

The innovative model of supporting short food supply chains by a local government unit on the example of the municipality of Kamienna Góra

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Abstract

Aim: The main goal of this article is to present the innovative model for supporting short food supply chains and to assess the effectiveness of actions taken by local authorities to develop the local market, using the municipality of Kamienna Góra as a case study.

Methodology: The article is based on a critical analysis of relevant literature and original research, including in-depth interviews with the Deputy Mayor and the Director of the Business Incubator of the Municipality of Kamienna Góra, the analysis of the municipality's strategic documents, and personal observations.

Results: The research findings indicate that the implementation of the innovative model for supporting short food supply chains has contributed to the development of the local agricultural market. However, the continued success of this system requires ongoing support from the local government.

Implications and recommendations: The research conclusions may contribute to the development of recommendations for public policies that support the growth of local food markets in a more coherent and sustainable manner at the national level.

Originality/value: The exploration of this topic is justified by the increasing need to support local food markets as a tool for the sustainable development of rural areas.

Keywords: short food supply chains, local government, innovative model, Kamienna Góra

1. Introduction

The subject of this article is the sustainable development of rural areas. Changes driven by globalization, the concentration of land and capital, and the presence of large retail chains are forcing the modernization of these areas while contributing to the erosion of their traditional character and local features. Large agricultural enterprises, which focus on monocultures, put small farms in a difficult position, as they are unable to increase their production efficiency. As a result, traditional farms that previously supplied products to local markets are disappearing (Raftowicz et al., 2024). In response to these challenges, new solutions are being sought to stabilize the socio-economic situation in rural areas, including through the active involvement of local government units.

Despite the growing number of studies on short food supply chains and the role of innovation in public management, few of them focus on the detailed analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of innovative models of supporting local food markets implemented by local governments (Kachniarz & Raftowicz, 2020; Raftowicz et al., 2019; Zerbian et al., 2022).

There is also a lack of analyses linking theoretical concepts of innovation with practical actions undertaken by local government units in regions with specific socio-economic conditions, especially in Poland.

The exploration of this topic is justified by the increasing need to support local food markets as a tool for the sustainable development of rural areas. In an era of globalization, where long supply chains dominate, short chains offer an alternative that can improve residents' quality of life by providing access to fresh, locally produced food and strengthening the local economy.

The main goal of the article is to present the innovative model for supporting short food supply chains that has been implemented in the municipality of Kamienna Góra and to assess the effectiveness of the actions taken by local authorities to develop the local market.

2. Literature review

The term 'innovation' originates from the Latin word *innovare*, meaning 'to do something new,' which provides a broad spectrum for its interpretation. Schumpeter (1934, 1942) introduced the concept of innovation into economic theory, viewing it as one of the most important traits for a company wishing to maintain a strong market position. In his opinion, the economic approach is seen as a dynamic process of crisis and equilibrium, where the 'entrepreneur' enhances economic processes through the adoption of innovations. According to Schumpeter, innovation occurs in five cases: 1) the introduction of a new product or a new type of product; 2) the introduction of a new method of production; 3) the opening of a new market; 4) the acquisition of a new source of raw materials or semi-finished products; 5) the implementation of a new organization of some industry.

Drucker (1992, p. 39) offers a somewhat different perspective on innovation. According to him, "innovation is a specific tool of entrepreneurship – a means by which resources are given new wealth-producing potential." This definition emphasizes that innovations are not merely technological novelties or fleeting trends but strategic actions that enable the creation of new value. Kotler (1994, p. 322) further specifies these resources by defining innovation in a more pragmatic manner. He states that "innovation refers to any good, service, or idea that is perceived as new by someone." Kotler points out that innovation does not have to be entirely novel in an objective sense; rather, what

matters is how it is perceived by the market or society. This means that innovation can be not only a completely new invention but also a new application, an improvement to an existing product, or an innovative approach to solving a problem that brings additional value and is perceived as new by its recipients. In this way, Kotler broadens the concept of innovation to include any actions that bring something new to the recipients, highlighting the importance of perception and market reaction to the introduced changes.

According to the Oslo Manual (*Podręcznik Oslo...*, 2008, p. 48), developed in collaboration with the European Commission and OECD, the definition of innovation is provided, along with its various types. According to this approach, "innovation is the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), process, marketing method, or organizational method in business practices, workplace organization, or relations with the surrounding environment." The Oslo Manual emphasizes that innovations are not limited to creating new products. They also include improvements to existing production processes, which can lead to increased efficiency or reduced costs. Additionally, innovations can pertain to marketing methods, such as new ways of promoting products, entering new markets, or changing the way of communicating with customers. Organizational innovations, in turn, refer to the introduction of new management methods or work organization that can improve the functioning of the company, for example, through better use of human resources or more efficient supply chain management. Importantly, innovations can also involve establishing new relationships with the environment, such as through strategic partnerships that allow companies to better adapt to changing market conditions. Thus, the Oslo Manual provides a comprehensive view of innovations, presenting them as a key element of economic development encompassing various aspects of business activities.

Previous discussions on innovation have mainly referred to enterprises. However, the issue of innovation can also be analysed in the context of public organizations, particularly local governments. According to Wojciechowski (2015), the source of innovation in local government is what stimulates the initiation of the change process. These may be inspired by individuals in local and regional power centres, working in local government administration, or municipal entities (companies). External stimulation, such as the needs of public service consumers, also plays a significant role.

Matysiak (1999, p. 80) is of opinion that local government, in addition to its traditional allocation function, also plays an important, though often marginalized, role in initiating social changes. This is because representatives of local government usually have the best information and motivation to initiate, promote, and then oversee specific projects beneficial to the local community. One example of such an initiative is the efforts made by local government units to develop local agricultural markets, which, according to Babczuk et al. (2017), is one of the signs of their effective impact on local agriculture and concern for the high standard of living of residents.

According to Raftowicz (2022, p. 64), short food supply chains should be understood as a process of delivering agri-food products with respect for the principles of sustainable development, based on three types of proximity:

- 1) proximity, meaning the locality of sales,
- 2) organizational proximity, involving the reduction of intermediaries (there can be at most one sales intermediary, excluding retail chains operating in multiple geographically dispersed locations),
- 3) social proximity ensuring continuous, up-to-date communication of knowledge between producer and consumer (based on trust), including information about the product's origin.

Gallaud and Laperche (2016, p. 69) argue that short food supply chains represent a specific form of social innovation driven by consumer social needs. In this view, short food supply chains can be defined as a form of economic exchange that creates social bonds, supports cooperation (between citizens, public administration, and farms), transparency, and fairness among exchange participants. This form of collaboration can contribute to deeper social changes.

3. The model of a local food market with the involvement of local government

Short food supply chains are inherently local or regional in nature. Therefore, it seems reasonable to involve local government authorities in their promotion and operation (Solarz et al., 2023). This is particularly relevant as Martinez et al. (2010), who studied local food systems in the USA, concluded that local government programs are more likely to effectively support local food systems compared to central government initiatives. Local governments often directly promote local food markets and provide funding for such activities, such as utilizing public spaces for markets. For instance, in the United States, there are numerous financial programmes directed specifically at local governments to support local food production. Some states and municipalities in North America offer incentives for low-income individuals to shop at farmers’ markets. An example is the New York City’s Health Bucks incentive programme which provides low-income consumers with free vouchers for purchasing fresh produce at farmers’ markets. Individual states and municipalities also support land use and zoning policies that favour small farms and create space for markets (Raftowicz, 2022, p. 107).

Similar conclusions are drawn from the research of González-Azcárate et al. (2023), which shows that local authorities in Europe are playing an increasingly significant role in transforming food systems. This article confirms the potential benefits of a broad territorial approach aimed at addressing the needs and challenges related to short food supply chain policies at the municipal level. In this context, the City Region Food Systems (CRFS) approach has significant potential to overcome many of the difficulties faced by municipalities. It is crucial for policymakers to develop new mechanisms and institutions at the urban level to effectively implement this approach.

In Poland, following initial failures in promoting short food supply chains, there has been a focus on the need to increase the role of local governments in projects initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to advance short food supply chains. Therefore, Kachniarz and Raftowicz (2020) developed a model describing the essence and nature of the connections between supply and demand, involving local government, as illustrated in Figure 1.

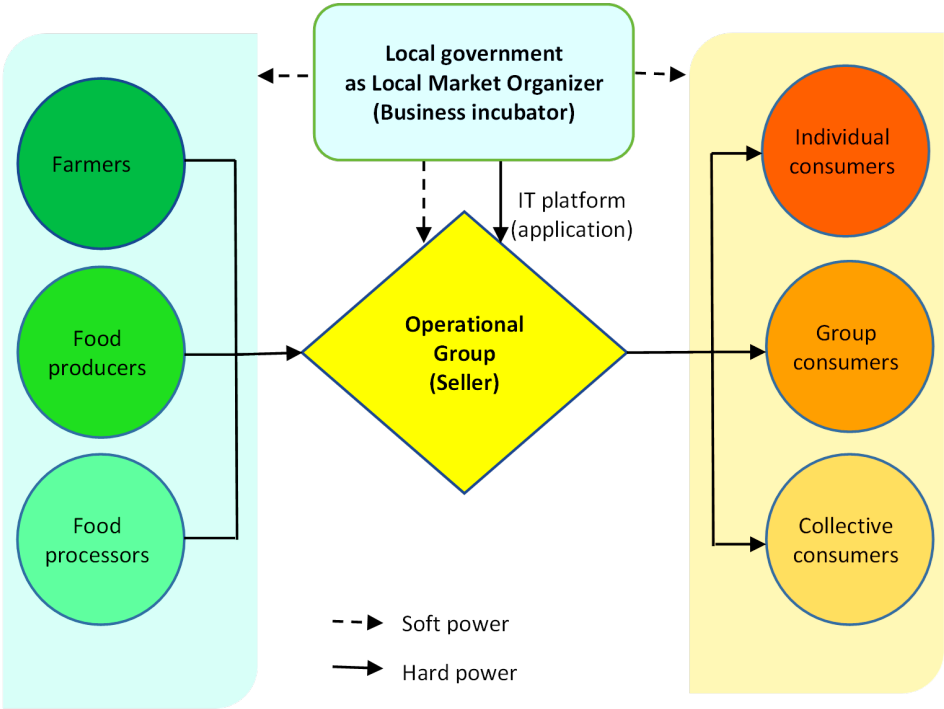


Fig. 1. Model of the local food market with the involvement of local government in Poland

Source: own elaboration based on (Kachniarz & Raftowicz, 2020).

The first stage in the effective functioning of short food supply chains is overcoming the organizational barrier, i.e., creating a market for buyers and sellers. In this framework, the municipality assumes the role of the Local Market Organizer, focusing primarily on generating demand and supply through soft actions (e.g. promoting, advising, integrating, supporting), without directly engaging in business activities. This is indicated by the dashed line (soft power) in the diagram. The beneficiaries of these activities can be both individual consumers and collective food entities managed by local government units. Business activities, along with associated revenues, costs, and financial-tax settlements, are exclusively reserved for the seller, i.e. the farmer, food producer, or processor. However, it is important to note that the model aims to maintain close relations between the demand and supply sides, which practically means minimizing the role of intermediaries. To coordinate activities and achieve positive synergy effects or create a comprehensive purchasing offer for consumers, the supply side can form Operational Groups in the form of associations, cooperatives, foundations, or commercial companies. In this setup, there is the possibility of separating the functions of the seller from the farmer, food producer, or processor and delegating these tasks to the Operational Group. Another option is to establish an Operational Group in the form of a consortium, which does not have legal personality. In such a case, a necessary element of the project is a group coordinator, who can be one of the producers or an external entity interested in participating in the creation of local agricultural markets, not necessarily aiming to generate revenue for themselves (social aspect).

A key role in this model is the use of intelligent solutions that optimize and generate collaboration networks, especially IT technologies (Salin, 1998). Modern information technologies can solve the problem of logistics in connecting geographically dispersed producers and consumers, e.g. using blockchain technology, which enables transactions without intermediaries and allows for tracing the origin of food 'from farm to table.' Moreover, recent trends indicate that blockchain technology is essential for developing a sustainable food supply chain due to its ease of product traceability, security, and transaction efficiency (Alkahtani et al., 2021). This solution offers benefits for both the supply and demand sides. From the perspective of farmers, food producers, or processors, such a system allows for regular offer preparation, flexible pricing, and the use of an expanding distribution network, offering deliveries tailored to recipient conditions, which facilitates simple and quick settlements. From the consumers' point of view, the system provides the functionality of traditional intermediaries through automation of market participant management, verification of the authenticity of products offered for sale, logistics of deliveries, and accuracy and flexibility of financial settlements (Raftowicz, 2022, pp. 109, 110).

In this model, the local government organizes the IT system (e.g., purchasing software licenses, initiating its use), while the Operational Group, after an incubation period, must acquire the rights to the license from the first transaction onward. The municipality cannot operate a sales portal as it might be suspected of engaging in business activities not permitted by the local government act. The municipality, as the license owner, provides it (free of charge) to the Operational Group with legal personality (e.g. an NGO that does not engage in business activities). If the license is provided to an entity engaged in business activities, allegations of unjustified public aid or favouritism towards entrepreneurs may arise, which is unacceptable. This solution is optimal for each party, as practice shows that, in the initial phase of self-organization by the supply side, purchasing such an IT tool is unrealistic due to high costs and lack of formalized cooperation agreements between the parties. Thus, the role of the local government, indicated in the model as 'hard power,' is crucial, as it can primarily obtain funds from European programs to organize such activities (including IT equipment, software, etc.) (Kachniarz & Raftowicz, 2020). The model implements the proposal to increase the role of local government in organizing short food supply chains. It eliminates entry barriers to the system (financial, organizational, and technological). At the same time, it should be noted that the effectiveness of the model will depend on the commitment and determination of local government representatives. It is important to emphasize that supporting and promoting short food supply chains is one of the discretionary tasks of local governments, to which they are not legally obligated. Local governments do not have established competencies to work in groups with businesses and treat 'cross-cutting' cooperation with some suspicion (Raftowicz-Filipkiewicz, 2013).

4. Methodology

An example of a municipality that was one of the first in Poland to implement this model of a local food market with the involvement of local government is the municipality of Kamienna Góra. It is located in the southern, mountainous part of the Lower Silesian region, positioned peripherally near the border with the Czech Republic. Kamienna Góra County has a population of 40,550 people (GUS, December 31, 2023) and is approximately 100 km from the Lower Silesian capital, Wrocław. Conceptual work on creating the sales platform www.zziemi.pl began in 2020 in collaboration with the Association of Local Producers of the Central Sudetes and the Business Incubator of the Municipality of Kamienna Góra. Initially, 23 agricultural producers and food processors from the Kamienna Góra region participated in the development of the platform. The launch of the test sales platform occurred in August 2021.

The research was conducted based on structured in-depth interviews with the Vice-Mayor and the Director of the Business Incubator of the Municipality of Kamienna Góra, as well as personal observations from May to June 2024. The questions focused on the actions and strategies undertaken by the municipality for the development of short food supply chains and their effectiveness from 2020 to 2024.

The limitations of the research include its focus on a single case – the municipality of Kamienna Góra. This means that the conclusions drawn from this case study may not be fully generalizable to other regions with different socio-economic, cultural, or demographic characteristics. In addition, the study relies mainly on interviews with key informants and document analysis, which may introduce a degree of subjectivity. Furthermore, the limited observation period (2020-2024) may not fully capture the long-term effects of implementing the innovative model, especially in the context of changes in local policy or market conditions.

5. Results

Research has demonstrated that the initiative undertaken by the municipality of Kamienna Góra to develop short food supply chains is innovative both organizationally and in terms of product development. This is the first initiative of its kind in Poland, where a local government unit has directly engaged in initiating and supporting the local agricultural market. The successful implementation of this initiative, in close cooperation with local farmers and producers, was made possible by the municipality's adoption of a modern sales platform which can also be used by other local government units. The zziemi.pl platform, a marketplace tool, enables producers to legally sell their products without intermediaries. This system allows customers to make purchases from multiple producers with a single payment.

To support this sales model, the municipality of Kamienna Góra launched the Local Processing Incubator which facilitates the legal processing of food products by local producers. The incubator is fully equipped and registered with the relevant oversight institutions, such as the District Veterinary Inspectorate (Powiatowy Inspektorat Weterynaryjny (PIW)) and the State Sanitary and Epidemiological Station (Państwowa Stacja Sanitarno-Epidemiologiczna (PSSE)). The costs of using the incubator are limited to utility fees, and the municipality, as the organizer of the local agricultural market, does not profit from renting the facility. Additionally, the municipality provides the platform for joint sales to local producers free of charge.

The product ordering process operates on a session-based model, allowing orders to be placed throughout the week, with product collection scheduled for a designated delivery or pick-up day. Producers declare the availability of their products by creating “virtual warehouses,” enabling them to adjust production to actual customer demand, thereby eliminating the need for excess inventory. The prepayment system allows customers to pay for their orders at the time of purchase, ensuring that

producers receive funds before delivering the goods. Product collection from multiple producers takes place at a single location that meets PSSE sanitary requirements. This solution automates the management of multiple pick-up points through one platform, streamlining communication with customers from the moment an order is placed until delivery.

The municipality of Kamienna Góra supports local producers in using the platform by assisting with price list preparation and report generation. Additionally, the municipality organizes training sessions and promotional activities and actively supports local producers by purchasing packages of their products for official events.

As part of the initiative, a unified visual identity was developed, which includes placing the sales group logo on products and promotional materials. Producers delivering goods to the shared collection point can monitor the quality of other suppliers' products, enabling mutual quality control, such as when a damaged item is included in a package. All sellers using the tools provided by the organizer must meet legal requirements, including registration with PIW or PSSE, which is significant given that local agricultural markets often rely on unregistered production. The legality of operations is regularly verified by the organizer. The *zziem.pl* platform differs from traditional online stores in that it does not operate on a commission-based model (such as *allegro.pl*). It allows customers to purchase products from multiple producers in a single order and make a single payment. This model enables customers to shop from home, while producers can reduce the need for direct contact with customers, which can be burdensome when handling large numbers of orders.

After evaluating 2.5 years of the platform's operation, it can be concluded that a leader is essential for organizing a local agricultural market – a role that can be effectively fulfilled by a local government unit. The high activity of the local government is notable. It has assumed the role of market organizer, concentrating on generating demand through both soft actions (e.g., promoting, advising, integrating, supporting) and hard actions (e.g., operating a business incubator, funding the online platform).

However, for the effective functioning of the platform both internal and external support is necessary. A key factor influencing the success of the project is whether the group was formed organically (initiated by producers) or created by an external entity (top-down).

Figure 2 illustrates the three stages of actions taken by the Business Incubator of the municipality of Kamienna Góra Municipality's.

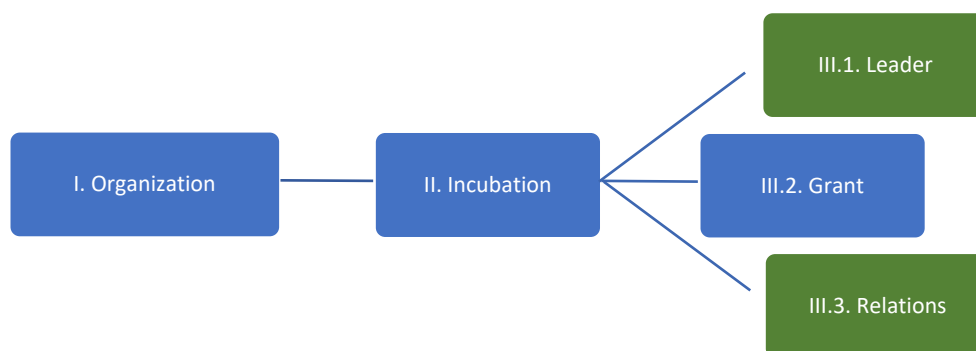


Fig. 2. Stages of actions taken by the municipality of Kamienna Góra to develop short food supply chains

Source: own elaboration.

Stage I involved organizing the space for the development of the local food market. It included the following elements.

1. Conducting an analysis of the potential of the selected region through surveys and reviews of databases such as the State Sanitary Inspection, Veterinary Inspection, Agricultural Advisory Center (e-marketplace), ARiMR, municipal offices, etc.

2. Gathering potential participants for the local agricultural market. This involved individual meetings with agricultural producers to present opportunities for collaboration with other local producers to establish a local agricultural market.
3. Organizing a series of meetings aimed at familiarizing and integrating producers, during which various forms of joint activities were proposed.
4. Implementing the solution prepared for the local agricultural market (in the case of the municipality of Kamienna Góra – the zziemi.pl platform).
5. Assisting in the establishment of an association that owns and operates the sales platform.

Stage II was the incubation process, estimated at 2-3 years. It included the following steps.

1. Supporting producers in the process of joint sales (including personal support – platform management, organization of deliveries, shopping lists, complaints; substantive support – assistance in legalizing production (e.g., registration with relevant supervisory authorities); and marketing support – advertising through Kamienna Góra municipality's information channels, engaging producers in local events (harvest festivals, fairs, etc.), purchasing gift baskets from producers by local governments and presenting them to visitors of the region.
2. Assisting in the ongoing operation of the association and preparing resolutions and financial reports.
3. Organizing integrative meetings for producers.
4. Securing funding to support production processes.

It was assumed that after the incubation period, the local agricultural market should become self-sufficient – the involvement of the municipality or another public institution should no longer be necessary. In the case of Kamienna Góra, there was an attempt to cease organizational support from the Business Incubator (in 2022), but this led to a halt in activities by producers regarding joint sales.

It can therefore be concluded that the attempt to end the incubation phase and transition to the phase of self-sustaining the system ended in failure.

The reasons for the failure are attributed to the simultaneous lack of two of the three elements: (III.1) a strong leader, (III.2) further financial grants, and (III.3) the existence of strong relations between the members of the operational group.

III.1. The first element is the existence of a strong leader – a person (farmer, company, non-profit organization) who feels the need to collaborate with local agricultural producers for joint sales. The leader can be either a producer or someone who is not a producer (e.g., consumer cooperatives usually organized by social activists or NGOs). Such action can be motivated by various factors:

- social – the desire to support agricultural producers and help residents of the same region;
- economic – the desire to achieve material benefits – both for food producers and non-food producers (K&DŻ allows for the existence of intermediary functions);
- image (marketing) – for example, if a producer wants to improve the image of their brand – products from K&DŻ are associated with high-quality products (Acella et al., 2024).

Additionally, joint sales increase the customer base through joint marketing and mutual recommendations.

III.2. The second important element for the sustainability of the initiative is the grant (usually funded by the municipality or another public sector institution). Binding producers to the project's duration require maintaining the group for a specified period. This is usually an artificial (forced) model of creating short food supply chains. Evidence of this is the decreasing number of operational groups EPI that received grants for establishing short food supply chains. Out of 213, 202 currently operate (Krajowa Sieć Obszarów Wiejskich, n.d.), which is an example of a project-based approach. As a result, the functioning of such initiatives is dependent on guaranteed financial resources (e.g., EU funds) and ends with the conclusion of funding or project implementation (Raftowicz-

-Filipkiewicz et al., 2016), contributing to a project-based effect (i.e., excessive focus on creating and implementing projects funded by public institutions).

III.3. The third determinant of the sustainability of the initiative for developing local agricultural markets is positive relations among market participants. A positive example of strong relations, which act as a driving force for the local agricultural market, is the 'Spizarnia – Local Food' initiative from Częstochowa (spizarnia.czyst.pl), operating as a local agricultural market created by a group of friends. All members of the group are small producers with a shared passion for healthy food. Initial activities related to organizing joint sales were carried out without grants or any external support. The group operates on the basis of mutual trust, even though sales often do not result in profits. For the producers, the factor uniting the group is the internal relationships within the group.

The existence of the first and third elements is a natural factor guaranteeing the success of maintaining local agricultural markets. When such initiatives arise organically, they have a high chance of success. In the case of the Kamienna Góra initiative, despite the passage of time and attempts to become self-sufficient, a leader did not emerge among the producers to take over the organizational functions, and strong social bonds that would guarantee the uninterrupted operation of the group aimed at joint sales were not established. The single unifying factor, which was the grants (blue in Figure 2), proved insufficient for achieving lasting success.

6. Conclusions

Based on the research, it can be concluded that the initiative implemented by the municipality of Kamienna Góra in developing short food supply chains represents an innovation at both the organizational and product levels. This is the first initiative of this kind in Poland, where a local government unit is actively involved in initiating and supporting the local agricultural market. This project showcases a novel approach to supporting local producers, and its success could serve as a model for other regions in the country, provided it is properly adapted to local conditions and societal needs.

The analysis of the municipality's actions shows that the effectiveness of supporting short food supply chains depends on the engagement of local authorities, who play a crucial role as market leaders and organizers. The implementation of innovative solutions, such as the zziemi.pl platform, allows for effective management of local product sales and contributes to the development of a sustainable food supply system.

However, research findings indicate that for the enduring success of such initiatives, both internal and external support, as well as the presence of strong leaders and positive social relationships, are necessary. Attempts to end organizational support from the municipality demonstrate that top-down initiatives may struggle with self-sufficiency, highlighting the importance of continued support from local government units.

The research suggests that similar initiatives can be successfully replicated in other regions, provided they are appropriately adapted to local conditions and social needs.

There is a need to expand research to other municipalities in Poland that have implemented similar innovative models for supporting short food supply chains. Comparative analyses could help identify success factors and barriers faced by different local governments, leading to a better understanding of the conditions that facilitate the effective implementation of such models. Such studies could also contribute to the development of public policy recommendations, supporting the development of local food markets in a more coherent and sustainable manner at the national level. Consequently, the gathered knowledge could be used to design support programs for municipalities across the country, thereby contributing to the strengthening of local economies and improving residents' quality of life.

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Innowacyjny model wspierania krótkich łańcuchów dostaw żywności przez jednostkę samorządu terytorialnego na przykładzie Gminy Kamienna Góra

Streszczenie

Cel: Zasadniczym celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie innowacyjnego modelu wspierania krótkich łańcuchów dostaw żywności oraz próba oceny skuteczności działań podejmowanych przez lokalne władze na rzecz rozwoju rynku lokalnego na przykładzie gminy Kamienna Góra.

Metodologia: Artykuł bazuje na krytycznej analizie literatury przedmiotu oraz badaniach własnych w oparciu o wywiady pogłębione w zastępcą wójta oraz dyrektorem Inkubatora Przedsiębiorczości Gminy Kamienna Góra, analizę dokumentów strategicznych gminy oraz własne obserwacje.

Wyniki: Wyniki badań wykazują, że wdrożenie innowacyjnego modelu wspierania krótkich łańcuchów dostaw żywności przyczyniło się do rozwoju lokalnego rynku rolnego, jednakże dalsze funkcjonowanie tego systemu wymaga stałego wsparcia ze strony samorządu terytorialnego.

Implikacje i rekomendacje: Wnioski z badań mogą przyczynić się do opracowania rekomendacji dla polityki publicznej, która wspierałaby rozwój lokalnych rynków żywności w sposób bardziej spójny i zrównoważony na poziomie krajowym.

Oryginalność/wartość: Badanie tego tematu jest uzasadnione rosnącą potrzebą wspierania lokalnych rynków żywności jako narzędzia zrównoważonego rozwoju obszarów wiejskich.

Słowa kluczowe: krótkie łańcuchy dostaw żywności, samorząd terytorialny, innowacyjny model, Kamienna Góra
