

Flemish pilots – an example of a regional cooperative food network between local producers and institutional kitchens in East- and West-Flanders

Flanders has set up two regional pilots, one in East-Flanders and another in West-Flanders. The aim of the pilots is to build a regional cooperative food network in which numerous producers and consumers are connected to each other. In this pilot, we want to address consumers of the institutional kitchens of Boeverbos, Sint-Bernardus en VIVES Kortrijk, as they have a large impact on the society.

Introduction

By bringing the local products to the institutional kitchens, the SME's can increase their turnover. This is only one of the numerous benefits of the cooperative food network. However, through interviews of the institutional kitchens, some difficulties were identified:

- They want to be sure that the safety of the food they order is guaranteed.
- They are afraid that this will go with a lot of administration.
- They are facing difficulties to include local food in public offers.
- They say that there is little demand from the costumers of the institutional kitchens.

To tackle the first two difficulties, a solution was to include a distribution platform as a logistic partner in the network to facilitate the link between the producers and institutional kitchens. Two different distribution platforms were therefore included in the pilots: Bidfood in Oudenaarde, East-Flanders and Horeca Totaal in Bruges, West-Flanders.

Both platforms are very different. Bidfood is an international company that has a lot of experience in provisioning institutional kitchens, but only little experience in cooperating with local producers. Horeca Totaal, on the other hand, is a national platform that has a lot of experience in cooperating with regional producers, but is experiencing a decreasing demand of local food from the institutional kitchens.

Two different approaches will be used to tackle the challenges of the platforms. With Bidfood the supply side will be facilitated by showing the producers how to cooperate with Bidfood. With Horeca Totaal the demand side will be facilitated by trying to raise awareness in the institutional kitchens to increase the demand of local food.

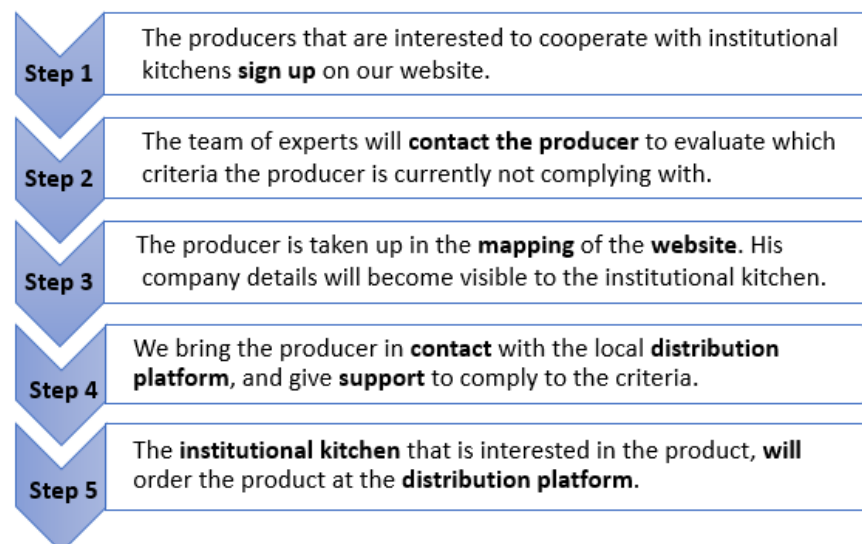
How did we do it?

To bring the SME's in contact with the distribution platform Bidfood, the Flemish partners organized a network event on 20th December. During this meeting, the project will be

presented, the producers will get to know each other and Bidfood will explain how they operate.

From February 2018 on, the website of the pilot will be published online, and the SME's will be able to register themselves via the website. Once an SME is registered, we will contact him to evaluate which requirements the SME is not yet complying with to deliver his food to the distribution platform. To comply to these requirements, they will be given support by the team of experts. In the following step, the SME will be incorporated in the mapping of the supply on the website. As such, his company details will be visible for the institutional kitchens. The SME will also be introduced to the distribution platform. Finally, the institutional kitchen that is interested in one of the products on the website, will order the product through the distribution platform, that will take care of the delivery of the product. All steps are represented in the flowchart here below.

How does it work?



What did we learn?

- That a distribution platform is needed to facilitate the logistics and delivery of local food in the institutional kitchens.
- That the producers are sometimes difficult to reach, and it is important to contact them personally.
- That when two different distribution platforms are incorporated in a pilot, their mutual relations have to be analyzed beforehand.
- That the institutional kitchens want to minimize their work on food processing, and therefore prefer processed food (unless not too much processing work is needed, e.g. mushrooms, onions, Belgian endives, etc.)
- That the demand of local food in institutional kitchens is decreasing.
- That food safety is an important issue for the institutional kitchens. Therefore, support needs to be given to the producers to help them complying with the criteria.

Next steps

To make the project a success, we will have to convince as much SME's as possible to enrol in the project, and at the same time raise the awareness in the institutional kitchens to increase the demand of local food.

To facilitate the process between the SME's and the institutional kitchen, we will come forward with a strong communication on our website to reach:

- The SME's: to offer them support
- The institutional kitchen: to explain what we can do for them to avoid complexity (e.g. hand over menus based on local food, hand over tricks to incorporate local food in public offers through workshops etc.)
- The costumer of the kitchen: to raise awareness through story-telling

After the end of the project we expect that a minimum of 20 SME's will increase their turnover by an increased demand of local food in the institutional kitchens.

Do you want to learn more?

Welcome to contact

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