food supply chains as locally embedded systems combining economic, social and environmental objectives through reduced intermediation and closer producer-consumer relationships. Gori and Castellini (2023) further demonstrate that alternative food networks differ substantially in governance mechanisms, spatial scales, objectives and actor configurations, making uniform evaluation inappropriate. Michel-Villarreal et al. (2019) add that transparency, local value creation and closer social relations coexist with important challenges concerning scale and operational efficiency. Taken together, these contributions imply that territorial sustainability depends less on geographical proximity itself than on how local food systems are organized and governed.



Short chains become more developmentally relevant when they combine viable market arrangements with equitable value distribution, environmental performance and durable relationships among territorial actors. Their evaluation should therefore move beyond food miles or the number of intermediaries and examine the institutional mechanisms through which local production and consumption are coordinated.

Paciarotti and Torregiani (2021) demonstrate that shortening food chains does not eliminate logistical complexity because producers often assume transportation, storage, order preparation and delivery activities previously performed by specialized intermediaries. Poor routing, small shipments and low vehicle utilization can consequently weaken both environmental and economic performance. Bayir et al. (2022) reinforce this organizational perspective by identifying recurrent barriers involving logistics, coordination, regulation, market access, information exchange and limited producer resources. Thomé et al. (2021) add that short and conventional supply chains can coexist within producer strategies, suggesting that territorial sustainability may depend on complementary channel portfolios rather than exclusive reliance on direct distribution. Tsoulfas et al. (2023) further show that research on short agri-food chains increasingly incorporates governance, resilience and territorial organization alongside marketing and sustainability. Together, these contributions imply that viable short chains require coordinated infrastructure and collective organizational capacity. Shared logistics, professionally organized distribution and institutional support can help small producers overcome scale limitations while diversified marketing channels can preserve local embeddedness without isolating producers from wider markets. Territorial policy should therefore support coordination mechanisms rather than assuming that removing intermediaries is sufficient.

Lankauskienė et al. (2022) show that digital platforms and two-sided networks can connect geographically dispersed producers and consumers while preserving important dimensions of territorial proximity when digital intermediation remains anchored in regional production networks. This contribution expands the concept of short food supply chains beyond exclusively face-to-face exchange and suggests that proximity may also be relational and organizational. Jarzębowski et al. (2020) complement this interpretation by emphasizing the diversity of direct sales, farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture and other short-chain configurations. Chiffolleau and Dourian (2020) further demonstrate that the sustainability of these arrangements depends on the quality of relationships, production practices and territorial conditions rather than on their formal classification as short chains. Thomé et al. (2021) add that producers frequently combine several distribution channels, indicating that digital and conventional mechanisms can complement locally embedded outlets. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that digitalization can reinforce territorial food systems when it reduces coordination costs, expands market access and sustains producer-consumer connections. Its contribution should therefore be assessed according to whether technological intermediation strengthens regional networks and local value creation rather than simply increasing transactional efficiency.

1.2. Producer Participation, Capabilities and Economic Viability

Aggestam et al. (2017) show that producers' willingness to expand short food supply-chain activities depends on attitudes, perceived feasibility and organizational conditions rather than on consumer demand alone. Charatsari et al. (2018) reinforce this behavioral perspective by demonstrating that farmers' participation is shaped by perceptions and broader motivational determinants in addition to expected prices. Benedek et al. (2018) further show that different short-chain channels attract different types of small-scale farmers because market arrangements create distinct transaction conditions and participation requirements. Dunay et al.



(2018) add that producers value not only income opportunities but also consumer relationships, traditions, environmental considerations and local identity when choosing direct-selling arrangements. Taken together, these contributions imply that participation in short food supply chains is selective and depends on both economic and non-economic incentives. Territorial strategies should therefore avoid assuming that expanded local demand will automatically generate a corresponding supply response. Effective support requires training, networking, infrastructure and market arrangements adapted to heterogeneous farm characteristics. Policies should also recognize the relational and territorial motivations that make local marketing attractive, since durable participation is more likely when alternative channels simultaneously support farm livelihoods, producer autonomy and locally valued forms of economic exchange. DeMartini et al. (2017) show that participation in short food supply chains can improve producer autonomy, customer relationships, recognition and opportunities for capturing a larger share of product value, while simultaneously imposing additional organizational and marketing responsibilities. Mundler and Jean-Gagnon (2020) reinforce this qualification by demonstrating that direct marketing can involve substantial labor requirements related to selling, processing, logistics and customer interaction, meaning that higher gross margins do not necessarily translate into better returns to labor. Chiaverina et al. (2023) provide broader evidence that participation in short chains can improve farm economic performance, although results remain conditioned by farm characteristics and the organization of marketing activities. Lee et al. (2020) similarly demonstrate that marketing-channel choice affects profitability because alternative channels distribute margins, costs and risks differently across participants. Together, these contributions imply that the economic sustainability of local food chains should be evaluated through net producer outcomes rather than sales revenues alone. Short chains become economically attractive when improved value capture adequately compensates farmers for the additional labor, logistics and commercial functions transferred to them. Territorial policy should therefore address labor organization and shared marketing services alongside market access. Bui et al. (2021) provide evidence from Vietnamese smallholders that short food supply chains can contribute to price and revenue stabilization, income sustainability, confidence and greener production practices, demonstrating that their potential extends beyond European farming contexts. Chiaverina et al. (2023) complement this evidence by showing across multiple studies that economic benefits are possible but depend on the characteristics of farms and marketing arrangements. Aggestam et al. (2017) further demonstrate that producer expansion depends on perceived feasibility and organizational capacity, while DeMartini et al. (2017) show that closer consumer relationships and greater autonomy can reinforce the economic incentives associated with short-chain participation. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that SFSCs can strengthen small-farm resilience when market organization combines income opportunities with manageable transaction requirements and stable producer-consumer relationships. Their territorial contribution is therefore contingent rather than automatic. Support mechanisms should help farmers develop marketing capabilities, coordinate logistics and respond to disruptions while preserving the relational advantages of local markets. Such conditions can allow short chains to improve not only value capture but also producer confidence, income stability and the capacity of small farms to remain economically viable within changing food systems.

1.3. Producer Experience, Consumers, Trust and Market Relationships

Azima and Mundler (2022) show that participation in direct markets is associated with several dimensions of farmers' occupational and economic satisfaction, extending evaluation of short food supply chains beyond revenue performance. Dupré et al. (2017) reinforce this perspective by demonstrating that diversified organic market gardeners can experience demanding workloads alongside greater autonomy, professional meaning and recognition. Floriš et al. (2022)

add that short chains may create valuable market opportunities for small farms otherwise disadvantaged within concentrated agri-food systems, although these benefits depend on organizational capabilities and access to resources. Michel-Villarreal et al. (2020) similarly show that farmers' markets provide economic opportunities and stronger customer relationships while imposing operational burdens that can affect their long-term attractiveness. Taken together, these contributions imply that territorially sustainable food systems must support acceptable working conditions as well as viable farm incomes. Direct marketing may strengthen autonomy, recognition and market access, but these advantages can be weakened by excessive workloads and organizational constraints. Territorial policy should therefore assess producer well-being, labor organization and professional satisfaction alongside sales and income indicators when determining whether short food supply chains offer durable pathways for maintaining small farms and economically active rural communities.

Giampietri et al. (2018) demonstrate that trust plays an important role in translating favorable consumer attitudes toward short food supply chains into purchasing intentions, making relational confidence a central asset of local markets. Cruz et al. (2021) reinforce this argument by showing that proximity, knowledge of production practices and greater visibility of producer identities can help rebuild consumer confidence where conventional food systems create information asymmetries. Hanus (2020) adds that consumer preferences for domestic and local products can stimulate demand for shorter chains through symbolic attachments to territorial origin and identity. Elghannam et al. (2020) further show that digital communication and social media can strengthen informational proximity by improving awareness and interaction between consumers and identifiable producers. Together, these contributions imply that local food markets depend on intangible relational resources as well as physical proximity. Trust, transparency, territorial identity and communication can differentiate short-chain products from standardized alternatives and encourage repeated exchange. However, these relational advantages require credible organizational mechanisms as initiatives expand. Producers and local institutions should therefore combine direct relationships with traceability, transparent communication and digital tools capable of preserving confidence beyond small face-to-face networks.

Koutsou and Sergaki (2019) demonstrate that producer cooperation and technological innovation can be combined to create short-chain arrangements that retain local value while offering consumers convenient access to producer-controlled products. Their case of automated milk vending illustrates that shortened chains need not rely solely on traditional farmers' markets or direct farm sales. Elghannam et al. (2020) complement this perspective by showing how digital tools can strengthen consumer engagement and informational proximity within alternative food networks. Michel-Villarreal et al. (2020) further emphasize that farmers' markets function as relational spaces where reputation, knowledge and trust accompany commercial exchange, while Cruz et al. (2021) show that visibility of producers and production processes can strengthen consumer confidence. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that innovation can support the scaling of short food supply chains without necessarily eliminating their relational foundations. Cooperative organization, automated distribution and digital communication can reduce access barriers and increase convenience, provided that technological intermediation preserves transparency and producer identification. Territorial strategies should therefore encourage organizational and technological innovations that improve market accessibility while maintaining the trust, local value retention and producer-consumer relationships that distinguish short food chains from conventional distribution systems.

2. Local Production, Territorial Embeddedness and Governance

2.1. Local Identity, Certification and Territorial Development

Mundler and Laughrea (2016) show that short food supply chains can contribute to territorial development through local economic circulation, direct relationships and stronger connections among producers, consumers and other actors, although these effects vary across local configurations. Brinkley (2017) reinforces this territorial perspective by demonstrating that embeddedness depends not simply on geographical clustering but on the structure of social networks, interactions and institutional relationships linking economic activity to place. Dubois (2019) adds that peripheral producers can remain territorially rooted while mobilizing external knowledge and connections through translocal practices, indicating that local development does not require territorial closure. Pato (2020) further shows that regional short-chain initiatives can create alternative commercialization opportunities for farmers while supporting consumer access to local products, despite continuing organizational and market constraints. Taken together, these contributions imply that territorial sustainability depends on the quality of relationships connecting local production with wider networks and institutions. Short food supply chains can reinforce regional economies when they retain value locally, deepen actor relationships and maintain access to external knowledge and markets. Territorial policy should therefore strengthen local networks without isolating producers from broader economic and informational resources.

Chicoine et al. (2022) demonstrate that consumers understand local food through multiple forms of proximity, including geographical, relational, identity-based and organizational dimensions, rather than through physical distance alone. Escobar-López et al. (2021) complement this perspective by showing that consumer and producer perceptions of proximity, local production and alternative marketing help construct the meaning and value of territorial embeddedness. Stanco et al. (2019) further demonstrate that farmers' markets reduce information asymmetry by allowing producers to communicate quality and authenticity directly, while consumers value attributes such as freshness, organic characteristics and value for money. El Hamidi (2023) provides Moroccan evidence showing that purchase intentions toward Marrakech-Safi "Produit Régional" products are positively associated with perceived quality, regional certification, packaging-related attitudes, societal perception and marketing campaigns. Together, these contributions imply that territorial origin acquires economic value only when consumers can identify, understand and trust the attributes associated with place. Local-food strategies should therefore combine geographic origin with credible communication, product quality and recognizable territorial narratives rather than assuming that proximity alone will generate stable consumer demand.

González-Azcárate et al. (2022) show that certification can support short food supply chains by communicating origin and production standards, particularly when direct interpersonal trust is limited, although formal certification can also generate additional costs. El Hamidi (2023) reinforces the market value of territorial certification by demonstrating that regional certification and communication contribute positively to purchase intentions for locally labeled products in Marrakech-Safi. Stanco et al. (2019) add that direct producer-consumer relationships remain important because they enable farmers to communicate product authenticity and reduce information asymmetry. Escobar-López et al. (2021) further emphasize that perceptions and narratives surrounding local products influence how consumers interpret alternative food networks. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that formal and relational forms of trust should be treated as complementary rather than competing mechanisms. Certification can extend credibility beyond face-to-face relationships, while direct interaction can give territorial labels

greater social meaning. Effective territorial marketing should therefore combine credible certification, transparent communication and producer-consumer relationships so that regional identity is converted into durable market recognition without undermining the relational foundations of short food supply chains.

2.2. Community Economies, Social Embeddedness and Peri-Urban Development

Connelly and Beckie (2016) show that scaling local food initiatives requires social infrastructure capable of preserving producer participation and relational embeddedness as market reach expands. Their contribution implies that growth becomes territorially sustainable only when organizational expansion does not reproduce the impersonal structures of conventional supply chains. Pinna (2017) reinforces this collective perspective by emphasizing networks of cooperation through which alternative food initiatives can pool resources, increase visibility and strengthen their influence over regional food policy. Reina-Usuga et al. (2020) add that territorial short food supply chains are shaped by governance arrangements that determine how actors coordinate resources, responsibilities and collective decisions across different institutional settings. Deller et al. (2017) broaden the discussion toward community economic development by showing that local food activity can generate entrepreneurial opportunities, economic linkages and income circulation within territories. Taken together, these contributions imply that scaling should be understood as the strengthening of territorial coordination rather than simply the expansion of sales volumes. Short food chains can generate wider developmental effects when cooperation preserves local value circulation and strengthens collective capacities. Territorial strategies should therefore support networks and governance structures that allow local initiatives to grow without weakening their social embeddedness.

O'Hara and Coleman (2017) demonstrate that public programs supporting farmers' markets and local food promotion can strengthen market infrastructure and address collective constraints that individual producers cannot resolve independently. Yacamán Ochoa et al. (2019) reinforce this institutional perspective by showing that peri-urban producers face regulatory, logistical, infrastructural and market barriers despite their geographical proximity to large urban markets. Yacamán Ochoa et al. (2020) further demonstrate that collective knowledge, networking and horizontal governance can strengthen city-region food systems while helping maintain peri-urban agricultural activity. Chaparro Africano and Calle Collado (2017) add evidence from Colombia showing that alternative peasant markets can support producer autonomy, direct exchange and locally rooted livelihoods. Together, these contributions imply that territorial proximity constitutes an opportunity rather than a sufficient condition for sustainable local food systems. Public infrastructure, cooperative organization and viable market institutions are required to convert proximity into durable economic relationships. Territorial policy should therefore connect urban demand with surrounding productive landscapes through logistics, market facilities and institutional support while preserving opportunities for small producers to participate autonomously in local value creation.

Hedberg and Zimmerer (2020) show that environmental practices within local food initiatives are shaped by interactions between market participation and social-ecological relationships, demonstrating that local embeddedness can support ecological behavior without guaranteeing it automatically. Reina-Usuga et al. (2020) complement this perspective by showing that governance determines how territorial actors organize resources and collective responsibilities, making institutional arrangements central to the environmental as well as economic performance of short chains. Deller et al. (2017) add that local food systems can generate wider community benefits when economic relationships and expenditures remain connected to the territory, while Connelly and Beckie (2016) emphasize that expanding initiatives must preserve the

social infrastructure supporting these relationships. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that territorial sustainability emerges from interactions among economic circulation, ecological practices and collective governance rather than from localization alone. Local food initiatives should therefore be assessed according to whether their growth strengthens community relationships, supports environmentally responsible production and retains economic value within the territory. Scaling becomes sustainable when organizational development deepens rather than erodes the social and ecological forms of embeddedness on which local food systems depend.

2.3. Collective Governance, Hybrid Networks and Food-System Reconnection

Chiffolleau et al. (2016) show that short food supply chains can contribute to food democracy by creating spaces for dialogue, learning and participation among producers, consumers and other stakeholders. Their contribution implies that territorial sustainability depends partly on whether local actors gain greater influence over the organization of food systems. Maticena and Corvo (2020) reinforce this political perspective by showing that short chains can support forms of de-commodification in which food relationships are organized around social values and producer agency rather than anonymous market exchange alone. Zhong et al. (2022), however, caution that geographical proximity does not automatically generate strong territorial embeddedness because differences among farmers, consumers and institutions may produce only fragmentary integration. Kurtsal et al. (2020) further demonstrate that durable short chains require governance mechanisms capable of coordinating heterogeneous actors and addressing shared logistical and marketing problems. Taken together, these contributions imply that local food systems become territorially embedded through active institutional and relational work. Shortening supply chains can strengthen producer agency and democratic participation, but these effects depend on sustained cooperation and the capacity to reconcile diverse interests within local food governance.

Hyland and Macken-Walsh (2022) show that food hubs can provide collective infrastructure for aggregation, distribution and coordination while maintaining relationships among farmers, consumers and institutions. Their contribution demonstrates that intermediation can support rather than necessarily weaken territorial embeddedness when governance preserves producer participation and local value retention. Rosol and Barbosa Jr. (2021) reinforce this interpretation by arguing that scaling local food networks may require intermediaries capable of overcoming logistical constraints without reproducing the power imbalances of conventional supply chains. Martens et al. (2022) further show that hybrid cooperation models can combine direct relationships, intermediary functions and collaborative structures to connect small producers with the scale and convenience requirements of urban demand. Fleury et al. (2016) add that intermediate-scale values-based supply chains can preserve farmer identities, product values and regional connections while reaching larger markets. Together, these contributions imply that territorial sustainability should not be equated with complete disintermediation. Appropriately governed intermediaries can strengthen short and regional chains by pooling resources and coordinating market access. The key issue is whether mediation remains accountable to producers and preserves the territorial values that distinguish these networks from conventional commodity systems.

Grando et al. (2017) demonstrate that the development of short food supply chains across European urban areas depends on diverse forms of leadership involving producers, civil society, public authorities and other organizations. This finding implies that city-region food systems require identifiable actors capable of coordinating initiatives across urban and rural spaces. Martens et al. (2022) complement this perspective by showing that hybrid organizational arrangements can strengthen functional relationships between dispersed rural producers and

concentrated urban demand. Fleury et al. (2016) further demonstrate that intermediate-scale networks can expand market access without necessarily abandoning regional identity or producer values, while Hyland and Macken-Walsh (2022) show that food hubs can act as coordinating organizations within multi-actor territorial networks. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that sustainable scaling depends on institutional architecture rather than simply increasing transaction volumes. Territorial strategies should therefore support intermediary and leadership structures capable of coordinating logistics, preserving producer influence and connecting rural production with urban markets. Scaling becomes compatible with local development when organizational innovation expands reach while retaining economic value, identity and decision-making capacity within the territory.

3. Territorial Sustainability: Performance, Policy and Resilience

3.1. Public Procurement, Institutional Support and Multidimensional Sustainability

Tregear et al. (2022) show that public-school catering systems generate different combinations of carbon emissions and local economic effects, demonstrating that territorial sourcing should not be treated as sufficient evidence of sustainability. Smith et al. (2016) reinforce this multidimensional perspective by showing that sustainable public food procurement must reconcile cost, environmental objectives, local economic development and operational constraints. Swensson and Tartanac (2020) add that regulatory design determines whether smaller and local producers can access institutional demand, making procurement rules an important component of territorial food policy. Molin et al. (2021) further demonstrate that environmental, social and economic criteria can be incorporated into public purchasing, although integrated implementation remains difficult. Taken together, these contributions imply that public procurement can strengthen regional food systems when institutional demand is deliberately structured around multiple sustainability objectives. Schools, hospitals and other public organizations can create stable markets for territorial producers, but effective policy requires accessible procurement procedures, coordinated criteria and careful evaluation of employment, environmental performance and local economic circulation rather than reliance on geographical origin alone. Malak-Rawlikowska et al. (2019) demonstrate that short distribution channels can enable producers to retain a larger share of final margins, while longer chains may sometimes perform better environmentally because of more efficient distribution. Majewski et al. (2020) reinforce this qualification by showing that low shipment volumes, transport inefficiencies and consumer journeys can make some short chains environmentally intensive on a per-unit basis. Loiseau et al. (2020) similarly demonstrate that the environmental performance of short and alternative apple-distribution channels depends strongly on logistics, transportation efficiency and consumer travel rather than physical distance alone. Schmutz et al. (2018) add that different urban short-chain configurations generate distinct combinations of social, economic and environmental outcomes. Together, these contributions imply that shortness should be treated as an organizational characteristic rather than a sustainability indicator. Territorial food policies therefore need multidimensional assessment frameworks capable of comparing value retention, emissions, logistics and social outcomes simultaneously. Supporting local production can generate important economic benefits, but environmental performance will depend on how products are consolidated, transported, stored and accessed by consumers.

Rucabado-Palomar and Cuéllar-Padilla (2020) show that short food supply chains can provide local producers with better prices, economic opportunities and social recognition, while requiring substantial skills, flexibility, technical effort and time. Their findings imply that market access alone is insufficient when farmers lack the organizational capabilities needed to manage

direct or shortened channels effectively. Tregear et al. (2022) complement this perspective by showing that local economic benefits depend not only on sourcing but also on employment and wider procurement arrangements. Swensson and Tartanac (2020) further demonstrate that institutional rules can either facilitate or restrict small producers' participation in public-food markets, while Majewski et al. (2020) show that logistical organization remains decisive for environmental efficiency. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that territorial food strategies should combine demand creation with producer capacity building and distribution coordination. Public procurement can become a rural-development instrument when smaller suppliers receive realistic access to institutional markets and when cooperative logistics reduce operational burdens. Such support can help local producers capture economic value without creating logistical inefficiencies that undermine the broader environmental objectives of territorial food-system development.

3.2. Environmental Performance, Logistics and Green Supply-Chain Management

Lulovicova and Bouissou (2023) show that environmental evaluation of local food policies should move beyond individual products toward a territorial life-cycle perspective capable of capturing effects across production, transport, consumption and spatial organization. Yang and Campbell (2017) reinforce this argument by demonstrating that conclusions regarding the environmental benefits of local food depend strongly on life-cycle methodology and cannot be inferred from food miles alone. Kissinger et al. (2019) further show that regional food localization should be evaluated through measurable resource use, ecological footprints and biophysical capacities rather than assumptions of environmental superiority. Touil et al. (2023) provide a complementary boundary perspective by showing that greener supply chains depend on managerial, economic, stakeholder and policy conditions, even though their study does not specifically examine short food chains. Taken together, these contributions imply that territorial proximity is only one component of environmental performance. Local-food strategies require comprehensive assessment of production efficiency, resource use, logistics and institutional conditions. Territorial shortening should therefore be combined with deliberate environmental management if local production is to contribute effectively to ecological sustainability.

Todorovic et al. (2018) demonstrate that collective logistics, shipment consolidation and improved transportation arrangements can reduce inefficiencies associated with fragmented short-chain distribution. Their contribution positions logistical coordination as a major territorial lever for reconciling economic viability with environmental performance. Michel-Villarreal et al. (2021) complement this perspective by showing that digital technologies can strengthen short food supply chains through improved communication, transactions and distribution during periods of disruption. Benedek et al. (2022) similarly demonstrate that producers responded to the COVID-19 shock through online sales, channel adjustment and organizational adaptation, although their capacities to do so differed considerably. Michel-Villarreal (2023) further links sustainability practices with resilience capabilities, emphasizing the importance of organizational flexibility and adaptive relationships. Together, these contributions imply that resilient local food systems require both physical and digital infrastructures. Shared logistics can reduce routine operational inefficiencies, while digital tools and diversified channels provide flexibility when normal distribution systems are disrupted. Territorial policy should therefore support cooperative logistics, digital capabilities and organizational learning so that proximity is converted into efficient and adaptable food-system relationships rather than remaining merely a spatial characteristic.

Smith et al. (2016) show that neither long nor short food chains are universally resilient because vulnerability depends on network redundancies, dependencies and adaptive capacities rather

than geographical distance alone. Benedek et al. (2022) reinforce this conclusion by demonstrating that short-chain producers differ markedly in their capacity to reorganize sales channels and adopt online mechanisms during crisis. Michel-Villarreal (2023) further shows that resilience is connected with sustainable operational practices and the ability to respond flexibly to disturbances, while Kissinger et al. (2019) emphasize that territorial food systems remain constrained by their underlying biophysical resources and productive capacities. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that territorial resilience should not be equated with local self-sufficiency or shortness. Durable food systems require diversity in channels, strong relationships, adaptive organizational capabilities and realistic knowledge of territorial resource constraints. Local production can strengthen resilience when embedded in sufficiently connected and flexible networks, but complete territorial closure may create new vulnerabilities. Policy should therefore promote diversified regional food systems capable of combining local embeddedness with external connections and adaptive options.

3.3. Crisis Resilience and Sustainability Transitions

Thilmany et al. (2021) show that local food supply chains gained visibility during COVID-19 because they could reorganize relationships and respond relatively quickly to changes in localized demand. Their findings suggest that diversified territorial supply structures can complement conventional chains and provide adaptive capacity during disruption. Béné (2020) reinforces this perspective by defining resilience through capacities to absorb, adapt and transform rather than simply return to pre-crisis conditions, while cautioning that localism alone does not guarantee food security. Fei et al. (2020) similarly demonstrate that localized food systems in China became more important under mobility and distribution constraints, although weaknesses in coordination and market access limited their performance. Cappelli and Cini (2020) further interpret the pandemic as an opportunity to reconsider the role of short chains and local production within broader food-system organization. Taken together, these contributions imply that territorial resilience depends on maintaining local productive capacity while ensuring effective distribution and cross-scale connections. Short chains can provide flexibility during shocks, but their durability requires infrastructure, coordination and accessibility rather than reliance on proximity alone.

Polita and Madureira (2021) show that short food supply-chain initiatives can evolve from protected innovation niches when collective action, learning and institutional relationships enable them to interact with wider socio-technical regimes. This transition perspective implies that successful local experiments require anchoring mechanisms if they are to influence mainstream food-system structures. Petruzzelli et al. (2023) reinforce this interpretation by positioning short chains as potential mechanisms for transforming relationships among production, consumption and territories, while emphasizing that their effects depend on integration into broader policy and market processes. Cirone et al. (2023) add that business-model design and value sharing are central to the economic sustainability of short chains because producers and consumers need viable mechanisms for distributing benefits fairly. O'Connor et al. (2025) further show that local producers contribute knowledge, biodiversity, community relationships and social-ecological resilience in addition to supplying food. Together, these contributions imply that scaling should not simply reproduce conventional chain structures at a larger volume. Territorial transition requires organizational models that preserve producer participation, fair value distribution and locally embedded knowledge while building stronger links with institutions and mainstream markets.

O'Connor et al. (2025) emphasize that local producers should be treated as active territorial actors whose motivations, knowledge and capabilities shape the resilience and sustainability of short food supply chains. Béné (2020) complements this producer-centered perspective by

showing that resilient food systems depend on diversity, adaptation and connections across scales rather than on self-contained localism. Thilmany et al. (2021) further demonstrate that diversified local channels can provide useful adaptive capacity during disruptions, while Polita and Madureira (2021) show that collective learning and institutional anchoring are necessary for local innovations to move beyond isolated niches. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that fair territorial transition requires both strong local agency and wider institutional connectivity. Producers need sufficient voice, organizational capacity and market opportunities to adapt their activities, but resilient local systems must also remain connected to broader networks capable of providing resources, knowledge and alternative outlets. Policy should therefore strengthen producer organizations, collaborative learning and institutional links so that short food supply chains can contribute to durable food-system transformation rather than functioning only as temporary responses to crisis.

4. Discussion

The literature reviewed indicates first that the economic and social contribution of short supply chains depends substantially on producer capabilities and the organization of market participation. Aggestam et al. (2017) and Charatsari et al. (2018) show that farmers' engagement is influenced by perceived feasibility, motivations and organizational conditions rather than market demand alone. Participation may provide greater autonomy and improve producers' ability to capture product value, but these benefits coexist with additional commercial and logistical responsibilities. DeMartini et al. (2017) emphasize the advantages associated with recognition and stronger customer relationships, whereas Mundler and Jean-Gagnon (2020) show that substantial selling, processing and distribution workloads may reduce the effective return to labor. These findings help explain why the economic performance identified by Chiaverina et al. (2023) remains heterogeneous across farms and marketing arrangements. The territorial contribution of short chains should therefore not be measured solely through turnover or price premiums. Producer well-being, working conditions, organizational capacity and continuity of participation are equally important. Policies designed to expand local markets should consequently combine demand development with training, cooperative logistics and shared commercial services. Such support can reduce the operational burden placed on individual farmers while preserving the autonomy and relational advantages that make shortened marketing arrangements attractive.

A second result concerns the importance of territorial embeddedness, trust and governance in transforming local production into sustainable territorial development. Chicoine et al. (2022) demonstrate that proximity encompasses geographical, relational, organizational and identity-based dimensions, suggesting that the value of local production cannot be reduced to physical distance. Stanco et al. (2019) show that direct interaction can reduce information asymmetries, while El Hamidi (2023) finds that perceived quality, regional certification, packaging-related attitudes, societal perception and marketing communication influence purchase intentions toward Marrakech-Safi regional products. Certification can therefore reinforce territorial identification, particularly when interpersonal relationships cannot alone sustain consumer confidence (González-Azcárate et al., 2022). At the collective level, Connelly and Beckie (2016) and Reina-Usuga et al. (2020) demonstrate that social infrastructure and governance arrangements become increasingly important as local initiatives expand. Moreover, Chiffolleau et al. (2016) associate short chains with opportunities for participation and food democracy. These findings indicate that territorial sustainability emerges from organized relationships among producers, consumers, institutions and intermediary organizations. Effective territorial strategies should therefore connect certification, communication, collective organization and market infrastructure. Local identity generates lasting economic effects when it is supported by credible quality

signals, participatory governance and mechanisms capable of retaining value within the territory.

A third implication is that environmental sustainability and resilience require greater attention to logistics, institutional coordination and cross-scale connections. Malak-Rawlikowska et al. (2019), Majewski et al. (2020) and Loiseau et al. (2020) demonstrate that shortened distances do not necessarily reduce environmental impacts because fragmented shipments, low vehicle utilization and consumer travel may offset the advantages of proximity. Todorovic et al. (2018) accordingly identify collective logistics and shipment consolidation as mechanisms for improving distribution efficiency. Digitalization provides an additional adaptive mechanism: Michel-Villarreal et al. (2021) and Benedek et al. (2022) show how online sales, communication technologies and channel adjustments helped producers respond to disruption. The COVID-19 experience further supports a differentiated interpretation of resilience. Thilmany et al. (2021) demonstrate that local food systems could respond rapidly to changes in demand, whereas Béné (2020) cautions that localization alone cannot guarantee food security. Smith et al. (2016) similarly associate resilience with redundancy, diversity and adaptive capabilities rather than chain length. Thus, territorially sustainable systems should combine strong local productive capacities with diversified marketing outlets, efficient shared infrastructure and connections to wider networks. Resilience is strengthened by flexible territorial integration rather than by economic or geographical isolation.

Conclusion

This review shows that short supply chains can contribute to territorial sustainability, but their contribution remains conditional on the economic, social, institutional and environmental organization of local food systems. Reducing the number of intermediaries can improve producer visibility, strengthen consumer relationships and increase opportunities for retaining value within territories. Yet short chains can simultaneously transfer marketing, transportation, storage and coordination responsibilities to producers, creating workloads and costs that may weaken their long-term viability. Territorial sustainability consequently depends on more than proximity. It requires capable producers, credible market relationships, collective organization, efficient logistics and institutional arrangements that allow benefits to be distributed among territorial actors. Trust and regional identity also play important roles, particularly when supported by certification, transparent communication and recognizable product attributes. At the same time, intermediary organizations should not automatically be viewed as incompatible with short-chain principles. Food hubs, cooperative distribution structures and hybrid networks can facilitate aggregation and expand access to larger markets while maintaining local value and producer participation. The central criterion is therefore not complete disintermediation but the capacity of governance arrangements to preserve territorial relationships and equitable economic participation as market systems develop.

The analysis also demonstrates that environmental performance and resilience must be approached through multidimensional evaluation rather than assumptions concerning geographical localization. Short supply chains can generate local economic and social advantages while still producing inefficient transport patterns or substantial resource requirements. Environmental benefits therefore depend on production methods, distribution organization, shipment consolidation, consumer behavior and territorial resource conditions. Similarly, resilience emerges from the capacity to absorb disturbances, reorganize activities and develop alternative channels rather than from reliance on local production alone. Digital technologies, diversified marketing arrangements, collective logistics and supportive public institutions can reinforce this adaptive capacity. Public procurement may also provide stable demand for territorial pro-

ducers when procurement procedures remain accessible to smaller suppliers and integrate economic, social and environmental objectives. The broader implication is that territorial food policy should avoid presenting local production and conventional networks as mutually exclusive alternatives. Sustainable territories require locally embedded systems that remain sufficiently open to external knowledge, markets and resources. Short supply chains can therefore support durable territorial transformation when local agency is combined with institutional connectivity, fair value distribution, efficient infrastructure and adaptive organizational capacities capable of responding to changing economic and environmental conditions.

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