Inspirational ideas

An app to find out where our food comes from

Consumers, have you ever thought "If only I knew a bit more about the origin of this food"? Farmers, have you wished you could inform final consumers about where and how your produce was produced? A number of Slovenian food processors along with a farmers' cooperative and a web developer have developed *OriginTrail*, a free smartphone app where you can trace local food from farm to fork.

This app was shortlisted for the TP Organics (European Technology Platform (ETP) for organic food and farming research) call for innovations in the category "New business models of value addition at the local level". The winners of the call were announced at the event *Organic Innovation Days* held in Brussels in December 2015 (see below).

A demand for food traceability

Food traceability is increasingly important for consumers today. People now want to know where their meat, fruit & vegetables and dairy come from. They also ask for values: specific origin like mountain farming, high animal welfare standards, fair prices for local farmers, etc. A study published in **Information & Management** found that for some shoppers just having the information available is enough to influence a purchase. "Simply making this kind of traceability information available for food products will encourage more purchases of those products, and at a higher price, even if the buyer never uses that information," says study co-author Rajiv Kishore, PhD, associate professor of management science and systems in the **University of Buffalo, School of Management.**

One of the food companies working with OriginTrail

"This however, is not an easy task," Žiga Drev, co-founder of OriginTrail tells us, "'Complex food products' are those which have several different suppliers: a cup of yoghurt can contain milk from over 100 farms. Also, 'network products' are those which can have a large variety of supplying businesses, for example as meat, tomato and egg producers all contribute to a ready-made lasagne." With such a variety of suppliers and products, Žiga Drev explains that it is not always possible to give all of the information about product origin to the consumer: "Even though such products might be local or of special origin, this information can get lost when the transmission of this information is interrupted within the value chain."

The OriginTrail group therefore felt challenged to find a solution which would both be a marketing tool for local food producers - providing them with an effective way to differentiate themselves based on the origin of their main ingredient - and an information tool for consumers so that they can find out more about what they are buying.

A digital solution

The OriginTrail smartphone app was launched in 2014. It is the result of a collaboration between a number of food processors, a farmers' cooperative and a web developer from Slovenia. It is a web and mobile solution bringing transparency to food value chains. Consumers can scan a product label and find out where the beef they want to buy was produced or if the apples they fancy have a Protected Geographical Indication. Žiga Drev says "OriginTrail presents an important step forward for local food producers. They go beyond simply stating the country of primary production, instead they unveil the entire path of the product's origin on a particular farm."

It also has a system where consumers can give their feedback on a particular product to the farmer, meaning that there is direct interaction between the shopper and the producer.

"The farmers that supply milk, meat or vegetables have been very positive about OriginTrail giving consumers an ability to see where the ingredients in end products come from. The farmers confident that the transparency the system provides will result in consumer confidence and shopping preference for their products." Žiga Drev.

A European app

At the moment, OriginTrail enables consumers to trace products from 3 food companies back to more than 1200 local farmers from Slovenia (meat, dairy and vegetables). They are currently working with a further food company and 2 farmers' cooperatives with around 400 farmers. For 2016, the group is looking into expanding the digital solution to other EU countries. OriginTrail was also studied in the European research project **HealthyGrowth**, which looked into supporting the growth of "values-based" organic food chains. HealthyGrowth was funded through the ERA-NET **Core Organic II**: Coordination of European Transnational Research in Organic Food and Farming Systems.

Organic Innovation Days

On 1-2 December 2015, the European Technology Platform for Organic Food and Farming Research and Innovation (TP Organics) organised the event Organic Innovation Days to discuss the innovation potential of organic food and farming systems and the opportunities and potential risks that could arise from innovations developed outside the organic sector. "Innovation is essential for the development of the entire European agri-food system: organic food and farming is a proven pioneer and providing innovative solutions to increase the sustainability of production," said Eduardo Cuoco, Head of the TP Organics secretariat. The winning solutions presented at the event included Vite.net®, a decision support system for the sustainable management of vineyards, the reduction of nitrates in organic cold meats and a crowdfunding campaign for a small-scale dairy farm. Abstracts of all short-listed submissions, including OriginTrail, are available for download on the **TP Organics website**.

Further information

www.tporganics.eu
www.origin-trail.com
Video explaining the app (in Slovenian) **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsxBR-vZc-E**
www.coreorganic2.org/healthygrowth

Photo Credits: OriginTrail