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Balancing small farm households' self-provisioning and integration with markets: typologies across European countries

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Abstract

Introduction and objectives - Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) relates to the capacity of the food system to ensure access to sufficient, nutrient and culturally acceptable food (HLPE, 2014). As part of the food system, farms play a key role to the availability, access and utilization of food: despite the declining number of agricultural holdings and gradual increase in farm size, the agricultural sector in Europe is largely composed by farms with less than 5 ha of agricultural land and a standard output below 4000 euro per year (Eurostat, 2015). Due to the wide variation in farm structures and the lack of consistent data across the EU-27, a commonly agreed definition of 'small farms' is hard to develop (EC, 2011), together with a shared understanding of the current and potential contribution of small farms (and food businesses) to food systems' FNS, in face of growing globalization and uncertainties. The research developed within the H2020 Project Salsa (<http://www.salsa.uevora.pt/en/>) aims to contribute to uncovering small farmers' distinctive contributions to FNS, for example the provision of food for the farm's family, the production on land not suitable for large scale farming and the use of marginal resources, the diversified forms of production and distribution, the safeguarding of biodiversity and quality foods provision.

According to the farm-household model (HLPE, 2013), there is a strict connection between farm and household needs and dynamics in farmers' decision-making processes, especially relevant for small scale family farming. The contribution of small farm households to food and nutrition security strongly depends on the way farms are connected to territorial food systems (Grando et al., 2016, Ingram, 2011). The present contribution focuses and discusses how smaller farms provide food and incomes for rural households (i.e. material and financial "access" dimension of FNS) in regional food systems across twelve European countries.

Methodology - Two key concepts underlie the role of small farm households to food and income provision. The first is the role of self-provisioning, namely if and to what extent farm production is directed towards household's consumption. Self-provisioning farms are those

that produce a range of products with the primary intention of 'self-provisioning', i.e. to satisfy a significant proportion of the general dietary needs, the consumption of a specific product (e.g. olive oil or wine) of their immediate household and extended family (plus other informal transactions). Those producing primarily for 'self-provision', may produce surplus products for sale via various channels into local, regional or even international markets, as part of a livelihood strategy.

A second feature that characterizes the relationship between the farm and the household is related to the strategies adopted for the integration into markets (i.e. to what extent farm production aims at being commercialized on one or more markets). Market integration characterizes those farms producing primarily for selling the majority of production via formal commercial transactions/channels: this may be the sole source of household income (full-time farming) or may be a partial source supplemented by other incomes (part-time farming).

This paper builds upon qualitative research developed in twelve European regions where small farms are prevalent, across different staple food products. In each region, an average of 30 in-depth interviews with small farmers and 4 focus groups with key informants were carried out and analysed. A comparative analysis across the twelve regions was then developed to un-pack differences and specificities and to reflect on cross-cutting aspects, by means of a questionnaire submitted to all project partners.

Results - Results discuss the different understandings on the meaning of these key variables across countries and articulate the interplays that take place in each context, in relation to external conditions (e.g. economic trends and political drivers) and internal factors (i.e. production sector, diversification, relations and capabilities, etc..) to the farm-households. The understanding of the interactions across these two concepts (i.e. complementarities and trade-offs) allows for the identification of small-scale farms typologies that can be observed in connection to the relative regional food systems, regarding their livelihood strategies as well as their contribution to FNS.

Keywords: small farming, food and nutrition security, market integration, self provisioning, farm household

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