

Can small farms and small food businesses in Northern Europe contribute to sustainable food security?

There is widespread acknowledgement and appreciation in Northern Europe of the important role that small farms play in supporting rural livelihoods, conserving biodiversity, and maintaining traditional landscapes, rural traditions and cultural heritage. The EU-funded SALSA project set out to examine another potentially important role of small farms – their contribution to food security.

NORTHERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE



Ile-et-Vilaine (FRANCE) - Perth and Kinross, and Stirling; Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, Arran and Cumbrae, Argyll and Bute (UNITED KINGDOM) - Hedmark (NORWAY)

211,000 SMALL FARMS



18% out of total farms
(Eurostat, 2016)



Occupy ca. 56.4% of total area
in these 4 regions (Eurostat, 2017)



Occupy ca. 0.10% of the Utilised
Agricultural Area (UAA) in these
4 regions (Eurostat, 2017)

KEY POLICY MESSAGES

Small farms in the regions of Northern Europe studied by the SALSA project only contribute to a limited extent to regional food availability as they produce only a small portion of the total food production in the region, but they play an essential role in keeping rural areas alive. They are also a vehicle for a lifestyle where values such as simple life, clean and safe food, animal welfare, environmental protection and closeness to nature are predominant.

In order to continue providing these benefits small farmers in Northern Europe need:

- Support with the labelling and marketing of regional produce;
- Mechanisms to get more involved with community development;
- Targeted financial support in less favoured areas;
- A system of redistributive payments (where relevant);
- A broad range of cooperation mechanisms;
- More arrangements and facilities to ensure access to land, and;
- Well-functioning agricultural knowledge and innovation systems that address the specific needs of small farms.



Source: EU - adapted by SALSA

Small farms in Northern Europe are found alongside some of the largest - and in some cases, most industrialised - farms in the whole of Europe.

The SALSA project conducted research in **four regions** (at the so-called NUTS3 level) of three countries in Northern Europe – UK, France and Norway. As a proportion of the total number of agricultural holdings, small farms range from 10% in Norway and 19% in Northern France to 45% in the west of Scotland.

In the regions of Hedmark (NO), Ile-et-Vilaine (FR), East and West Scotland (UK) that were studied by SALSA, small farms only **contribute to a limited extent to regional food availability** since they produce only a small portion of the total food produced in the region.

Nevertheless, they do still play an important role in these regional food systems regarding those products (e.g. from horticulture) of which a large proportion **grown in the region is also consumed in the region**. In the case of these specific products, small farms tend to **connect directly with consumers** and provide a range of “alternative pathways” for local consumers to buy more locally-produced food.

SALSA typology of small farms



1. Part-time farms

Farming appears to be a secondary activity that supplements other sources of income, by generally young farmers, who started farming as their own option; a high proportion of production stays in the household



2. Conventional strugglers

Second poorest cluster, and oldest; farming is rooted in tradition; agriculture accounts for a high proportion of income; high household self-consumption



3. Conventional entrepreneurs

Relatively wealthy, relatively old and established in farming; rely on family labour; access markets through cooperatives



4. Business specialised

Wealthiest group, relatively old and established in farming; extensive use of hired labour; access to markets through cooperatives, invest in certification



5. Business multifunctional

Wealthy, relatively young and new to farming; extensive use of hired labour; diverse portfolio of buyers

 = Most representative types in Northern European regions analysed by SALSA

Small farms in Northern Europe are also commonly **linked to lifestyle choices** where values such as simple life, clean and safe food, animal welfare, environmental protection and closeness to nature are important. This is probably why many small farms have **diversified into small businesses** focused on agro-tourism or educational activities – a trend observed especially in the regions studied by SALSA in Norway and Scotland, which benefit from a busy flow of tourists during the summer growing season.

Other key characteristics of the small farm sector in Northern Europe are:

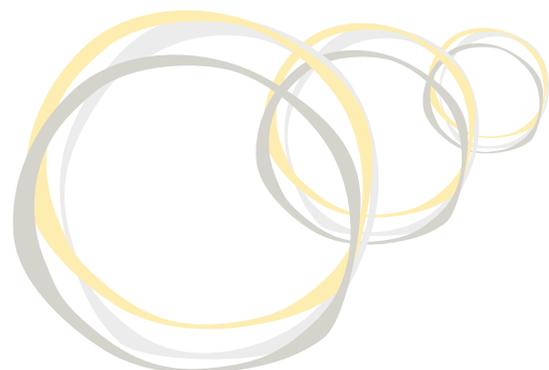
- An interest in business models for small farming based on innovative economic strategies;
- high added-value products (e.g. the increasing prevalence of niche markets for speciality products from small farms was observed in Ile-et-Vilaine, France), and;
- the development of various new marketing channels linked to the concept of short food supply chains.

WHO ARE SMALL FARMERS IN NORTHERN EUROPE?



According to the typology of small farms developed by the SALSA project, the most common types of small farm found in the countries of Northern Europe studied by SALSA are '**Business specialised**', '**Business multifunctional**' and '**Part-time farms**' (see the graphic for more explanation).

One specific characteristic of the small farms found in Northern Europe is their **high level of involvement** in "alternative" approaches to environmental management, supply chain development, community engagement and business organisation.





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WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF SMALL FARMS IN NORTHERN EUROPE?

The results of the analysis conducted on the four regions studied by SALSA in Northern Europe led to the consistent identification of certain specific needs in each country.

Scotland (UK)

Two priority policy themes were identified in the transitional (post-Brexit) context of Scotland, namely:

Access to Land – a specific need was identified for land reform on the West coast of Scotland to enable greater access to affordable land for small-holdings to expand in size.

Market Integration – a broad range of needs related to the development and supply of local markets for locally produced food, including the branding of more local food products of defined local provenance. Increased cooperation/partnership between farmers, small food businesses and other value chain actors is

needed with much potential for various forms of start-up and social innovation to play a role in building stronger market linkages and a durable customer base for small-scale producers and processors.

Northern France

Similar needs were identified in Northern France:

Access to Land - with specific emphasis upon access to land for new entrants (especially young people) interested in more innovative, collaborative and diversified approaches to small-scale food production. There is a particular need for greater access to land in the peri-urban areas that are closest to the largest concentrations of consumers interested in local food.

Collaboration - local, small-scale, collaborative actions are needed to empower and enable small farmers in many aspects of their day-to-day transactions ranging from cooperative marketing to sharing farm machinery.



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Norway

For Norway, the context was slightly different and three key needs were identified:

Connectivity and Infrastructure - where the priority need was to increase investments in connectivity, infrastructure (better roads/reducing travel time) and avoiding centralizing public services in order to maintain rural areas alive.

Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) - where stakeholders felt that measures should be coupled with capital or investment programs to allow small farms to acquire new technologies.

Natural Resources and Climate - the priority intervention identified was increasing investments in climate-smart technologies.

Access to land seems to be a common and severe issue across both Scottish and North France regions, and a major barrier preventing farmers to contribute more to regional food availability. In both Scottish and Norwegian regions the issue of the **lack of capital** of small farms was raised under different priority policy themes (Market Integration and AKIS), which disadvantages them either in relation to the latest technological interventions available to large farms (Norway), or simply for assuring their own processing through abattoirs (Scotland). For the rest, small farms in SALSA's Northern European regions face **similar sectorial concerns as in the rest of Europe**.



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HOW CAN POLICY ENABLE SMALL FARMS IN NORTHERN EUROPE?

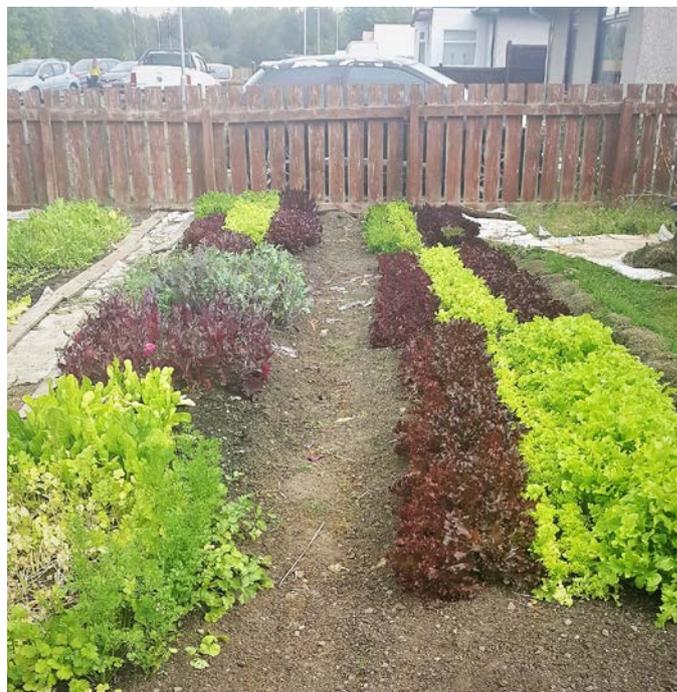
Consultation with stakeholders in the Northern European regions studied by SALSA identified some **common recommendations** for supporting small farms in the contrasting policy domains governing each of the three countries and regional contexts. These recommendations refer to **generic types of measures**, leaving it to decision makers to consider how their specific policy context and available policy tools can accommodate these measures.

Small farmer and regional produce labelling and visibility

Participants felt that produce from small farms entering the local food chain through short supply chain type measures, or similar, should benefit from appropriate labelling, validating and promoting their contribution to regional food security for key products.

Mechanisms for small farmer involvement in community development

In recognition of the **mutual dependency** between small-scale farms (in the retention of community facilities schools, shops and recreational facilities) and the community (for purchasing produce and supporting various markets), small farmers should be **actively encouraged and supported** as both the initiators and beneficiaries of Community-led Local Development (CLLD), LEADER and Smart Village type initiatives in rural areas. Possible projects under such initiatives could include opportunities to integrate new entrants, train them in agricultural techniques and therefore increase the stability of regional food systems.



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Less Favoured Areas (LFAs)

Financial support and other mechanisms to support small farms from Less Favoured Areas should be continued in Northern Europe as many small farmers are **located in marginal areas with limited opportunities for increased productivity and profitability.**

Climate change

Small farms are highly vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change and need targeted support via **farm advice providers** and **appropriate knowledge exchange activities** to encourage adaptation. Climate change adaptation frameworks should also consider financing mechanisms to support the transition of small farms towards more sustainable technologies and production systems.

It is also important not to overlook the role that small farms can play in **climate change mitigation** by encouraging local food consumption, the diversification of production, educating consumers and better organising local food chains. National/ regional climate change mitigation strategies should take account of this contribution and **target small farms accordingly.**

Redistributive payments

Stakeholders in the Northern European regions studied by SALSA support the idea of **redistributing area-based support payments** from larger farms towards smaller farms in order to redress current discrepancies and recognize their contribution to delivering a range of public goods, including food security.

Cooperation

Policy makers should seek to develop a **broad range of cooperation measures** to enable cross-sectorial collaboration, communication and improving support for cooperation in the marketing and distribution of produce from small farms. This does **not need to be limited to food security alone**, collaboration with small farms can also involve other policy sectors such as education and social welfare. Where relevant policy measures exist this type of collaboration can be advanced via CLLD/LEADER and Smart Village type initiatives.

Access to land

The lack of access to land was deemed to be one of the **biggest barriers** to small scale food production across all four regions studied by the SALSA project in Northern Europe.

Land Reform policy in Scotland¹ is designed to improve Scotland's system of land ownership so that land may "contribute to a fair and just society while balancing public and private interests" and support more people productively using land. This is a significant step, and has enabled the development of community owned land in remote regions. It is important to implement it carefully, as it can have unintended consequences for small-scale farms, such as reducing land available for tenancy or rental.

In other regions it was believed that opportunities and support for individuals to purchase/rent small areas of farmland for small-scale production should be implemented. Numerous good examples exist for encouraging new entrants into small-scale farming, including the **networking of younger and older farmers** in areas where generational renewal is most needed.



1 <https://www.gov.scot/policies/land-reform/>

AKIS

For small farms to succeed using innovative marketing methods, the underlying support needs to exist. This refers not just to subsidies, but to marketing initiatives, advice, training and innovation support. A **well-functioning farm advisory system** at local level is therefore essential.



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GOOD PRACTICES

CROFTING

In Scotland the historical 'crofting' system has helped preserve small farming systems, particularly on the West coast. Crofts are common working communities or 'townships' typically consisting of small individually-owned plots of marginal land which share poor quality hill ground used for grazing.

Crofts enjoy certain rights under the Crofter Scotland Act not given to other small farms in Scotland. While current Scottish Crofting legislation should be updated to allow for more flexibility, this particular regulatory practice was seen by participants from other Northern European regions to be a potential good practice that could help small farms protect their farming systems and develop a solution for one of their most pressing issues, namely access to land.



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