

# SMART-CSA webinar 5.3.2026 – summary

The aim of the first phase of the SMART-CSA project is to strengthen national networks and gather practical, field-based knowledge about diverse local agriculture. The webinar brought together farmers, professionals, educators, and project actors to discuss the current state of the sector, its challenges, and future opportunities. This enabled different perspectives to meet.

The webinar was implemented as a participatory workshop.

## Key findings

### 1. Structures favour large-scale actors

Current agricultural policy, subsidy systems, and regulations are primarily designed for large-scale farms. Small-scale and diverse farms are easily left outside the system or placed at a disadvantage. Area-based subsidies, heavy bureaucracy, and rigid interpretations limit development.

### 2. Interest exists, but it does not translate into action

Interest in local food and sustainable solutions has increased among consumers, and policymakers are generally positive. However, this does not lead to concrete change:

- purchasing behaviour rarely changes
- small actors struggle to access markets
- political action remains limited

A key challenge is visibility and accessibility: many people are simply not aware of existing alternatives.

### 3. Community is the foundation of operations

Community-based models such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), cooperatives, and REKO networks were seen as key solutions to many challenges.

Communities enable:

- sharing of resources
- reduced workload
- improved market access
- learning and peer support

At the same time, community increases consumer engagement and understanding of food production.

#### **4. Time is the main bottleneck**

Time emerged as the most critical limiting factor—more important than money.

Time is mainly spent on:

- administrative work and subsidy applications
- sales and logistics
- use of digital tools
- communication and coordination

Even when solutions exist, they are not implemented because there is no time to adopt them.

#### **5. Digitalisation is fragmented and burdensome**

Digital tools are widely used (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, email), but their use is fragmented and often inefficient.

Key challenges:

- too many separate tools
- manual and time-consuming processes (e.g. orders via Facebook comments)
- dependency on external platforms

The need is not more digitalisation, but simple, appropriate solutions that save time.

#### **6. Learning happens in practice and through peers**

Training and materials are available, but the most meaningful learning happens:

- through peers
- through practical work
- through networks

There is also significant untapped knowledge within communities that is not systematically shared.

#### **Summary of needs and development directions for the SMART-CSA project**

- strengthen collaboration with existing training and entry pathways (e.g. farm-in-farm models)
- co-create micro-learning formats together with practitioners in the field
- activate and utilise skills within communities
- document and share working models within realistic resource limits
- strengthen communication towards consumers within available resources
- better understand time use and workload within resource constraints
- translate field experience into clear, actionable policy messages