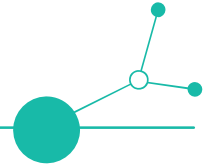


D3.1.3 Regional Action Plans for AFNs support in participating regions (PL)



12 2024





Food4CE

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Table of contents

1. THE FOOD4CE PROJECT IN A NUTSHELL	3
2. PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT.....	4
3. GENERAL INFORMATION.....	4
3.1. OVERVIEW OF THE REGION	4
3.2. STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS.....	8
3.3. INNOVATION HUB OVERVIEW	9
3.4. IDENTIFICATION AND PRIORITISATION OF REGIONAL NEEDS	10
4. POLICY CONTEXT	11
4.1. EXISTING POLICY CONTEXT.....	11
4.2. POLICY GAPS AND CHALLENGES	14
5. REGIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	15
5.1. POLICY OBJECTIVES	15
5.2. PROPOSED POLICY CHANGES.....	15
5.3. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY	17
6. LIST OF ACTIONS	19
6.1. ACTIONS OVERVIEW	19
6.2. DETAILED ACTIONS PLAN	19
6.3. RISK MANAGEMENT.....	23
6.4. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	25
7. CONCLUSIONS	27
REFERENCES	28
LIST OF FIGURES	29
LIST OF TABLES	29

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1. The Food4CE Project in a nutshell

Food4CE is a European project funded by the INTERREG Central Europe Programme, aimed at supporting Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) in their efforts to create sustainable and resilient food supply systems. AFNs are essential for promoting short food supply chains and reducing the carbon footprint of food distribution. However, they face challenges such as lack of knowledge on logistics collaboration, digitalisation and distribution/delivery systems, which are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Food4CE seeks to address these challenges by establishing 5 local and 1 Transnational Innovation Hub (IH), bringing together actors from different sectors including researchers, business experts, food producers, logistic and transport operators, and policy makers. These hubs will focus on advancing AFNs logistics efficiency through the development of innovative tools and solutions.

Two innovative tools are being jointly developed within the project: the Knowledge Transfer Platform and the Matchmaking Platform. The former is intended for sharing logistics best practices and solutions, while the latter is intended for creating new B2B and B2C logistics solutions and services. The aim is to facilitate knowledge transfer and exchange between different regions and actors, and to create a unique mutual support network for AFNs in Central Europe.

Food4CE will also provide jointly developed regional action plans for each participating region and transnational (CE) policy guidelines for AFN support. The project aims to establish a sustainable and lasting AFN support mechanism, which will continue working even after the project end. This will be achieved through the integration of the Transnational Innovation Hub into the existing European Network of Logistics competence centres.

Food4CE is a vital initiative that seeks to support AFNs in their efforts to create sustainable and resilient food supply systems. By establishing local and transnational Innovation Hubs and developing innovative tools and solutions, the project aims to facilitate knowledge exchange and cooperation between different actors and regions, leading to a sustainable and lasting AFN support mechanism.



2. Purpose of the document

The purpose of the regional action plan, titled "D.3.1.3 Regional Action Plans for AFNs Support in Participating Regions," is to outline concrete strategies and steps for enhancing Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) within each participating Central European region. Each regional action plan serves as a targeted roadmap for implementing specific activities and interventions that respond to the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities identified in that region. The objectives of the deliverable include defining clear policy recommendations, proposing actionable measures, and identifying key stakeholders necessary for effective implementation.

These plans aim to ensure that Innovation Hub activities are translated into region-specific actions that promote sustainable, resilient, and inclusive food systems. Through detailed tasks, timelines, and milestones, the action plans will foster stakeholder collaboration, increase support for AFNs, and facilitate tangible policy and systemic changes to strengthen local and regional food systems.

3. General information

3.1. Overview of the Region

The Wielkopolska region is located in central-western Poland and is an important point on the map of European transportation routes. Wielkopolska is ranked second in the country in terms of area occupied and third in terms of population. The province's territory covers 29,826.50 square kilometers, equivalent to 9.5% of Poland's total area. On its territory are located such centers as the Poznan and Kalisko-Ostrowska agglomerations, as well as important industrial regions - the Kalisz Industrial District, the Poznan Industrial District and the Konin Brown Coal Basin. Wielkopolska neighbors the following provinces: to the south with Lower Silesia and Opole, to the north with Pomerania and West Pomerania, to the east with Łódź and Kuyavia-Pomerania.



Figure 1 Greater Poland in Poland



Geographical Features

Wielkopolska is characterized by low-lying terrain, diversified by the presence of lakes, forest complexes, hills and pre-valleys. Forests occupy about 800,000 hectares, accounting for 25.8% of the total area of the province. A significant part of the region - about 32% - is made up of areas under legal protection. They include national parks, nature reserves and landscape parks, whose purpose is to preserve the natural, scenic and biodiversity values of the area.

Resources

Wielkopolskie Voivodeship is located at the junction of two water regions - the Warta River Basin and the Central Oder River Basin. A significant part of the voivodeship's area is covered by the Warta water region, which extends to its northern, central and southeastern areas. The boundaries of this region are defined by the drainage basins of the Warta River, which is the main axis of the hydrographic system of the province. The most important watercourses forming the network of the Warta River basin in the area include the Noteć River.

The southwestern part of the voivodeship is located within the boundaries of the Middle Oder water region. The dominant watercourse of this zone is the Barycz River, which is a right-bank tributary of the Oder, whose most important tributaries in Wielkopolska are the Orla.

The geological system of the region, particularly the presence of quaternary formations occurring near the land surface, determines the distribution and abundance of groundwater. These resources are mainly found in sand and gravel deposits filling river valleys and pre-valleys, as well as in aquifers located between layers of clay. The most valuable groundwater reserves are concentrated in the so-called main groundwater reservoirs (GZWP), which are natural reservoirs that meet specific quality and quantity standards.



Figure 2 Map of rivers of Wielkopolskie Voivodeship, Poland

Wielkopolska province has a diverse economic character, combining agricultural and industrial functions. Land used for agriculture accounts for more than 58.2% of the region's total area. Average or low-quality soils predominate here - there are no soils classified as Class I, and the share of Class II soils is marginal. As a result, efficient agricultural production requires intensive fertilization, which carries an increased risk of negative environmental impact. The greatest importance of agriculture and the related processing industry is achieved in the southern and southeastern parts of the province, where conditions for farming are most favorable. In turn, in the northern and western regions of the region, distinguished by significant natural and scenic values, the dominant economic function is performed by the tourism and recreation sector. The eastern areas, particularly around Konin and Turek, are the center of activities related to energy, mining and extractive industries, which is reflected in the employment structure and economic specialization of these areas.



Wielkopolska voivodeship is located in the temperate climate zone, in an area where marine and continental climate influences interact. This climatic peculiarity is manifested primarily in the high variability of weather conditions, resulting from the influx of diverse air masses - polar maritime, polar-continental, arctic and tropical. The lowest temperatures are recorded in the northern part of the region, where the number of days with negative temperatures is the highest in the province, and annual precipitation exceeds 700 mm. The average annual temperature for the entire province is around 8.2°C - in the northern direction it decreases to 7.6°C, while in the south and west it reaches values reaching 8.5°C. The region has one of the longest growing seasons in the country. In the area of the South-Poland Lowland it is about 228 days, while north of Gniezno and Szamotuly it shortens gradually, reaching 216 days on the northern edges of the province. Relatively low precipitation, combined with low forest cover and a large share of arable soils, results in significant variability of water flows in rivers, as well as periodic lowering of groundwater levels. As a result, Wielkopolska is counted among the regions with the greatest water deficit nationwide.

Demographics

As of June 2024, Wielkopolska province had a population of 3,484,177, accounting for 9.3% of the country's total population. In the demographic structure of the region, 54.9% was urban population. The largest urban center remains the Poznań agglomeration, with a population of about 600,000. The second largest urban complex is the Kalisz-Ostrowska agglomeration, located in the southern part of the province, with a population of about 200 thousand.

The region's largest cities also include Kalisz, Konin, Pila, Ostrów Wielkopolski, Gniezno and Leszno. The average population density in the province is 117 people per square kilometer. The highest rates were recorded in Poznań (2071 persons/km²) and Leszno (2026 persons/km²), while the lowest - not exceeding 50 persons/km² - are found in the districts of Złotów, Czarnkowsko-Trzcianecki and międzychodzki. Administratively, the region comprises 35 counties, including 4 cities with county rights, and 226 municipalities - of which 19 have urban, 90 urban-rural and 117 village status.

Wielkopolska Voivodeship is characterized by a positive demographic trend, which manifests itself in both positive natural growth and positive migration balance. In addition, the region is among the four provinces with the lowest level of unemployment in the country, which translates into a growing demand for agri-food products. Agriculture and the processing industry have gained the greatest importance in the southern and southeastern parts of the province, where their development is particularly intensive.

Agricultural Practices and Economic Indicators

The agri-food sector in Wielkopolska province is based mainly on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which dominate the meat, milk, fruit and vegetable processing industry. These companies often integrate traditional production methods with modern technologies, which allows them to successfully compete in both domestic and international markets.

Competition in the region is diverse and includes both local producers and larger domestic and foreign companies. Wielkopolska companies are distinguished from their competitors by the high quality of their products, innovation and concern for the environment, which is their significant competitive advantage. In 2024, the value of Polish agri-food exports reached a record high of EUR 53.5 billion, an increase of 2.7% compared to 2023. Although these figures refer to the whole country, Wielkopolska, as one of the main agricultural regions, contributes significantly to the results.

Wielkopolska is famous for its diverse agri-food production, which includes meat and meat products, dairy products, fruit and vegetable products, vegetable oils (including cold-pressed rapeseed oil), honey and beekeeping products, bakery and confectionery products, as well as craft spirits.

Environmental Impact and Climate Change

Wielkopolska, as one of Poland's major agricultural regions, is characterized by intensive crop and livestock production. This activity contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, such as methane and nitrous oxide, mainly



from animal husbandry and fertilizer use. In addition, intensive land use leads to soil degradation and loss of biodiversity. In response to these challenges, sustainable agricultural practices such as the use of biomass for energy production and the development of a closed-loop bioeconomy are being promoted, which can reduce the negative impact of agriculture on the climate.

Wielkopolska is experiencing more frequent extreme weather events that negatively affect agriculture. In 2023, the region experienced significant rainfall shortfalls, especially in May, which translated into a decrease in crop yields. The topsoil had a moisture content of 20-35%, which is insufficient for proper plant growth. In 2024, farmers in the Konin region reported losses caused by frost, drought and heavy rainfall, which led to flooding and crop damage.

Social and Cultural Dynamics

The social and cultural dynamics of Wielkopolska province are closely linked to the development of the agri-food sector. Phenomena such as the growing interest in organic farming, financial challenges in agriculture and migration of workers have a significant impact on changes in the social and cultural structure of the region. In the face of these changes, it becomes important to support local communities and promote sustainable agricultural development.

In 2024, farmers in Wielkopolska find themselves in a difficult financial situation. An analysis by the Wielkopolska Chamber of Agriculture showed that farms in the region are suffering losses mainly due to low purchase prices and unfavorable weather conditions. Compared to other sectors of the economy, such as industry or services, income from agricultural activities was significantly lower, which may affect the decisions of young people in choosing their future career path.

Despite these difficulties, the area of land devoted to organic crops in Greater Poland increased last year, which indicates the growing interest of farmers in organic production methods. Although the exact percentage share of these crops in the region's total agricultural land area has not been determined, a clear upward trend is evident.

In response to the shortage of local labor, Greater Poland's farms are increasingly hiring foreign workers. One example is the municipality of Kepno, where more than 2,000 foreigners from 35 countries are registered, including Ukraine, Indonesia, Colombia and Georgia.

Supply chain and distribution networks

In Wielkopolska, the distribution of organic food and products directly from farmers is based on diverse channels that allow consumers to access fresh, local foodstuffs.

The Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) in Wielkopolska leverage these various channels to promote short food supply chains and enhance local food resilience. The Wielkopolska e-Bazarek is a key AFN component, functioning as a regional online platform supported by the Wielkopolska Agricultural Advisory Center (WODR) that enables farmers to sell directly to consumers. Beyond this online tool, AFNs utilize traditional outlets, as specialized stores in major cities (like Poznań, Kalisz, and Konin) and dedicated sections in larger retail chains offer certified organic food. Seasonal events, such as the Wielkopolska Agricultural Fair in Sielinek and other local festivals, are popular AFN opportunities for direct interaction and sales between organic farmers and the public. Furthermore, many farmers rely on direct sales from their farms, which is especially common in rural and suburban areas. Reflecting a growing trend, an increasing number of organic food producers and distributors are expanding their AFN activities through online sales with home delivery, providing residents across Greater Poland with easy access to organic products

The Wielkopolska e-Bazarek is a regional online platform supported by the Wielkopolska Agricultural Advisory Center, which allows farmers to sell their products directly to consumers. The platform promotes local producers and makes it possible to purchase fresh products directly from farmers, increasing the availability of organic food in the region. An increasing number of organic food producers and distributors



are opting for online sales with home delivery, allowing residents throughout Greater Poland easy access to a wide range of organic products without having to leave their homes.

Many farmers in Wielkopolska conduct direct sales from their farms, offering fresh produce to consumers. Such sales are particularly popular in rural and suburban areas.

3.2. Stakeholder analysis

The project first identified the main stakeholders directly involved in the activities of the Innovation Centre among the AFN network (including local producers, consumer groups and other organizations associated with them), both at the beginning and during the project. The group identified so far consists of: Agricultural Experimental Plants (RZD) Przybroda, PULS, President of the Management Board of Agrountegracja Sp. z o.o.; Wielkopolska Agricultural Advisory Institution (WODR); Bank Żywności Pilski; Agricultural Experimental Farm Swadzim; Research and Development Staff, Łukasiewicz Research Institute - PIT.

Each of these stakeholder groups is considered a leading person, having a significant impact on the effective functioning of the AFN. They will share their knowledge and experience through the main IT tools within the IH, i.e. KTP and MP, which will also be an important element of IH promotion. They will also present their results and best practices in different shows, webinars etc.

In addition, some stakeholders are identified as actors who are not involved in all the activities of the Innovation Hub, but are informed about the project activities and are considered as important players in the context of developing the Regional Action Plan and/or creating networks to implement specific activities aimed at achieving the project objectives. PULS in agreement with Food Banks has planned activities on food and waste logistics in the region by organizing workshops for the local community. During the participation in the events, the objectives and activities of the Food4CE, PULS and food banks were presented.

In addition, regular communication is conducted with the Voivodeship Agricultural Advisory Centre (WODR) in order to promote the activities of the Innovation Centres and MP and KTP among local action groups (LGDs).

Ultimately, participation in the National Scientific Conference "Polish Village - a vision of renewal and development", which will be held on 9 and 10 May 2025 in Poznań as part of the European Congress of Village Renewal and Development (EKOiRW) will be one of the key events carried out as part of the Polish Presidency of the European Union and will be a forum for the presentation of ideas, innovative solutions, best practices, as well as entities and support systems, which will be an opportunity to present the Innovation Centre in a wider network of stakeholders of the agri-food industry in Poland. Participation in the Entrepreneurship Days in June 2025 will also be an opportunity to broaden the interest of this group of entities in the AFNs.

Engagement Strategy

A list of all relevant stakeholders was prepared by all partners and categorized based on their interest in the project and their decision-making power.

Stakeholder [organisation, name and surname]	Power/Interest	Involvement in IH (co-creation session, interview etc.)
Agricultural Experimental Plants (RZD) Przybroda, PULS , Filip Mazur	Medium power / Medium interest	Co-creation session, advisory board, workshops



CEO of Agrountegracja Sp. Z o.o. , Wojciech Styburski	Medium power / Medium interest	Co-creation session, advisory board, workshops
Agricultural Advisory Centre in the Wielkopolska Region (WODR), Justyna Winiarska	High power / Medium interest	Co-creation session, advisory board, consulting service
Pilski Food Bank, Emil Żerebito, representative PBŻ	Medium power / High interest	Co-creation session, advisory board, workshops
Agricultural Experimental Farm Swadzim, PULS, Arkadiusz Wojciechowicz	Low power / Medium interest	Co-creation session, advisory board, workshops

3.3. Innovation Hub overview

The main Vision of IH is the establishment of a regional hub to support the operation of SFSCs. Specific Objectives is promoting knowledge transfer, co-creation of innovations, and fostering improvement of AFNs within Central Europe. PULS IH field of interest is logistic, costs of reaching the customer; Connection between authorities, higher education, research organizations and AFNs

Services offered: Fostering knowledge and networking opportunities between all stakeholder (AFNs, authoritys, business support organizations, higher education and reseach) through getting to know the needs and perspectives on the topics SFSC & AFNs.

Co-creation approach:

To fulfill the co-creation mandate and the multi-stakeholder approach, the Innovation Hub actively organizes collaborative sessions involving key regional actors. These co-creation sessions are a vital element of stakeholder engagement and are planned for various organizations, including the Agricultural Experimental Plants (RZD) Przybroda, the CEO of Agrountegracja Sp. z o.o., the Pilski Food Bank, and the Agricultural Advisory Centre in the Wielkopolska Region (WODR). These sessions serve as a living lab where end-users and experts collaboratively work on the shape of the SFSC, focusing on topics like logistics efficiency, cost optimization, and sustainable food management. The outcomes of these co-creation sessions directly inform the policy recommendations and actions proposed in the regional plan.

Main objective (medium to long-term):

- Short-term: Identification of strengths and weaknesses of farms operating in short supply chains.
- Long-term: Improving efficiency and increasing the importance of short supply chains. Increasing integration between actors in short supply chains"

Citizens engagement is organizing demonstrations and talks on healthy food production. Multi-stakeholder approach (hard requirement): In improving the SFSC, the model of the multi-stakeholder approach will be applied. This approach will eliminate the dominance of only one link, which is often the practice in large supply chains.



Thanks to the living lab, the end-users (mostly citizens), through their involvement in numerous studies, will have a significant influence on the shape of the SFSC. Power/Interest of IH are to ordering processes, storage and warehousing, transportation and deliveries, resilience logistics.

Key observation is minimizing distance between producers and consumers, IT Tools and technologies, transparency and traceability measures, quality and freshness measures, cost optimization, agricultural consulting, knowledge exchange, sustainable food management - zero waste by involvement in IH (co-creation session, interview etc.)

Advisory Board Member of PULS Innovation Hub: PULS, L- PIT, Agricultural Advisory Centre in the Wielkopolska Region, AgroIntegracja Sp z o.o., Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska Region, Experimental Farms belonging to PULS, Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP), Fresh Logistics Polska, Pila Food Bank.

3.4. Identification and prioritisation of regional needs

The challenges below are the emerging ideas, themes, and challenges that need to be addressed to enhance AFNs in the region:

- **Market access:** Farmers often struggle to connect directly with consumers and institutions, limiting their ability to sell locally. This difficulty in finding direct markets prevents small-scale producers from fully capitalizing on their local proximity and necessitates a stronger, more visible platform for connecting supply with demand.
- **Consumer awareness:** There is a notable lack of public knowledge regarding the value of local and sustainable food systems. Low consumer awareness affects demand for Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC) products, as the benefits of buying local (such as quality, freshness, and environmental impact) are not fully understood or appreciated by the wider population.
- **Infrastructure:** The region faces inadequacies in the physical logistics required to make AFNs efficient. Poor infrastructure, including insufficient transport and storage facilities, creates bottlenecks that hinder the effective, timely, and cost-effective distribution of food from farm to consumer.
- **Regulatory barriers:** Small producers are often burdened by complex administrative and legal requirements that are better suited for large-scale operations. These intricate regulations around food safety and distribution can be prohibitive, acting as a significant challenge for smaller AFN initiatives to operate and scale up.
- **Financial constraints:** AFNs frequently operate with limited resources and face difficulties accessing necessary capital and funding. This restricted access to financial resources and grants impedes the ability of farmers and related enterprises to invest in new technologies, upgrade infrastructure, or expand their operations.
- **Supply chain coordination:** Effective collaboration and trust are frequently missing among the diverse stakeholders in the food system. The lack of structured cooperation between farmers, consumers, processors, and retailers complicates the entire supply chain, leading to inefficiencies and missed opportunities for synergy.
- **Seasonality:** The inherent fluctuations of agricultural production throughout the year pose a major challenge for consistent AFN supply. The seasonal nature of harvests creates periods of oversupply and undersupply, making it difficult for AFNs to ensure stable and consistent product availability for consumers and institutional buyers.
- **Competition:** Smaller AFN initiatives struggle to compete effectively against the dominance of conventional, large-scale agriculture and established, highly efficient supply chains. The sheer size and economy of scale of larger operations often overshadow smaller SFSC projects, making it challenging for them to gain a significant foothold in the market.



4. Policy Context

4.1. Existing Policy Context

National Policies, Goals and Objectives

In Poland, in order to strengthen the position of farmers in the food chain, the Council of Ministers already adopted on 16 May 2017 a document entitled Common Agricultural Policy after 2020 - Polish priorities, which states that "Alternative distribution channels, including short supply chains, and local markets that increase farmers' participation in the value-added chain, foster the development of organic and traditional production and strengthen the links between farmers and consumers should be supported more effectively".

Thus, AFN schemes have become a political priority and have since been included in policy documents, including agricultural and rural development funding programmes, in particular the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the negotiations of the 2021-2027 programming period. AFN schemes are a way to realise the vision of the Polish countryside 2050. Vision of the Polish countryside 2050 states, that the countryside by 2050 will be digitised and open not only to wholesale large-scale production, but also to securing the needs of smaller farmers, and consumers who want to enjoy local and organic food.

Polish CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027

On the basis of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy, Poland has developed a strategic plan of the Common Agricultural Policy to meet the specific needs of stakeholders in the Polish area. The strategic plans of the Common Agricultural Policy are to support the change towards an intelligent, sustainable, competitive, resilient and diversified agricultural sector, ensuring long-term food security. They also contribute to the implementation of climate action, protection of natural resources, preservation or enhancement of biodiversity, as well as improvement of the socio-economic structure of rural areas.

The Polish CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 envisages the sustainable development of farms, the processing sector and the improvement of living and working conditions in rural areas. It will support the protection of water, soil, air and biodiversity and promote the production and use of sustainable energy. It will also focus on smallholders and animal welfare. In addition, Poland aims to more than double the agricultural area under organic farming by 2030.⁸⁷

The following objectives and measures in the Polish CAP Strategic Plan may affect alternative food networks (AFNs):⁸⁸

- Priority development of quality food production and investments aimed at increasing market orientation and competitiveness of farms.
- Supporting young farmers and organic farmers by offering preferential investment support conditions (higher aid intensity).
- Establish close cooperation between farmers and the processing sector and support short supply chains, especially for small farms and quality products.
- Introduce so-called Ecoschemes, which will encourage farmers to implement environmentally and climate-friendly practices that go beyond legal requirements and to move towards more sustainable and environmentally friendly agriculture. These will be allocated 25% of the direct payment envelope with a particular focus on soil conservation and sustainable production methods.
- Expanding and strengthening the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) and further facilitating the establishment of operational groups of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) to develop and implement innovative projects.



Many of the needs of rural areas will be addressed through other EU instruments, such as the Reconstruction and Resilience Facility (RRF) or the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), or through national initiatives. Poland expects to achieve 87% broadband coverage in rural areas by 2025, which will significantly affect the digital accessibility of the countryside and may contribute to the development of short food supply chains.

Rural Development Programme

Another programme affecting rural development and agricultural production, with implications for the development of AFN, is the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 (RDP 2014-2020), extended for a further two years, which is being developed on the basis of European Union legislation, (EU) No 1305/2013 of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The Rural Development in Poland is managed nationally through one Rural Development Programme (RDP).

RDP assumptions that may particularly affect the operation of AFN:

- Facilitate knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas.
- To improve the competitiveness of all types of farming and increase farm profitability.
- Improve food chain organisation and promote risk management in agriculture.
- Supporting resource efficiency and the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy in the agriculture, food and forestry sectors.
- To enhance social inclusion, reduce poverty and promote economic development in rural areas.

The financial assistance instruments planned in the Programme will be aimed primarily at the development of agricultural holdings - Modernisation of agricultural holdings, Restructuring of small agricultural holdings, Premiums for young farmers, Payments to farmers transferring small agricultural holdings.

Within the framework of improving the organisation of the food chain, it is envisaged to support investments related to the processing and marketing of agricultural products, further development of producer groups and organisations and quality systems for agricultural products and foodstuffs. Furthermore, in order to facilitate direct sales of agricultural products, it is planned to continue support for the construction and modernisation of marketplaces.

In order to ensure sustainable development of rural areas, measures contributing to the development of entrepreneurship, village renewal and development, including technical infrastructure, will be continued, to be implemented both under separate measures and through the Leader measure. Continuation of the implementation of Local Development Strategies (Leader) will strengthen the implementation of bottom-up initiatives of local communities.

A new measure will be Organic farming, which aims to increase marketable organic production.⁸⁹

National Recovery and Resilience Plan

The National Plan for Rebuilding and Increasing Resilience (NIP) is a development plan setting out the goals for rebuilding and building Poland's socio-economic resilience after the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and the reforms and investments to achieve them. Support targeted at organic producers for investment or reform of their operations concerns support for diversification and shortening of the supply chain of agricultural and food products and building the resilience of actors in the chain.

Under the investments of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan under the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, support will be available for, among others:

- expansion or reconstruction of micro, small and medium-sized agri-food processing enterprises;
- construction and modernisation of storage and distribution centres for agricultural, fishery and aquaculture products;
- processing and marketing of agricultural, food and fishery and aquaculture products (processing and marketing from the farm);
- on-farm investment in agriculture 4.0;



- construction of a centre for sustainable agriculture in mountain and foothill areas.

Regional and Local Policies, Goals and Objectives

Regional agricultural policies benefit from the guidance of national programmes. Individual provinces have agricultural support centres that distribute funds from strategic programmes at regional and local level. There are local and grassroots initiatives, such as food co-operatives, which, however, are not legally binding and operate on an association basis.

The first Polish co-operatives began to emerge around 2010, but their roots go back to the second half of the 19th century, when the co-operative movement was born. Food co-operatives are grassroots initiatives - in Poland mostly informal - to obtain high-quality agricultural produce, food products or personal hygiene products directly from local producers. The activities of the co-operatives are socially, environmentally and economically important and are therefore in line with the European Green Deal Strategy. According to research, Polish cooperatives are mainly supplied by organic farmers (not always certified), as well as small processors using local products, and customers-consumers, knowing their suppliers, make informed purchasing decisions. In this way, food co-operatives have long been putting into practice the objectives of the EU's Farm-to-Fork Strategy, which stipulates that all actors in the food chain, from the primary producer to the final consumer, must play a role in the creation and functioning of a sustainable food system. Thanks to the conscious consumers of these grassroots initiatives, environmentally sound agriculture (e.g. regenerative agriculture) is developing in Poland in a more sustainable way, as farmers and female farmers opting for this type of cultivation and breeding methods have greater certainty of sales.

As mostly informal institutions, co-operatives do not receive any institutional, financial or material support (e.g. in the form of access to public spaces), which means that they remain mainly the domain of people with high social, cultural and financial capital, who, due to the abundance of their own wallet, can afford to develop such an organisation in pursuit of their own passion or idea. Moreover, Polish co-operatives are not integrated, which means that they do not benefit from each other's experience and mutual support. It is difficult to say exactly how many co-operatives are currently operating in Poland, as most of them are informal, grassroots movements. It is estimated that there are about 50 of them all over the country, mainly in large cities, but there are also smaller, usually associations of a dozen or a few dozen members.

In 2022, there were around 50 food co-operatives in Poland - supplying a maximum of 5,000 people.⁹¹ The first co-ops started to emerge around 2010. In 2016, the researcher estimated that there were only 1,520 co-ops. We are therefore witnessing a slow but steady increase in their number. Unfortunately, many of them disappear after a few seasons of operation. The more permanent ones are those built in large cities, where access to high-quality raw materials is more difficult than in smaller urban centres, so the motivation to maintain them is greater. Because in Poland, with few exceptions, they are based solely on voluntary work, after a while the enthusiasm and willingness to work regularly wears off, and leaders drop out. The groups do not always have the ability to solve problems that sooner or later arise. In addition, as most co-operatives operate in public spaces (schools, municipalities) informally provided free of charge, a change in the management of these institutions or the emergence of conflicts cause them to lose their space for action. Inflation also makes the number of people who can afford their products decrease. The operation of co-operatives is also affected by the limited number of producers who farm in an organic, sustainable way and would be interested in supplying to co-operatives. As written above, individual co-operatives operate differently on a day-to-day basis. In Poland, most are informal groups, often using the space of cultural institutions, schools and community activity centres. They meet once a week or twice a month and between meetings place orders with farmers, local producers. Usually someone else is responsible for contacting each supplier. Some co-operatives only order products that are certified for organic farming. Many opt for a certificate of trust, i.e. ordering products from a farmer or processor they trust. Most often, each co-op member has to work a small, fixed number of hours per month for the community.



In conclusion, on the basis of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union, Poland has developed a strategic plan of the Common Agricultural Policy, which aims to meet the specific needs of stakeholders in the area of Poland, which sustainable development of farms, the processing sector and improvement of living and working conditions in rural areas. Some elements from the Common Agricultural Policy plan also support development towards the creation of AFN, which is also supported by the Rural Development Programme, and the National Plan for Rebuilding and Increasing Resilience. At the regional and local level, there are national programmes for agricultural development and support, implemented by local branches of the Agricultural Development and Modernisation Agency. However, it is difficult to find specific and separate regional policies at the level of provinces or municipalities to provide institutional support for initiatives promoting AFN development. At the local level, food co-operatives are being established, and cooperatives and local markets are being created, but these do not have a form or support regulated by the state.

4.2. Policy Gaps and Challenges

While national policy provides a high-level strategic direction for Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), the Wielkopolska region faces specific gaps in policy and operational challenges that impede the stability and growth of its local food systems.

Policy Gaps

These gaps represent key areas where institutional action and tailored regional legislation are currently lacking:

- **Lack of Specific Regional AFN Support Policies:** Although Poland's CAP Strategic Plan and the Rural Development Programme (RDP) advocate for supporting alternative distribution channels, it is difficult to find separate, dedicated policies at the provincial or municipal level that provide institutional support for AFN development initiatives. Consequently, the implementation of AFN support relies heavily on national measures rather than locally adapted strategies.
- **Absence of Formal Support for Grassroots Initiatives:** Local AFNs, particularly food co-operatives, operate largely as informal, grassroots movements. As informal institutions, they do not receive any institutional, financial, or material support, such as access to public spaces, which is essential for their operations. This lack of state-regulated support means co-operatives primarily remain the domain of individuals with high social, cultural, and financial capital.
- **Lack of Integration Among Co-operatives:** The estimated 50 food co-operatives across Poland, which mainly operate in large cities, are not integrated. This means they fail to benefit from each other's experiences, mutual logistical support, or coordinated purchasing power, leading to operational isolation and limiting their collective influence.
- **Missing Formal Recognition of AFNs:** A foundational policy objective identified in the Action Plan is the explicit need for the "Lack of recognition and identification of AFN's". Without formal recognition, these networks lack the legitimacy and defined organizational forms required to be consistently included in regional planning, public procurement policies, and targeted funding streams.

Key Operational and Structural Challenges



These challenges are operational hurdles that directly impact the daily functioning and long-term viability of AFNs in the region:

- **Financial Sustainability for Farmers:** Farmers in Wielkopolska, despite the region's strong agricultural sector, are in a difficult financial situation. Losses are reported mainly due to **low purchase prices** and unfavorable weather conditions. As a result, income from agricultural activities can be significantly lower compared to other economic sectors like industry or services, posing a serious challenge to motivating farmers to invest in AFNs.
- **Digitalization Gap in Rural Areas:** AFNs struggle with a significant lack of knowledge regarding **digitalization**. While Poland aims for high broadband coverage in rural areas by 2025, the lack of digital competency prevents AFNs from efficiently utilizing online tools (like the Knowledge Transfer Platform and the Matchmaking Platform) to improve logistics and distribution systems.
- **Logistics and Distribution Weaknesses:** AFNs are particularly challenged by a "lack of knowledge on logistics collaboration" and inherent "deficiencies in distribution/delivery systems". This is further complicated by **inadequate infrastructure**, such as a lack of proper transport and storage facilities, which directly hinders the efficiency of the Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs).
- **Vulnerability of Informal Structures:** The informal nature of food co-operatives makes them highly unstable. They are vulnerable to losing their physical space due to **changes in the management of public institutions** (e.g., schools, cultural institutions) that initially provide free access. Moreover, the reliance solely on **voluntary work** causes "enthusiasm and willingness to work regularly wears off," leading to leader burnout and eventual collapse of the organization.
- **Limited Producer Base:** The growth and scalability of AFNs are hampered by a constrained supply of goods. There is a **limited number of producers** who farm using organic or sustainable methods and are willing or interested in reliably supplying co-operatives or other AFN models.

5. Regional Policy Recommendations

5.1. Policy objectives

The overall aim of this Action Plan is to support Alternative Food Networks in Wielkopolska in gaining recognition, financial support, higher level of cooperation and better knowledge transfer. To this end, we encourage the regional stakeholders to align around the following policy objectives, based on the previous analysis:

- Giving recognition and identification of AFN's
- Systematically supporting organic food production
- Supporting actively cooperation of different stakeholders in Wielkopolska food sector
- Organizing of trainings and active knowledge transfer

5.2. Proposed policy changes

The following policy changes are recommended for the Wielkopolska region to strategically support and strengthen Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), transforming them into more resilient, recognized, and integrated components of the regional food system.

1. Provide Formal Recognition to AFNs



This policy aims to move AFNs from informal grassroots initiatives to formally acknowledged economic and social entities, granting them legal standing and access to institutional support. The region must support and validate a participatory, evidence-based process that systematically identifies and formalizes the organizational structures common to AFNs, such as food cooperatives, producer groups, or local e-commerce initiatives. Formal recognition addresses the current gap where local food co-operatives operate without institutional, financial, or material support. By granting formal status, these networks gain legitimacy, can enter into legal contracts, access public funding streams, and benefit from structured technical assistance, thereby stabilizing their long-term operation which currently suffers from high dropout rates due to volunteer burnout and lack of stability.

2. A Grant Program for Sustainable Agriculture

This policy directly addresses the need for system support for organic food production and tackles the financial difficulties faced by farmers transitioning to more sustainable methods. The region should establish a comprehensive grant program specifically for its farmers who commit to transitioning to organic, agroecological, or regenerative farming methods. This financial support is crucial because efficient agricultural production in Wielkopolska often requires intensive fertilization due to predominantly average or low-quality soils, creating an increased risk of negative environmental impact. The program would provide targeted funds to mitigate the financial losses and investment costs associated with the transition period, supporting the documented growing interest in organic production in Greater Poland. It helps align regional farming practices with climate goals, reduce greenhouse gas emissions from livestock and fertilizer use, and counteract the negative effects of intensive land use like soil degradation.

3. "Farm-to-Table" Partnerships

This policy is designed to create reliable, guaranteed markets for local producers, fostering active cooperation among different food sector stakeholders. The core objective is to promote and financially support formal partnerships that connect farmers with local businesses, restaurants, schools, and public institutions as well as with logistics providers who can deliver more efficient short food supply services. Creating guaranteed markets, particularly through public procurement of food for schools or hospitals, provides AFNs with stable demand and predictable income, which is vital given the farmers' difficult financial situation due to low purchase prices. This stable commitment allows small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which dominate the region's agri-food sector, to invest and plan more effectively, mitigating the risk associated with market access and price volatility, and strengthening the entire local food system's resilience.

4. Training and Advisory Services for Farmers

This policy addresses the acknowledged lack of both active knowledge transfer and necessary skills among AFN actors. The region must actively support the organization of regular, specialized workshops and training sessions, ideally co-led by the Innovation Hub and the Wielkopolska Agricultural Advisory Centre (WODR). Training should focus on addressing the AFNs' current challenges, including lack of knowledge on logistics collaboration, digitalisation, and efficient distribution/delivery systems. By fostering knowledge exchange and technical competencies in areas like IT tools and technologies, the region can enhance the efficiency and importance of short supply chains and ensure that the efforts of the Innovation Hub are translated.



5.3. Policy implementation strategy

Following aspects represent key strategic elements for ensuring the effective and sustainable implementation of the Regional Action Plan for Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) in Wielkopolska, translating the proposed actions into long-term systemic change.

Multi-level Governance Coordination

Multi-level governance coordination is the strategic process of **aligning the policy goals and actions** of the AFN Regional Action Plan across different administrative tiers—specifically the **regional (Marshal's Office), national (CAP Strategic Plan, RDP), and local (municipalities/LGDs)** levels.

- This strategy ensures that regional initiatives, such as establishing the Regional Register of Certified AFNs (Action 2), are mutually reinforcing with, and can effectively draw funding from, national support mechanisms like the Rural Development Programme (RDP).
- Effective coordination prevents duplication of effort and ensures that local needs are appropriately addressed within the framework of broader policies, like the Polish CAP Strategic Plan's goal of supporting short supply chains.

Phased and Adaptive Implementation

This involves **structuring the Action Plan's implementation in distinct phases** and maintaining the ability to adjust the strategy based on real-world outcomes and emerging needs.

- Actions are prioritized based on their timeframes:
 - **Short-term** actions (e.g., Legal and Accounting Support Vouchers - Action 3) focus on immediate stabilization and formalization of grassroots initiatives.
 - **Medium-term** actions (e.g., Seed Funding for Organic Transition - Action 4; Public Procurement Mandate Pilot - Action 5) focus on building capacity and guaranteed markets.
 - **Long-term** actions (e.g., Permanent Observatory - Action 1; Shared Logistics Infrastructure Fund - Action 6) focus on establishing permanent institutional and physical support mechanisms.
- Adaptivity is crucial, particularly to mitigate risks such as insufficient political will or farmer interest, by allowing the use of data from the Permanent Observatory (Action 1) to inform necessary adjustments to policy and funding strategies.

Stakeholder Involvement and Policy Co-Design

This refers to the continuous and active engagement of all relevant groups in the process of shaping and executing the Action Plan, moving beyond mere consultation to **collaborative co-creation**.

Capacity Building and Knowledge Support

This focuses on providing the necessary **skills, tools, and technical expertise** to AFN actors to overcome critical operational challenges, especially in logistics and digitalization.

- Key mechanisms include:



- **Digital Competency Training (Action 7):** Providing hands-on practical skills for utilizing e-commerce and IT tools, such as the Matchmaking Platform (MP), to close the digitalization gap.
- **Farmer-to-Farmer Mentorship Program (Action 8):** Leveraging peer-to-peer knowledge sharing to build trust and increase the capacity of new AFN farmers to implement sustainable practices and improve production efficiency.
- This directly addresses the identified challenge of AFNs lacking knowledge on logistics collaboration and digitalization.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Flexibility

This is the process of continuously **tracking progress (Monitoring)**, **assessing impact (Evaluation)**, and **using findings to adjust the plan (Flexibility)**.

- The **Permanent Observatory (Action 1)** is the primary mechanism for systematic monitoring, collecting data on AFN evolution and sustainability indicators.
- **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** are used to measure the success of each action, such as the "Number of informal groups achieving legal status" (Action 3) or "Increase in land area under organic transition" (Action 4).
- Findings from monitoring are translated into targeted policy measures and training opportunities, ensuring the plan remains relevant and effective, thereby mitigating the risk of insufficient political will/funding by providing evidence-based justification.

Suggested Implementation Roles (Non-Exhaustive)

These are the key institutions responsible for leading and contributing to the implementation of the actions:

- **Marshal Office of Wielkopolska Region (Manage Closely):** Acts as the highest-level political and funding guarantor. Crucial for Actions 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 (formal recognition, funding, and procurement mandate).
- **PULS Innovation Hub:** Provides technical expertise and co-creation leadership. Essential for developing tools and best practices, leading Actions 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 8 (observatory, register, seed fund, logistics, and training).
- **Wielkopolska Agricultural Advisory Centre (WODR) (Manage Closely):** Critical for farmer outreach and advisory services. Leads Actions 3, 7, and 8 (vouchers, digital training, and mentorship).
- **Local Action Groups (LGDs) / Local Government:** Crucial for grassroots implementation. Involved in Actions 3 and 5 (vouchers and public procurement pilot).
- **Agricultural Experimental Plants (RZD):** Provides knowledge and testing environment for sustainable practices. Involved in Action 4 (Seed Fund).



6. List of actions

6.1. Actions overview

Having outlined the overarching policy objectives and the key changes required to support the development of Alternative Food Networks at the regional level, this section presents a list of concrete actions that can help produce the desired changes.

ACTION PLAN proposed changes	Supporting Actions
I. Provide formal recognition to AFNs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 1: Permanent Observatory Action 2: Regional Register of Certified AFNs
II. A Grant Program for Sustainable Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 3: Legal and Accounting Support Vouchers Action 4: Seed Funding for Organic Transition
III. Farm-to-Table" Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 5: Local Food Public Procurement Mandate Pilot Action 6: Regional Shared Logistics Infrastructure Fund
IV. Training and Advisory Services for Farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 7: Digital Competency Training for E-commerce Action 8:Farmer-to-Farmer Mentorship Program

Table 1. List of actions

6.2. Detailed actions plan

The following actions have been derived from stakeholder consultations and the identified policy objectives. They are presented as non-binding, indicative implementation options that could inform future initiatives. Each action reflects a cautious formulation to leave room for political discretion and adjustment.

Action 1: Permanent observatory

Establish a Permanent Observatory on Alternative Food Network to monitor their evolution, analyse models and sustainability and connect research with policy. The Observatory will regularly collect and assess data on AFNs and translate findings into

Description: targeted policy measures, training opportunities, and updates to regional strategies—ensuring that field needs directly inform institutional action. Monitoring can be performed with help of tool for mapping best practices and logistics solutions developed in Food4CE project.



- Organize quarterly or semi-annual meetings with key stakeholders to assess trends, challenges, and opportunities.
- Task and activities:**
- Establish a mailing list to facilitate information sharing, event coordination, and the dissemination of relevant materials.
 - Produce an annual report on the state of AFNs, including agreed indicators for economic, social, and environmental sustainability.
- Timeframe:** Long-term.
- Leads:** Marshall Office of Wielkopolska, Innovation Hub in PULS
- Required resources:** Stakeholder facilitation, research staff.
- Funding sources:** Regional funds; research grants.
- KPIs:** Number of research outputs produced; Number of meetings held and stakeholders involved

Action 2: Regional Register of Certified AFNs

- Description:** Establishing an official **Regional Register of AFNs** (e.g., food co-ops, producer groups, e-bazars) that meet defined criteria for short supply chains, transparency, and sustainability. The tool for mapping best practices can be the way how to identify AFN's and which organizations do not meet the defined criteria.
- Define certification standards based on supply chain length and product origin.
- Task and activities:**
- Create and maintain the public online register.
 - Offer registered AFNs priority access to regional support programs and public procurement tenders.
- Timeframe:** Medium-term (12-24 months).
- Leads:** Marshal's Office Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, PULS Innovation Hub.
- Required resources:** IT development for the online register, administrative staff for verification and maintenance.
- Funding sources:** Regional funds for digitalisation and public administration, Technical Assistance (TA) for project management.
- KPIs:** Number of AFN entities successfully registered; Percentage of regional support funds allocated to registered AFNs.

Action 3: Legal and Accounting Support Vouchers

- Description:** Offer subsidized vouchers to informal AFN groups (like food co-operatives) to cover the costs of legal consultation and accounting services required for formal registration and compliance.



Task and activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contract with local legal and accounting firms to provide services at a subsidized rate.• Promote the voucher program through WODR and local community centres.
Timeframe:	Short-term (6-12 months).
Leads:	Wielkopolska Agricultural Advisory Centre (WODR), Local Action Groups (LGDs).
Required resources:	Dedicated budget for voucher subsidies, administrative resources to manage the voucher distribution and redemption.
Funding sources:	Regional Social Fund, RDP (Rural Development Programme) funds for advisory services.
KPIs:	Number of vouchers distributed and redeemed; Number of informal groups achieving legal status within the program year

Action 4: Seed Funding for Organic Transition

Description:	Launch a specific regional Seed Fund (micro-grants) to financially support farmers in their first 1-3 years of transitioning to certified organic or regenerative farming methods, addressing initial financial constraints. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish clear eligibility criteria for transitional farms.
Task and activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide grants for soil testing, initial certification fees, and specialized equipment purchases.• Ensure coordination with national CAP payments.
Timeframe:	Medium-term (12-36 months).
Leads:	Marshal's Office Department of Agriculture, PULS Innovation Hub, Agricultural Experimental Plants (RZD).
Required resources:	Capitalization of the Seed Fund, technical experts to review applications.
Funding sources:	Regional grant program funds, RRF (National Recovery and Resilience Plan) support targeted at organic producers.
KPIs:	Total amount of seed funding disbursed; Increase in land area under organic transition in Wielkopolska.

Action 5: Local Food Public Procurement Mandate Pilot

Description:	Pilot a policy change mandating that a specific public sector entity (e.g., a large school district or hospital) allocates a minimum of 20% of its food budget to products sourced directly from local, recognized AFNs.
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Task and activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify a pilot institution and secure political commitment.• Adjust procurement rules to simplify tendering for small farmers.• Provide technical support to farmers on meeting the required volume and food safety standards.
Timeframe:	Medium-term (18-30 months).
Leads:	Marshal's Office Department of Agriculture, Local Government (municipality), WODR.
Required resources:	Policy and legal consulting, technical assistance for procurement staff and farmers.
Funding sources:	Regional funds for policy implementation, RRF funds for supply chain diversification.
KPIs:	Percentage of food budget spent on local AFN products by the pilot institution; Total value of new contracts secured by AFNs through the pilot.

Action 6: Regional Shared Logistics Infrastructure Fund

Description:	Establish a dedicated fund for co-financing investments in shared, localized logistics infrastructure (e.g., refrigerated drop-off points, communal storage, cold chain equipment) to address the lack of infrastructure.
Task and activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accept applications from formal AFN groups or local business support organizations for infrastructure co-financing.• Prioritize projects that facilitate multi-farm consolidation and reduce food miles.
Timeframe:	Long-term (24-60 months).
Leads:	PULS Innovation Hub (for technical assessment), Marshal's Office (for fund management).
Required resources:	Capitalization of the fund, engineering and logistics experts for project evaluation.
Funding sources:	ERDF for regional infrastructure development, National/Regional RDP funds for processing and marketing.
KPIs:	Number of new shared storage/logistics points created; Measured reduction in delivery distance/carbon footprint for participating AFNs.

Action 7: Digital Competency Training for E-commerce

Description:	Provide practical, hands-on training for farmers on using digital tools, including e-commerce platforms (like Wielkopolska e-Bazarek), inventory management, and basic online marketing.
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- Task and activities:**
 - Develop a curriculum covering the Matchmaking Platform (MP), e-commerce setup, and digital marketing.
 - Host regular, small-group training sessions led by IT and business experts.
- Timeframe:** Ongoing (Short-term modules, long-term commitment).
- Leads:** PULS Innovation Hub (MP/KTP expertise), WODR (for farmer outreach).
- Required resources:** IT trainers, portable computer equipment for workshops, development of tutorial content.
- Funding sources:** Regional funds for digitalisation, EAFRD

Action 8: Farmer-to-Farmer Mentorship Program

- Description:** Create a mentorship program where experienced, successful AFN farmers (mentors) are paired with and financially compensated to advise those new to short supply chains or sustainable transitions (mentees).
- Task and activities:**
 - Identify and recruit mentors based on proven success in AFN operation and sustainable practices.
 - Develop a structured curriculum and schedule for on-farm and advisory sessions.
- Timeframe:** Medium-term (12-36 months).
- Leads:** WODR (for coordinating traditional advice), PULS Innovation Hub (for AFN best practices).
- Required resources:** Stipends for farmer-mentors, administrative support for program matching and coordination.
- Funding sources:** CAP Strategic Plan funds for EIP-AGRI/AKIS networking, Regional Human Capital Development funds.
- KPIs:** Number of mentor-mentee pairings established; Mentee satisfaction rating with the advice received; Increase in AFN sales or production efficiency reported by mentees.

6.3. Risk management

Risk (Action where occurs)	Probability	Impact	Priority	Mitigation strategy
Lack of Farmer Interest/Capacity in New Programs (Actions 2, 4, 7, 8)	Medium	High	High	* Action 8: Farmer-to-Farmer Mentorship Program to build trust and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. * Use WODR's extensive outreach network to promote and simplify program entry (e.g., for Seed Fund). * Ensure Digital Competency Training (Action 7) is practical and addresses immediate operational needs.



<p>Insufficient Political Will/Funding (All Actions, especially 1, 4, 5, 6)</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>* Action 1: Permanent Observatory to provide data for evidence-based policymaking and demonstrate AFN value to the Marshal's Office. * Secure political commitment for the Public Procurement Pilot (Action 5). * Diversify funding by targeting multiple sources: Regional Funds, RDP, RRF, and ERDF as planned in each action. * Actively engage 'Manage Closely' stakeholders like the Marshal's Office and Chambers of Agriculture/Commerce.</p>
<p>Co-operative/Grassroots Initiative Dropout (Actions 2, 3)</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>* Action 3: Legal and Accounting Support Vouchers to stabilize and formalize informal groups. * Action 2: Regional Register grants formal recognition and priority access to support, increasing legitimacy and stability. * Emphasize that formal status helps them enter legal contracts and access public funding.</p>
<p>Inadequate Logistics/Infrastructure (Actions 5, 6)</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>* Action 6: Regional Shared Logistics Infrastructure Fund to co-finance communal storage and cold chain equipment. * Involve Logistics Providers (Keep Satisfied stakeholder) early to ensure proposed solutions are feasible and efficient. * Action 5: Target procurement from AFNs with existing, albeit small, logistics capacity to build momentum.</p>
<p>Digital Tool Non-Adoption/Ineffectiveness (Action 7)</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>* Action 7: Digital Competency Training explicitly covers the Matchmaking Platform (MP) and Knowledge Transfer Platform (KTP). * Training must be hands-on and practical on e-commerce, not just theoretical. * Leverage WODR's outreach to ensure targeted adoption among local action groups (LGDs).</p>
<p>Inconsistent Product Supply (Action 5)</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>* Action 5: Public Procurement Mandate Pilot provides stable demand, incentivizing producers to plan for consistent supply. * Action 4: Seed Funding for Organic Transition expands the overall base of sustainable producers. * Encourage "Farm-to-Table" Partnerships to secure commitment from multiple producers, mitigating seasonality risk.</p>

Table 2. Potential risks and mitigation strategy



6.4. Stakeholder engagement

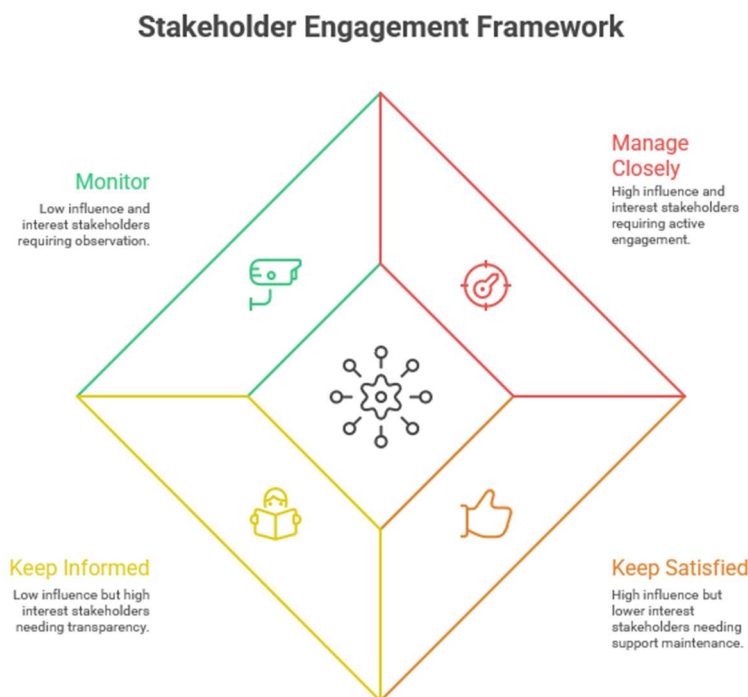


Figure 3 Stakeholders engagement framework

1. Manage Closely

These stakeholders have high influence and high interest in the project. They require close management and active engagement to ensure their needs and expectations are met.

- **Marshall Office of Wielkopolska Region:** As a regional governing body, their support and approval are critical for project success. Regular communication, involvement in key decisions, and addressing their concerns are essential.
- **Regional Forum of Smart Specializations:** This forum plays a key role in regional development strategies. Engaging with them ensures alignment with regional priorities and access to valuable expertise.
- **Working Groups of the Regional Forum (Food and Logistics):** These groups possess specialized knowledge and influence within their respective sectors. Their input and support are vital for project relevance and impact.
- **Chambers of Agriculture:** Representing agricultural interests, their involvement is crucial for projects impacting the agricultural sector. Understanding their needs and addressing their concerns is essential.
- **Chambers of Commerce:** Representing business interests, their engagement ensures the project aligns with business needs and promotes economic development.
- **Agro Advisory Organizations:** These organizations provide expertise and guidance to agricultural stakeholders. Their involvement ensures the project is practical and beneficial to the agricultural community.



2. Keep Satisfied

These stakeholders have high influence but lower interest in the project. It is important to keep them satisfied to maintain their support and avoid potential roadblocks.

- **Sub-Regional Institutions:** These institutions have a regional scope and can influence project implementation. Maintaining a positive relationship and addressing their concerns is important.
- **Logistics Providers (KEPs & Freight Forwarders):** Their involvement is crucial for efficient supply chain management. Ensuring their needs are met and maintaining open communication is essential.
- **Chamber of Agriculture:** (Also listed in "Manage Closely" due to potentially high interest depending on the project specifics).
- **Chamber of Commerce:** (Also listed in "Manage Closely" due to potentially high interest depending on the project specifics).

3. Keep Informed

These stakeholders have low influence but high interest in the project. Keeping them informed ensures transparency and builds goodwill.

- **Consumer Groups:** Their interest in the project stems from its potential impact on consumers. Providing clear and accessible information builds trust and support.
- **Academia:** Academic institutions can provide valuable expertise and research support. Keeping them informed fosters collaboration and knowledge sharing.
- **General Public:** Keeping the public informed promotes transparency and builds support for the project.

4. Monitor

These stakeholders have low influence and low interest in the project. Monitoring them is important to identify any changes in their level of interest or influence.

- **Media:** Monitoring media coverage helps track public perception and identify potential issues.
- **Political Parties:** Monitoring their positions on relevant issues helps anticipate potential political impacts.
- **Non-Food SMEs:** While not directly involved, their perspective on the business environment can be valuable.
- **International Markets:** Monitoring international market trends helps identify opportunities and threats.

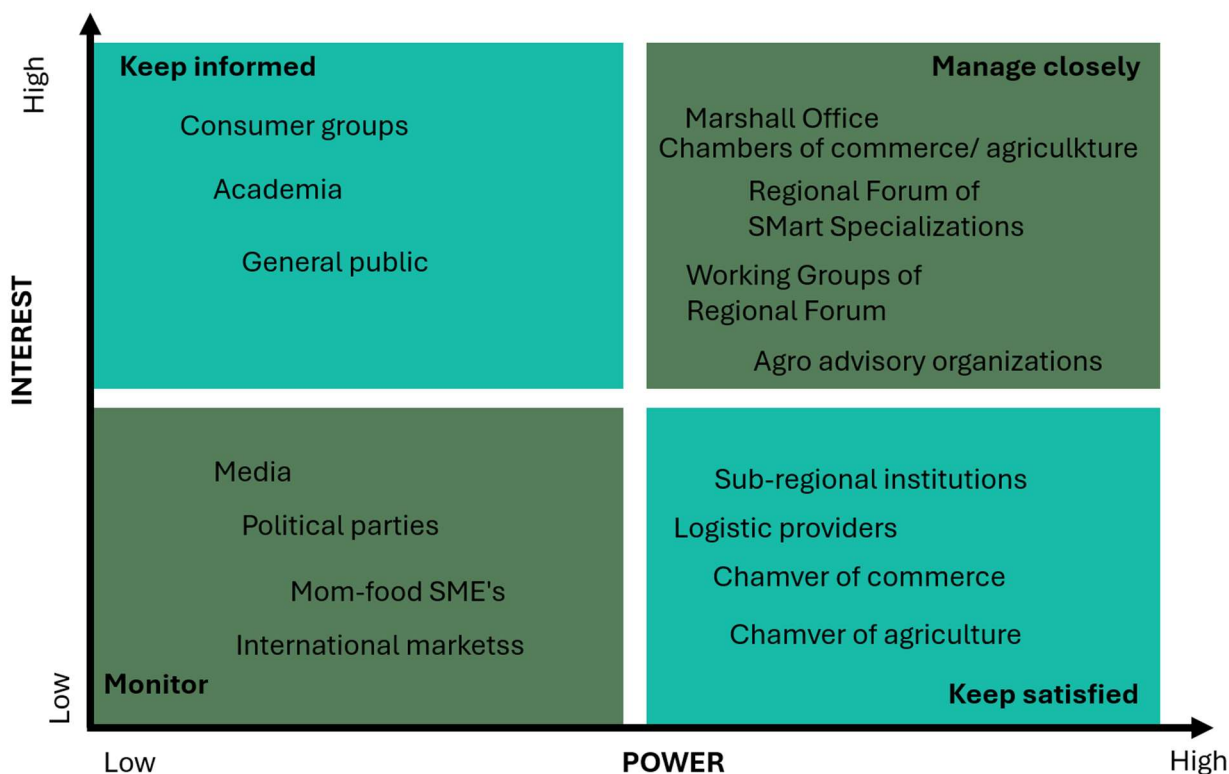


Figure 4 Stakeholders matrix

7. Conclusions

The Regional Action Plan for the Wielkopolska region, developed under the Food4CE project, provides a comprehensive roadmap for supporting and strengthening Alternative Food Networks (AFNs)¹. The overall aim of this plan is to help AFNs gain **recognition, financial support, a higher level of cooperation, and better knowledge transfer** within the region².

Key Findings and Policy Gaps

The analysis highlighted that while national policies like the Polish CAP Strategic Plan and the Rural Development Programme (RDP) advocate for supporting alternative distribution channels, there is a **distinct lack of specific, dedicated regional policies** at the provincial or municipal level to provide institutional support for AFN development³.

The main challenges and policy gaps identified are:

- **Absence of Formal Support:** Local, grassroots initiatives like food co-operatives operate informally and thus do not receive necessary institutional, financial, or material support, leading to instability⁴.
- **Financial Constraints:** Farmers face a difficult financial situation due to low purchase prices and unfavorable weather, reducing motivation to invest in AFNs⁵.
- **Digital and Logistics Deficiencies:** AFNs lack knowledge on logistics collaboration, digitalization, and face inadequate infrastructure for distribution/delivery systems⁶⁶⁶⁶.

Regional Policy Objectives and Actions



To address these gaps, the Action Plan set four core policy objectives⁷:

1. Giving **recognition and identification of AFN's**.
2. Systematically supporting **organic food production**.
3. Supporting actively **cooperation** of different stakeholders.
4. Organizing of **trainings and active knowledge transfer**.

These objectives are translated into four proposed policy changes, each supported by two concrete actions

Policy Challenge	Supporting Actions
Provide Formal Recognition to AFNs	Action 1: Permanent Observatory, Action 2: Regional Register of Certified AFNs
A Grant Program for Sustainable Agriculture	Action 3: Legal and Accounting Support Vouchers, Action 4: Seed Funding for Organic Transition
"Farm-to-Table" Partnerships	Action 5: Local Food Public Procurement Mandate Pilot, Action 6: Regional Shared Logistics Infrastructure Fund
Training and Advisory Services for Farmers	Action 7: Digital Competency Training for E-commerce, Action 8: Farmer-to-Farmer Mentorship Program

Table 3. Policy challenges and proposed actions

The successful implementation of this Action Plan will rely on the **active engagement and collaboration** of key stakeholders—particularly the Marshall Office of Wielkopolska, Chambers of Agriculture/Commerce, and the PULS Innovation Hub—to ensure the efficient translation of project activities into tangible, sustainable, and inclusive food systems for the region. This plan aims to establish a lasting AFN support mechanism that continues beyond the Food4CE project end.

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List of Figures

Figure 1 Greater Poland in Poland

Figure 2 Map of rivers of Wielkopolskie Voivodship, Poland

Figure 3 Stakeholders engagement framework

Figure 4 Stakeholders matrix

List of tables

Table 1. List of actions

Table 2. Potential risks and mitigation strategy

Table 3. Policy challenges and proposed actions