



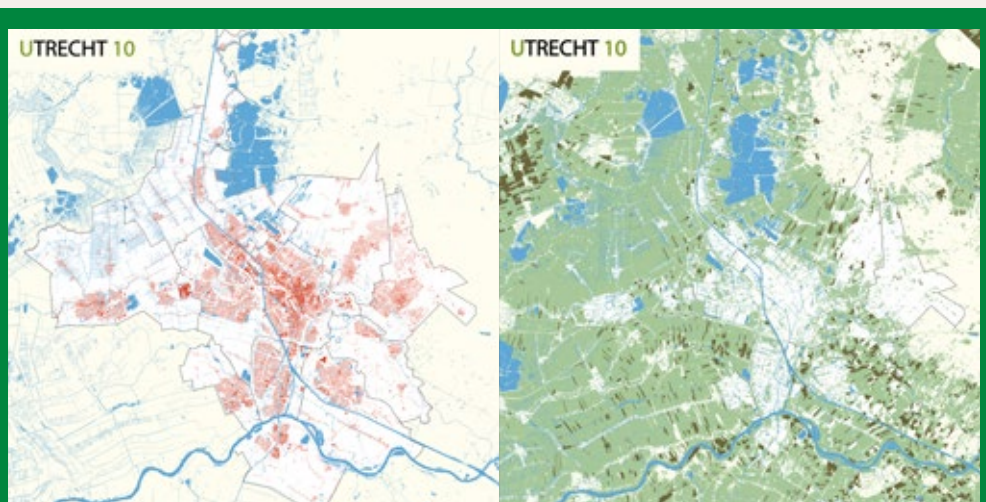
Assessing and Planning the City Region Food System of Utrecht (The Netherlands)

:: The Utrecht city region

The U10 region (hereafter 'Utrecht region') is a network of 10 municipalities including the city of Utrecht and 9 surrounding municipalities. Utrecht Region has a population of around 730.000 inhabitants [2015], with predicted growth to 830.000 by 2030. Located in the centre of the Netherlands, it forms an important infrastructure hub.

:: Who feeds the city region?

Data on food supply are scarce, not least due to the strong export focus of Dutch agriculture. Nationally, 65% of the food consumed is sourced from Dutch farmers, but little is known about food flows within the country. Based on expert interviews and data from main local food distribution initiatives, it is estimated that agriculture in the Utrecht region provides at most 5% of all the food consumed in the region. The Utrecht region thus plays **a minor role as provider of food to its consumers.**



Population densities (in red) in the Utrecht region [Source: Basisregistratie Topografie, Kadaster, 2017]

Utrecht region land use map: grassland (light green) and arable land (dark green)

Agriculture in the Utrecht region consists mostly of grassland for dairy farming. A smaller number of farms grow fruit, mostly apples and pears, potatoes, wheat and sugar beets. Vegetable production is almost non-existent. Agriculture in the Utrecht region is relatively small-scale and faced with an aging farmer population.

It is also characterised by its multifunctionality where primary production is combined with leisure, nature conservation and social or educational care services for vulnerable groups.

In the cities of Utrecht and Zeist, one finds a **large variety of urban and peri-urban agriculture activities**, ranging from allotment gardens, community and school gardens, to semi-governmental urban farms and income-generating gardens and farms. Rather than producing large volumes of food, these initiatives provide an important range of social and educational services to the Utrecht region.

Food processing

Food processing in the region is largely disconnected from local production. The main food processing sectors in terms of employment (bread and pastry, alcoholic drinks and fish products) **primarily depend on inputs from outside the Utrecht region**. Some industries, like beer breweries, may have a local marketing strategy. The single largest food processor is a coffee producer (Douwe Egberts). **Dairy processing is the largest sector with potential for local or regional marketing, mainly through on-farm processing of cheese**. The number of people employed in fruit processing is limited.



An interactive map of different businesses engaged in local and regional food. <http://www.ruaf.org/regionalfoodmaputrecht/> [Source: RUAf, 2017]

Food wholesale and distribution

Two companies (Willem&Drees and Local2Local) are the main distributors of local and regional food in the Utrecht region. A third provider (Rechtstreef) recently ended its activities. Willem&Drees stopped supplying local food to supermarkets, and now focusses on online sales and home deliveries. Initiatives experience fierce competition from commercial home delivery services (e.g. Hello Fresh) that provide food boxes without clear local provenance. This illustrates that **markets for local and regional food are still small and unstable. There is a need for further consumer awareness and coordination**.

Food marketing, catering and retail

Utrecht consumers buy 80% of their food in supermarkets. **The market share for direct sales of local food**, through farm shops (e.g. Landwinkel) and weekly farmers' markets, **is limited**. Nonetheless, there is a growing number of community-based initiatives such as consumer buying groups or box schemes. Several well-known restaurants (e.g. Karel V, Vaartsche Rijn, Colour Kitchen) explicitly put local and regional food on their menu, and there is a special logo (Flairtje) for restaurants that work with fair-trade and regional products.

Food consumption

According to the Municipal Public Health Monitor (2017), 18% of respondents indicate that they often or always buy regional food products. This percentage is relatively low compared to consumer who reported to buy often or always organic (65%) or seasonal (32%) food. There are increasing **concerns with regards to diet-related health issues**. National studies show that Dutch people on average consume insufficient fruit, vegetables, fish and fibre. Unhealthy food consumption patterns contribute to overweight (ranging from 38 to 57% for different municipalities in the Utrecht region) and severe overweight (9 to 16%). Diabetes type I and II (ranging from 33 to 49 persons per 1000 inhabitants) is increasingly prevalent, though numbers are still lower than national averages.

Food and organic waste

In the Netherlands, in 2009, 1,4-2,5 million tons or 83-151 kg per capita of food waste was generated along the entire food chain. No specific data are available at the level of the Utrecht region. In 2011, total food waste was estimated at 89-210 kg per capita, suggesting **an overall increase in food waste**. This implies that the Netherlands was not on track to meet national targets to reduce food waste by 20% in 2015. Today, the Utrecht municipality aims to support food waste prevention initiatives as part of its Healthy Urban Living policy 2015-2018.

Who governs the food system?

Several initiatives supported by the Utrecht municipality, such as Eetbaar Utrecht (Edible Utrecht) and Lekker Utrechts (Tasty from Utrecht), successfully put regional food on the agenda in the past years (2009-2014). Currently, **the main policy framework in the Utrecht municipality for food issues is Public Health policy**, and "team food" at this department is leading food policy development. The policy focuses on promoting "Healthy Urban Living", and with key policy documents such as "Building a healthy future" the municipality aims to improve public health with healthy, sustainable and local food and enhances the

societal and economic movements by connecting to developments, supporting and stimulating them.

Relationships with other relevant actors for food policies at the level of the Utrecht region are still less developed, although policies state that 'the municipality will connect with regional food developments and take up a facilitating and stimulating role'. This includes connections with other municipalities in the Utrecht region, with the province of Utrecht, but also with European programmes.



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:: Opportunities for strengthening the Utrecht City Region Food System (CRFS)

- **Increase access to healthy and nutritious food.** Regional food marketing initiatives have over the past years improved the quality of their services and have become more easily accessible through internet. Aggregation of data on sales, logistics and consumer profiles may offer new opportunities to target specific individuals and communities.
- **Promote food-related business and employment.** The current political and socio-economic context in the Utrecht region offers opportunities for regional food businesses and networks connecting a wide range of sectors (education, energy, waste management, recreation, etc.).
- **Fostering rural-urban linkages and a circular economy.** In the medium term, there are opportunities for regional food initiatives to collectively valorise nutrient flows (organic waste, sewage sludge) from the city and use these – processed safely – in agriculture or energy production. This may also offer new opportunities for business development in a circular economy.
- **Promote ecosystem services and natural resource management.** The Utrecht region is characterised by several important cultural landscapes and ecological values which were historically shaped in co-production with agricultural land-use. These features can be strengthened further and linked to recent national policies on “nature inclusive agriculture”.

:: Proposals for policy and planning interventions in the Utrecht CRFS

Four thematic priorities for exploring and developing (policy) interventions were identified in 2017. These priorities were selected, based on stakeholder interest, knowledge and available resources. Potential collaborative strategic actions among public authorities, civil society and private sector were identified as follows:

1. **More local and regional food on the plate:** actively support local and regional food markets and thereby contribute to a more robust city region food system.
- **Collaboration and coordinated action between municipalities in the region:** Developing regional food markets requires improved coordination between urban food demand and supply of regional food products from farm businesses located in surrounding municipalities. Include regional food in policy agendas involving Utrecht and other municipalities (within the region), the Province of Utrecht, and in European policies such as LEADER or Rural Development plans.
 - **Public procurement of regional food products:** Set clear targets for the share of regional food in public food services. Shares of regional



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food can be gradually increased, so that producers can adapt production to growing demand. Utrecht's current municipal catering contract only includes targets on organic food.

- 2. Further develop the role of food in a healthy and inclusive city:** Utrecht municipality has adopted “healthy urban living” as the main framework for food policy and is developing various food related policy actions. However, links between food, health, education and social inclusion policies require further strengthening and development. This is already partly taken up within the national City Deal “Food on the Urban Agenda” – a collaboration for best practice exchange and policy development of 12 Dutch cities and 3 national ministries – in which the city of Utrecht is leading the cluster on “Awareness raising, health, and social inclusiveness”. Development and monitoring of related indicators can support further policy formulation and implementation.
- 3. Urban agriculture, community and allotment gardens offer opportunities to strengthen a social economy:** Many professional urban agriculture businesses are fragile and rely on financial remuneration for social and health services from –often temporary – policy schemes. Community gardens and allotment gardens have clear and important social and ecological impacts, but lack recognition and support to guarantee their continuity. Development and testing of mechanisms that measure and remunerate social and ecological services provided by urban agriculture is needed, along with initiatives that strengthen corresponding business models.

- 4. Strengthening integrated food governance mechanisms:** There is a need to further develop mechanisms for integrated food governance within the municipality of Utrecht and the overall Utrecht region. This involves both the integration between different policy sectors within the municipality, as well as coordination and collaboration among municipalities and other public authorities (province, LEADER, etc.) within the U10 region. Also, mechanisms are needed for inclusive and participatory food governance, that involve stakeholders from civil society and private sector actors. Their engagement in regional food policies and strategies will enhance their effectiveness and societal support.



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