



PAFO-COLEAD INNOVATIONS SERIES: Innovations and successes of African farmer-led businesses and SMEs

SESSION N°21

How farmers and SMEs respond to the changing needs and preferences of consumers in Africa

Thursday 10 October 2024 - 12:00-14:00 UTC

Online ([Zoom](#))

English-French-Portuguese interpretation available

1. Context

Population growth and urbanisation are changing food production trends and transforming people's dietary habits. In the rapidly evolving market landscape of Africa, farmers and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face unique challenges and opportunities to meet the changing needs and preferences of consumers. A more sustainable and equitable food system is needed, and it can be built on stronger relationships between people, communities and their environments. Short food supply chains have gained increased attention in recent years due to their potential for creating beneficial economic, social and environmental outcomes.¹ Creating connections between consumers and producers seems a promising approach to foster sustainable consumption behaviour in international food supply.²

Traditional food deliveries based on direct supplies or sales in physical marketplaces (farmers' markets) were the forerunner of today's Short Food Supply Chains (SFSC)w.³ Recent developments in the food market show

¹ Malak-Rawlikowska, A.; Majewski, E.; Wąs, A.; Borgen, S.O.; Csillag, P.; Donati, M.; Freeman, R.; Hoàng, V.; Lecoœur, J.-L.; Mancini, M.C.; et al. Measuring the Economic, Environmental, and Social Sustainability of Short Food Supply Chains. *Sustainability* 2019, *11*, 4004. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11154004>.

² Weber, H., Loschelder, D. D., Lang, D. J., & Wiek, A. (2021). Connecting consumers to producers to foster sustainable consumption in international coffee supply – a marketing intervention study. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *37*(11–12), 1148–1168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2021.1897650>.

³ Definition of SFSC based on the three “proximity” dimensions: (i) ‘Physical (geographical) proximity’ which refers to the distance of transportation measured with Food Miles of the product from production place to the final consumer; (ii) ‘Organizational proximity’ expressed by the number of intermediaries in the chain (zero or maximum one); (iii) ‘Social proximity’ which emphasizes some form



a renaissance of traditional, direct ways of delivering food, coupled with an emergence of more innovative types of distribution systems which provide direct linkages between producers and end consumers.⁴

A significant change to food systems and to consumption habits is needed. Consumer organisations are part of the solution and must be included as fundamental partners for driving this change. With the right information, knowledge and incentives, consumer behaviour can impact positively upon the achievement of the right to adequate food for all. Raising the awareness of consumers, in the right context, can empower them to make choices that will aid a transformation of food systems, generating social, economic, cultural and environmental good practice, to influence policy and legislation that will drive a sustainable course. Consumer behaviour not only responds to, but also contributes to the way food is produced, processed, distributed, marketed, consumed and wasted; as such, responsible consumption, combined with responsible private sector action, greater governance, and political and fiscal incentives, can carve the way for sustainable, ethical and fairer development.⁵

Many consumer organisations around the world already provide consumer education on the role consumers can have in combatting and mitigating climate change. Their campaigns show, for example, how consumers can reduce their carbon footprint, reduce plastics consumption, food and water waste, buy locally and organic, recycle and compost, generate their own urban or rural small holdings, and 'go green'.⁶ A consumer who knows more about the origins and the processes involved in the production of food could make responsible food choices, especially if additional incentives exist, such as on pricing or subsidies.

2. Consumer's expectations from farmers and value chain actors

Today's consumers' expectations from farmers and value chain actors in the agrifood sector are driven by a combination of new expectations, technological advancements, and a growing emphasis on sustainability and health. As a result, farmers and value chain actors are under immense pressure to meet these demands while maintaining efficiency and profitability in their businesses.

Quality and safety: Consumers expect farmers to produce healthy, safe, and nutritious food. They also expect value chain actors to maintain these standards during processing and distribution. Traceability has become a key factor, with consumers wanting to know the origin of their food and the journey it took to reach their plates. They demand transparency in the production process, from farm to table.

Sustainability and environmental impact: Consumers increasingly demand sustainable practices. They expect farmers to adopt environmentally friendly methods and sustainable farming practices, such as reducing pesticide use, conserving water, and the reduction of carbon footprint and promoting biodiversity. The demand for eco-friendly packaging and reduced food miles also reflects this trend.

Ethical practices and fair trade: Ethical considerations are increasingly influencing consumer choices. There is a growing demand for fair trade products, where farmers receive fair compensation for their labour. Consumers are concerned about the working conditions of farm labourers and the ethical treatment of animals. They expect value chain actors to uphold high ethical standards, ensuring that workers are treated

of 'relationship' between consumer and producer of food based on mutual trust and closeness of the transfer of information; Malak-Rawlikowska et al., *op. cit.*

⁴ Raftowicz, M.; Solarz, K.; Dradrach, A. Short Food Supply Chains as a Practical Implication of Sustainable Development Ideas. *Sustainability* 2024, *16*, 2910. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16072910>.

⁵ FAO. 2021. [Consumer organizations and the right to adequate food— Making the connections](#). Rome.

⁶ See the sustainable consumption section of the [Consumers International website](#).

fairly, and animals are raised humanely. Certifications such as Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance, and Animal Welfare Approved are becoming important indicators for consumers.

Innovation and technology: The integration of technology in agriculture is another area where consumers have high expectations. Precision farming, biotechnology, and digital agriculture are some of the advancements that consumers expect farmers to adopt. These technologies can lead to more efficient use of resources, higher yields, and reduced environmental impact ensuring that food is fresh and delivered promptly.

Health and nutrition: Health and nutrition are paramount concerns for modern consumers who look for products that promote well-being. There is a growing preference for organic, non-genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and nutrient-rich foods. Consumers are more informed about the health benefits of various foods and expect farmers to produce crops that meet these nutritional standards. The demand for functional foods, which provide health benefits beyond basic nutrition, is also on the rise.

Transparency: Consumers want clear information about how their food is produced, processed, and transported. This includes details on farming practices, animal welfare, and the use of GMOs.

3. Strategies and innovations from farmers and SMEs to meet consumer's demand

The food supply chain is vulnerable and with imbalances between small and large operators. Strengthening connections between producers and consumers has the potential to improve farmers' position in the value chain.⁷ More and more consumers want to feel connected to the food they eat and appreciate direct engagement with farmers and value chain actors through farm visits, social media, and other platforms. Smallholders and SMEs need strategies in place to adapt their offerings to the changing consumer's demands. Some examples below of key elements:

Understanding consumer trends: African consumers are increasingly health-conscious, environmentally aware, and tech-savvy. They demand transparency, sustainability, and convenience. Farmers and SMEs must stay informed about these trends through market research, consumer feedback, and industry reports. In Africa, there is also a growing preference for locally produced goods, driven by a desire to support local economies and reduce dependency on imports.

Embracing technology: Technology plays a crucial role in helping African farmers and SMEs adapt. For farmers, precision agriculture technologies such as drones, sensors, and GPS mapping allow for more efficient and sustainable farming practices. These technologies help in monitoring crop health, optimising resource use, and reducing environmental impact. They provide farmers with access to weather forecasts, market prices, and agricultural advice. SMEs leverage e-commerce platforms, social media, and digital marketing to reach a broader audience.

Promoting sustainable practices: Sustainability is a significant concern for modern consumers. African farmers are adopting organic farming, crop rotation, and integrated pest management to meet the demand for eco-friendly products. These practices not only appeal to environmentally conscious consumers but also contribute to long-term soil health and biodiversity. SMEs are also focusing on sustainability by using eco-friendly materials, reducing waste, and implementing energy-efficient processes as well as getting certifications (i.e., Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance).

⁷ EC. [Connecting consumers and producers in innovative agri-food supply chains](#). 2024.

Supporting product innovation: Innovation is key to staying relevant. African farmers are diversifying their crops, experimenting with new varieties to cater to niche markets and developing new products that align with consumer trends, such as health-focused foods, artisanal goods, or customisable products. By continuously innovating, SMEs can differentiate themselves in a crowded market.

Building strong relationships with consumers: African farmers are increasingly participating in farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture programmes, and farm-to-table initiatives. These direct-to-consumer models foster trust and loyalty by providing consumers with fresh, locally sourced products and a personal connection to the producer.

Adopting flexibility and adaptability approaches: Finally, flexibility and adaptability are crucial traits for both farmers and SMEs. The ability to pivot quickly in response to market changes can make the difference between success and failure. This might involve adjusting production methods, exploring new sales channels, or rebranding to align with current trends.

4. Way forward

The expectations of consumers from farmers and value chain actors in the agrifood sector are multifaceted and ever evolving. Quality and safety, sustainability, ethical practices, innovation, and health are some of the key areas where consumers have set high standards. Meeting these expectations requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders in the agrifood value chain. By embracing sustainable practices, leveraging technology, and prioritising ethical and health considerations, farmers and value chain actors can not only meet but exceed consumer expectations, paving the way for a more sustainable and resilient agrifood sector. African farmers and SMEs are responding to the changing needs and preferences of consumers through a combination of technology adoption, sustainable practices, product innovation, strong consumer relationships, and adaptability.

Key points for discussion:

- What are the opportunities for African SMEs in connecting with consumers?
- What innovations are required to meet the evolving consumer's demands?
- What models do work in better connecting farmers and businesses to consumers?

More information, including the programme, is available on Agrinnovators.org, the platform that consolidates all the information related to the Innovations Sessions and provides a [forum](#) for exchange and networking.

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Agenda

12:00-12:10 Introduction: *Dr. Babafemi Oyewole, CEO, PAFO*

Moderator: *Isolina Boto, Head of Networks and Alliances, COLEAD*

12:10-13:00 Panel: **successes in connecting farmers and SMEs to consumers**

- *Marlène Kindji, Founder and Director, Badémè Natural Foods, Benin*
- *Joanne Murunga, COO, Kentaste Products Limited, Kenya*
- *Tantely Rakotobe, Founder Manager, TROPIKALY & UTAM, Madagascar*
- *Francis Muia, Regional Project Coordinator, Slow Food Kenya*

13:00-13:20 Discussants

- *Peter Mwangi, Founder and CEO, Pemu Agrifood Academy, Farmworks Agriculture, Kenya*
- *Raschad Al-Khafaji, Director, FAO Liaison Office in Brussels*

13:20-13:50 Debate

13:50-14:00 Key takeaways and conclusion



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