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Interfaces

MAP Position Paper

# TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE & RESILIENT VALUE CHAINS



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## 1. Summary and key messages

The present paper documents the outcomes of the discussions and interactions held in the MAP of the region of Central Greece as part of addressing the topic “Sustainable and resilient value chains”. After outlining the current situation in the region, the key results of the discussions in the MAP (held in July 2022) are presented. The MAP members’ contribution to the discussion helped make apparent some of the needs that the local value chains face (e.g., need to empower the role of cooperatives), as well as changes that occurred in the way they operate to respond to the challenges imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, interventions at the policy level were highlighted (policy interventions already implemented as well as interventions that could potentially be implemented at the local, national and EU levels with respect to, for example, education and training).

## 2. Introduction

The aim of the MAP discussions was to let its members propose interventions and identify gaps related to the transition towards sustainable and resilient agri-food value chains, based on the needs of the region. The region of Central Greece has a significant contribution to the country’s agricultural production and there is a considerable portion of the local population working in the local agri-food value chain. The actors involved in the local value chains need solutions for more efficient ways for the promotion of the local agri-food products in the market.

The objectives of the MAP discussions have been the following:

- Objective 1: Establishment of short value chains for the benefit of all involved stakeholders.
- Objective 2: Modernisation of agri-food value chains in the region of Central Greece.
- Objective 3: Establishment of a collective culture among all the stakeholders involved in the regional value chains.

Based on the needs that have been explicitly highlighted by the MAP members (detailed descriptions of the needs of the MAP are provided in section 4.1), Objective 1 relates to the potential of short value chains in terms of benefiting producers and strengthening trade at local level. The need to adopt and apply innovative, technology-supported methods all along the value chain to ensure that quality is not compromised during the “journey” of agri-food products from Farm to Fork has been the need underpinning Objective 2. Objective 2 is also relevant to the expressed need of bridging the gap between producers and the utilisation of modern, ubiquitous digital tools. As highlighted during the discussions, there is the necessity of cooperation among all the different entities involved in the agri-food value chain that relates to Objective 3.

The MAP discussions revolved around the below listing questions which played the role of sub-topics guiding the discussions.

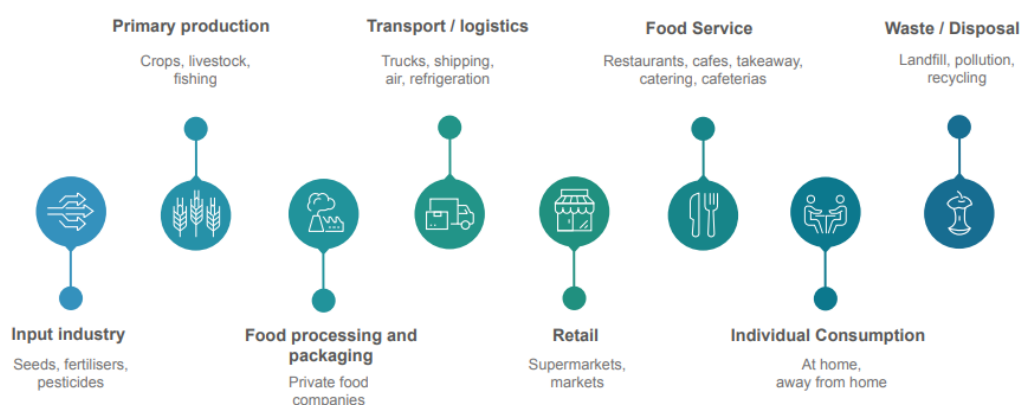
- What are the needs of the area covered by the MAP in relation to sustainable and resilient value chains?
- What are the policy interventions already in place, and what are examples of actions taken by local actors addressing these needs implemented on the area covered by the MAP?
- Which policy interventions (i.e., instruments, measures) are recommended by MAP members to be implemented at the local, regional, and/or national level? How can the EU support these interventions?
- What are the knowledge gaps and what research projects are needed?

During the discussions, the MAP members made specific recommendations for policy interventions/measures towards addressing the expressed needs and referred to existing gaps to policy and research.

### 3. Current situation based on background research and evidence

The Paris Agreement (2015) highlights the impact of climate change on food security, hunger, and the food production systems' vulnerability. Agri-food value chains are expected to be severely affected by extreme weather events being the result of climate change, yet they also have a significant contribution and part in this emerging, ominous landscape.

In the coming years, the agri-food sector will need to address significant challenges. More specifically, by 2050, it will need to feed 40% more people worldwide by increasing food production by 70%, whereas the increase in the cultivated land is not expected to rise above 10% (E&Y, 2022). Within such a context, the need for sustainable supply chains is more than necessary. Sustainable food supply chains are complex systems involving several stakeholders and processes, as well as flows of goods/materials and information (Anastasiadis, Apostolidou, Michailidis, 2020). At each stage of the production process (see Figure1 below), relevant SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) need to be taken into consideration to identify and set realistic and measurable objectives towards more environmentally friendly and resilient supply chains. For instance, minimising the negative impact on SDG6 (Clean water and sanitation) by reducing water consumption (e.g., in primary production, input industry, or food service) in regions facing severe water stress problems should be a priority. In addition, the delivery of products produced on methods having a reduced energy footprint and minimal GHG emissions (primary production) has the potential to positively impact on SDG 13 (Climate action).



**Figure 1:** Simplified overview of the stages of a food value chain

Source: UN Environment Programme, *CATALYSING SCIENCE-BASED POLICY ACTION ON SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION: The value-chain approach & its application to food, construction and textiles* (2021)

The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic is that global supply chains must become more resilient, diverse, environmentally friendly and socially responsible. Trade should make a decisive contribution to a sustainable economic recovery, while at the same time it should help businesses to rebuild and reorganise their broken value chains. The agri-food sector entails a wide and complex network of feedbacks and trade-offs between

the environment, economic activities, transport, trade, livelihoods, and human health. Since its first wave in 2019, the outbreak of COVID-19 is still having an unparalleled effect on the agri-food sector. The health and socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic are prevalent to the way that agri-food systems are organised and operate (Takavakoglou, Pana, Skalkos, 2022).

Countries and regions whose economies rely on the primary sector appear to have endured to some extent the negative impact of the pandemic. Such a case is the region of Central Greece, where agriculture is a key financial activity providing income and employment to a significant portion of the local population. Located literally in the “heart of Greece” and being less than an hour drive away from Athens, the region of Central Greece is the country's second largest region in terms of surface size (15,549 km<sup>2</sup>). It comprises five regional units – equivalent to districts within regions- (Fthiotida, Evia, Viotia, Fokida, and Evrytania) and is known for its great variety in scenery, made up of valleys, mountains, fir and pine forests, pastures, and a long coastline. The region of Central Greece has a significant contribution to the country's agricultural production with its arable land being equal to 10% of the total arable land in Greece (*Enterprise Greece Invest & Trade, 2016*). The agri-food sector of the region contributes with 18% of the total exports of Greek agri-food products. Moreover, 20% of the workforce of the region of Central Greece are employed in the agricultural, forestry, and fishing sectors (*Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2020*). The strategic geographic position of the region makes it a strong contributor to the national and European economy.

According to the experts in the agri-food sector, the quality of the agricultural products is a key strength of the region positively impacting in value chains, as opposed to increased production costs, which appear to have a negative effect.

## 4. Position of the Multi-Actor Platform

### 4.1. Identified needs

The region of Central Greece is well known for the quality of the agricultural products produced there and has a significant contribution to the country's agricultural production (see section 3 for details). Even though agricultural production in the region was not heavily affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic, delays in the delivery of agri-food products to the market were encountered. In addition, a rise in prices was observed as the result of an increase in costs related to segments of the agri-food value chain, which had to be absorbed and were eventually transferred to the prices paid by the buyer/ consumer. The availability of agri-food products was also affected by the restrictions imposed to retail markets during the quarantine periods.

Regarding the existing value chains in the region of Central Greece, the major players are (outdoor) public markets, retail sales points, catering shops, wholesale trade markets, agricultural cooperatives, manufacturing and processing units, and traders. During the discussions, the MAP members referred to the potential of short value chains in terms of benefiting producers and strengthening trade at local level. Given the morphology of the land in most geographic regions in Greece (with the region of Central Greece included), short value chains appear to be an ideal solution for the delivery of quality agri-food products to the consumer. The MAP members also highlighted the potential and need to adopt and apply innovative, technology-supported methods (e.g., related to production, food safety and certification, environmental sustainability and protection, and quality assurance) along the value chain to ensure that quality will not be compromised during the “journey” of agri-food products from Farm to Fork. To make the adoption of such methods and practices a reality, it is critical to ensure and promote cooperation among all the different entities involved in the agri-food value chain in the region (producers, advisors, agricultural cooperatives, agri-food product processors, traders, retailers, consumers, public administrations and legal entities). The MAP members made clear that things are not there yet. Nevertheless, steps need to be taken to this direction.

Bringing all these players together and providing the incentives to make them share a common vision is recognised as a requisite for the benefit of all the stakeholders involved in the regions agri-food value chains.

Apart from the need to establish short value chains by bringing together various stakeholders sharing a common vision, it is equally important to provide the means of making short value chains sustainable. With respect to this, the MAP members mentioned the need of establishing Legal Entities and the required legislation to ensure the framing of the context within which short value chains could operate. This is needed to provide the rules and conditions under which the various value chain players can get together as shareholders benefiting and making profit based on commonly established ethical, social and environmental priorities.

On top of the above, another point that was highlighted during the discussions in the MAP was the need to bridge the gap between producers and the utilisation of modern, ubiquitous, and in some cases free to use digital tools (websites, social media, tools for developing online shopping facilities, etc.). Such a development could potentially help in the realisation of the short value chain vision by bringing producers, consumers and value chain intermediaries closer.

## 4.2. Existing interventions and actions

A list of specific actions, undertaken in the region of Central Greece by local actors, which are indicative of an interest towards shifting sustainable value chains are the following:

### **Title “Products from the heart of Greece”**

An initiative of the “Agro-Food Partnership of the Region of Central Greece” (<https://agrifoodcentralgreece.gr/>), a non-profit organisation located in the region of Central Greece, having to do with certification of local produced products. The main purpose of this effort is the promotion and recognition of the region’s products, as well as the certification of products from the region, under the label: “Products from the heart of Greece”. In this context, recognised certification organisations make evaluations of businesses wishing to promote there agri-food products under the “Products from the heart of Greece” label.

### **Agricultural cooperatives**

There are many agricultural cooperatives established and operating in the region of Central Greece having the capacity and interest to innovate for change, and thus pave the way towards short, sustainable value chains in the region. An inventory of the agricultural cooperatives in the region of Central Greece is available at: <https://agrifoodcentralgreece.gr/en/producer>. Many of them are open to visitors and are selling points for agri-food products, including some of the locally produced 31 PDO (protected designation of origin) products and wines.

### **Title “From farm gate to shelf”**

There is an effort for changing the way that farmers use the land towards more sustainable ways. So, either individual producers or producers being members of cooperatives can be certified for meeting specific standards (e.g., standards for organic agriculture and organic livestock, the Agro 2.1-2.2 standard<sup>1</sup>, etc). This initiative has started gaining traction given the increasing interest of consumers in agri-food products produced on sustainable agricultural practices (e.g., organic products).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tuv-nord.com/gr/en/certification/food-primary-production/agro-2/>

### **4.3. Recommendations from the MAP**

#### **4.3.1. Recommendations for future rural policies**

During the discussion with the members of the Central Greece MAP, it was noticed that short value chains in the region could become a reality by strengthening the links between the local agricultural production and gastronomy. What was highlighted was the need to have restaurants in the region using locally produced agricultural products, which is not yet entirely the case. This way, the local gastronomy will become the best “ambassador” of the agricultural products grown in the region. To this end, the members of the MAP stressed the role that policy interventions and incentives (related to the use of local agri-food products by the restaurants in the region) could potentially play. Such measures have the potential to ensure, to some extent, a wider consumption of the locally produced agri-food products at the regional level.

In addition to the above, the design and implementation of measures reducing bureaucracy and heavy taxation could provide local actors with incentives to undertake entrepreneurial initiatives within the context of the local value chain. Another important measure highlighted in the discussions in the MAP relates to the adoption of measures framing a context for informing consumers about the benefits of short value chains, hence making them aware of and equally responsible for such an endeavour. Adequately informed consumers can become important contributors to the establishment of collaboration schemes between primary production and retail/consumption. This needs to become top priority at the regional level. Providing incentives to producers (taking the form of concrete policy interventions/measures) for the purpose of enabling them to adopt more environmentally friendly crop growing practices can also be a step towards the establishment and sustainability of short value chains. Agri-food products produced by using sustainable agricultural practices are of increased quality and this can be a unique selling point for convincing consumers on the importance of short value chains. Furthermore, policy measures shaping a frame for advertising short value chains beyond the boundaries of the geographic region they relate to (e.g., in agri-food related events, exhibitions, fairs, etc.) can provide the potential for more visibility.

At the EU level, there are already tools providing guidance such as the European Green Deal’s Farm to Fork strategy, the EU Biodiversity strategy, etc. These tools offer guidelines and frameworks to be considered for the establishment, strengthening, and sustainability of short value chains at the regional/local level. However, these tools need to be further adapted to national, regional, and local contexts to fit the particularities of different societal, economic, and cultural needs. Moreover, entities involved in the agri-food value chain are sometimes not adequately informed about the existence of such tools. Given that, there is a need for establishing multi-actor schemes and communication/collaboration channels bringing together various actors and entities ranging from universities and research organisations to cooperatives and citizens, to make the existence of such tools and frameworks widespread and common sense.

#### **4.3.2. Recommendations for future research agendas**

The Central Greece MAP members pointed out that the education and appropriate training of practitioners in digital skills related to sustainable agriculture and food systems could be a first step towards contributing to a smooth transition of the agricultural sector to sustainable chains. Based on that, research and development projects concerning training and education of entities that are involved in the agri-food value chain would be beneficial. Education and training can help at a more strategic level towards taking steps to short and sustainable value chains. This has the potential to raise the awareness of the community, at the local and regional levels, on the benefits that may be reaped from the establishment and function of short supply chains. It can help members of local and region communities understand issues/ parameters having to do with value chain related economic, environmental and social factors. The contribution of universities and/or research organisations (e.g., university departments located in the region of Central Greece) in the

design and delivery of such educational/ training problems could be catalytic. The MAP members highlighted the existence of gaps in the delivery of relevant educational/ training programs having the capacity to raise the awareness of value chain actors and the broader society.

The new generation of farmers will succeed in paying attention to and adopting sustainable practices given that in most cases they have a higher educational level, and are also exposed to more stimuli, compared to the previous generations. They are more familiar with technology, more aware of the importance of issues having to do with food safety, consumer behaviour and preferences, as well as environmental protection, and are more knowledgeable of the opportunities that may stem within the context of short value chains. Based on the feedback provided by the MAP members, most young farmers in the region are interested in and eager to engage in sustainable practices. In such a context, the role of collective schemes could be of increased value. Strengthening the role of cooperatives can help in a horizontal manner by wide opening the way for products produced on sustainable practices to the market.

## Conclusions

The following main points have been raised in the MAP discussions with respect to the needs of stakeholders:

- Need to strengthen the trade of agri-food products at the local level.
- Need to adopt innovative, technology-supported methods and solutions.
- Need to empower the role of cooperatives.
- Need to establish short, sustainable value chains by bringing together various stakeholders sharing a common vision that is based on commonly accepted ethical, social and environmental priorities.
- Need to bridge the gap between producers and the utilisation of modern digital tools

As regards the policy- and research-related recommendations that came from the side of the MAP members, the following points have been stressed:

- Policy measures helping to promote the consumption of locally produced agri-food products.
- Minimisation of bureaucracy and relief from heavy taxation for the local actors wishing to establish entrepreneurial activity within the local value chains.
- Establishment of collaboration schemes between primary production and consumption/ retail by taking measures for the effective and efficient information of consumers.
- Incentives to producers for adopting more environmentally friendly practices moving towards the establishment and sustainability of short value chains.
- Education and training of entities involved in the agri-food value chain.
- Need for establishing multi-actor schemes and collaboration channels bringing together entities from universities and research organisations to cooperatives and consumer organisations, which could play a decisive role in the training and education of people involved in local value chains.

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## Annex 1 Methodology used by the MAP

The steps that were followed with respect to the implementation of the discussions and interactions in the MAP of the region of Central Greece involved: (i) development of informative material sent to the people invited in the MAP (a slide deck summarising the main topic points/questions for guiding the discussions); (ii) initial communication with representatives of the local agri-food value chains for the purpose of identifying the MAP members; (iii) recruitment of the MAP members by means of targeted communication with them (via email and phone calls) including the sending of the informative material that was created (including the MAP Discussion paper); (iv) implementation of the MAP meetings and collection of input/feedback from the MAP members; and (v) processing of the results/outcomes of the MAP discussions by drafting the MAP Position Paper.

The stakeholders who got involved in the discussions as members of the MAP were representatives of the local society, representatives of the public authorities of the region, and scientists. They were all very eager to know in advance what the discussions would be about. To this end informative material was developed and sent (as part of the initial communication with them) to help them establish an understanding of the scope and purpose of the meetings/discussions.

Although the MAP members were eager to contribute to the discussions and provide useful points regarding region-related needs and recommendations, it was sometimes difficult to keep track of time and a structured way of having the discussions by also keeping a focus on the topic and questions discussed. Given the above, the duration of the MAP discussions had to be slightly extended to provide enough time to all MAP members to present their points and have their voices heard.

The topic appeared to have an increased level of relevance to the region as made evident by the input of the MAP members. Although the number of participants was quite high, no controversial points were made. There appeared to be a consensus about what is considered a need and what is considered a priority for the region and the local stakeholders when it comes to the establishment and strengthening of short value chains.

From a methodological point of view, more time and a better structure for the discussions would be helpful.



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