

## ABSTRACT

The emergence of farmers' markets (FMs) and farm shops (FSs) in Czechia is a follow-up of the expansion of alternative food networks (AFNs) from Western Europe and North America where they have been developing for several decades. AFNs are an up-to-date topic as they respond to the growing concerns about the negative effects of the globalized conventional food system on social, economic and environmental aspects of food production, distribution and consumption. Each form of AFNs emphasizes a different aspect of the food system sustainability. FMs and FSs should primarily enable direct selling of quality local products made by small producers to support local economy, rural development, environmental protection and to improve quality of life. Based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, the aim of the dissertation is to explore the emergence and development of AFNs in Central Europe. Using the example of Czechia, considering the communist past of the region, the work evaluates the contribution of AFNs to build a more sustainable system of food production and consumption and the weak points of the phenomenon in Czechia and, using a comparison of the AFN evolution elsewhere, points out challenges which AFNs face or will face in the future. Major theoretical problems of AFNs are that no universal definition of AFNs exists and that conventional and alternative food networks are in opposition to each other which prevents mutual positive influence. The main problem of Czech FMs and FSs, also experienced by AFNs elsewhere, is the conventionalisation which lies in adopting practices typical for conventional food networks that endangers the authenticity of AFNs, thus the achievement of sustainable goals ascribed to them. AFNs also face the competition of conventional retail chains which show attempts to make profit from the popularity of AFN principles by building campaigns on the Czech origin and quality. The Czech experience confirms the doubts about the ability of consumer-based food movements to achieve sustainable principles ascribed to them. FMs and FSs, which operate on commercial basis, have to meet the customer demand that is often in conflict with AFN principles. Therefore, the major benefit of AFNs lies in the positive example for conventional food system and in stimulating a public debate about the ethics of food production and consumption. In the context of repeated incidents pointing out a questionable food quality and practices of producers and retailers in the Czech conventional food network, AFNs should be valued for a positive motivation of consumers' interest in food quality. Next research should focus on a thorough analysis of real benefits which AFNs bring producers and consumers to identify factors which are crucial for the success of authentic AFNs.

**Keywords:** alternative food networks; farmers' market; farm shop; post-communist context; sustainable food production and consumption; Czechia, Prague; Ireland