COCOREADO H2020 PROJECT

FOOD SYSTEM INNOVATOR TOOLKIT

CH2 Getting inspired from examples

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COREADO connecting consumers and producers to rebalance farmers' position

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2.1- Introduction

Food system transformations that better connect consumers and farmers are achieved through novel food initiatives and practices, which reconfigure existing relationships or generate new relationships between food chain actors. Food systems, their contexts, situations, and needs, vary greatly. This means that specific solutions might be needed to improve their sustainability. In the meantime, there is a range of existing solutions: **effective novel food initiatives that can be adapted,** and from which helpful lessons can be learned. This chapter focuses on different ways that good practices can be identified and studied, and how their lessons can be applied to improve food systems in different contexts and regions.

For a network to serve as a sufficient ground for learning, there must be a systematic and effective approach to collecting, sharing, and analysing pre-existing practices. This chapter will focus on different ways that learning from good practices can be implemented by food system innovators for maximum benefit. There will be a particular focus on **good practices in novel and fair food systems (NOFAs)** that COCOREADO ambassadors were working with.

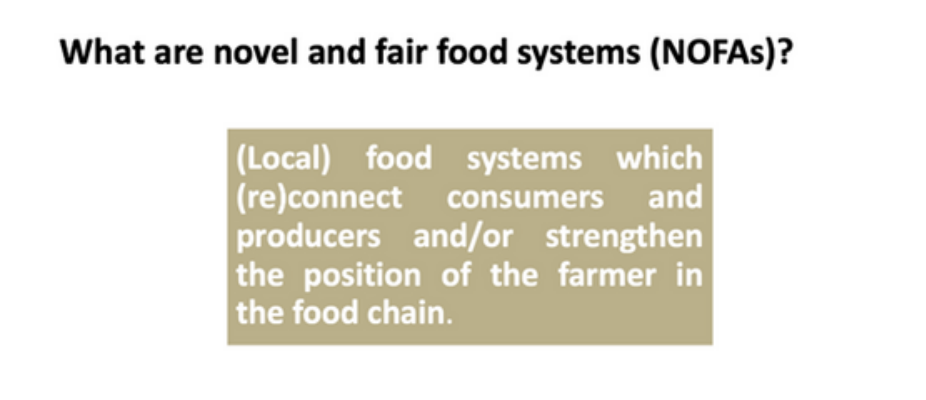

Figure 1. The definition of novel and fair food systems (NOFAs).

"Good practices" refer to sustainable activities and initiatives that have proven to be effective and bring about expected results in combatting pre-defined problems. Nowadays, food systems face a range of challenges (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. The challenges agri-food systems face.

To address these challenges, one needs to account for **the complex human-environmental character of food systems**. This includes a variety of components such as environment, people, institutions, processes, and actors (from producers to consumers), and activities such as food production, distribution, and consumption. Food systems also have different drivers, such as: biophysical and environmental; technology and infrastructure; political and economic; sociocultural and demographic (Brouwer, McDermott and Ruben (2020)) (See Figure 3).

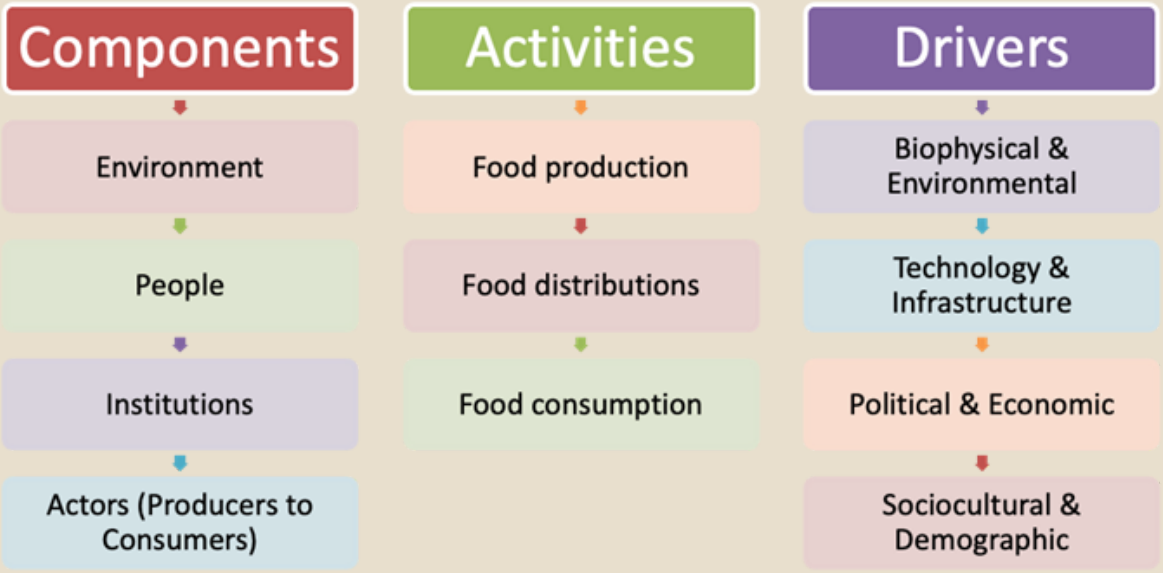

Figure 3. The elements of the complex human-environmental character of food systems. of COCOREADO Ambassador Network.

The COCOREADO project focused specifically on **the problem of disconnected producers and consumers.** As agri-food supply chains have become longer and include more actors, the distance between the primary producers and consumers has increased. This has created a gap between them, including a communication gap, as farmers sell their products to intermediaries and lack contact with final consumers. Consequently, this means that farmers are not aware of opportunities to improve their offers and adapt to demand. At the same time, consumers lack information on the origin of the food they eat. Therefore, the project's specific interest in existing good practices was focused on their potential to combat longer and more globalized food chains, communication gaps between consumers and producers, poor opportunities for producers to adapt their offers to consumers' demand, and lack of information for consumers about the food they consume (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Finding the focus of the good practices through analysing the challenges they are trying to combat.

Across Europe, there are numerous examples that demonstrate concrete ways for farmers to collaborate on opportunities that are both consumer-driven and conducive to improving farmers' incomes. How to find them?

2.2- Finding and identifying good practices

Defining the focus of the good practices you are looking for

Once you are clear about the problems you wish to address in your food system, you can specify whom the good practices you are seeking are meant for, and what their purpose is. For instance, the COCOREADO project has had **a focus on youth, with an aim to contribute to the development of novel and fair food systems.** This goal was achieved **through the identification of good practices** based on **success factors**. These good practices can be further exploited and disseminated, for instance, through activities with dedicated ambassadors and co-creation with local actors.

Figure 5. The approach and integration of good practices within the COCOREADO project

For the project's purposes, good practices were considered within **NOFAs or (local) food systems in which innovative collaborations between farmers and other food system actors occur, which includes practices that connect consumers and producers to overcome unfair trading practices and rebalance the farmers' position**. More specifically, these are collaborations that can make use of economies of scale, smarter distribution, reduction of environmental footprints, territorial approaches, etc., to improve farmers' income. An example of novel food systems is sharing the farmer's risk with consumers while reconnecting farmers and consumers, such as in community supported agriculture.

Small farmers can strengthen their position by creating added value in terms of products or services offered. In this context, increased consumer concern about sustainable food can be regarded as an opportunity for small farmers.

In this case, one main element to look for when considering whether a particular example can serve as a good practice is if it contributes to the overall transformation towards sustainable and fair food systems. **Fair food systems** are referred to as **innovative ways for farmers to collaborate with each other**, as well as with intermediaries and other parties, on opportunities aiming to connect consumers and farmers, improve farmers' income, and strengthen farmers' position in the food chain.

As part of this innovative way to collaborate, you can encounter **a set of concrete practices that focus on the end result of a supply chain collaboration (SCC), supporting the success of NOFAs**. Each good practice is defined by one or several **success factors** – elements of action through which it has contributed to building a more sustainable food system.

Selection process of good practices

For the process of selecting the good practices, it is crucial to develop clear criteria. Figure 6 offers an overview of selection criteria used within the COCOREADO project for pre-selecting the innovative initiatives. With the help of these criteria, within the COCOREADO project **an initial list of 61 good practices** was gathered by project partners from different parts of Europe. You can use this list to consider other good practices within your own country/region, or use it as an example to develop your own list of criteria.

Figure 6. An example of the list of criteria to be used when identifying good practices.

Information sheet with criteria for pre-selecting innovative initiatives together with all partners

Strengthening the position of the farmer

Refers to farmers achievements within a supply chain collaboration. Did the farmer improve his/her economic position by using this specific collaboration?

Improving the connection between producer and consumer

Refers to the establishment of connectedness between producers and consumers. Did the farmer establish a more direct relationship with his/her consumers? Do both farmer and consumer share knowledge, value and meaning about the product and its provenance, production and consumption? Is there a mutual understanding of producers/consumers on needs and mutual benefits.

Potential of scaling-up/replicability

Do you think this case has the potential to be replicated or to be scaled up?:

- Do you think the case has potential to grow/scale-up in its current form and context?
- Do you think similar cases can be set up in its own country?
- Do you think this case can be replicated in other contexts and countries?

Willingness of key informants to cooperate (excluding criterion)

Please think about and share your expert perception about the willingness of the key actors from the initiative to be pre-selected to further cooperate with the project. Do you think actors from the initiative you suggested would be willing to share information about their practices. E.g. through an interview or a visit to the farm/shop/market?

Selection process of good practices

Further, from the initial list of good practices, **14 NOFAs** were examined more closely. These 14 cases, that were selected from across Europe, illustrate good practices and success factors leading to benefits for farmers, consumers, and broader local communities. The common element between these 14 cases is that **they represent fair short food supply chains,** which become successful and sustainable thanks to meaningful cooperation between farmers, producers, and other actors along the food chain, all striving to shorten the distance between production and consumption.

You can get acquainted with the short list of NOFAs gathered within the project **here**!

2.3- Learning from good practices

The identified good practices and their key success factors serve as a guide for new initiatives. They have been validated with COCOREADO ambassadors who are experts in their field and they capture the diversity of initiatives across Europe.

Rui Almeida
CONSULAI, Portugal

When considering any novel initiative gathered within the COCOREADO project, or one that you know in your own region, the question remains of how to break down the elements of success and how they can serve as learning points for new and inspiring initiatives. In COCOREADO, the practices were grouped based on a common success factor identified as the key aspect of that practice.
Below you can find a list of **10 common success factors** that have been identified.

1 Success factor: Transparency and availability of information

Key aspect to **establish trust.**

- Being able to visit the farm producing the products purchased, and/or having the producer available in the selling location.
- Sharing a profile of farmers that are part of the initiative, so that consumers "know the face" of the people that are producing their food.
- Direct contact with end customers.
- The trust aspect is mentioned in very different types of NOFAs. Even when there are formal agreements, there is always a mention of trust between supply chain partners. NOFAs that sell products from more than one farmer often operate as a sort of quality label. Consumers may want organic, fair, local produce, but don't have time to check for this with every product they buy. Once they trust the NOFA, they know that all products purchased there are organic and fair.

2 Success factor: Engagement of the value-chain

Key aspect to **connect producers and consumers.**

- Both consumers and producers have an integral role in the initiative through an association or cooperative, through which they are represented by members who have decision-making powers.
- Exploring ways to maintain the importance of the community aspect and to attract local people.
- Setting up a collaboration with other farmers that ensures that all farmers can determine their own price but are incentivized to deliver good quality products on time.
- The initiator has autonomy over different parts of the lifecycle of the product, including production, packaging, and delivery within the initiative.

3 Success factor: Strategic production planning

Key aspect to **reduce food waste at the farm- and consumer-level, while maintaining a competitive advantage.**

- The farmer can easily acquire knowledge on market demand and adjust their production
- accordingly, thanks to a closer relationship between producer and consumer.
- Experimenting with more and different crops.
- To help farmers plan ahead, implement a subscription model for consumers, where they can choose the frequency with which they order.

4 Success factor: Multidisciplinary partnership

Key aspect to **ensure a comprehensive approach that can maximise success.**

- Establishing long-term partnerships with public and/or private entities can give greater support in resources, finances, and training. This can include the support of the municipality or government.
- Combining the initiative with a network of various food-related activities can bring profitability (e.g., restaurants, shops, agri-tourism).
- Partners of the initiative are responsible for collecting products from farmers; less travelling minimizes environmental and economic costs.

5 Success factor: Goal congruence

Key aspect to **ensure that all parts are satisfied.**

- A common goal gives the participants a shared purpose and encourages them to work together as a team to achieve an end result.
- Consumers or participants have a similar vision, mission, and values.

6 Success factor: Financial resources/company structure

Key aspect for **financial longevity.**

- Applying for funding (e.g., LIFE funding, subsidies).
- Crowd funding to kickstart a project.
- Having more than one income source, so that the new initiative is only part of the total farm income.
- Adjusting financial goals to the initiative structure; a non-profit organisation has different goals than a private farmer.

7 Success factor: Define target market

Key aspect to **ensure likelihood of purchase.**

- Recognition of customer needs.
- Using market segmentation to your advantage (middle- or high-income families, families with children, retirees, consumers who are ecologically conscious). This type of initiative usually focuses on a market niche.

8 Success factor: Quality certification and/or focus on high quality

Key aspect to **differentiate offer.**

- Innovative product (e.g., products from vertical farming in a city using controlled environmental agriculture).
- Offering local products.
- High-end product: focus on higher quality. Customer is aware the product might be more expensive due to its characteristics.

9 Success factor: External communication

Key aspect to **build brand awareness.**

- Participation in different marketplaces, such as fairs, events, and catering.
- Use of communication tools to interact with consumers, such as newsletters, APPs, and web-based
- platforms.
- Communication strategy: A clear and strong story, from product-based to story-based marketing. Uniqueness is important.

10 Success factor: Personality and skills of the initiators

Key aspect for a **business mentality.**

- Founders share the same goal and common motivation (innovation, food, sustainability).
- Founders have different backgrounds.
- Founders are passionate and curious.
- Education level of the initiators on areas related to the agricultural sector and/or business management.
- Communication between initiators is well thought-out before starting the initiative. Define the communication tools to be used.
- A complementary team founding the initiative. In case of one initiator, there is an external
- board (e.g. consultants, advisors).
- Adapting the type of initiative to the personality of the farmers. For example, a community supported agriculture initiative (CSA) requires a lot of social interaction with customers. Vending machines do not require this.
- Knowledge/use of financial terms.
- Decision-making based on sales data or other financial data.
- Price-setting mechanisms to promote certain buying behaviour. For example, Landare supermarket takes lower margins on local products.

This list of good practices and success factors is complex and represents an ideal scenario for a fair and novel food system initiative. It is expected that no one initiative has all these factors, but rather an assortment, with some considered socially successful, economically successful, environmentally successful, or a combination.

2.4- Pairing international evidence with local context

Once the initiative has been recognized and assessed against pre-set criteria, and its success factors identified, it can be used as a tool for learning. Specifically, if you are passionate about fair food supply and are looking for an inspiring idea of how to turn your passion into action, you can learn from other successful initiatives that have inspired farmers, entrepreneurs, and local authorities across Europe. You can consider if an initiative and the innovative short food supply chain can be **replicated** in your respective region.

In the COCOREADO project, **replicability roadmaps** were developed to represent **14 successful initiatives that can serve as the first source of inspiration.** Each roadmap helps readers to learn about the main factors for the success of these initiatives. The roadmaps also include insights about what must be kept in mind if the readers want to replicate the success pathways in their own work.
Watch the presentation video here.

Figure 7. Overview of some of the replicability roadmaps, available on the website

The 14 cases were selected from across Europe and illustrate good practices and success factors leading to benefits for farmers, consumers, and broader local communities. The common element between the 14 cases is that they represent fair short food supply chains, which become successful and sustainable thanks to meaningful cooperation between farmers, producers, and other actors along the food chain, all striving to shorten the distance between production and consumption.

Figure 8. Screenshot of a self-check list in one of the replicability roadmaps.

The roadmaps were created to learn about problems experienced by others, and to deliver knowledge about solutions, sources of funding, business models, good practices, and factors of success. To facilitate replication, the replicability **roadmaps include a self-checklist** to help you consider important elements when developing your ideas or planning your own solution.

Nevertheless, when considering the possibilities of replicating a good practice, you should also be mindful of the **possible challenges** related to the local context. Some of them have been listed below:

Replicability of a good practice

Possible challenges

- Access to information about the context of the local partners
- Local regulations
- Cross-cutting context in the EU
- Local subsidies
- Knowing your target audience/consumers and adapting your business strategy to them
- Cross-border barriers: administrative, digital platforms, decentralised databases

Apart from the overall challenges, it is worth considering additional challenges related to the replicability of the good practice in a particular context. For instance, you might want to consider the availability of infrastructure, existing strategic planning of agricultural production at local and regional levels, consumer awareness and demand, and other similar aspects.

Despite the aforementioned challenges, we encourage you to first look at the opportunities that replication of the good practices may represent and use the developed roadmaps and other good practices as a source of inspiration to bring positive change to the local context.

2.5- Cross visits and other sources of good practices

While the roadmaps represent one way to learn about good practices, there are also other sources of inspiration that can be beneficial for you and your team. Among these, **cross-visits** provide an opportunity to learn while visiting the actual setting of a good practice.

1. Cross visits

I think the cross visits are extremely important. Go together and see what is there, listen to people and then exchange information. What do you like, what do you dislike? That's something that I would certainly take up in the future again. So people can really see with their feet on the ground what a project looks like, and what kind of things people struggle with. And those can be personal things as well, those can be marketing things, ethical things, ideas, or ideals that people have.

Tessa Avermaete, project coordinator
KU LEUVEN, Belgium

The methodology for the COCOREADO cross-visits is modelled on the NEFERTITI and Agrispin method. This approach is based on a two-day visit which includes the kick-off, demonstrations, reflections, a social activity, and knowledge exchange.

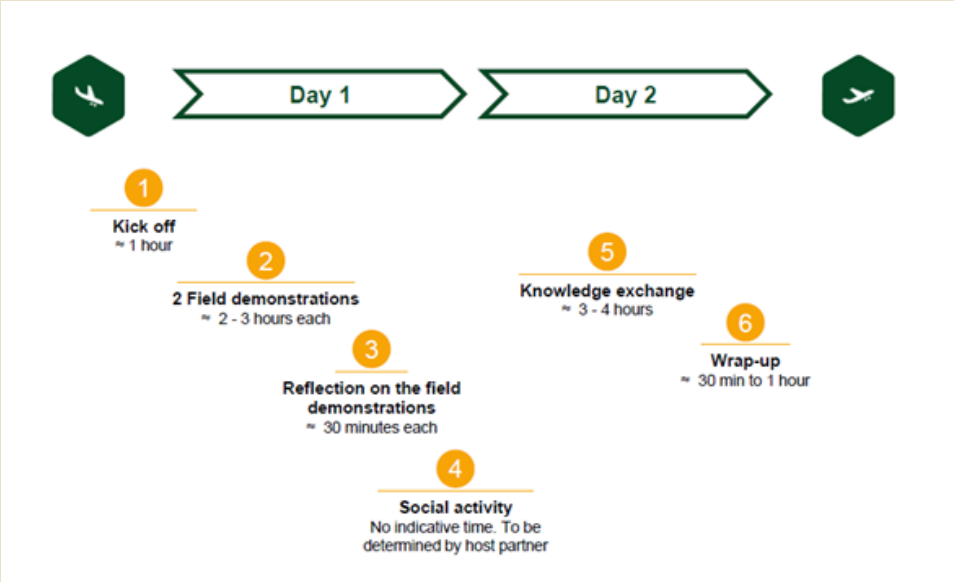

Figure 8. NEFERTITI cross-visit approach, available in 'CROSS VISIT GUIDELINES TO ON FARM DEMONSTRATIONS'.

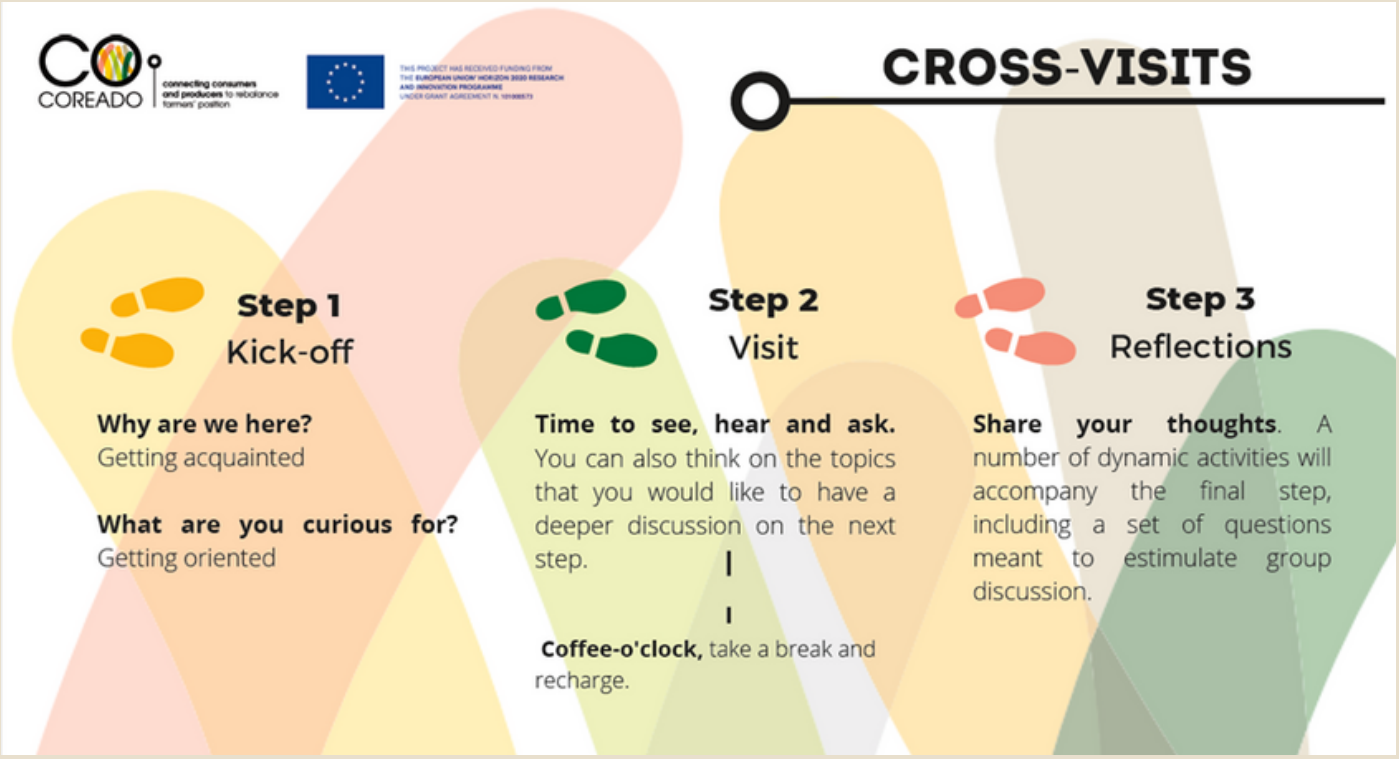

Figure 9. COCOREADO three-step approach for a cross-visit.

Considering the limited time available in the Ambassadors Training, three simple steps were implemented, modelled after the NEFERTITI and Agrispin approach.

Step 1 - Kick-off (15min)

GETTING ACQUAINTED:

- Introduction of the cross-visit purpose to the host.
- Introduction of the cross-visit host (by the host).

GETTING ORIENTED: Before the cross-visit, the questions below should be answered and addressed during this stage.

1. What are you most curious about?
2. What kind of answers would you like to take home after this visit?
3. How would you like to use these answers for your own work in your network?
4. What specific experience or knowledge would you like to share?

If a flyer for the initiative is available, it should be distributed before the visit.

Step 2 - Visit

Necessary materials:

- Notebooks and pens: distributed before the visit.

The participants must make sure they collect the necessary information. Therefore, cross-visit organisers should distribute materials where participants can write their doubts and relevant points to clarify in the next step.

Coffee-o'clock (10min): After the visit, a small break can take place to let the participants discuss what was visited. During this break, water and food should be provided.

Step 3 - Reflections

For this step, the required materials can vary depending on the exercise. Below we will provide an explanation for an exercise conducted in a cross-visit for the 3rd Ambassadors Training in Riga:

- Bingo card
- Notebooks
- Pens

There should be a sufficient number of facilitators, in addition to the host, to promote discussion among different participants. The timekeeper takes note of key aspects and ensures time management.

The exercise consists of a bingo card with the 10 success factors previously presented to the ambassadors (which are also present in this toolkit), as well as space to write down the good practices associated with the success factor. The objective is to engage with the host over the course of the visit, to discuss good practices and the potential to replicate them in their own local contexts.

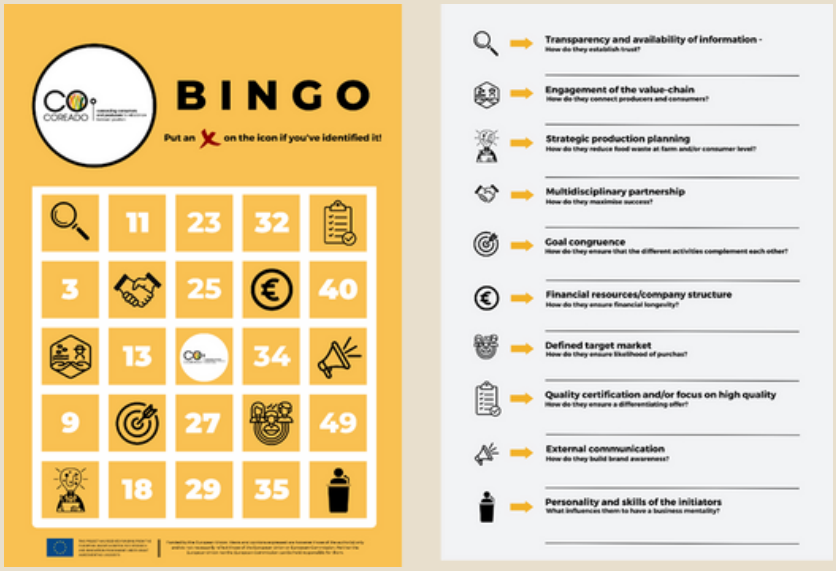

Figure 10. A bingo card with 10 success factors that can be used during cross visits.

*"I am very satisfied with the visit to **Getliņi Eko** enterprise, I saw for the first time the municipal garbage plant from where they get heat energy and then grow vegetables: cucumbers and tomatoes. It was amazing and very impressive, thank you for such an opportunity."*

Participant of COCOREADO Ambassador Programme

2. Other sources of good practices

While you are considering if organising a cross visit, or taking part in one, would be an available and beneficial option for you, below we provide a list of other useful sources that can provide you with extra inspiration and lead to other types of good practices!

1

Practices on Public Procurement (PROCURS)

Examples of public procurement practices in Europe to derive common solutions that can be implemented in future sustainable public procurements.

MORE INFO

2

The agroBRIDGES Toolbox

The agroBRIDGES Toolbox is a collection of 12 practical tools to support the growth of Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) in Europe and bring producers and farmers closer to consumers.

MORE INFO

3

COACH project's Communication, Learning and Innovation Platform (CLIP)

The CLIP hosts a searchable 'Living Library' of 34 **beacons**. Each beacon tells a different story of how to shorten food chains and reconnect food producers and consumers. For each one, collaboration between actors has been of vital importance – the beacons showcased in our library bring together farmers, civil society, local authorities, and citizens with shared goals.

MORE INFO

4

Global network of lighthouse farms

A network of exemplary farms and foodscapes from around the world that have found radical solutions to address current sustainability challenges.

MORE INFO

5

Liaison project's Interactive Innovative Toolbox

Practical "How to Guides", newsletters, videos, reports and handbooks, policy briefs and conference papers.

MORE INFO

6

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups

Operational Groups are intended to bring together multiple actors such as farmers, researchers, advisers, businesses, environmental groups, consumer interest groups, or other NGOs to advance innovation in the agricultural and forestry sectors.

MORE INFO

7

EU CAP network: Forum of best practices

Enhance the cooperation between primary producers, improve their position within the food supply chain and increase market transparency.

MORE INFO