

# (Urban) Living Labs: A Practical Method to Strengthen Local Food Systems and Short Food Supply Chains

## Problem encountered and objective

Addressing complex and urgent sustainability challenges such as producing and distributing food locally requires the collaboration of multiple disciplines. Urban Living Labs (ULLs) are real-life environments where farmers, advisors, policymakers, researchers, and citizens work together to test new solutions for local food system challenges. Using the (Urban) Living Lab Way of Working (LLWOW) developed by AMS Institute, EU4Advice Living Labs follow a structured, step-by-step approach: understanding the local context, engaging stakeholders, defining shared ambitions, co-creating interventions, testing them in practice, and learning collectively. ULLs offer a hands-on, place-based method to develop and strengthen Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs).

## Main results / outcomes

In EU4Advice, Living Labs (LLs) in the Netherlands, Ireland, Hungary, and Spain applied the LLWOW methodology to understand local needs, bring together relevant actors, and test small-scale interventions addressing Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) challenges. The ULL approach provided practical tools and methods such as stakeholder mapping, co-creation, iterative piloting, and monitoring and evaluation cycles that helped structure collaboration and generate context-specific insights. Through regular cross-Living Lab exchanges, coordinators shared challenges, solutions, and emerging practices, which strengthened learning on SFSC advisory needs, governance processes, and policy considerations. LLs activities contributed to building capacity among practitioners and advisors and supported the development of targeted training efforts.

## Practical recommendations

Practitioners interested in accelerating SFSC innovation, building cooperation across sectors and local actors, strengthening learning and expertise, or testing new support services can use the LLWOW methodology to set up their own Living Lab. Begin by engaging key actors, defining a shared challenge, and co-creating small experiments. Keep the process open, iterative, and grounded in real-life conditions. The method is replicable and adaptable to rural, peri-urban, or urban contexts.

## Further information

For a practical introduction to the (Urban) LL method, consult the **Urban Living Lab Way of Working (LLWOW) handbook**, which provides steps, tools, and examples for designing and running LLs. Additional materials, case studies, and methodological resources are available through AMS Institute and the EU4Advice project. These resources help practitioners adapt the LL approach to their own regional context.

<https://www.ams-institute.org/documents/123/AMS-LLWOW-Handbook.pdf>

## About this abstract

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**Date:** February 2026

**EU4Advice** aims to lay the ground for effective capacity building of SFSC actors, by supporting advisors as catalysers of the knowledge flow from research to practice within an EU network of SFSC advisors, and by promoting their integration into national AKIS.

