

LEBENSMITTELNETZWERK BASEL

FELD ZU TISCH

Initiative description

THE IDEA

Feld zu Tisch is a initiative of the non-profit cooperative Lebensmittel Netzwerk Basel, aiming to build a resilient, sustainable, and regionally anchored food system in the Basel area. It promotes ecologically responsible B2B trade between local producers and professional buyers, guided by sustainability principles such as organic or biodynamic farming, fair pricing, and regional value creation. Rather than functioning as a label, Feld zu Tisch serves as a practical instrument for transforming local food systems.



Figure 1: Hof Wollfloch Ollingen

PARTNERS & NETWORK

The Feld zu Tisch network strengthens direct, long-term partnerships between farms and catering businesses in the Basel area. The cooperative has already a broad network with 52 suppliers and customers. The current participators are functioning as multipliers for further acquisition. Feld zu Tisch is profiting from strong partnerships as the "FHNW", "Bundesamt für Landwirtschaft" or "GenussStadt Basel".

Key milestones include the launch of a new proprietary trading platform in May 2025, replacing prior iterations due to technical limitations. Additionally, a pilot collaboration with three institutional kitchens in the care sector is scheduled for September 2025, aimed at creating stable supply flows and scaling B2B operations (1). Access to the platform requires membership in the cooperative, typically through a CHF 500 share investment. Members gain voting rights, join thematic groups, and co-shape strategic decisions. This participatory structure transforms Feld zu Tisch from a mere marketplace into a collaborative network that fosters long-term relationships and strengthens regional food system resilience.



Figure 2: Hof Wollfloch Ollingen

MARKET PLACE

The platform facilitates direct marketing of food products within a 30-kilometre radius of Basel, eliminating intermediaries. It combines digital infrastructure with a socially and ecologically motivated cooperative model, enabling producers to set their own prices and receive bundled orders and automated invoicing. The online marketplace, currently in its pilot phase, charges producers an 8% transaction fee, while buyers incur only 0–3% payment processing fees depending on the payment method. Deliveries are either handled directly by producers or via pickup, without additional charges.

Sustainability perspectives

ECOLOGICAL

The cooperative supports biodiversity and agroecological resilience by maintaining short, transparent supply chains that favour varietal diversity typically excluded from industrial agriculture. This operational logic aligns with scholarly calls to shift away from high-yield monocultures toward ecologically diverse, nutritionally rich food systems. By fostering direct producer-consumer relationships and allowing for flexible, demand-responsive harvesting and distribution, Feld zu Tisch contributes to minimizing food waste while enhancing the viability of diversified production systems (2).

Feld zu Tisch embodies a systemic shift in agri-food governance. It underscores the importance of contextualized agricultural practices, grounded in local ecologies and cultural heritages. By enabling direct exchange between small-scale producers and regional buyers, the platform supports the conservation of local breeds and heritage varieties while facilitating their economic integration into modern markets (3).

While shorter transport routes for regional food reduce emissions by an average of 4–5%, food choice itself has a far greater impact on the climate. Animal-based products, especially meat, generate significantly higher greenhouse gas emissions compared to vegetables, fruits, and plant-based alternatives. Shifting dietary patterns toward more plant-based options is essential for achieving substantial emission reductions (4).

Feld zu Tisch promotes agricultural systems that are rooted in regional contexts and adapted to local ecological conditions. By supporting producers who apply organic, biodynamic, or low-intensity farming practices, the initiative fosters biodiversity and ecological resilience. The model aligns with findings on the benefits of semi-natural, low-intensity farming systems, which contribute to species-rich habitats, landscape heterogeneity, and improved nutritional quality of food products (5).

ECONOMY

Organizationally, the cooperative model of Feld zu Tisch enhances economic resilience for small-scale producers by decoupling them from volatile global markets and centralized retail structures. Producers set their own prices, ensuring greater autonomy and fair value retention. Although the platform applies an 8% usage fee on gross sales to fund operations, the elimination of intermediaries yields increased profitability for farmers and cost-efficiency for buyers. This decentralised arrangement exemplifies how localised economies can integrate sustainability and become more resilient.

Feld zu Tisch also strengthens the regional economy by ensuring that value creation remains local. With over 50% of the added value for processed goods required to stay within the region, the initiative supports small enterprises and rural livelihoods. The low entry cost, typically CHF 500 in cooperative shares, makes participation accessible to producers and buyers alike. Shared logistics, automated invoicing, and bundled orders reduce transaction costs, while the absence of delivery fees for pickup or direct delivery further enhances affordability. This model promotes a circular, resilient food economy that benefits all actors along the supply chain.

SOCIAL

Socially, Feld zu Tisch cultivates a collaborative network that strengthens community cohesion and empowers local actors. By fostering direct connections among farmers, restaurateurs, and retailers, it facilitates trust-based relationships and knowledge exchange. The initiative helps preserve traditional agricultural practices and local food cultures. Through participatory governance and regional cooperation, Feld zu Tisch contributes to social inclusion and shared responsibility in shaping sustainable food systems. Regular events, such as farm visits, kitchen dialogues, and producer-buyer meetups, foster mutual understanding and increase public engagement.

Potentials

TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL

The transformative potential of Feld zu Tisch is tied and restricted to the region of Basel and is limited by a few factors. Since only a certain amount and variety of foodstuffs can reasonably be produced within the designated area, which also depend on seasonal availability, local weather and soil conditions, as well as the limited shelf life of certain kinds of produce, such as lettuce, it's unlikely that such a group can replace the existing conventional food system completely within its region in the foreseeable future. However, transforming the existing one into a more regional and sustainable state step by step, is entirely possible. The goal in mind: If a product is available through such an alternative food system, it should be procured through it.

Beyond the region of Basel, its transformative potential would unfold once other groups take up the idea and replicate it in their own densely populated urban areas surrounded by rural hinterlands, adapting to the specifics of the area where necessary. Such a network of networks would likely benefit tremendously from exchanging their experiences and expertise with each other. Scaling up in such a way would also negate the risks of growth for individual stakeholders. If a single group in the network is starting to struggle for one reason or another, the effect on the other groups will be limited. Furthermore, having a number of individual networks within a larger network could help offset crop failures within one region, making the overall system more resilient.

GROWTH AND CHALLENGES

Because of the self-imposed limit to a region, Feld zu Tisch can focus on growing in density, rather than width, i.e. connecting as many local producers as possible to local customers. We learned that the prices for unprocessed produce on the platform, such as carrots or potatoes, are lower compared to regular suppliers. But some ingredients, especially meat and fish, could likely be sourced at a lower price from abroad through the conventional food system. Likewise, the time and machinery required for a product could raise its price above an attractive level for local customers, mainly due to high domestic labour cost and economies of scale. While certain cantinas are likely willing to pay extra for regional and seasonal products, some restaurants work on thin profit margins and might simply not be able to shift to more expensive ingredients.

A possible solution could lie in a more diverse supply of local produce, which could give customers an incentive to use more than one source for ingredients. Put simply, if customers can source a number of different goods from one place, they might be willing to pay a bit more for some of them, if others are cheaper compared to competing suppliers. In this regard it might be a good idea to find out on what category of ingredients local restaurants are spending the most money on, beef or lamb meat for example, and diversify the supply on that information.

Figure 3: Agroscope



Further development

PUBLICITY

To not only facilitate the relationships, but also to make them visible to the public, communication is needed that focuses on trust, transparency and shared values. The network works with several tool to reach out, like a newsletter or a speed-dating format between producers, restaurants and public. In the next phase Feld zu Tisch will be profiting from their partnerships and network possibilities. The first participators will be multipliers for further partner acquisitions.

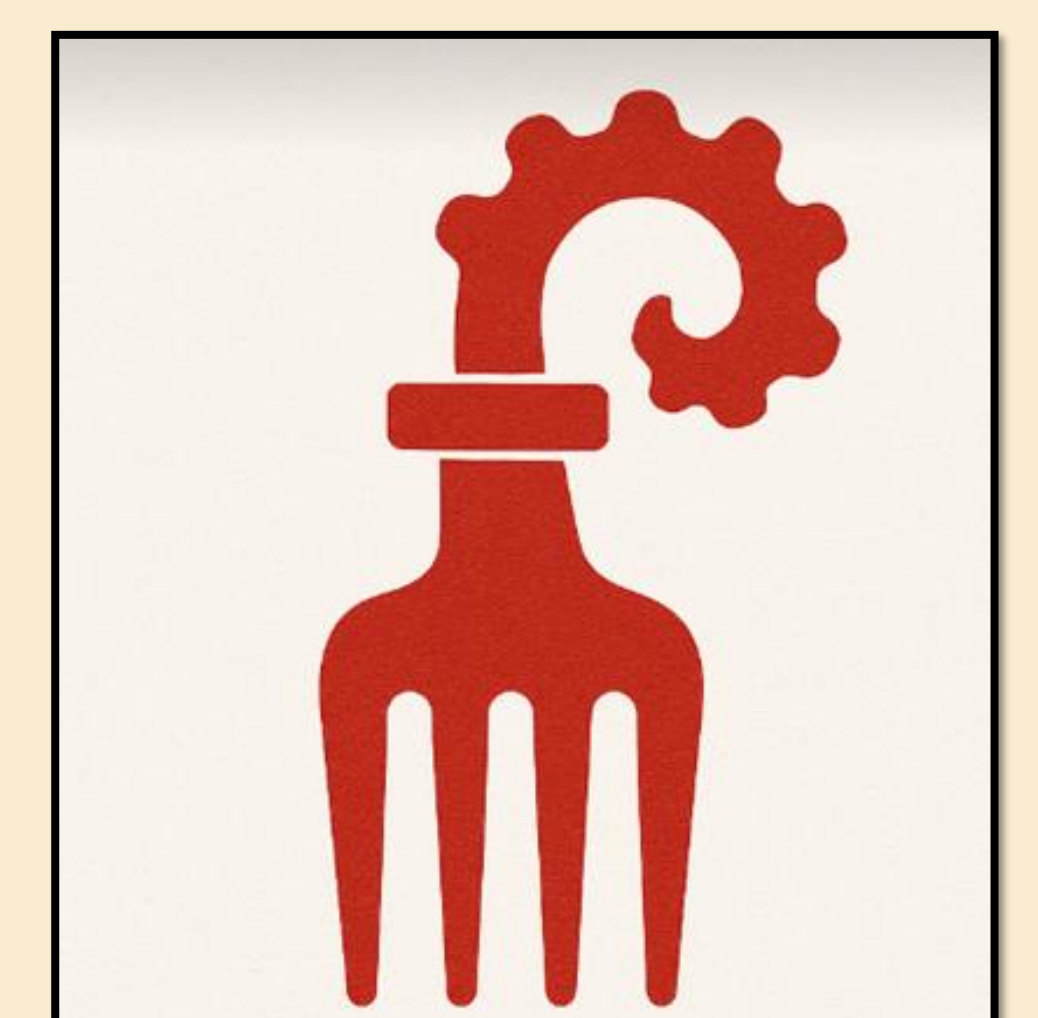
Another tool for the public relations work could be about telling stories behind the ingredients. One key component could be joint portraits of chefs and farmers or showcasing the personal stories and relationships behind the regional products. These portraits would illustrate the value of local collaboration and highlight the human connection in the food chain. Menus themselves could serve as tools for communication, by featuring visible signs of cooperation, including a recognisable logo and a QR code that links to background stories or short videos introducing the producers involved. To facilitate partnerships, the initiative could also offer a digital or physical platform where interested businesses – such as farms, dairies, or restaurants – can connect, exchange needs and offers, and form collaborations.

This makes Field to Table not just a logistical project, but also a social and cultural one - which shows that regionality starts with relationships.

IDEAS

Experience from Switzerland e.g. with the „Fait Maison“ or „Schweizer Regionalprodukte“ label and international examples such as „Regionalfenster“ (Germany) or „Campagna Amica“ (Italy) show that clearly visible origin labelling is also effective in gastronomy in sensitising consumers to regional products. Such labels create trust, promote transparency and strengthen local value creation.

In the Feld zu Tisch project, which links regional producers with Basel restaurants, a dedicated label can make a targeted contribution to recognising the origin of regional ingredients on menus. It makes regional food quickly recognisable for guests and supports conscious consumer decisions. The logo thus becomes a communicative link between agriculture, catering and the urban population - and contributes to the long-term establishment of a sustainable urban food system.



Possible logo for the region, generated by the authors with AI-Tools (unofficial)

Interview with an participating farmer:

The way to Basel (37km) is only worthy with an order value of 1'000 Chfs. Otherwise the costumers pick them up themselves. The membership in the cooperative came through personal contacts and he benefits above all from the long-term partnerships with bigger standing orders (6).

Bibliography

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