

Less obstacles to cross-border food markets for happier local farmers



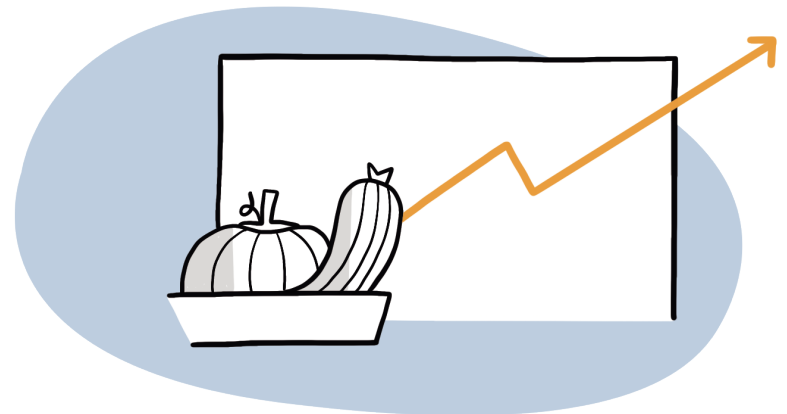
Small cities and villages at the border of Hungary and Romania are dependent on agriculture, with locally produced products and goods in high demand on both sides of the border. 35 representatives of towns along the border have joined forces to establish the Gate to Europe European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), in order to boost trade and economic development among its members across the border. Supporting small-scale farmers who grow sustainable food is part of the “km0” philosophy to boost local food systems and markets. However, the legal framework for cross-border direct sales of small-scale local products has not yet been developed, making it difficult to know which rules apply in each case.

Stefan and Sofia, two small-scale apple farmers from Romania, live in the Gate to Europe border region and wish to sell their produce in Hungary, since there is a strong demand for Romanian fruit in the Hungarian market. Due to its soil composition, the Hungarian section of the border region is more suited to growing vegetables, while the Romanian section is more suitable for growing fruit. Stefan and Sofia get to the border, hoping to join the local farmers’ market on the other side, only to find out that they have not obtained the correct Hungarian VAT permit on time to be able to sell there.

Their experience is just an example of the many local self-employed farmers in this region who lack sufficient information on how to cross the border with their products, which procedures to follow, as well as facing difficulties in accessing credit, obtaining selling permits, paying taxes and other administrative obstacles. In this sense, the opportunities of small producers are limited, and they must focus their sales on domestic markets in the absence of an opportunity to enter new markets across the border.

What are some of the potential solutions?

The experts involved in *b-solutions* proposed an innovative approach to promoting cross-border cooperation, with a high potential for replicability for other farmers and producers and to inspire additional projects. The main objective is to promote fairer access to local products by overcoming geographical constraints, in addition to easing the financial and administrative burdens and bureaucratic hurdles between the two countries. Overcoming these obstacles will improve access to fresh and locally grown food, thus contributing to sustainable food production chains and providing the consumer with more locally-grown options.

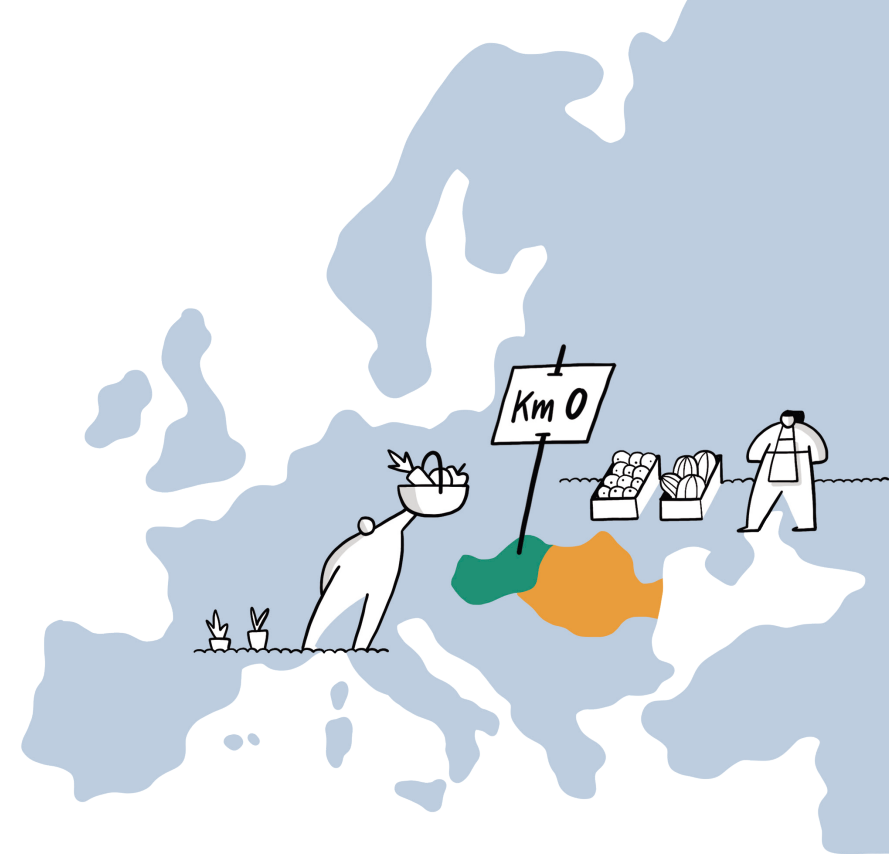
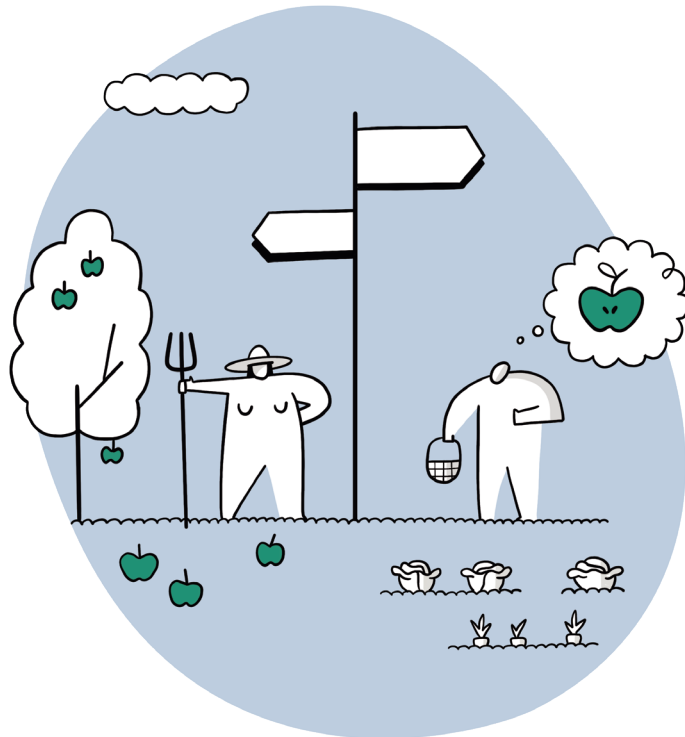


A bottom-up approach involves producers joining together, with the help of the regional chamber, building a relationship with their counterparts in the neighbouring country to share experiences and jointly work towards easing the administrative requirements. A top-down approach is also necessary, in which state and local authorities create a favourable environment to facilitate the market entry of small producers to directly sell their products across the border.

In addition to providing more information to the producers and farmers, greater access to funding is an essential first step, since having more capital would make it easier to work on tackling the current barriers and providing a way to boost their operations.

According to **Dr. Kres Tünde Tímea** of the **Gate to Europe EGTC**,

“ we believe that these agricultural projects need to be more open and accessible for everyone who is interested. Furthermore, the legislation should be simpler for everyone to understand. ”



Lastly, the possibility of being recognised as “local producers,” regardless of the national territory where their farmlands or orchards are located, would grant farmers and producers better access to the market in the cross-border region. Derogations to national laws in this sense would promote the participation of farmers like Stefan and Sofia in the local economy.