

# Effective Communication in Alternative Food Networks: A Scoping Review and Implications for Scottish Food Systems

Nsongurua Inyang<sup>1\*</sup>, Shadi Hashem<sup>1</sup>, Katrin Prager<sup>1</sup>

Supplementary Table 1. Data extraction (All Countries)

Country/Author	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
UK, Italy, Spain, Romania, Poland, Germany, France and Co (Gori and Castellini, 2023)	Farmers' markets, CSAs, Cooperatives, Box schemes, farm shops, etc.	Direct interaction and social contact, social media, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	Environmental sustainability, product quality, fair prices, transparency and origin, animal welfare, reliability	Awareness and engagement, increased trust, enhanced social connection and community, and increased motivation to purchase from AFNs.
Several countries, for example, the UK, Italy, Hungary, Germany, etc. (Takagi <i>et al.</i> , 2024)	CSA	Direct interaction, community networks, websites and email communication	Information about food production, food ingredients, and intangible values of CSA, such as contributions to environmental and social goals. Tangible values, e.g., content and frequency of the share.	Consumers' realisation of intangible benefits like social capital plays a crucial role in satisfaction, decision-making and long-term commitment.
Several countries, e.g., Poland, Romania, Hungary (Trenouth and Sovová, 2025)	Farmers' markets, CSAs, box schemes, etc.	Direct interaction	Quality, safety, tradition, cultural heritage, care and social values.	Increased Reliance on Informal Networks and Direct Purchase:
Several countries (Drejerska, Gołbiewski and Fiore, 2019)	Short food supply chains	Social media (especially Facebook), Websites	Messages related to the completion of a successful season, social responsibility, general background and product information	A relatively wide audience for Facebook pages was investigated; however, interaction with consumers was found to be limited (low number of comments and shares)
Several countries, e.g. the UK, the US, Italy, Ireland and Canada (Tregear, 2011b)	Farmers markets	Face-to-face interaction	Quality, rootedness in places, ecological sustainability, often represented by reducing food miles and carbon emissions, social justice and relationships, and product properties	More positive, harmonious community relations and democratic participation. Negative outcomes include: increased time, effort and skill for planning, shopping, preparation and cooking, which is a high opportunity cost for consumers.

\* Corresponding author: n.inyang.23@abdn.ac.uk

<sup>1</sup> School of Geosciences, University of Aberdeen, AB243UF, Scotland, United Kingdom

**Supplementary Table 2 (Cont.).** Data extraction (All Countries)

Country/Author	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
UK and co (Kummer and Milestad, 2020)	Box schemes	Digital tools, e.g., email, web pages and social media. Face-to-face meeting at pick up spots, visiting the farm on open days and occasional events, telephone,	Information about products, e.g., origin, description, and recipes. Values and principles, e.g., organic production, quality, and sustainability	Satisfaction and trust, change eating habits and attitude towards food.
Italy, Spain, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Co		Web portals, printed leaflets were added to box deliveries, face-to-face and personal interaction through events and meetings, surveys and interviews (in-depth interviews, focus groups, questionnaires)	Values, e.g., quality production, organic production, sustainable development, product and process information, health and welfare messages.	Behavioural changes, Increased knowledge, awareness, and understanding, trust and relationship building, behavioural changes, community building, social and economic benefits.
Germany and co (Furtschegger et al, 2015)	Mid-scale food supply chains	Face to face, print, email, websites, social media, radio, and TV commercials	Operational information, e.g., delivery logistics, product availability, and lack of products, recipes, packaging, events, and activities,	Increased knowledge and awareness, trust and identification, feedback, and engagement
Spain and co (Georges and Caleman, 2021)	Agricultural cooperatives	Group meetings, phone calls, text messages, face-to-face, newsletters, websites, emails, social media (limited usage)	Exchange of technical information about production processes, managerial information, market trends, and cooperative activities.	Improved member commitment to the cooperative, member satisfaction, trust, enhanced member involvement, and participation in the governance of the cooperative

**Supplementary Table 3 (Cont.).** Data extraction (United Kingdom)

Author/ UK	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
(Bos and Owen, 2016)	Farmers' markets, CSAs, box schemes, producer and consumer cooperatives, community gardening initiatives	online(websites and social media presence) and offline channels (physical presence/word-of-mouth)	Environmental Sustainability, freshness, local sourcing, and organic produce. Promotion and advertising, product and seasonal information, and encouraging participation and engagement.	Broader outreach, enhanced virtual reconnection. However, most consumers were somewhat ambivalent when asked if social media messages influenced their food behaviour.
(Levidow, Berardi and Jung, 2024)	Community food growing initiatives	Grassroots visual storytelling, in-person conversations, WhatsApp discussion groups, blogs written by participants	Short video stories about participants' experiences (involves using smartphones and simple editing software and sharing them online)	Strengthens community bonds, sense of empathy and trust, stronger emotional connection to the garden space, increased participation, and motivation
(Furness et al, 2022)	CSA	Email, face-to-face interactions (produce collection points, volunteering opportunities, group events), social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram)	How to use the produce (e.g., recipes), the task of growing food and the environment, sharing personal experiences on WhatsApp, and celebrating successes, farmers sharing photos, and food advice among members.	Increased knowledge, sense of community and social connection, building social capital, and mental health benefits
(Griffins and Philips 2024)	Farm shops	In-person interaction and online promotion via websites	Authenticity, rich, multi-sensory experience encompassing both the enterprise buildings and the surrounding farm sites	connection to the farm, knowledge of produce offered, reassurance of how produce has been raised and cared for. Feeling welcomed and gaining trust.

**Supplementary Table 4 (Cont.).** Data extraction (Italy)

Author/ Italy	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
(Röhrig, Hassler and Roesler, 2021)	Farm shops	Face-to-face through direct sales and home deliveries, occasionally organising events and educating members on environmental food education.	High product quality (original taste and outstanding nutritional composition), production methods, animal welfare, emphasis on traditional and cultural rooting of produce, price justification, and environmental benefits	Greater understanding, trust and appreciation, increased willingness to pay, trust and accountability. A major setback of this strategy is limiting access for a wider range of people.
(Belletti <i>et al.</i> , 2024)	Farmers markets	Face-to-face, FM websites and social networks, dissemination of printed materials, workshops, seminars, and tastings,	Information that guarantees product origin and characteristics, fair trade, fresh, healthy, and locally produced food, sustainable production practices, producer identity and values,	Maintains consumers' confidence, enhances understanding of products, practices and values.
(Baldi <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	Solidarity purchasing groups (box schemes)	Personal direct interaction between producers and consumers	Focus on consumer priorities such as preservative-free, organic, fresh and GMO-free. Production process and nutritional ingredients	Members seem more prone to searching for non-local products, meaning that messaging solely focused on local food may be less effective
(Carriero De Souza, Rover and Forno, 2023)	Network of farmers in CSAs and farmers' markets.	Direct sales (face-to-face)	Critic of the dominant food system, emphasis on citizenship and participation, promotion of social and ethical values	Greater participation and empowerment, increased knowledge and trust, and formation of consumer networks.
(De Bernardi and Tirabeni, 2018)	Food assembly (products are ordered online and then picked up at a weekly farmers' market)	Face-to-face communication and online communication through digital platforms, labels	Ideas about food, values, opinions, feedback suggestions, ethical awareness, and local and organic food	Face-to-face communication significantly influenced sustainable purchasing behaviour, while digital communication influenced both purchasing and consumption behaviour.
(Cicatiello, 2020)	Box schemes	Face-to-face through direct selling/delivery	Higher quality products, environmental sustainability, biodiversity conservation, fresher and more nutritious products,	High customer retention, increased market share, willingness to pay extra for products
(Carfora, Morandi and Catellani, 2022)	“local food supply chain”	Smart phone app called PsyMe	Messages focused on the environmental consequences of purchasing or not purchasing local food	Significant enhancement of self-reported choice of local food.

**Supplementary Table 5 (Cont.).** Data extraction (Italy)

<b>Author/ Italy</b>	<b>AFN Type</b>	<b>Communication Channel</b>	<b>Key Messages</b>	<b>Outcome Reported</b>
(Palascha and Chang, 2024)	Social supermarkets/food banks	Word of mouth, infographics. both offline and online channels	Health and environmental benefits, flexible recipes with suggestions for alternative ingredients	Moderate behavioural change. The study also found that migrants showed more indifferent responses to the various messages compared to native Italians.
(Aprile and Punzo, 2022)	The author didn't specifically name AFNs, but focused on the effect of environmental sustainability labels on food products.	Product labelling	Product origin, Sustainability information, e.g., biodiversity conservation, reduced carbon footprint, ethical/social aspects,	Informed decision making, increased preferences for environmentally sustainable labelled products, and willingness to pay a premium price for foods with sustainability labels.
	Solidarity purchasing groups, Farmers markets	Word-of-mouth, Posters, and local events	Ethical consumption and solidarity, Support for small-scale local producers	Higher market attendance, strong sense of community.

**Supplementary Table 6 (Cont.).** Data extraction (Poland)

Author/ Poland	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
(Struś <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	CSA	Direct contact.	Origin and quality of food, price. Farmers communicate how far they are willing to deliver their produce.	Engagement in production, connection and trust, acceptance of prices.
(Goszczyński <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	Farmers markets	Face-to-face through direct interaction	Traditions and experiences related to food, quality, recipes, and cooking talks	Memory, reminiscences, habits, and family tradition shape food choices. Consumers are still drawn to bigger stores for more convenience, e.g., parking space.
(Robinson and Śpiewak, 2023)	Farmers market	Direct interaction at the market itself	Justification for higher prices, emphasis on quality, and taste	Good sense of community, acceptance of value narratives, and developing relationships
(Abbt, 2024)	Food cooperatives, farmers' markets, allotment gardens, etc	Direct interaction	Trust, quality, origin, good taste, naturalness, freshness, locality, environmentally friendly, healthy, hygienic, GMO-free, and minimal additives. Community and connection, rural heritage and tradition, Contrast to industrial food.	Increased transparency and trust, strengthened relationships, participation in civic and community action, connection to rural heritage, feeling of security and control.
(Szymański, 2021)	Online selling platforms	Social media marketing and search engine optimisation. E-mail marketing, Public relations actions, Loyalty programs, TV commercials, Radio advertisements, and Advertising in the press	Characteristics of individual food products, information about farming, Sales promotion messages to convey discounts, and gifts	Consumer satisfaction. Better attitude towards online shopping, however, too many choices can require more cognitive effort, leading to consumers buying less. A major success factor is consumer ethnocentrism.
(Barska and Wojciechowska-Solis, 2020)	Short food supply chains, e.g., farmers' markets, cooperatives	Platform, website, and mobile applications, labels	Quality and characteristics, origin and authenticity, support for local economy, health and wellbeing, media promotion,	Consumers become more aware and feel a greater sense of responsibility for the natural environment, and a higher level of consumer knowledge, which tends to influence their shopping behaviour

**Supplementary Table 7 (Cont.).** Data extraction (Poland)

<b>Author/ Poland</b>	<b>AFN Type</b>	<b>Communication Channel</b>	<b>Key Messages</b>	<b>Outcome Reported</b>
(Kosior and Młodawska, 2024)	Not mentioned	Digital media, social campaigns	Quality, certification, information about animal welfare, biodiversity conservation, efficient resource use, and technological advancements	A significant concern raised was the potential for consumers and the general public to misunderstand or misinterpret the shared data, leading to negative interpretations and potentially damaging the producer's image.
(Hornowski <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	"Small-scale food producers"	Face-to-face interactions at farmers' markets, farm shops, and during delivery. Local newspapers, flyers, websites, and social media	Product quality and origin, production methods, health benefits, ethical values,	Better understanding, increased trust, stronger relationships with local food systems, greater willingness to support local and sustainable food producers

**Supplementary Table 8 (Cont.).** Data extraction (Denmark)

<b>Author/ Denmark</b>	<b>AFN Type</b>	<b>Communication Channel</b>	<b>Key Messages</b>	<b>Outcome Reported</b>
(Thorsøe and Kjeldsen, 2016)	"Food Communities of Copenhagen and Aarhus" A network of urban consumers sourcing organic produce from regional producers	Direct communication at events	Messages relating to transparency and trust, quality food, fair prices, and sharing values	Facilitates cooperation and creates coherence, enabling consumers to engage with the network and access produce without needing deep knowledge about the production process
	CSA and box schemes	Interactive communication technology (mobile app and social media)	Inputs for product development, ideas, and opinions about the product, packaging, recipes, etc	Growth in subscribers enhances consumers' well-being

**Supplementary Table 9 (Cont.).** Data extraction (Germany)

<b>Author/ Germany</b>	<b>AFN Type</b>	<b>Communication Channel</b>	<b>Key Messages</b>	<b>Outcome Reported</b>
(Opitz <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	CSA Food coops Self-harvest gardens	Face-to-face, Meetings, telephone, newsletters, internet blogs,	Information about seasonality, recipes, cultivation techniques,	Better understanding and appreciation of agricultural production and food
(Roep and Wiskerke, 2012)	AFNs	Branding and logos, slogans, packaging, direct contact, certification, and labels	Quality, environmental and ethical values, origin, and organic production	Product recognition, increased demand, and success,
(Middendorf and Rommel, 2024)	CSAs	Direct contact	Production standards and cultivation methods, risk sharing	a sense of connection to the farm, Enhanced commitment, and stay rates
(Teufer, Waiguny and Grabner-Kräuter, 2023)	Food cooperatives	Sustainability labels	Messages related to the environmental (short transport distances), social, and economic impacts of the products	The use of labels positively influences consumers' intention to buy from the network.
(Zoll, Specht and Siebert, 2021)	“Alternative Food Networks”	Face-to-face interactions at farm shops, markets, and community events, product labels and packaging, newsletters, and email updates. Online platforms such as websites and social media	Product origin and traceability, sustainability values, ethical and social values, personal stories, and transparency.	Increased awareness and knowledge, strengthened trust in producers and the food system, changed purchasing behaviour towards more sustainable and ethical food choices, enhanced sense of community and connection to local producers.
(Horvath, Raimbert and Raton, 2024)	Farmers markets, Consumer associations	Direct exchanges and fostering various forms of proximity (point of sales, farms, and consumer associations)	Product traceability and specific characteristics, messages about transparency and solidarity	Restores confidence, higher satisfaction and engagement, a higher willingness to pay for products, and consumers value relational proximity with farmers.

**Supplementary Table 10 (Cont.).** Data extraction (Romania)

Author/ Romania	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
(Moellers and Birhala, 2014)	CSA	Farm visits and personal contact, local NGOs,	Reliability and commitment through weekly delivery of fresh produce, welcoming messages, organic practices, and crop status. Environmentally friendly products, natural or traditional production	Positive change in purchasing behaviour and priorities, trust in partnerships, increased connections, and awareness. However, the study reported limited community building, socialisation and interaction among consumers.
	CSA and farmers markets	Face-to-face, street banners	Health, food quality, and sustainability	Consumer engagement, enhanced trust, and improved rural livelihoods
(Möllers, Bäuml and Dufhues, 2022)	Farmers' markets, box schemes, CSAs	Labelling as traditional production	Local origin, quality, fairness	Consumers strongly prefer non-certified "traditional" produce over certified organic products.
(Polimeni <i>et al.</i> , 2022)	Farmers markets	Direct, face-to-face interaction.	In a product presentation, consumers learn about how the products are grown. Consumers learn about the importance of local, sustainable agriculture.	Increased consumer awareness and knowledge, relationships, and loyalty with sellers
(Smeds and Axelsson, 2014)	CSA and box schemes	Word of mouth during deliveries and pick-up points, farm visits, phone, email, Facebook, and social events.	Food quality, contribution to sustainability, convenience,	Increased awareness, development of trust, deepens involvement and participation.
(Dumitru <i>et al.</i> , 2023)	Family farm products	Labelling (keywords suggested are traditional, nature, community) and awareness campaigns.	Quality, taste, freshness, health, supporting the local economy, and origin.	Increased willingness to pay more, confidence in certified products.
(Möllers, Bäuml and Dufhues, 2022)	Farmers markets and CSAs	Labelling	The labelling conveys key messages such as naturalness, trust, quality, rural values, and support for small farmers.	Strong consumer preference for traditional products over certified organic products.
(Popa and Dabija, 2019)	Small and medium-sized organic producers	Food tasting campaigns, organic labels, and logos	Health benefits, environmental protection, product quality, highlights of the perceived negative effects of conventional food, and local origin.	Increased awareness of benefits, increased preference and purchase, however, most consumers have more confidence in food sold by peasants than in products with "bio labels".

**Supplementary Table 11 (Cont.).** Data extraction (Spain)

Author/ Spain	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
(Sánchez-Hernández, 2024)	Farmers' markets, CSAs, box schemes,	Face-to-face interactions at farmers markets, on-farm sales, delivery, social media, e.g., Facebook and Instagram.	Food quality and characteristics, environmental commitment, health promotion, and community building.	Consumer loyalty and a strong sense of community
(Espelt <i>et al.</i> , 2019).	Cooperatives	Social media, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Direct communication during regular visits.	Producers talk about their farm work and the price mechanism.	Builds closer relationships, builds confidence, and consumers prioritise purchasing local products.
(Vázquez and Del Moral, 2022)	Farmers markets	Direct communication in the physical space of the markets.	Trust, origin, and provenance of food, agroecological commitment, and community involvement.	Increased awareness and demand for products, and increased willingness to pay a higher price.
(Miralles, Dentoni and Pascucci, 2017)	Consumer groups and community gardens	Direct communication with consumers, enabling direct visits from consumers to producers, email, and social media.	Messages about providing alternatives to the mainstream food system, supporting small and local producers, building community, food sovereignty, biodiversity, value of products, including origin, quality, method of production and stories behind them.	Enhanced consumer participation and sense of community; however, Consumers find it challenging to maintain social media platforms.
(Ibáñez-Jiménez <i>et al.</i> , 2024)	Cooperatives, Buyer groups, association of producers/consumers	Word-of-mouth at workshops, events, and direct sales. social networks and websites.	Their values and principles, the promotion of local varieties and benefits they provide, messages about protecting crop biodiversity, cultural heritage, and providing resilience to climate change, and food security	Strengthened loyalty
	CSAs, Food cooperatives, farmers' markets.	Periodic meetings, websites	Information about products, health, fair trade, and weekly product orders	Increased urban engagement and partnerships

**Supplementary Table 12 (Cont.).** Data extraction (Spain)

<b>Author/ Spain</b>	<b>AFN Type</b>	<b>Communication Channel</b>	<b>Key Messages</b>	<b>Outcome Reported</b>
(Sanz-Cañada, Yacamán-Ochoa and Pérez-Campaña, 2024)	Cooperatives (Agroecological cooperative supermarkets)	Marketing campaigns, websites,	Value-based food, prioritising local, organic, seasonal, artisanal, healthy food, reducing ecological footprint,	It attracts value-driven consumers. A high level of satisfaction is reported. Despite this satisfaction, a significant number of people spent less than 20% of their family budget at the cooperative supermarket.
(Giampietri <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	Farmers markets	Face-to-face interactions at markets.	Sustainability, tradition, quality.	Enhanced trust, willingness to pay premium prices, and support for local producers.
(González-Azcárate, Cruz Maceín and Bardají, 2021)	“Short food supply chains”	Face-to-face communication.	Product quality, food information, health attributes, and support for rural development.	Increased awareness and commitment, attraction and willingness to buy, and higher frequency of buying.
(Peña Rodríguez <i>et al.</i> , 2024)	Farmers markets	Word-of-mouth, workshops and exhibitions, flyers, internet.	Care for the natural environment, the origin of products, quality, and health.	Positive opinion of consumers about the market.

**Supplementary Table 13 (Cont.).** Data extraction (Hungary)

Author/Hungary	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
(Balázs, Pataki and Lazányi, 2016)	CSA	Direct interaction during weekly delivery of boxes and farm visits, Newsletters, emails, social media, and surveys for feedback.	stories for production procedures, recipes and tips for cooking, education on local, seasonal, healthy and sustainable diets.	Increased knowledge and awareness, behavioural changes, development of trust and relationships, a sense of community and belonging.
(Torok <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	Farmers' markets, box schemes, and community gardens.	Face-to-face contact and online platforms, community interaction by existing members.	Quality, safety, health, local origin, support for the local community, trust, and reliability.	Participation, increased level of commitment, and self-actualisation.
	Local food buying clubs	Direct contact through farm visits, events, and delivery. Online platforms.	Product quality and production methods, ethics and values, and consumer education about food cultures.	Enhanced trust, sense of community, dietary shift, and higher support for local producers.
Hungary (Benedek, 2023)	Short food supply chains	Social media, email, and phone, direct interaction, even in covid 19 pandemic.	Updates on regulations and opening times, availability and product details, ordering and delivery instructions, and changes in product mix.	Increased demand for online and home delivery, learning and knowledge exchange, increased sales, and appreciation for home delivery.
	Farmers market and CSA	Posters, local events, social media.	Freshness, Local and seasonal food, Trust and transparency, support for small-scale farmers.	Growing consumer participation.
(Szabó and Juhász, 2015)	Farmers' markets, CSAs, and farm shops	Direct contact is the primary channel, including printed materials and websites.	Product information, product characteristics, pricing.	Despite direct communication, producers "do not have an accurate understanding of their customers' requirements. Consumers desire more detailed product information, tasting opportunities, and tangible signs of reliability (like receipts and accurate weighing), as well as a deeper connection with producers.
(László and Wahlen, 2024)	Consumer groups	Direct communication	Attributes associated with value proximity, such as freshness, taste, reliability, safety, evocation of local flavours, naturalness, and nutritional value.	Higher understanding of local food, increased trust, and young consumers perceive local food as expensive, so emphasising added values like freshness and reduced environmental impact might increase willingness to pay.

**Supplementary Table 14 (Cont.).** Data extraction (All Countries)

Country/Author	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
UK, Italy, Spain, Romania, Poland, Germany, France and Co (Gori and Castellini, 2023)	Farmers' markets, CSAs, Cooperatives, Box schemes, farm shops, etc	Direct interaction and social contact, social media, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	Environmental sustainability, product quality, fair prices, transparency and origin, animal welfare, reliability	Awareness and engagement, increased trust, enhanced social connection and community, and increased motivation to purchase from AFNs.
Several countries, for example, the UK, Italy, Hungary, Germany, etc (Takagi <i>et al.</i> , 2024)	CSA	Direct interaction, community networks, websites and email communication	Information about food production, food ingredients, and intangible values of CSA, such as contributions to environmental and social goals. Tangible values, e.g., content and frequency of the share.	Consumers' realisation of intangible benefits like social capital plays a crucial role in satisfaction, decision-making and long-term commitment.
Several countries, e.g., Poland, Romania, Hungary (Trenouth and Sovová, 2025)	Farmers' markets, CSAs, box schemes, etc	Direct interaction	Quality, safety, tradition, cultural heritage, care and social values.	Increased Reliance on Informal Networks and Direct Purchase:
Several countries (Drejerska, Gołębiewski and Fiore, 2019)	Short food supply chains	Social media (especially Facebook), Websites	Messages related to the completion of a successful season, social responsibility, general background and product information	Relatively wide audience for Facebook pages investigated; however, interaction with consumers was found to be limited (low number of comments and shares)
Several countries eg UK, the US, Italy, Ireland and Canada (Tregear, 2011b)	Farmers markets	Face-to-face interaction	Quality, rootedness in places, ecological sustainability, often represented by reducing food miles and carbon emissions, social justice, relationships, and product properties	More positive, harmonious community relations and democratic participation. Negative outcomes include: increased time, effort and skill for planning, shopping, preparation and cooking, which is a high opportunity cost for consumers.
UK (Bos and Owen, 2016)	Farmers' markets, Farm shops	Email newsletters, social media	Environmental Sustainability, freshness, local sourcing, organic produce	Broader outreach, however, most consumers were somewhat ambivalent when asked if social media messages influenced their food behaviour
UK (Levidow, Berardi and Jung, 2024)	Community food growing initiatives	Grassroots visual storytelling, in-person conversations, WhatsApp discussion groups, blogs written by participants	Short video stories about participants' experiences (involves using smartphones and simple editing software and sharing them online)	Strengthens community bonds, sense of empathy and trust, stronger emotional connection to the garden space, increased participation and motivation

**Supplementary Table 15 (Cont.).** Data extraction (All Countries)

Country/Author	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
UK (Furness et al, 2022)	CSA	Email, face-to-face interactions(produce collection points, volunteering opportunities, group events), social media (Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram)	How to use the produce (e.g. recipes), the task of growing food and the environment, sharing personal experiences on Whatsapp and celebrating successes, e.g., farmers sharing photos, food advice among members.	Increased knowledge, sense of community and social connection, building social capital, and mental health benefits
UK(Griffins and Philips 2024)	Farm shops	In-person interaction and online promotion via websites.	Authenticity, rich, multi-sensory experience encompassing both the enterprise buildings and the surrounding farm sites.	connection to the farm, knowledge of produce offered, reassurance of how produce has been raised and cared for. Feeling welcomed and gaining trust.
UK and co (Kummer and Milestad, 2020)	Box schemes	Digital tools, e.g., email, web pages and social media. Face-to-face meeting at pick up spots, visiting the farm on open days and occasional events, and telephone.	Information about products, e.g., origin, description and recipes. Values and principles, e.g., organic production, quality and sustainability.	Satisfaction and trust, change eating habits and attitude towards food.
UK (Bos and Owen, 2016)	Farmers' markets, CSAs, box schemes, producer and consumer cooperatives, community gardening initiatives	online(websites and social media presence) and offline channels (physical presence/word-of-mouth).	Promotion and advertising, product and seasonal information, and encouraging participation and engagement.	Increased awareness and access, enhanced virtual reconnection, and potential for behavioural influence, though the extent of this influence requires further study.
Italy, Spain, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Co		Web portals, printed leaflets were added to box deliveries, face-to-face and personal interaction through events and meetings, surveys and interviews(in-depth interviews, focus groups, questionnaires).	Values, e.g., quality production, organic production, sustainable development, product and process information, health and welfare messages.	Behavioural changes, Increased knowledge, awareness and understanding, trust and relationship building, behavioural changes, community building, social and economic benefits.
Italy	Solidarity purchasing groups, Farmers markets	Word-of-mouth, Posters, and local events.	Ethical consumption and solidarity, Support for small-scale local producers.	Higher market attendance, strong sense of community.
Italy (Röhrig, Hassler and Roesler, 2021)	Farm shops	Face-to-face through direct sales and home deliveries, occasionally organising events and educating members on environmental food education.	High product quality (original taste and outstanding nutritional composition), production methods, animal welfare, emphasis on traditional and cultural rooting of produce, price justification and environmental benefits	Greater understanding, trust and appreciation, increased willingness to pay, trust and accountability. A major setback of this strategy is limiting access for a wider range of people.

**Supplementary Table 16 (Cont.).** Data extraction (All Countries)

Country/Author	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
Italy (Belletti <i>et al.</i> , 2024)	Farmers markets	Face-to-face, FM websites and social networks, dissemination of printed materials, workshops, seminars and tastings,	Information that guarantees product origin and characteristics, fair trade, fresh, healthy and locally produced food, sustainable production practices, producer identity and values	Maintains consumers' confidence, enhances understanding of products, practices and values.
Italy (Baldi <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	Solidarity purchasing groups (box schemes)	Personal direct interaction between producers and consumers	Focus on consumer priorities such as preservative-free, organic, fresh and GMO-free. Production process and nutritional ingredients	Members seem more prone to searching for non-local products, meaning that messaging solely focused on local food may be less effective
Italy (Carrieri De Souza, Rover and Forno, 2023)	Network of farmers in CSAs and farmers' markets.	Direct sales (face-to-face)	Critic of the dominant food system, emphasis on citizenship and participation, promotion of social and ethical values	Greater participation and empowerment, increased knowledge and trust, and formation of consumer networks.
Italy (De Bernardi and Tirabeni, 2018)	Digital farmers market (Food assembly)	Not mentioned	Knowledge regarding sustainable consumption behaviours and best practices	Consumers become more sustainable in their consumption habits
Italy (De Bernardi, Bertello and Venuti, 2019)	Food assembly (products are ordered online and then picked up at a weekly farmers' market)	Face-to-face communication and online communication through digital platforms, labels	Ideas, values, opinions, feedback suggestions, ethical awareness, and local and organic food	Face-to-face communication significantly influenced sustainable purchasing behaviour, while digital communication influenced both purchasing and consumption behaviour.
Italy (Cicatiello, 2020)	Box schemes	Face-to-face through direct selling/delivery	Higher quality products, environmental sustainability, biodiversity conservation, fresher and more nutritious products,	High customer retention, increased market share, and willingness to pay extra
Italy (Carfora, Morandi and Catellani, 2022)	"local food supply chain"	Smart phone app called PsyMe	Messages focused on the environmental consequences of purchasing or not purchasing local food	Significant enhancement of self-reported choice of local food.
Italy (Palascha and Chang, 2024)	Social supermarkets/food banks	Word of mouth, infographics. both offline and online channels	Health and environmental benefits, flexible recipes with suggestions for alternative ingredients	Moderate behavioural change. The study also found that migrants showed more indifferent responses to the various messages compared to native Italians.
Italy (Aprile and Punzo, 2022)	Product labelling	Product labelling	Product origin, Sustainability information, e.g., biodiversity conservation, reduced carbon footprint, ethical/social aspects,	Informed decision making, increased preferences for environmentally sustainable labelled products, willingness to pay a premium price for foods with sustainability labels

**Supplementary Table 17 (Cont.).** Data extraction (All Countries)

Country/Author	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
Poland	Food cooperatives and CSA	Facebook, local radio, websites, and face-to-face.	Healthy, local food. Sustainable and ethical food systems	Trust, Growth in membership
Poland (Struś <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	CSA	Direct contact, origin and quality of food, price.	Farmers communicate how far they are willing to deliver their produce,	Engagement in production, connection and trust, acceptance of prices.
Poland (Goszczyński <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	Farmers markets	Face-to-face through direct interaction	Traditions and experiences related to food, quality, recipes and cooking talks	Food choices are shaped by memory, reminiscences, habits, and family tradition. Consumers are still drawn to bigger stores for convenience, e.g., parking space.
Poland (Robinson and Śpiewak, 2023)	Farmers market	Direct interaction at the market itself	Justification for higher prices, emphasis on quality and taste	Good sense of community, acceptance of value narratives and developing relationships
Poland (Abbt, 2024)	Food cooperatives, farmers' markets, allotment gardens, etc	Direct interaction	Trust, quality, origin, good taste, naturalness, freshness, locality, being environmentally friendly, healthy, hygienic, GMO-free, and having minimal additives. Community and connection, rural heritage and tradition, Contrast to industrial food.	Increased transparency and trust, strengthened relationships, participation in civic and community action, connection to rural heritage, feeling of security and control.
Poland (Szymański, 2021)	Online selling platforms	Social media marketing and search engine optimisation. E-mail marketing, Public relations actions, Loyalty programs, TV commercials, Radio advertisements, and Advertising in the press.	Characteristics of individual food products, information about farming, Sales promotion messages to convey discounts, and gifts.	Consumer satisfaction. Better attitude towards online shopping, however, too many choices can require more cognitive effort, leading to consumers buying less. A major success factor is consumer ethnocentrism.
Poland (Barska and Wojciechowska-Solis, 2020)	Short food supply chains, e.g., farmers' markets, cooperatives	Platform, website and mobile applications, labels.	Quality and characteristics, origin and authenticity, support for local economy, health and wellbeing, media promotion.	Consumers become more aware and feel a greater sense of responsibility for the natural environment, and a higher level of consumer knowledge, which tends to influence their shopping behaviour.
Poland (Kosior and Młodawska, 2024)	Not mentioned	Digital media, social campaigns.	Quality, certification, information about animal welfare, biodiversity conservation, efficient resource use, and technological advancements.	A significant concern raised was the potential for consumers and the general public to misunderstand or misinterpret the shared data, leading to negative interpretations and potentially damaging the producer's image.

**Supplementary Table 18 (Cont.).** Data extraction

Country/Author	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
Poland (Hornowski <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	“Small-scale food producers”	Face-to-face interactions at farmers' markets, farm shops, and during delivery. Local newspapers, flyers, websites and social media.	Product quality and origin, production methods, health benefits, and ethical values.	Better understanding, increased trust, stronger relationships with local food systems, and greater willingness to support local and sustainable food producers.
Denmark	CSA and box schemes	Interactive communication technology (mobile app and social media).	Inputs for product development, ideas, and opinions about the product, packaging, recipes, etc.	Growth in subscribers enhances consumers' well-being.
Denmark (Thorsøe and Kjeldsen, 2016)	"Food Communities of Copenhagen and Aarhus" A network of urban consumers sourcing organic produce from regional producers.	Direct communication at events.	Messages relating to transparency and trust, quality food, fair prices, and sharing values.	Facilitates cooperation and creates coherence, enabling consumers to engage with the network and access produce without needing deep knowledge about the production process.
France (Horvath, Raimbert and Raton, 2024)	CSA, Food coops and self-harvest gardens	Social interaction through farm open days and social media.	Community building, sharing risk and sustainability.	Strong reconnection of the food producer with consumers.
Germany and co (Furtschegger <i>et al.</i> , 2015)	Mid-scale food supply chains	Face to face, print, email, websites, social media, radio and TV commercials.	Operational information, e.g., delivery logistics, product availability and lack of products, recipes, packaging, events and activities.	Increased knowledge and awareness, trust and identification, feedback and engagement.
Germany (Opitz <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	CSA Food coops Self-harvest gardens	Face-to-face, Meetings, telephone, newsletters, internet blogs,	Information about seasonality, recipes, cultivation techniques,	Better understanding and appreciation of agricultural production and food
Germany (Roep and Wiskerke, 2012)	AFNs	Branding and logos, slogans, packaging, direct contact, certification and labels	Quality, environmental and ethical values, origin and organic production	Product recognition, increased demand and success,
Germany (Middendorf and Rommel, 2024)	CSAs	Direct contact	Production standards and cultivation methods, risk sharing	a sense of connection to the farm, Enhanced commitment, and stay rates
Germany (Teufer, Waiguny and Grabner-Kräuter, 2023)	Food cooperatives	Sustainability labels	Messages related to the environmental (short transport distances), social and economic impacts of the products	The use of labels positively influences consumers' intention to buy from the network.

**Supplementary Table 19 (Cont.).** Data extraction (All Countries)

Country/Author	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
Germany (Zoll, Specht and Siebert, 2021)	“Alternative Food Networks”	Face-to-face interactions at farm shops, markets and community events, product labels and packaging, newsletters, and email updates. Online platforms such as websites and social media	Product origin and traceability, sustainability values, ethical and social values, personal stories and transparency.	Increased awareness and knowledge, strengthened trust in producers and the food system changed purchasing behaviour towards more sustainable and ethical food choices, enhanced sense of community and connection to local producers.
Romania	CSA and farmers markets	Face-to-face, street banners	Health, food quality and sustainability	Consumer engagement, enhanced trust and improved rural livelihoods
Romania (Moellers and Birhala, 2014)	CSA	Farm visits and personal contact, local NGOs,	Reliability and commitment through weekly delivery of fresh produce, welcoming messages, organic practices, and crop status.	Positive change in purchasing behaviour and priorities, trust in partnerships, increased connections and awareness. However study reported that limited community building, socialisation, and interaction among consumers remained at a low level.
Germany (Horvath, Raimbert and Raton, 2024)	Farmers markets, Consumer associations	Direct exchanges and fostering various forms of proximity (point of sales, farms, and consumer associations).	Product traceability and specific characteristics, messages about transparency and solidarity.	Restores confidence, higher satisfaction and engagement, and a higher willingness to pay for products; consumers value relational proximity with farmers.
Romania (Möllers, Bäuml and Dufhues, 2022)	Farmers' markets, box schemes, CSAs	Labelling as traditional production.	Local origin, quality, fairness.	Consumers strongly prefer non-certified “traditional” produce over certified organic products.
Romania (Polimeni <i>et al.</i> , 2022)	Farmers markets	Direct-face-to face interaction.	In a product presentation, consumers learn about how the products are grown. Consumers learn about the importance of local, sustainable agriculture.	Increased consumer awareness and knowledge, relationships and loyalty with sellers.
Romania (Smeds and Axelsson, 2014)	CSA and box schemes	Word of mouth during deliveries and pick up points, farm visits, phone, email, Facebook, and social events.	Food quality, contribution to sustainability, and convenience.	Increased awareness, development of trust, deepens involvement and participation.
Romania (Moellers and Birhala, 2014)	CSA	Face-to-face through	Environmentally friendly products, organically produced, natural or traditional production.	Consumers show greater willingness to pay for products.
Romania (Dumitru <i>et al.</i> , 2023)	Family farm products	Labelling (keywords suggested are traditional, nature, community) and awareness campaigns.	Quality, taste, freshness, health, supporting the local economy, and origin.	Increased willingness to pay more, confidence in certified products.

**Supplementary Table 20 (Cont.).** Data extraction (All Countries)

Country/Author	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
Romania (Möllers, Bäuml and Dufhues, 2022)	Farmers markets and CSAs	Labelling	The labelling conveys key messages such as naturalness, trust, quality, rural values, and support for small farmers.	Strong consumer preference for traditional products over certified organic.
Romania (Popa and Dabija, 2019)	Small and medium-sized organic producers	Food tasting campaigns, organic labels and logos.	Health benefits, environmental protection, product quality, highlights of the perceived negative effects of conventional food, and local origin.	Increased awareness of benefits, increased preference and purchase, however, most consumers have more confidence in food sold by peasants than in products with “bio labels”.
Spain	CSAs, Food cooperatives, farmers market.	Periodic meetings, websites	Information about products, health, fair trade, and weekly product orders.	Increased urban engagement and partnerships.
Spain (Miralles, Dentoni and Pascucci, 2017)	Consumer groups and community gardens	Direct communication with consumers, enabling direct visits from consumers to producers, email, and social media.	Messages about providing alternatives to the mainstream food system, supporting small and local producers, building community, food sovereignty, biodiversity, value of products, including origin, quality, method of production and stories behind them.	Enhanced consumer participation and sense of community; however, Consumers find it challenging to maintain social media platforms.
Spain (Sánchez-Hernández, 2024)	Farmers' markets, CSAs, box schemes,	Face-to-face interactions at farmers markets, on-farm sales delivery, social media, e.g., Facebook and Instagram.	Food quality and characteristics, environmental commitment, health promotion, and community building.	Consumer loyalty and a strong sense of community.
Spain (Espelt <i>et al.</i> , 2019).	Cooperatives	Social media, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. Direct communication during regular visits.	Producers talk about their farm work and the price mechanism.	Builds closer relationships, builds confidence, and consumers prioritise purchasing local products.
Spain (Vázquez and Del Moral, 2022)	Farmers markets	Direct communication in the physical space of the markets.	Trust, origin, and provenance of food, agroecological commitment, and community involvement.	Increased awareness and demand for products, and increased willingness to pay a higher price.
Spain and co (Georges and Caleman, 2021)	Agricultural cooperatives	Group meetings, phone calls, text messages, face-to-face, newsletters, websites, emails, and social media (limited usage).	Exchange of technical information about production processes, managerial information, market trends, and cooperative activities.	Improved member commitment to the cooperative, member satisfaction, trust, enhanced member involvement and participation in the governance of the cooperative.

**Supplementary Table 21 (Cont.).** Data extraction (All Countries)

Country/Author	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
Spain (Ibáñez-Jiménez <i>et al.</i> , 2024)	Cooperatives, Buyer groups, association of producers/consumers	Word-of-mouth at workshops, events and direct sales. social networks and websites.	Their values and principles, the promotion of local varieties and benefits they provide, messages about protecting crop biodiversity, cultural heritage and providing resilience to climate change of food security.	Strengthened loyalty
Spain (Sanz-Cañada, Yacamán-Ochoa and Pérez-Campaña, 2024)	Cooperatives (Agroecological cooperative supermarkets)	Marketing campaigns, websites.	Value-based food, prioritising local, organic, seasonal, artisanal, healthy food, reducing ecological footprint.	It attracts value-driven consumers. A high level of satisfaction is reported; despite this satisfaction, a significant number of people spent less than 20% of their family budget at the cooperative supermarket.
Spain (Giampietri <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	Farmers markets	Face-to-face interactions at markets.	Sustainability, tradition, quality.	Enhanced trust, willingness to pay premium prices, and support for local producers.
Spain (González-Azcárate, Cruz Maceín and Bardají, 2021)	Short food supply chains	Face-to-face communication	Product quality, food information, health attributes, and support for rural development.	Increased awareness and commitment, attraction and willingness to buy, and higher frequency of buying.
Spain (Peña Rodríguez <i>et al.</i> , 2024)	Farmers markets	Word-of-mouth, workshops and exhibitions, flyers, internet	Care for the natural environment, the origin of products, quality, and health.	Positive opinion of consumers about the market.
Hungary	Farmers market and CSA	Posters for local events, social media	Freshness, local and seasonal food, Trust and transparency, support for small-scale farmers.	Growing consumer participation.
Hungary (Balázs, Pataki and Lazányi, 2016)	CSA	Direct interaction during weekly delivery of boxes and farm visits, Newsletters, emails, social media, and surveys for feedback.	stories for production procedures, recipes and tips for cooking, education on local, seasonal, healthy and sustainable diets.	Increased knowledge and awareness, behavioural changes, development of trust and relationships, a sense of community and belonging.
Hungary (Torok <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	Farmers' markets, box schemes, and community gardens	Face-to-face contact and online platforms, community interaction by existing members.	Quality, safety, health, local origin, support for the local community, trust and reliability.	Participation, increased level of commitment, and self-actualisation.
Hungary (Benedek, 2023)	Local food buying clubs	Direct contact through farm visits, events and delivery. Online platforms.	Product quality and production methods, ethics and values, and consumer education about food cultures.	Enhanced trust, sense of community, dietary shift, and higher support for local producers.

**Supplementary Table 22 (Cont.).** Data extraction (All Countries)

Country/Author	AFN Type	Communication Channel	Key Messages	Outcome Reported
Hungary (Benedek, 2023)	Short food supply chains	Social media, email and phone, direct interaction, even in covid 19 pandemic.	Updates on regulations and opening times, availability and product details, ordering and delivery instructions, and changes in product mix.	Increased demand for online and home delivery, learning and knowledge exchange, increased sales and appreciation for home delivery.
Hungary (Szabó and Juhász, 2015)	Farmers' markets, CSAs, farm shops	Direct contact is the primary channel, including printed materials and websites.	Product information, product characteristics, pricing.	Despite direct communication, producers "do not have an accurate understanding of their customers' requirements. Consumers desire more detailed product information, tasting opportunities, and tangible signs of reliability (like receipts and accurate weighing), as well as a deeper connection with producers.
Hungary (László and Wahlen, 2024)	Consumer groups	Direct communication	Attributes associated with value proximity, such as freshness, taste, reliability, safety, evocation of local flavours, naturalness, and nutritional value.	Higher understanding of local food, increased trust, and young consumers perceive local food as expensive, so emphasising added values like freshness and reduced environmental impact might increase willingness to pay.

**Supplementary Table 2.** Summary of study characteristics

	<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage of studies (N=75)</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Geographic focus</b>	Multi-country	9	12.0%
		United Kingdom (UK)	11	14.7%
		Italy	13	17.3%
		Poland	10	13.3%
		Romania	10	13.3%
		Spain	13	17.3%
		Hungary	10	13.3%
		Denmark	2	2.7%
		France	1	1.3%
<b>2</b>	<b>AFN Type studied</b>	Farmers markets	48	64.0%
		Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)	44	58.7%
		Box schemes	30	40.0%
		cooperatives	28	37.3%
		Farm shops	15	20.0%
		Short food supply chains (SFSC)	12	16.0%
		Solidarity purchasing groups (GAS)	6	8.0%
		Community gardens/food growing	7	9.3%
		Online selling platforms	3	4.0%
<b>3.</b>	<b>Communication channels</b>	Direct/Face-to-face interaction	71	94.7%
		Digital (website, email, newsletter)	52	69.3%
		Social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	41	54.7%
		Printed materials (Leaflets, flyers, posters)	20	26.7%
		Labelling and packaging	13	17.3%
		Events (workshops, tastings, farm visits)	23	30.7
		Word of mouth	11	14.7
<b>4.</b>	<b>Key message frames</b>	Product quality and attributes (freshness, taste, health)	62	82.7%
		Origin and provenance (local, traceability, know your farmer)	59	78.7%
		Environmental sustainability (Organic, biodiversity, low footprint)	55	73.3%
		Social and ethical values (fair price, community, support for small farmers)	53	70.7%
		Trust and transparency	45	60.0%
		Practical Information (recipes, logistics, seasonality)	28	37.3%
		Tradition and cultural heritage	22	29.3%

**Note:** Percentages are calculated as (count/75)\*100. Studies often feature multiple categories (for example, a study can examine both farmers' markets and CSAs), so counts and percentages may present multiple occurrences.

**Supplementary Table 2.** Summary of study characteristics

	Characteristic	Category	Count	Percentage of studies (N=75)
5.	Reported outcomes	Trust and relationship building	62	82.7%
		Increased knowledge and awareness	58	77.3%
		Community building and social connection	53	70.7%
		Behavioural change (purchase habits, dietary shift)	48	64.0%
		Consumer satisfaction and loyalty	39	52.0%
		Willingness to pay a premium	23	30.7%
		Challenges/negatives (time cost, access limits, miscommunication)	18	24.0%

**Note:** Percentages are calculated as  $(\text{count}/75)*100$ . Studies often feature multiple categories (for example, a study can examine both farmers' markets and CSAs), so counts and percentages may present multiple occurrences.