

Knowledge Sharing as a Factor in Building Competitive Advantage and Resilience Among Local Food Producers

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Abstract: This article examines knowledge sharing as a factor in building competitive advantage and resilience among local food producers operating in short supply chains (SFSCs) in Poland. Despite the growing importance of knowledge, social capital, and collaboration for adaptability, there is a lack of in-depth empirical research on this group. The study fills this gap using data from a survey conducted among 600 local food producers. The results reveal a clear cooperation gap, with few producers participating in formal organizations and engaging in coopetition relationships. Knowledge sharing is incidental and occurs primarily within relationships based on trust. At the same time, a small group of producers engaged in collaboration achieves market effects, including increased sales, productivity, profitability, and market share, confirming the importance of knowledge as a strategic resource. The barriers identified by producers, including weak negotiating power, limited access to financing, pricing pressure, labor shortages, lack of market knowledge, and insufficient institutional support, are endogenous in nature. They stem from limited knowledge flows and low levels of collaboration, rather than from autonomous structural barriers. This means that knowledge and collaboration deficits are the primary source of development constraints in SFSCs. The study contributes theoretically by demonstrating that the resilience of local food systems is a function of active knowledge flows. Practical implications point to the need to strengthen collaborative networks, foster collective learning, and shift public policies towards a knowledge-based approach.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing, Cooperation, Coopetition, Resilience, Local food producers, Short food supply chains (SFSCs)

1. Introduction

Local food producers play an important role in building sustainable and resilient food systems. Growing consumer interest in high-quality, provenance-identified products produced in SFSCs reinforces the importance of local food systems as an alternative to globalized distribution models (Keegan et al., 2024). At the same time, these producers operate under numerous constraints related to production resources, technology, access to markets, and human capital (FAO, 2017), as well as barriers resulting from the nature of the market, certification requirements, production scale, and supply chain relationships (Oglethorpe and Heron, 2013). In Poland, these challenges are particularly evident due to the dominance of small and medium-sized enterprises and the strong position of retail chains, which impose quality, logistics, and pricing standards that are difficult for local producers to meet (Zarebski et al., 2025). As a result, local producers, despite offering unique and regionally rooted products, have limited bargaining power and low adaptability.

In such a context, the ability to effectively manage knowledge (Gardeazabal et al., 2023) becomes crucial, encompassing the processes of acquiring, transferring, applying, and sharing knowledge (Deng and Lu, 2022) in order to create value (Kozhakhmet & Nazri, 2017). Knowledge sharing, understood as the exchange of experiences, values, contextual information, and expert insights (Davenport & Prusak, 1998), is the foundation of joint strategic actions (Maizza et al., 2019). Moreover, it enhances the sustainability, agency and resilience of producers, constituting a source of competitive advantage (Šūmane et al., 2017; O'Connor et al., 2024; Scorrano et al., 2025; Hasdiansyah et al., 2025; Krasnokutska et al., 2025; Alzate Rendón et al., 2025).

Despite the growing importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing in the European debate, research on the mechanisms of their utilization in the local food production sector remains limited, creating a clear research gap. The aim of this article is to analyze the impact of knowledge transfer and collaboration processes on the effectiveness of entities operating in SFSCs. The article contributes to the discussion on the role of knowledge in the local food production sector, demonstrating that the development of local food systems requires not only material resources but, above all, systemic support for collaboration and knowledge sharing processes. These enable the transformation of individual producers' experiences into collective knowledge capital, strengthening their competitiveness and resilience to market volatility.

2. Literature Review

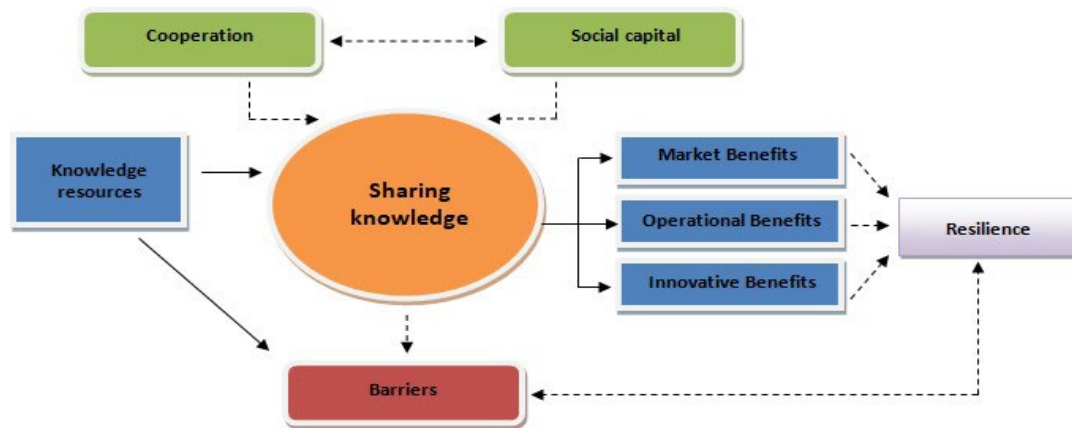
According to the resource-based view (RBV) and the knowledge-based view (KBV), intangible assets such as knowledge, skills, and competencies constitute a key resource for building competitive advantage, adaptability, and overall performance (Ofori-Baafi et al., 2025; Ali et al., 2023). In the context of increasing market complexity, knowledge is becoming a strategic resource determining the economic performance and survival of organizations (Stoeva et al., 2024; Vesperi & Coppolino, 2023). It encompasses both explicit and tacit elements, rooted in practices, experience, and local traditions (Gardeazabal et al., 2023; Thomas et al., 2020). Knowledge sharing is a dynamic process based on interaction, communication and network building (Wang et al., 2010; Singh et al., 2025), enabling collective learning and generating new solutions (Davenport & Prusak, 1998).

Local food producers base knowledge exchange primarily on informal social relationships (Shaijumon, 2018; Wood et al., 2014). They create networks of practice in which knowledge circulates through observation, conversation, and experience (Oreszczyn et al., 2010), serving as a primary channel for information exchange (Laforge & McLachlan, 2018) and generating relational benefits (Stoeva et al., 2024). Furthermore, markets and social events serve as local knowledge institutions, enabling the observation of practices and the exchange of experiences (Hinrichs et al., 2004). This strengthens local embeddedness but limits the scale of knowledge flows. The lack of formal knowledge exchange structures hinders the systematization of practices, the implementation of innovation, and the development of resilience.

Social networks, both formal and informal, play a key role in interorganizational knowledge transfer (Marchiori & Franco, 2020; Porto Gomez, 2018). Coopetition is particularly important, enabling access to resources and knowledge while maintaining competitive pressure, fostering innovation (Estrada et al., 2016; Abubakar, 2026; Osarenkhoe, 2010). Knowledge sharing is therefore the foundation of cooperative ecosystems (Bacon et al., 2020). The effectiveness of knowledge sharing also depends on individual and social factors, such as trust, prior experience, social support, and group cohesion (Brooke, 2017; Zain et al., 2022; Tulinayo et al., 2022). Despite the potential of social networks, numerous barriers hinder knowledge flow. These include: lack of trust, fear of copying solutions, lack of motivation, lack of a culture of collaboration, insufficient technological infrastructure, information uncertainty, cultural differences, geographic distance, and the strong embedding of knowledge in individual practices (Hawryszkiewicz & Binsawad, 2016; Cummings & Teng, 2003; Caragliu & Nijkamp, 2016; Goh, 2002). As emphasized by Lowitt et al. (2015) and Cheng et al. (2008), the most important barrier limiting the potential of collective action and knowledge sharing is the lack of trust, a factor that fundamentally conditions the possibility of creating and maintaining networks of cooperation and knowledge sharing.

Knowledge sharing plays a key role in optimizing local food systems. Knowledge exchange generates strategic, operational, and market benefits, such as increased productivity and efficiency, cost reduction, strengthened customer relationships, improved decision-making processes, increased business agility, accelerated new product development and improved product quality, and increased employee satisfaction and retention (Olaleye et al., 2024; Lutz et al., 2017; Schmit et al., 2019; Azeem et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2025; Argote & Ingram, 2000; Singh et al., 2025; Zaragoza-Sáez et al., 2026; Sudarti & Dewi, 2022; Pal et al., 2024). It also fosters territorial identity and strengthens local branding, which is particularly important in the context of short supply chains (Maizza et al., 2019). Knowledge transfer from customers and suppliers enhances innovation (Corral de Zubielqui et al., 2019). The combination of practical knowledge, traditional wisdom, and innovative approaches forms the basis for the adaptability and resilience of food systems (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2025). This confirms that knowledge sharing is a systemic mechanism that enables producers not only to reduce costs and improve efficiency but also to develop innovations, build competitive advantage, and strengthen the resilience of local food systems.

Based on this, the K-CORE model was developed, integrating key factors influencing knowledge sharing. It assumes that knowledge resources (explicit and tacit) form the basis for collaboration, reinforced by social capital (trust, shared values, norms of cooperation). Barriers limit the effectiveness of collaboration, while knowledge sharing leads to market, operational, and innovation benefits, strengthening producers' resilience. The model incorporates feedback loops: increased resilience reduces barriers and promotes further knowledge exchange.



Source: Own study

Figure 1: Knowledge–Cooperation–Resilience Model for Local Food Producers (K-CORE Model)

3. Research Methodology

The study was conducted in 2025 on a sample of 600 food producers and processors in Poland, using purposive sampling based on activity in SFSCs. Data was collected using PAPI, CAPI, and CATI techniques, using a structured questionnaire. The tool, piloted to ensure content validity, consisted of modules examining, among others: entity characteristics, cooperation and knowledge-sharing mechanisms, and barriers to growth. Supply chain issues were measured by analyzing the structure of sales channels, logistics (production-sales distance), the degree of chain shortening, and relationships with partners (negotiating power). The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of social research ethics. Respondent participation was voluntary and anonymous, and data was processed in accordance with applicable data protection regulations.

The sample consisted primarily of local food producers aged 45-64 (58%), with 39.5% younger than 44. Women constituted 41.3% of the sample, and men 49.8%. The majority of respondents had secondary education (57%), and 30.5% had higher education. Respondents were largely experienced entrepreneurs. 73% had been operating for over 5 years, and 39.7% for over 10. The most frequently declared legal form was sole proprietorship (48%) and agricultural retail (33.8%). The sales reach confirms the strong roots in SFSCs: 71% of producers sell locally, and 40.5% sell regionally. The distance between production and sales was most often less than 30 km (64%). For 72% of respondents, their business was the main or sole source of household income.

4. Results

4.1 Cooperation gap and Limited Knowledge Sharing

The research results reveal a clear cooperation gap among the analyzed group of local food producers, which directly limits knowledge sharing and the ability to build competitive advantage and resilience. Only 7.17% of respondents operate within industry organizations, and only 2.67% collaborate with producers offering similar products, meaning that over 90% operate in business isolation. This isolation is also evident in consumer relations and the selection of sales channels. Producers play a negligible role in the active knowledge sharing process. 1.83% of respondents organize lectures, 2.67% conduct thematic workshops, and 10% conduct tastings. The vast majority (87.33%) limit their activities to production and sales functions, ignoring educational aspects. The sales structure also reflects an individualistic operating model. In the analyzed group, own shops and on-farm sales dominate (over 90% of responses in total), while forms requiring collaboration, such as sales through other producers (1.83%) or cooperatives (4.33%), are marginal. The lack of collaboration and limited knowledge flows result in stagnant development. As many as 93.33% of producers have no plans for expansion, 95.17% lack certification, and 90.67% do not protect their innovations, indicating a low level of professionalization and limited adaptability.

4.2 Cooperation and Competition Between Local Food Producers

A small group of collaborating producers (N=16) stands out from the entire sample, serving as a model example of how knowledge-sharing mechanisms work. Although collaboration is rare, where it does occur, it

creates an environment conducive to trust, knowledge exchange, and achieving tangible market benefits (Table 1).

Table 1: Cooperation and competition between local food producers

Aspect	Indicator	Operationalization	(%)
Collaboration Structure	Collaboration with similar-sized manufacturers	Collaboration: formal and informal relationships with other producers (coopetition)	62.5
	Collaboration with much larger manufacturers	Participation in joint activities, exchange of resources	37.5
Trust and security of relationships	Appropriate level of trust	Trust: declared confidence in the integrity of partners	100
	Awareness of the negative effects of opportunism	Relationship security: awareness of risks and their impact	100
Flow of knowledge and resources	Sharing resources	Knowledge sharing: exchange of experiences, information, and resources	87.5
	Acquiring resources through collaboration	Knowledge acquired: new information, contacts, and resources	81.25
	Shared values	Common standards and goals as a basis for collaboration	93.75
Engagement and motivation	Collaboration enables new projects	Commitment: joint initiatives and actions	56.25
	Collaboration motivates action	Motivation: declared increase in activity thanks to collaboration	93.75
Long-Term benefits	Discovering new market opportunities	Resilience: ability to adapt and diversify	75.0
	Diversification of suppliers/partners	Adaptive capacity: network expansion	68.75
	Introducing high-demand products/services	Product innovation	68.75
	Acquiring profitable customers	Increased market stability	68.75
Short-Term benefits	Increased sales	Resilience measured by market indicators	87.5
	Increased market share	Market performance indicators	75.0
	Increased customer satisfaction	Quality of market relationships	100
	Reduced costs/waste	Operational efficiency	62.5
	Increased productivity	Productivity as an element of resilience	93.75
	Increased profitability and ROI	Profitability: a key dimension of resilience	93.75

Source: own study.

The results indicate that collaboration generates strong knowledge exchange mechanisms. 100% of collaborating producers report a high level of trust, 87.5% share resources (including knowledge), and 81.25% acquire new resources through collaboration. Collaboration also fosters value alignment (93.75%) and motivation to act (93.75%), and over half of producers indicate that it enables the implementation of projects that would have been impossible to accomplish individually. The market benefits are equally clear. 75% of collaborating producers reported increased sales, productivity, profitability, and market share. These results confirm that collaboration serves as a catalyst for innovation, development, and resilience, while the lack of collaboration, prevalent across the sample, leads to stagnation and limits the adaptive capacity of local food systems.

4.3 Barriers as Endogenous Constraints Resulting from Limited Knowledge Flows

Analysis of the constraints to operating within short supply chains identified by local food producers reveals that these constraints are not solely operational or market-related. They stem primarily from limited knowledge flows and a lack of collaboration, which prevent producers from building economies of scale, strengthening their negotiating position, and developing market competencies. Seventy-six percent of local food producers cite a weak negotiating position as a key barrier. This is a direct consequence of operating in isolation. Producers, lacking knowledge of common sales strategies and the ability to coordinate their activities, are unable to negotiate prices or supply terms. Similarly, 72.17% of respondents cite a lack of

financing, which can be interpreted as a result of a lack of knowledge about available support instruments, commercialization opportunities, and the practices employed by other producers. The identified operational barriers, such as intense competition (53.50%) and low prices (51.83%), also stem from limited knowledge exchange. Producers don't know how to differentiate their products, build local brands, or communicate the added value of short supply chains. Lack of access to market and marketing knowledge prevents them from achieving benefits that, in other contexts, are a natural result of collaboration and shared experiences. Resource barriers, such as staffing constraints (44%), indicate operational overload for producers who, acting individually, lack the ability to share resources, seasonal workers, or services. Sharing requires trust and the flow of organizational knowledge, elements that are underdeveloped in the surveyed group. Information barriers, including a lack of knowledge about markets and prices (22.34%), indicate that one in four producers operates in an uncertain environment, unaware of buyer requirements, local demand, or consumer trends. Limited access to information further reduces the willingness to cooperate, as producers fail to see potential benefits or assess risks. Institutional barriers, including insufficient government support (46%), indicate a lack of knowledge about agricultural policy instruments, opportunities for collaboration with institutions, and a lack of representation of producer interests. At the same time, producers declare that their region offers good infrastructure and organizational conditions for cooperation. Over 75% confirm the good quality of infrastructure (roads, internet), and nearly 71% positively assess the accessibility of markets and sales outlets (distance from the farm, opening hours, costs). The fact that producers recognize the potential and facilities for cooperation in their region, yet choose not to participate, suggests that the barrier to cooperation is not technical or logistical in nature.

5. Discussion

The research results confirm the findings of the literature, according to which knowledge, both explicit and tacit, is a key resource determining the innovation and adaptability of food producers (Ofori Baafi et al., 2025; Ali et al., 2020). However, in the studied group of local food producers, this resource remains limited. Minimal educational activity indicates a lack of space for social learning, which contradicts the findings of Wang et al. (2010) and Singh et al. (2025), which emphasize the importance of interaction and collaborative learning for effective knowledge sharing. Additionally, producers point to information barriers, such as a lack of knowledge about markets and prices (22.34%), which confirms the observations of Schmit et al. (2019) and Azeem et al. (2021) regarding the impact of market knowledge deficits on strategic decision-making ability. In the K-CORE model, this indicates a weakening of the 'Knowledge' component. The second component of the 'Cooperation' model is the least developed in the studied group of producers. Only 7.17% operate within organizations, and 2.67% collaborate with competitors, which blocks knowledge flows and contrasts with the findings of Stoeva et al. (2024), who indicate that European SFSCs are based on strong cooperation mechanisms. Barriers reported by producers, such as weak negotiating power (76%), lack of financing (72.17%), strong competition and low prices (ca. 52%), and staffing difficulties (44%), are consistent with the literature on cooperation barriers (Lowitt et al., 2015; Cheng et al., 2008; Kacperska & Łukasiewicz, 2020), pointing to the key role of trust and fear of opportunism in limiting cooperation. A small group of cooperating producers stands out against this background and provides empirical validation of the K-CORE model. This group demonstrates full trust (100%), intensive resource sharing (87.5%), and the acquisition of new resources (81.25%). Collaboration enables the implementation of projects that could not be accomplished individually (56.25%) and enhances motivation (93.75%). These results are consistent with the literature on collaborative ecosystems (Estrada et al., 2016; Osarenkhoe, 2010; Bacon et al., 2020), in which collaboration serves as a catalyst for innovation and knowledge transfer. The third component of the 'Resilience' model is directly dependent on the previous two. Among the surveyed producers engaged in collaboration, as many as three-quarters reported increases in sales, productivity, profitability, and market share, confirming Cacciolatti and Lee's (2025) findings regarding the role of knowledge sharing in increasing flexibility and adaptability. In the entire sample, this mechanism is ineffective; the lack of collaboration and limited knowledge flows translate into development stagnation, low specialization, and limited system resilience.

6. Conclusion

The research findings demonstrate that cooperation and knowledge-sharing mechanisms are underdeveloped among the studied group of local food producers, limiting their ability to build competitive advantage and resilience. The K-CORE model supports the understanding that knowledge flows, not material resources, are the foundation of development. A small group of collaborating producers demonstrates that active knowledge exchange generates tangible market benefits and strengthens resilience. Our results complement the findings

of Stoev et al. (2024), demonstrating that the lack of interaction mechanisms in SFSCs generates not only relational constraints but also development barriers resulting from knowledge deficits. The K CORE model supports the understanding that the development of local food systems requires, above all, strengthening cooperation and knowledge-sharing processes, which activate feedback loops leading to increased resilience.

7. Implications

Strengthening local food systems requires a shift in public policies from infrastructure investments to actions that foster collaboration, knowledge sharing, and social capital. Supporting collaborative networks as platforms for knowledge transfer and creating conditions conducive to cooptition, which generates above-average benefits, is crucial. Trust, not infrastructure, is the most important factor; it is trust that determines collaboration and knowledge flows. Interventions should focus on building relationships through repeated interactions, joint activities, and initiatives that strengthen sustainable collaborative networks.

8. Limitations

The study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the purposive sampling method limits generalizability to the entire population of food producers, although it allows for capturing the specific characteristics of SFSCs. Second, the data are declarative in nature, which carries the risk of perceptual errors and social desirability bias. Third, the small size of the group of collaborating producers limits the scope of statistical comparisons, although it provides a valuable contrast to the dominant model of isolation. Fourth, the cross-sectional nature of the data does not allow for capturing the dynamics of collaboration processes and knowledge flows over time.

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Ethics Declaration: Ethical clearance was not required for the development of this research.

AI declaration: I declare that I have not used AI resources or tools.

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