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Familjen Kamprads stiftelse  
The Kamprad Family Foundation for Entrepreneurship, Research & Charity

# Enhancing Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas through Local Food Systems

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# Table of contents

Abstract .....	v
Svensk sammanfattning .....	vi
Preface .....	i
Background .....	ii
Project Aim .....	iii
Project process and course of action .....	v
Project findings and output .....	ix
Academic output .....	ix
Conference presentations .....	ix
Scientific publications .....	x
New courses and educational contributions .....	xii
Career development .....	xiii
Applied output .....	xiii
Project webpage .....	xiv
Newsletters .....	xiv
Workshops .....	xv
Videos .....	xvi
Digitalization and digital app prototype .....	xvi
Input on policy and strategy .....	xvii
The UNESCO Creative Cities Network .....	xvii
Datasets for future publications and learning .....	xvii
New project applications .....	xvii
Results and findings .....	xix
Project ethics report .....	xxii
References .....	xxiii
Publication abstracts .....	xxiv

## **Abstract**

In the global pursuit of more sustainable production systems, increasing attention is being directed toward food production and consumption. A frequently emphasized dimension in the transition toward a more sustainable food system is the development of local entrepreneurship within this sector.

The project *Enhancing Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas through Local Food Systems* has explored how entrepreneurial conditions can be developed and contribute to greater sustainability within the food sector. Through quantitative and qualitative studies of entrepreneurs, policymakers, and other enablers, the project's aim has been to highlight and analyze the strengths, opportunities, weak-nesses, and challenges of local food systems.

The project's results point to significant opportunities for improving entrepreneurial conditions through new digital solutions, public procurement processes, private institutional consumption as well as modified entrepreneurship oriented policies within the sector.

## Svensk sammanfattning

I den globala strävan efter mer hållbara produktionssystem vänds blickarna allt oftare mot livsmedelsproduktion- och konsumtion. En ofta framhållen dimension mot ett mer hållbart livsmedelssystem är utvecklingen av lokalt entreprenörskap inom denna sektor. Projektet *Enhancing Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas through Local Food Systems* har undersökt hur de entreprenöriella förutsättningarna kan utvecklas och bidra till en större hållbarhet inom livsmedelssektorn.

Genom kvantitativa och kvalitativa studier av entreprenörer, beslutsfattare och andra möjliggörare har projektets målsättning varit att belysa och analysera lokala livsmedelssystemens styrkor, möjligheter, svagheter och utmaningar. Projektets resultat visar på stora möjligheter kring de entreprenöriella förutsättningarna genom nya digitala lösningar, offentliga upphandlingsprocesser, privat institutionell konsumtion, liksom modifierade ansatser till entreprenörskap inom sektorns riktlinjer och strategier.

## Preface

This report is a summary of the project *Enhancing Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas through Local Food Systems*, which started on September 1, 2022 and ended on August 31, 2025. The project has been funded by the Kamprad Family Foundation and the main project owner has been Mid Sweden University through the European Tourism Research Institute (ETOUR).

## Background

Despite encouraging trends around local food systems (LFS) in terms of the popularity, health effects and regional employment numbers, local food producers continue to experience significant adjustment problems when pursuing new business opportunities. As a result, improving the conditions for the development of local food production is crucial to enhancing entrepreneurship in rural and peripheral areas. This was the principal background reason for starting this research project, and it has guided the construction of themes and work packages to address during the project duration. Another founding setting of the activities through this venture has been the recognition that LFSs provide benefits that go far beyond the economic value of food production and processing, which, in turn, supports the practice of entrepreneurship in rural and peripheral areas.

In Sweden, as in other countries, the food sector is a core business sector for the entire economy. It mostly consists of smaller businesses, with around 40% of its employees working in micro businesses. A recent international comparison revealed that the Swedish food sector trails other countries in terms of innovation, which indicates a growing need for new research on small businesses and entrepreneurship in the sector. Even if major companies are generally more effective in economic terms, small companies are important because they help to diversify the market while providing important opportunities that underpin LFS in rural areas.

## Project aim

It is difficult to overstate the significance of Local Food Systems (LFSs) in creating innovative entrepreneurial environments which, at the same time, are vitally important for the sustainable development of rural regions (Gil et al. 2019). Despite their relatively low proportion of total agricultural output, LFS are growing in popularity worldwide; e.g. in the United States, LFS have shown nearly three-digit growth rates (Low et al. 2015). In addition, 78% of American local farmers and food producers reported their intention to maintain or expand their operations, thereby bypassing consolidated wholesale distribution, resulting in up to 7-times higher net revenues (O'Hara 2011).

A growing body of research demonstrates that LFSs directly contribute to regional employment, more diverse local food production, healthier eating habits as well as enhanced food security and sovereignty (Andree et al. 2014).

Moreover, compared to industrial food systems, LFSs help to reduce the environmental footprint of agricultural activities as well as to provide important connections between rural periphery and urban-centered areas (Van der Gaast et al. 2021). Notably, micro- and small-sized farming along with local food production and distribution is, in every sense, an entrepreneurial activity (Enthoven & Van den Broeck 2021). Despite these encouraging trends, local food producers experience significant adjustment problems when pursuing new business opportunities. As a result, improving the conditions for the development of local food production is crucial to enhancing entrepreneurship in rural and peripheral areas (Kwil et al. 2020). In addition, this proposed project also recognizes that LFSs provide benefits that go far beyond the economic value of food production and processing, which, in turn, supports the practice of entrepreneurship in rural and peripheral areas (Skoglund & Sjölander-Lindqvist 2020). Further on, a recent Swedish governmental report concluded that small food businesses need to improve their market capacity (Swedish Government Official Reports 2015:15).

Based on this background, the purpose of this project is to enhance scholarly as well as applied knowledge on entrepreneurship in rural areas through LFSs (Goldenberg & Meter 2019).

This project aim was achieved through five interrelated work packages:

- *Entrepreneurship and Swedish Local Food Systems.* Local food systems' strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats have been assessed via a survey and during workshop discussions. Moreover, entrepreneurs' goals, like ecological ethics and personal interests to maintain traditions, heritage and community engagement have been studied. Finally, collaborative network configurations, like strong cohesion and brokerage, which favor the birth and diffusion of creative mind-sets and idea generation have been studied and highlighted.
- *Digitalization and Swedish Local Food Systems.* After assessing the online presence of the local food system in Region of Jämtland, digital solutions to enhance the marketing effectiveness of locally produced food have been identified and analyzed. Moreover, digital application prototypes have been constructed attempting to connect consumers and local food producers.
- *The Potential of Institutional Markets for Swedish Local Food Systems.* Because of complex procurement processes, most schools and other Swedish institutions procure their food from industrial or non-local sources. Here, analysis of the economic, legal as well as policy barriers have been discussed and analyzed in order to find solutions where opportunities and barriers for selected schools to source their food from local food systems are evaluated. An in depth look at the opportunities for private schools and institutions to serve local food has also been undertaken in parallel.
- *Policy-Entrepreneurial Encounters for Transformation.* This work package explored how policies, public funding, laws and public institutions hamper or unleash the potential of local entrepreneurship to contribute to integrated, sustainable regional development through investments in local food systems. Through a study on the ways Swedish policies and strategies address entrepreneurship and food production, as well as interviews and

surveys on its effects, workshops and publications have highlighted this topic and informed key stake holders.

- *Collaborating for Rural Futures*. Results of the work packages were synthesized and knowledge exchange have continuously been undertaken by engaging entrepreneurs, civil organizations, and policymakers to support cohesion, to harness development potentials, and to cope with trade-offs in rural contexts. Workshops and site visits have thus been organized to disseminate results and to stimulate dialogue. Bottlenecks, contradictions, opportunities, and limitations in the facilitation of the entrepreneurial role in contributing to rural development have been highlighted during these discussions and dialogues.

## Project process and course of action

This project was initiated as a cooperation between Mid Sweden University and the University of Gothenburg, as well as collaborators from the University of Bocconi in Milano and Ravensburg-Weingarten University. These collaborators constituted an interdisciplinary group of researchers, working with applied institutes and actors in order to ensure not only the scientific but also the applied value of the project findings and output.

The organizing of the project was synchronized around the five work packages and included an overview of food policy documents and strategies in Sweden, a survey sent to the small scale food producers in the region of Jämtland, interviews have been undertaken with food producers and policy makers across Jämtland and Sweden. Empirical data has also been gathered through field studies and during the workshops held together with various actors from the sector. This data and empirical input have been shared across the work packages and collaborators within the project.

The project team consisted of the following group:

*Wilhelm Skoglund* ([wilhelm.skoglund@miun.se](mailto:wilhelm.skoglund@miun.se)) is associate professor at the Mid Sweden University and has a background in working with entrepreneurship and place development, often with a particular focus on small scale food entrepreneurship and gastronomy.

*Beate Stålsett* ([beate.stalsett@miun.se](mailto:beate.stalsett@miun.se)) is a PhD-student at the Mid Sweden University. Her research focuses on entrepreneurship and innovation in policy and practice.

*Emma Björner* ([emma.bjorner@gu.se](mailto:emma.bjorner@gu.se)) is a researcher at the University of Gothenburg and has a background in working with place branding, place development and entrepreneurship, often with a focus on sustainability, inclusion, co-creation, and food.

*Daniel Laven* ([daniel.laven@miun.se](mailto:daniel.laven@miun.se)) is associate professor in human geography and an associate of ETOUR, the European Tourism Research Institute. His research is centered around topics including management of landscapes and protected areas; cultural and creative sectors; heritage and heritage tourism; heritage, peacebuilding and contested space; and evaluation theory and methods.

*Eva Lindahl-Toftegaard* ([eva.lindahl-toftegaard@miun.se](mailto:eva.lindahl-toftegaard@miun.se)) is a legal expert on Public Procurement. She has been engaged in Public Procurement since 1995, written two books and numerous articles on the subject and currently holds the position as lecturer in law at MIUN.

*Kai Kronenberg* ([kai.kronenberg@miun.se](mailto:kai.kronenberg@miun.se)), PhD, is a senior lecturer at the department for economics, geography, law and tourism at Mid-Sweden University and has a background in business administration and tourism economics. He is also affiliated with the European Tourism Research Center (ETOUR) in Östersund, Sweden. His research focuses on regional development, input-output methodologies, tourism workforce, and the socio-economic impacts of tourism and events.

*Annelie Sjölander Lindqvist* ([annelie.sjolander-lindqvist@gu.se](mailto:annelie.sjolander-lindqvist@gu.se)) is associate professor in social anthropology and senior lecturer in human ecology, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg. Her research in the food research field of food focuses on gastronomy, small-scale food entrepreneurship and food policy. *Towe Johnson* ([towe.johnson@torsta.se](mailto:towe.johnson@torsta.se)) has a Master of Food Science from Grythyttan, has been employed as a project assistant at Mid Sweden University and currently works at Torsta center for agriculture and forestry.

*Matthias Fuchs* ([matthias.fuchs@unibz.it](mailto:matthias.fuchs@unibz.it)) is full professor at Free University of Bolzano-Bozen, Italy since July 2024. Before this date he was professor for tourism management at Mid-Sweden University. His disciplinary background is in business administration. His research interests are in business intelligence in tourism, socio-economic impact and regional circular economy in tourism. Matthias is also the editor-in-chief of the Journal of Information Technology & Tourism.

*Wolfram Höpken* ([wolfram.hoepken@rwu.de](mailto:wolfram.hoepken@rwu.de)) is professor for Business Informatics and eBusiness at the University of Applied Sciences Ravensburg-Weingarten and director of the Institute for Digital Transformation. His main research fields are artificial intelligence, data science and big data analytics, semantic web as well as ICT systems in Tourism.

*Rodolfo Baggio* ([rodolfo.baggio@unibocconi.it](mailto:rodolfo.baggio@unibocconi.it)) has a background in physics and information technology. He has worked professionally in the IT field for over twenty years, specialising in information systems design and management training, and has held positions at several companies in Italy and abroad. He then worked with university teaching and research in Italy and overseas. His research focuses on complex tourism systems and networks, and their relationship with information technology.

## **Project findings and output**

Results from this project has been aimed towards informing on institutional and entrepreneurial practices that encourage synergies between different global agendas, regional/national strategies and private sector actions. Project findings also aims at serving as the basis for engaging regional LFS entrepreneurs and actors in action-oriented dialogue. Also, the project has attempted to share findings with policy actors and entrepreneurs throughout Sweden as well as internationally. Summing up this background, this project has attempted to have both an applied as well as a more traditionally scientific approach to its activities and reporting.

The empirical data from the survey, interviews and field studies was initially presented in workshops in order to verify findings and add new data, at the same time as this informed applied actors for them to use in their organizations and activities. The various applied output channels have included workshops, newsletters, videos, input to regional policies and strategies, digital application prototypes, popular publications, and other media presence.

## **Academic output**

### **Conference presentations**

During this project, two sessions at international conferences were organized. One took place at the Regional Studies Associations (RSA) annual conference in Florence 2024, where four of the project participants presented papers on dynamic procurement systems, digital platforms for food producers, and food policy for entrepreneurship under the project session "*Exploring the routes to creative local food system development in rural regions*".



Image: Daniel Laven, Emma Björner, Annelie Sjölander-Lindqvist and Wilhelm Skoglund at the annual RSA.

In 2023, the project participated with four of its partners in the Stockholm Gastronomy Conference with presentations on food education, food and place development, as well as the connection between food producers and restaurants.

Other conference participation included the project doctoral student Beate Stålsetts presentation of policy narratives and entrepreneurship during the Spain Gastronomy Conference in Madrid in May 2025.

## Scientific publications

The conferences meant possibilities to present and get feedback on the scientific manuscripts originating from the project. These papers have all been circled around local food systems, entrepreneurship and rural development. Below is a list of the papers produced within the frames of the project. Papers included are either published or in publication process.

- Björner, E., Fuchs, M. & Höpken, W. (In preparation) *Digital platforms and online narratives in local food systems: A meta-data analysis and critical assessment from Sweden. Evaluating the potential of institutional markets for Swedish local food systems.*
- Björner, E., Höpken, W., Fuchs, M., Lock, F., Essert, N., & Kastler, E. *Digital Presence of Local Food Producers in Rural Sweden: Determinants, Patterns, and Strategic Implications.* To be submitted to *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development.*
- Björner, E. & Sjölander Lindqvist, A. (In process). *Between Policy and Practice: Challenges and Opportunities for Food Entrepreneurs.* To be submitted to *Journal of Business Research.*
- Gregorio; D., Nicolosi, A., Skoglund, W., Laven, D., Selander; J., Löfstrand, P., Laganà, V.\* and Marcianò, C. *Craft beer consumption preferences in Sweden and Italy. A segmentation of consumers using the cluster analysis method.* To be submitted to *Journal of Wine Business research.*
- Heinzelmann, D., Hoffmann, A., Kähling, M., Kilian, L., Müller; L., and Direzinci, M. (2025) *Reconnecting Consumers with Producers: A Mobile App to Promote Ethical Consumption and Local Producer Visibility.* Student thesis. Hochschule Ravensburg-Weingarten University of Applied Sciences.
- Johnson, T. & Skoglund, W. (In preparation) *Lokalt på menyn i privata skolor.* ETOUR, Mittuniversitetet.
- Kjellberg, M., Skoglund, W., & Haller, H. (2024). *Decreasing the carbon footprint of food through public procurement—A case study from the municipality of Härnösand.* *Frontiers in Nutrition*, 11, 1330892.
- Lock, F., Essert, N., Kastler, E. (2025) *Analysis of online presence of local food producers.* Student thesis. Hochschule Ravensburg-Weingarten University of Applied Sciences.
- Rytkönen, P. I., Skoglund, W., Oghazi, P., & Laven, D. (2024). *Exploring the dynamics of innovation: patterns of growth and contraction in the local food industry.* *British Food Journal*, 126(13), 1-17.
- Schützer, B., Björner, E. & Sjölander-Lindqvist, A. (2025). *Interaction, communication, and trust: keys to connecting farmers and restaurants in southwest Sweden.* *Agric Hum Values.*

- Sherwood-Walter, M. (2024). *Cultivating Resilient Local Food Systems: Identifying opportunities and strategies for sustainable public procurement*. Master thesis. Uppsala Universitet.
- Sjölander Lindqvist, A & Skoglund, W. (2024). *Hantverksöl och mikrobryggerier*. Poddavsnitt. Matarvspodden. Göteborgs universitets publikationer.
- Sjölander Lindqvist, A & Skoglund, W. *Hantverksölets sociala terroir*. I *Rätt på rätt: om det svenska matarvet*, red Persson, M & Högström Berntson, J. Carlssons bokförlag, Göteborg. (In press)
- Skoglund, W., Stålsett, B., Sherwood Walter, M. Laven, D. Björner, E. Sjölander Lindqvist, A. Fuchs, M. Baggio, R. & Höpken, W. *Evaluating the potential of institutional markets for Swedish local food systems*. (In preparation)
- Stålsett, B., Kronenberg, K., Johnson, T. and Fuchs, M. (2025) *Challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurship in local food systems*. Survey report. Mid Sweden University. ETOUR.
- Stålsett, B. *Policy narratives of sustainable entrepreneurship - rethinking the entrepreneurial hero for a post-growth economy*. (In preparation)
- Stålsett, B. *Adaptation and resistance to neoliberalism in narratives of craft entrepreneurship – refining the ‘contours of entrepreneurial subjectivity’*. (In preparation).

In the end of this report, abstracts from each publication are attached as well as links to full papers.

## **New courses and educational contributions**

Apart from publications, the projects have also produced educational input. Through the intense cooperation with the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, Mid Sweden University offered courses together with the University of Parma under the headline Food City Design.

For more background on this educational cooperation with a UNESCO connection, see <https://www.miun.se/Forskning/forskningsprojekt/pagaende-forskningsprojekt/enhancing-entrepreneurship-in-rural-areas-through-local-food-systems/aktuellt-inom-projektet/presentation-av-forskning-vid-stockholm-gastronomy-conference-2023/>.

The project has also produced a course syllabus in procurement. The course *“Public procurement and Local Food Systems”* belongs to the discipline of law.

## **Career development**

During the time project, a number of colleagues were initially employed, others have been cooperating closely, and some recruited throughout the progress of the project. Outside the initial project members, the project cooperated closely with Associate Professor Paulina Rytönen from the University of Södertörn, and the master student Madison Sherwood-Walter. The project has also been able to employ Beate Stålsett as a licentiate student, who will now proceed to a doctoral student position under Mid Sweden University. The project also employed Towe Johnson as a project assistant, she after the project became employed by the regional green center Torsta outside of Östersund where she among other assignments works with and contributes to Östersunds membership in the UNESCO Creative City Network.

## **Applied output**

In parallel to the scientific production in the project work, the members have continuously produced applied output attempting to reach out to politicians, policy makers, food entrepreneurs, and other actors involved or interested in gastronomy and local food systems. This output has included workshops, video productions, newsletters, media presence, popular publications, digital app prototype construction, policy and strategy input, field studies and visits, and also cooperation with The UNESCO Creative Cities Network, all of which has been described on the project home page.



Image: A study visit at a dairy in Jämtland.

## Project webpage

The project web page has been continuously updated with the project activities and publications and is also the platform to communicate with interested outside actors. So far, the project home page has been visited up to around 1000 times, with many of the visitors finding the home page via the newsletters sent out through the project. Find the project webpage here:

<https://www.miun.se/Forskning/forskningsprojekt/avslutade-forskningsprojekt/enhancing-entrepreneurship-in-rural-areas-through-local-food-systems/>

## Newsletters

Throughout the project, the team has with the help of Mid Sweden University's communication staff delivered four newsletters that have been sent out to politicians, policy makers, academic colleagues as well as food entrepreneurs. The newsletters can be found at this address:

<https://www.miun.se/Forskning/forskningsprojekt/avslutade-forskningsprojekt/enhancing-entrepreneurship-in-rural-areas-through-local-food-systems/nyhetsbrev/>

## Workshops

Along with using existing mechanisms for knowledge transfer, the project team has arranged four workshops during the project, three of them has taken place at Mid Sweden University in Östersund and one in Falkenberg at the municipality center. These workshops have been a way to ensure an interflow of ideas between the concerned actors and that the research activities and findings of the consortium enjoy maximum visibility, versatility, and engagement by relevant audiences. The themes of the workshops have included entrepreneurial perspectives on policy, public procurement, digital visibility, and a presentation of the survey of food producers in Jämtland. See for example:

<https://www.miun.se/Forskning/forskningsprojekt/pagaende-forskningsprojekt/enhancing-entrepreneurship-in-rural-areas-through-local-food-systems/aktuellt-inom-projektet/workshop-om-lokal-mat-skolmaltider-och-digital-synlighet/>



Image: Workshop at the Mid Sweden University, March 20, 2024.

## Videos

Our Mid Sweden University media communication team has also enabled the project to record video interviews with not only project actors, but also with entrepreneurs around the region of Jämtland, as well as municipality representatives and LRF employees.

<https://www.miun.se/Forskning/forskningsprojekt/pagaende-forskningsprojekt/enhancing-entrepreneurship-in-rural-areas-through-local-food-systems/aktuellt-inom-projektet/pa-vag-mot-dynamisk-upphandling-av-lokala-livsmedel/>

## Digitalization and digital app prototype

To analyze the digitalization and online presence of LFPs, a dataset was compiled reflecting the digital footprint of 297 producers in Jämtland-Härjedalen. In addition to basic company information, the dataset includes variables such as website presence, engagement on platforms like Google Maps, Facebook, Instagram, and TripAdvisor, as well as participation in specialized regional platforms like REKO-rings. It also captures indicators of traffic and user feedback volume. The exploratory analysis revealed that the five most commonly used online platforms by local food producers in the Jämtland-Härjedalen region in Sweden are Facebook, Google Maps, company websites, Instagram, and Mathantverk.se, with Facebook being the most frequently adopted tool for online visibility.

Working with students from the University of Ravensburg-Weingarten the project has also developed a prototype of an application to be used by consumers in order to enable easier connection with producers. This application as well as the study of the producers presence on the web is described closer in reports found on the webpage:

<https://www.miun.se/Forskning/forskningsprojekt/pagaende-forskningsprojekt/enhancing-entrepreneurship-in-rural-areas-through-local-food-systems/publikationer/>

## Input on policy and strategy

Particularly the workshops and the newsletters have been informative in regard to the regional policy and strategy work on food. For example, a new regional food policy in Jämtland has been under development during the project and the workshops have touched upon topics which are covered in the policy development process. Outside of this, applied summaries of for example the survey findings have been put together and sent to the regional group working with the modifications of the strategy. Also, the project members have been interviewed during the project to use as input the new, modified regional food strategy.

## The UNESCO Creative Cities Network

The projects studies and results have served as important input into the continuous work with the city of Östersunds membership in the UNESCO Creative City Network. For example, the findings were part of the mutual educational efforts in the Food City Design courses which have taken place at the premises of the University of Parma during two occasions since 2022.

## Datasets for future publications and learning

As the project members have continuously gathered empirical input and other material, project members now have a survey of the food producers in Jämtland which has been analysed and used, but will also continue to be used for academic and popular output in the next couple of years. This is also the case with much of the other empirical material that has been used as input in the project, from interviews to secondary data.

## New project applications

During the project, contact has been established with other Kamprad Foundation projects. One example is the “Utveckla och förbättra tillsammans” at Mid Sweden Universitys Quality Management department with whom several meetings were held. Another contact has been Högskolan i Kristianstad and the project members of “Outdoor Recreation, Hospitality, and Rural Development”, and a visit was undertaken in 2024.

This lead the two projects to closer academic cooperation and a new project application under the title “Entrepreneurship and Local Food Systems: Finding

Promising Practices in Rural Sweden”, where the previous two projects findings have been merged into new ideas and needs for local food systems in rural Sweden.



Image: Visit with collaborating colleagues at Höskolan Kristianstad.

Other applications that have had its origins in this project include two developmental projects into the cultural and creative industries in Sundsvall and Östersund, and also an attempt to get a craft beer legislation evaluation funded. Finally, an application together with the Swedish resource center for artisan food was delivered to the Jämtland County Board in 2024, with the objective to deliver a mutual food conference in 2027.

## Results and findings

The results and findings from the project have been published through traditional academic output, but also continuously through the workshops and newsletters. Below are some condensed extracts of the findings, that can be find in more detail on the project web page and in the publications.

The work package on entrepreneurship and policy have been studied through a review of national and regional strategies as well as interviews:

- Results point towards a use of the entrepreneurship concept in a rather traditional way, which sometimes exclude micro- and small businesses which often are run with ambitions that go beyond solely growth and profit.
- If the policy and strategy documents are to be more relevant for these kinds of micro- and small producers so that they feel included, a broader perspective would be beneficial.
- Continuing on the same topic, the topic lifestyle entrepreneur and related approaches are highly relevant in order to approach the producers in ways that connect to the realities of their life worlds.

Some of the results of the survey sent to the food producers in Jämtland include:

- *Company structure:* The majority are sole proprietorships, often registered as sole proprietorships or limited liability companies.
- *Drivers:* The strongest drivers are passion, quality, sustainability and local roots.
- *Challenges:* Lack of capital, vulnerability to illness, difficulties in hiring and competition from larger players.
- *Opportunities:* Increased demand for local and sustainable food, as well as new political frameworks.
- *Threats:* Economic uncertainty, climate change and political decisions.

- *Digitalization*: Many use social media and REKO rings for marketing and sales, but few use Dynamic Purchasing Systems (DIS).
- *Local roots*: Many companies depend on local actors, but also see potential in replacing imported raw materials with local alternatives.

Results from the study on food in private schools has shown that:

- *Low transparency*: Many schools have contracted meals and little transparency into what is served.
- *Lack of policy*: Few schools have guidelines or requirements for local or sustainable food in their contracts.
- *Challenges*: Perceived high costs, lack of time and knowledge, and difficulties in influencing suppliers.
- *Opportunities*: There is interest, especially if it can be used as a profiling or sales argument. There is also room for increased dialogue with suppliers.
- *Conclusion*: Schools have the potential to play an important role in local food systems, but more knowledge, collaboration and support are needed.

Some of the insights from the study on the digitalization within the sector has shown that:

- *Digital presence*: 75% have Facebook, 57% have their own website, but only 40% have Instagram. Few are on TripAdvisor.
- *Sales channels*: Social media, REKO rings and events are important. Few sell to public institutions.
- *Digital platforms*: Examples such as Gårdsnära and Mathantverk.se show potential but suffer from a lack of updating.
- *New app, LOWAL*: A digital platform under development that will connect local producers with conscious consumers. The focus is on sustainability, transparency and user-friendliness.

- *Challenges:* Consumers have difficulty finding local food and producers lack effective tools to reach out digitally.

Finally, the work package focusing on creating relationships and networks in order to establish an efficient outreach has been highlighted throughout the project. The workshops in Jämtland and Halland, the participation in regional strategy groups, place visits and feedback through other parallel projects has meant that findings have reached relevant users as well as their feedback has had impact on the project and its path to reach the aim and goals initially set up.

## **Project ethics report**

Initially, the project completed an application for an ethical review to The Swedish Ethical Review Authority. This application was processed by the authority concluding with no ethical objections.

The project has still discussed this topic among the members, deciding to closely follow the ethics recommendations of the Mid Sweden University. This meant that the project continuously have avoided gathering information on sensitive personal data, and also made sure that the data gathered has been stored according to the standards of Mid Sweden Universitys Research ethics council.

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## Publication Abstracts

Björner, E., Höpken, W., Fuchs, M., Lock, F., Essert, N., & Kastler, E. Digital Presence of Local Food Producers in Rural Sweden: Determinants, Patterns, and Strategic Implications. (In preparation)

### Abstract

**Purpose** – This study examines the digital presence of local food producers (LFPs) in Jämtland–Härjedalen, Sweden, a region where culinary heritage and tourism intersect. It aims to analyze how producers utilize online platforms, what factors influence digital visibility and engagement, and how distinct patterns of online presence emerge.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Using a dataset of 297 LFPs, the study applies descriptive statistics, non-parametric tests, regression analysis, association rule mining, and cluster analysis to explore platform adoption, success determinants, and inter-platform relationships. The research is guided by configuration theory to conceptualize digital presence as a multidimensional and relational construct.

**Findings** – Facebook, Google Maps, and company websites dominate usage, while Instagram and regional platforms play secondary roles. Company size, turnover, and posting activity significantly affect engagement, whereas company age does not. Cluster analysis identifies three strategic profiles: “Digital High Performers,” “Steady Connectors,” and “Offline Traditionals.” Multi-platform strategies anchored by websites deliver superior engagement outcomes.

**Research limitations/implications** – The study focuses on one Nordic region and uses cross-sectional data. Future research should adopt longitudinal and comparative designs to examine digital evolution and performance outcomes across regions.

**Originality/value** – This research contributes to SME digitalization literature by applying configuration theory and introducing advanced analytical techniques to map digital presence patterns. Practical implications include targeted training in social media management, incentives for website development, and capacity-building for smaller firms to bridge digital divides.

**Keywords** – Local food systems; Digital presence; Rural entrepreneurship; Social media; SME marketing; Sweden.

Direzinci, M., Heinzelmann, D., Hoffmann, A., Kähling, M., Kilian, L., and Müller; L., (2025) Reconnecting Consumers with Producers: A Mobile App to Promote Ethical Consumption and Local Producer Visibility. Student thesis. Hochschule Ravensburg-Weingarten University of Applied Sciences.

## Abstract

This study explores the potential of a mobile platform, Lowal, to influence consumer behavior toward more local and ethically produced food. Addressing the persistent attitude-behavior gap, Lowal integrates geolocation, customizable filters, and a multi-dimensional sustainability rating system covering animal welfare, plant sustainability, climate and energy, and waste and circularity. A mixed-methods evaluation with 21 participants combined think-aloud protocols and a structured questionnaire to assess usability, acceptance, and behavioral impact. Results indicate strong user engagement, particularly with the interactive map and animal welfare ratings, which emerged as the most influential decision factor. Participants valued the app's clarity, transparency, and potential to support decision-making, though improvements in terminology, visual density, and filtering were suggested. The findings highlight how transparency, personalization, and trust-building features in platform design can foster sustainable purchasing behavior while enhancing the visibility of small-scale producers.

Keywords: mobile platform, attitude-behavior gap, multidimensional rating system, behavioral impact, sustainable purchasing behavior

Johnson, T. & Skoglund, W. Lokalt på menyn i fristående skolor - En fallstudie från Jämtland och Västernorrland. ETOUR, Mid Sweden University (In preparation).

## Abstract

Lokala livsmedelssystem har fått allt större uppmärksamhet de senaste åren, både som en möjlighet för hållbar utveckling, lokal resiliens och beredskap och som en viktig del i att stärka entreprenörskap på landsbygden. I glesbefolkade regioner som Jämtland och Västernorrland utgör matproduktion och måltidsverksamhet inte bara en ekonomisk sektor utan också en del av en levande landsbygd och lokal identitet. Här finns småskaliga producenter, starka mattraditioner och en växande vilja att knyta samman lokala resurser på nya sätt. En nyckel till detta är hur offentliga och institutionella aktörer väljer att köpa sin mat. Både offentliga upphandlingsprocesser och privat institutionell konsumtion kan ha betydande möjligheter för att förbättra förhållanden för landsbygdsentreprenörer, såväl inom livsmedelsproduktion som de kringliggande värdekedjorna. Den här rapporten fokuserar på privata institutioner och framförallt skolor och hur de förhåller sig till lokala livsmedelsproducenter. Slutsatserna visar att intresset är stort och aktörerna ser en potential i att koppla hållbarhetssamtal med elever till skolmaten och därtill ser man en marknadsföringspotential. Hindren är dock flertaliga, bland annat i form av begränsade matlagingsmöjligheter då det ofta är uppvärmningskök, behov av kompetens kring hantering av färska livsmedel och råvaror, liksom finansiella

Kjellberg, M. Skoglund, W. & Haller, H. (2024). Decreasing the carbon footprint of food through public procurement: –A case study from the municipality of Härnösand. *Frontiers in Nutrition*, vol. 11.

## Abstract

Eating habits are among the strongest drivers of negative environmental impact. Public procurement has been suggested as an efficient lever to catalyze changes within the food system. This study examines alternative purchase processes that may decrease the carbon footprint of publicly procured food through a case study of a municipality in the Northern part of Sweden. The GHG emissions associated with the current food service in the case study were 2.2 kg CO<sub>2e</sub> per kg food and must be reduced by 40.9% by 2030 to comply with the Paris Agreement; 76% of the emissions derive from food of animal origin (44% from unprocessed red meat). Three alternative diet scenarios, “zero red meat,” “–50% red meat,” and “flexitarian free from red meat,” were explored. Only 6% of the total purchased food kilograms were altered, yet the cutback of meat caused GHG emissions reductions turned out to be as high as 44%. The Swedish Law on Public Procurement, deficient infrastructure, unsustainable food culture, and local politicians' reluctance to change were mentioned as the main obstacles to materializing necessary changes in the food procurement system. The respondents also pointed out essential policy changes at the national and municipal levels.

Lock, F., Essert, N., Kastler, E. (2025) Analysis of online presence of local food producers. Student thesis. Hochschule Ravensburg-Weingarten University of Applied Sciences.

## Abstract

Local Food Systems (LFS) are gaining popularity worldwide, despite accounting for a relatively small share of total agricultural output. Research shows that LFS contribute to regional employment, diversify local food production, and promote healthier eating habits.

Despite these encouraging trends, local food producers face significant adaptation challenges when seeking new business opportunities. Therefore, improving the conditions for the development of local food production is crucial for the promotion of entrepreneurship in rural and peripheral areas.

As part of the research project *Enhancing Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas through Local Food Systems*, one focus of the project is on digitalization and local food systems and in particular the assessment of the online presence of local food producers (LFP) in the Jämtland-Härjedalen region in Sweden.

To analyse the digitalization and online presence of LFPs, a dataset was compiled reflecting the digital footprint of 297 producers in Jämtland-Härjedalen. In addition to basic company information, the dataset includes variables such as website presence, engagement on platforms like Google Maps, Facebook, Instagram, and TripAdvisor, as well as participation in specialized regional platforms like REKO-rings. It also captures indicators of traffic and user feedback volume.

In this context, the aim is to investigate how local food producers use online platforms to promote their products and what factors influence their digital marketing success. The study further examines platform usage patterns, interdependencies, and distinct configurations of online presence among LFPs.

Rytkönen, P., Skoglund, W., Oghazi, P., & Laven, D. (2023). Exploring the dynamics of innovation: Patterns of Growth and contraction in the local food industry. *British Food Journal*.

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is shed light on the underlying forces behind entrepreneurship within a regional innovation system (RIS) in a remote rural region. The authors examine the following questions: Which are the main underlying forces behind the entrepreneurial process in a rural RIS characterized by traditionally low-tech, small-scale businesses? How can the development of a low-tech regional innovation system be conceptualized?

**Design/methodology/ approach** – The design of the study is based on entrepreneurship theory. Data analysis followed practices used in phenomenography, a research approach used to analyse and identify commonalities and variations in populations' perceptions of a certain phenomenon. Data are composed using semi-structured interviews and a database composed of company information of all firms in the population.

**Findings** – A proactive mobilization of regional stakeholders and resources can be an important driving force behind the entrepreneurial process and generation of a rural RIS. Innovation can be generated within low-tech industries turning the rural context into an asset. An RIS in a remote rural context can be initiated and orchestrated by regional authorities, but knowledge brokering and orchestration can also be managed by networks of small-scale businesses brought together by mutual benefit and common interests.

**Research limitations/implications** – Regional innovation systems theory is most often used to study hightech industries. But by combining regional innovation systems with rural entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship context theory is a fruitful avenue to understand the role of rural entrepreneurship in regional development, even in remote and peripheral regions. Innovation does not need to entail high-tech international environments; it can appear as the result of efforts in low-tech industries in rural and remote environments. The authors' findings need to be scrutinized; therefore, the authors call for more research on regional innovation systems in rural environments.

Schützer, B., Björner, E. & Sjölander-Lindqvist, A. (2025). Interaction, communication, and trust: keys to connecting farmers and restaurants in southwest Sweden. *Agric Hum Values*.

## Abstract

Farm-to-restaurant relationships play a crucial role in shaping Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), yet these partnerships are influenced by a complex interplay of trust, communication, and economic constraints. The aim of this study is to explore farmers' perspectives on their relationships with restaurants purchasing their produce. Based on interviews with farmers and participant observation conducted in the Gothenburg region, southwest Sweden, this study highlights the importance of direct, in-person engagement for fostering mutual trust and understanding between farmers and restaurants. The theoretical framework is rooted in prior ethnographic research about social relations within farming, characterised by analytical concepts such as 'social embeddedness' and 'relational materiality'. These concepts help in understanding the complexity of AFNs and illustrate their dynamic and constantly evolving nature. While our findings confirm that close relationships between farmers and restaurants enhance food quality and support sustainable production, they also highlight challenges, including time constraints, price pressures, and communication difficulties. The study underscores the importance of representing the interaction between food actors while simultaneously considering farmers' actual conditions, self-benefiting principles, and market-bound forces within a Swedish context.

Sherwood-Walter, M. (2023). *Cultivating Resilient Local Food Systems: Identifying opportunities and strategies for sustainable public procurement*. Master thesis, Uppsala University.

## Abstract

The industrialization of the global food system has drastically altered agricultural practices, transitioning from small-scale, subsistence farming to large-scale, transnational supply chains dominated by agribusinesses. While this shift has increased productivity, it has led to environmental degradation, economic inequity, and loss of traditional agricultural knowledge. This study explores the potential of public procurement of local food, particularly in school meals, to drive sustainable development, entrepreneurship, and innovation in rural Swedish communities while mitigating the negative aspects of industrialized agriculture. Using case studies, study visits, and semi-structured interviews with key informants representing school meal development and procurement from Hofors, Karlstad, and Östersund, this study aimed to identify the challenges and opportunities for municipalities to increase institutional consumption of local food within each municipality's local context. Processing these interviews using a systematic qualitative coding method and constructing thematic narratives provided insights into the barriers institutions face in procuring local food and highlighted strategies for enhancing collaboration between local producers and institutional consumers. Challenges in local food procurement include climate constraints, agricultural limitations, market dynamics, and legal and organizational barriers. Practical approaches to overcome these challenges include standardizing sustainable procurement policies, effective stakeholder communication, and collaborating with local businesses and organizations. This research highlights the pivotal role of public procurement in supporting resilient local food systems, especially in school meals. By addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities, institutions can play a significant role in promoting sustainability, supporting local entrepreneurs, and ensuring the vitality of rural communities in the face of global food system challenges.

Skoglund; W., Stålsett, B., Haller, H., Sherwood Walter, M., Sjölander-Lindqvist, A., Johnson, T., Laven, D., & Björner, E. The potential of institutional markets for rural food entrepreneurs – a case study from Northern Sweden, (In preparation).

## Abstract

Local Food Systems (LFS) have in recent times been highlighted as a potential pathway towards sustainability in the food sector. This includes aspects such as healthier eating along with opportunities for greater entrepreneurial activity in rural contexts.

For the development of the LFS sector and its entrepreneurs, public and institutional procurement has been acknowledged as having a substantial potential impact due to its capacity for transformative changes and expansion of the overall market for entrepreneurs. Despite this potential, current research points towards a need for further studies on the potential impact of public and institutional procurement on local food systems and its entrepreneurs.

This exploratory study reports on one example of the relationship between public procurement and LFS from rural Sweden. The aim is to evaluate the potential demand, opportunities, and barriers for selected institutions to source their food from small scale entrepreneurs within the local food system. The background of this aim is that most Swedish institutions (such as schools and elder homes) procure their food from industrial and/or non-local sources.

The methodological approach for this study is a case study on a developing procurement tool in Northern Sweden. It is based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative input, with interviews undertaken with procurement administrators and entrepreneurs, as well as a survey uncovering entrepreneurial challenges.

The preliminary results of the study indicate a strong interest from institutional representatives to strengthen the connection to local, often small-scale food producers, and enable more frequent as well as larger procurements from them. However, many difficulties are experienced in order to proceed with these objectives. These obstacles include certain path dependencies that “lock in” some institutions into highly processed food offers, lack of public cooking facilities, budget constraints, entrepreneurial lack of interest, time, and capacity to deliver due to transportation and logistics.

Stålsett, B. Adaptation and resistance to neoliberalism in narratives of craft entrepreneurship, (In preparation).

## Abstract

The importance of wellbeing for people and communities has gained increasing attention in policy and research, including entrepreneurship research. Craft entrepreneurship, a form of lifestyle entrepreneurship, creates economic and social value for people and communities. However, while craft entrepreneurship may be motivated by a desire for personal and communal wellbeing it also offers challenges that impact these desires as different business logics collide. This study contributes to research on entrepreneurial wellbeing by exploring the effects of the 'entrepreneurial self' on lifestyle entrepreneurs. It does so by focusing on narratives of craft entrepreneurs to extend our knowledge of the impact of neoliberalism on a micro-level, focusing on the individual entrepreneurs and their close community. By applying the concept of 'contours of entrepreneurial subjectivity' and the psychic power of neoliberalism the paper seeks to answer: In what ways do craft entrepreneurs adapt to and resist neoliberal values? It finds that the contours of entrepreneurial subjectivity appear different for the craft entrepreneur compared to studies of other entrepreneurial subjects. The main difference may be found in the logics of craft production where capitalist and neoliberal values are challenged. But it also appears that by anchoring the purpose of the entrepreneurship in the local community and its survival, the entrepreneur does not carry the responsibility and pressure alone, it rather becomes a collective endeavour and suggestibly minimizes some of the contours of entrepreneurial subjectivity and the effects of the psychic life of neoliberalism. Implications for policy and research on entrepreneurship and wellbeing are discussed.

Keywords: entrepreneurial-self, craft entrepreneurship, wellbeing

Stålsett, B. Policy narratives of sustainable entrepreneurship - rethinking the entrepreneurial story for a post-growth economy, (In preparation).

## Abstract

As entrepreneurship and sustainability have been invoked as policy imperatives it is important to explore further what kind of entrepreneurship is currently advocated in policies in specific business sectors and how it is seen as contributing to sustainability. In the food sector, sustainable production and consumption have become policy objectives for the European Union and its member countries. This study takes a critical perspective and analyses how entrepreneurship is presented in food-related policies on different governance levels in a Swedish context, and discusses how these presentations create narratives that align with or depart from ideas of a post-growth economy. The study finds a dominant narrative of entrepreneurship and innovation as practices for sustainable economic growth and trade, where productivity, job creation and competitiveness are prioritized outcomes. However, there are also counter-narratives supporting entrepreneurship that align with principles of post-growth and that can provide alternative sustainable directions for businesses in the food sector were they to be positioned differently. The paper concludes that there are opportunities for researchers and policymakers to re-imagine the entrepreneurial story in a post-growth economy by lifting heroes that are currently on the policy side-lines as part of the dominant narrative.

Keywords: policy narratives; entrepreneurship; sustainability, post-growth