

The role of ICTs in supporting collaborative networks in the agro-food sector: two case studies from south west England

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Abstract. Over recent years, in a wide range of countries, grassroots initiatives have emerged aimed at overcoming the limits of the mainstream agro-business system. These initiatives aim at improving farmers' access to local and regional markets and consumers' access to fresh local produce. Among these initiatives, Food Hubs have emerged as a promising way to improve local food supply systems. They represent collaborative networks of producers and consumers that aggregate, distribute, and market local food products. ICTs enable these collaborative networks by allowing information exchange among their actors and by providing collaborative tools that allow quick co-ordination between members of the network. The paper aims to analyse, through a multi-case study analysis, how the adoption of ICTs have fostered the development of new, "alternative" initiatives oriented at establishing local food networks and to reconnect producers and consumers. The study will present results from the analysis of two food-hub initiatives based in South West England, which are adopting informative systems to support their activities and to implement novel business models: Stroudco Food Hub and Dean Forest Food Hub.

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