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### *Problem description*

Many new entrants who start an agricultural business or successors who take over their parents farm are trying to do so with new sustainable business models. They see opportunities to set up the farm in an innovative way and so respond to the wish of society and consumers to produce more sustainably. This may imply for example switching to organic farming, starting tourism activities or setting up short chains where other revenue models are possible due to the direct connection with the customer.

However, the burdens for new entrants are diverse, including access to land, labour, capital, housing, markets, knowledge and the networks needed to acquire these resources. Fertile land becomes extremely expensive. Prices for food commodities are low. Farm income is, especially in some subsectors, extremely unstable. This holds all across Europe and leads to a continuous decrease in the number of farmers.

The hurdles are diverse and region-specific including among others:

1. Newbies that want to invest in urban farming are confronted with extremely high land prices in and around cities
2. There is a growing gap between consumers and food producers; food and farming literacy among young people is very limited
3. Innovative ideas often request cooperation with other partners, while a network to find the right partners often lacks at the local level

At the same time, new entrants often experience a communication gap with their customers. Farmers get critique from citizens and movements for many issues in society, such as soil and water pollution or emissions. Miscommunications and the gap between consumers and producers further contributes to polarization in the food and farming debate.

Polarization hinders a constructive dialogue in society and hence also jeopardizes the development towards more sustainable food systems. Vice versa, an environment that facilitates the dialogue between all actors in the food system can significantly contribute to stimulate sustainable food systems. Local authorities can contribute to create such enabling environments.



## *Potential solutions*

Local authorities increasingly recognize the added value of new entrants in agriculture. Over the last decade, many cities have invested in the development of local food strategies in which farmers have a crucial role to play. Several case studies demonstrate that, all across Europe, farmers and local authorities come up with solutions that can be beneficial for new entrants. Some examples demonstrate how the cooperation between local authorities and new entrants can be a win-win situation.

An increasing number of cities provide 'space' for experiments in local food production. Calls are launched to give new entrants access to community-owned land and innovative food production initiatives to flourish. In Leuven (Belgium), the city provided in 2020 land for local farmers. In total, 10 plots owned by the municipality, were released for urban farming projects. Projects were among others evaluated on their business model, innovation potential and ecological added value. Several new entrants successfully applied for a plot.

Also in terms of public education, new entrants can bundle forces with local authorities. Farmers can exploit the growing interest in farm education. Local authorities often have programs that support farmers to open their farms for education activities, such as school visits to the farm. Within the newbie project, Domen Virant demonstrated this potential. Domen is a young farmer in Slovenia, who is also passionate about education and working with children. In 2019, he received the newbie award for his business model which clearly shows how food production and on-farm education can be managed.

In the context of a EIP-AGRI workshop 'Cities and Food – connecting consumers and producers', the potential of local farmers for public procurement was also raised. This topic is now further explored in the H2020 project COCOREADO. Whereas local as such can legally not be a criteria in tenders on public procurement, local authorities can decrease the burdens for local new entrant to apply for such tenders.

Finally, local authorities can facilitate the access to the market for new entrants. In Belgium, the ngo Rikolto launched the cooperative KORT'OM. Rikolto works closely together with several city councils to facilitate the development and strengthen the business plan of such farmers' cooperative in urban environments.

### *Recommendations / suggestions*

New entrants face enormous challenges starting up a business. National regulations, as well as their concerns about national measures, are often dealt with by representative groups such as farmers' organisations. However, there are also arguments for new entrants to engage directly with local authorities.

Local authorities have a good overview of the stakeholders within the area that are interested in cooperation with local food producers. That can be for a broad range of actions including for example research opportunities, initiatives in the domain of social work, education programmes, etc.

In the same context, local authorities can provide insights in the agenda. That holds for both the political agenda – such as the focus areas of a legislation – and for the agenda of local activities and events. Traditionally, local events in Europe have a gastronomic component. One can thereby observe a revival of the interest in local food cultures and local food production, with among others literally space for local farmers.

It is also worth for new entrants to engage in local food councils. These food councils, which are increasingly operationalized in cities and towns, set the scene for local food and farming policies. As new entrant, being part of such councils assures that the concerns of starters in the agricultural sectors are heard.

NEWBIE

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