



EU INNOVATE

**SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION IN ACTION:
THE CASE STUDY “SNAPSHOT” SERIES**

FOOD ASSEMBLY

Enhancing Food Distribution from Local Farmers to Consumers



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About EU-InnovatE

Between 2014 and 2016, the EU-InnovatE project investigated the potential of citizen innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship to achieve sustainable lifestyles in Europe by 2050. The following is one of a series of case study “snapshots” illustrating how new enterprises are being created by passionate, visionary individuals to benefit society at large.

The Case of Food Assembly:

Enhancing Food Distribution Through Direct Online Sales from Farmers to Consumers

An online service, Food Assembly provides efficient food distribution directly from farmers to consumers by delivering to local collection points and cutting out middlemen.

In 2009, French entrepreneur Guilhem Cheron, who had a background in industrial design, began considering ways of improving direct sales between farmers and consumers. His idea was to guarantee local farmers and producers a steady income, whilst offering customers flexibility to choose when and what they want from a list of, for example, fruit, vegetables, meat, and dairy products. At the heart of the system would be an online app listing available produce plus tools for placing orders and completing financial transactions. As building such an app was not one of his specialisms, Cheron looked for a partner with technical knowledge to develop an operational system.

Collaborative Innovation in Practice

Through a platform that links entrepreneurs with technical specialists, he went into partnership with Marc-David Choukroun. They came up with the idea of ‘Food Assembly’ which would enable farmers to sell to local groups of consumers run by an ‘Assembly’ (community) leader. Farmers and producers would receive over 80 per cent of the money paid for produce, with the remainder split equally between Assembly leaders and the costs associated with managing and maintaining the software and systems.

Clear roles for the parties involved were set out. Assembly farmers would decide on fair prices for their produce and make deliveries regularly to a community location on a prescribed day and time. Assembly leaders would find suitable venues, such as community halls, cafés and schools, as distribution points and at least 50 Assembly members willing to buy produce. The leaders would also find local farmers and producers willing to take part and post their available produce on the app. Members of the Assembly would choose, and pay for, their produce each week online. The software running the Food Assembly app was designed to distribute the proceeds automatically to the parties involved.

On a practical basis, Food Assemblies take place on a given day of the week and at a set time, Assembly leaders set up the venue where farmers and customers can meet up and exchange the orders. Meeting regularly on a weekly basis allows consumers, local farmers and producers to become acquainted and to build relationships and trust.

With initial investment from business angels, an online app to support the distribution model was developed over a period of a year. In September 2011, and with the app ready for use, the first local community group was formed, farmers and producers were identified and a viable number of members were signed-up.

Food Assembly has proved to be a success and highly popular with consumers. Demand grew steadily to set up other Food Assembly groups. The model devised by the founders proved to be scalable and within three years, over 300 active Food Assemblies had been set up. In response to the success, many farmers have taken on more staff to handle increased demand for their produce. Groups were formed across France, and the model has been successfully introduced in other countries, including Germany, Spain and the UK.

Summary of User-Driven Innovation

Food Assembly depends upon the energies and drive of all of the participants, especially the community leaders, farmers and producers, and the organisation's administrative team which coordinates and promotes the service while maintaining the online platform. Feedback and suggestions are regularly received about the app's functionality from the tens of thousands of members of the Assembly who order online each week. Over 30 people are employed in administration, many of whom are involved in research and development to ensure on-going improvements in systems and software.

Influence on Core Business

A significant influence on the success of the enterprise has been public demand to know where food is grown or produced. Consumers have also become more attuned to buying good quality local produce as and when it is in season, rather than resorting to out-of-season imported products that involve considerable 'food miles'.

Through experience, the founders have realised that the people who become Assembly leaders have a major influence on sustaining and carrying forward the initiative. Investigations have been made about appropriate personal characteristics needed for the role, and a rigorous selection process has been put in place to ensure the right people are appointed.

Cross-Sector Relevance: Top Three Insights

- A robust online system can be used to bring producers and consumers together and ensure fair and transparent transactions, and stimulate sales growth.
- Creating a business that is readily scalable and responds to consumer needs, requires time and effort spent in devising a sound business model and making modifications to it in the light of experience and application.

- Entrepreneurs can create sustainable businesses that have an environmental impact by enlisting the involvement of consumers and producers in a partnership that ensures mutuality of benefit for all parties.

To Learn More About the Case...

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Further Information

The Food Assembly: www.thefoodassembly.com

La Ruche Qui Dit Oui: www.laruchequiditoui.fr

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