

ABSTRACT

Local food producers create value that extends beyond food production and economic performance. They contribute to trust between producers and consumers, community wellbeing, and regional identity. However, these forms of social value are often difficult to measure and communicate because traditional evaluation systems mainly focus on financial indicators.

This research aims to explore how regional social value created by small food producers in the Netherlands can be identified, measured, and communicated. The study focuses on three dimensions of social value: trust, community pride, and regional identity. In addition, it seeks to identify practical indicators that can support the development of a Total Value Tool.

A mixed-method approach was used, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with three local food initiatives: Voedselbos Glanerbeek, De Voedselbos Winkel, and Herenboeren Lingezege-Grootstal. Quantitative data were collected through an online survey completed by 16 consumers of local food products. Interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, while survey responses were analysed using descriptive statistics.

The findings show that social value is created through transparency, storytelling, participation, social inclusion, and community engagement. Consumers strongly associated local food with trust, community contribution, authenticity, and regional identity. Based on these findings, practical indicators were identified, including volunteer participation, consumer trust ratings, community events, local partnerships, and activities related to regional culture and identity.

This research concludes that local food systems generate important forms of social value that are not captured by traditional financial measurements. The proposed Total Value Tool provides a practical framework for making these contributions more visible and communicable, enabling small food producers to better demonstrate their broader impact on communities and regional development.

Keyword : social value, local food systems, short food supply chains, regional identity