

The sustainability of the activities of food banks in the Czech Republic with regard to the planned strategic changes of the EU agri-food sector

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Abstract: The review type article aims to identify key aspects for sustainability of activities of food banks in the Czech Republic, in connection with currently given objectives of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy for the agri-food complex in the programming period starting from 2023. In this context, there are taken into account identifiable impacts on current best practice of food banks.

Keywords: food banks, food supply chain, Common Agricultural Policy

JEL Classification: Q18, D21

1 Introduction

Food banks can be considered as independent institutions of public interest due to the possibility of reducing food waste and also through corporate social responsibility in relation to address poverty and related nutritional needs of the affected population (eg. Caraher and Furey, 2018). Beck and Gwilym (2022) add that food banks have become a type of a safety net for people who have failed the social security system in times of the Covid-19 pandemic and current austerity.

The problem framework of activities of food banks in the European area can be identified mainly in the diverse range of areas for managerial solutions, which include, on the one hand, financing of this type of activity with regard to the necessity to fully follow hygiene standards when donating food and, on the other hand, the lack of interest to participate in the food donation system by certain types of business entities (eg. Gracjasz and Grasseni, 2020; Nikolov, 2021).

The EU strategy for the period 2021+ targets the need to transform the agri-food complex with an emphasis on fair market conditions, quality, safety and environmental friendliness of production systems. In the mentioned context, an effort to "redesign" food supply chains, which currently represent about a third of global greenhouse gas emissions, is declared. It is also associated with an inefficient consumption of natural resources, resulting in loss of biodiversity and negative health impacts. Furthermore, aspects, which take into account the sustainable economic profitability and viability of participating economic entities, especially primary producers, are emphasized (©European Commission, 2021).

2 Methods

The review type article is based on the research of the current state of knowledge in the field of effective provision of food banks' services. Methods of analysis and synthesis of both foreign and domestic information sources are used.

Secondary data was also used as part of the European Commission's monitoring of the price situation and market outlook for agricultural commodities and food, which are available at the Agriculture and rural development portal (European Commission, ©2022a).

3 Research results

European Food Bank Federation represents institution that aims to reduce food insecurity in Europe by preventing food waste and promoting the need for solidarity, support and development of food banks in countries where their services are needed. It emphasizes in its latest report (European Food Bank Federation, ©2022) the negative effects of the war conflict in Ukraine on ensuring the security perspectives of supplying vulnerable groups of people with food and the necessity of direct measures by the EU to respond to the given crisis situation. The Czech Federation of Food Banks is a member of the European Federation of Food Banks in the Czech Republic. The Czech Federation of Food Banks currently supports activities of 15 regional food banks in the Czech Republic, incl. common central distribution warehouse in Prague.

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3.1 Provision of services of food banks in the Czech Republic

Provision of food banks' services in the Czech Republic towards the distribution of food aid according to the Act No. 110/1997 Coll. on food and tobacco products, as amended, has been supported since 2016 by the national budget of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic. In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the deterioration of the financial situation of socially weaker groups of the population, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic has increased the financial framework of the long-term support provided to food banks (Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic, ©2022). These facts were positively reflected in the volume of aid distributed by domestic food banks to people in material need (see Table 1).

Table 1 Volume of operational and investment subsidies provided by Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic, volume of distributed food help by food banks in the Czech Republic

Item / Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020 - 2021	Total
Volume o subsidies (Mill. CZK)	22.5	29.6	40.8	117.0	177.2	387.1
Volume of food help (tons)	1300	2300	4200	4700	7000*	19500

Source: Own processing using data of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic (©2021) and the Czech Federation of Food Banks (©2021)

*Note: Volume of food help for year 2021 not currently available

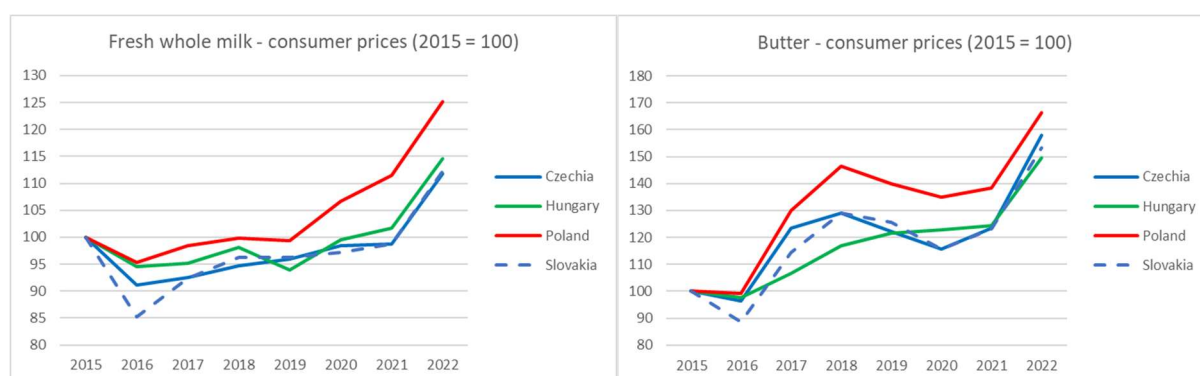
Beside the financial support of the Ministry of Agriculture, there is also a financial support by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of the Environment, which in the year 2022 will be provided to food banks in the Czech Republic 200 million CZK for investments from EU budget (Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic, ©2022; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs ©2021).

3.2 A Context of the Common Agriculture Policy and sustainable food production behind year 2022

Addressing food waste is one of the essential areas for achieving sustainable development within the agri-food complex. A 2016 study (European Commission ©2022b) concluded that 20 % of food in the EU is wasted. This waste represents approximately 6% of greenhouse gas emissions in the EU and also represents an excess burden on soil, water use and other scarce natural resources. By mid-2023, the European Commission will propose relevant binding targets that will enable the reduction of food waste throughout the EU.

Raise of food prices that is caused by negative development of cost of inputs within the whole foodchain itself could be directly controlled by the EU Common Agriculture Policy. Fig. 1 declares development of consumer prices of selected products in Visegrad 4 member countries. Rapid increase of producer prices of basic food is correlated with the raising proportion of people who need food help provided by food banks.

Fig 1 Development of consumer prices for fresh whole milk and butter



Source: Own processing using data of European Commission (©2022a)

Note: Data for year 2022 represents available values for the first half year

Meuwissen and Feindt et al. (2021) point out at the importance of the resilience attributes of food production systems, it shows that it depends significantly on the design of the system itself. Assessing the systematic resilience of agricultural production systems can help highlight its vulnerability. Many farming systems in Europe are facing a looming resilience crisis.

Sustainable food production is essential for its availability. It is necessary to continue the long-term construction of sustainable, productive and resilient agriculture, as envisaged in the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies. The current crisis highlights aspects of the dependence of the EU food production system on imported inputs such as fossil fuels, fertilizers and feed. These facts emphasize the need for a fundamental reorientation of EU agriculture and its EU food systems towards sustainability in line with the Green Deal and the reformed Common Agricultural Policy. (European Commission ©2022c).

4 Conclusions

The recent crisis caused by the spread of the disease COVID 19 and the current war crisis affect food security not only in the EU Member States, but throughout the world. Food banks in the role of charitable type of non-profit organizations can be a certain safety net for people in material need.

The activity of food banks in Europe is professionally supported by the European Federation of Food Banks (FEBA). These federation have got currently 24 full and 6 associated members. FEBA declares that European food banks are dependant on donations and sharing of food. FEBA recognizes the following major activities of food banks: supply, distribution and operations. All these activities are mostly depend on volunteer work. This fact raises the question of how to sustainably adopt the activities of this type of non-profit organizations also in the context of planned changes of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

This review type of article provides a partial output of on-going research project on key attributes for sustainable provision of food banks in the Czech Republic regard to a best practice in this area. This research project will, in its various phases, focus on taking into account the context of identifiable impacts on the current best practice of food banks in EU member states. Achieving the objectives of the on-going project is assumed mainly through the use of relevant publicly available secondary information and data. It is also intended to conduct a questionnaire research among representatives of food bank full/associated members.

The concept of food banks in the area of supporting socially disadvantaged population groups is not new and has a tradition both in the EU core countries and in newer member states. However, they are facing new challenges, starting with the pandemic of a new type of corona-virus and the current war conflict. It is therefore very important to continuously revise the frontiers of the possibilities of providing a given type of social services of a charitable nature. All the aforementioned aspects in the context of the necessary reforms of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, respecting the key areas of the so-called Green Deal.

It is also necessary to reflect within the current ongoing research that the activities of food banks also compensates existing inefficiencies of the food production system, which can basically be viewed through the amount of food waste. However, binding surplus food and reducing its waste only through food banks cannot be sustainable in the long run. In this context, it is thus possible to discuss the usability of food waste also, for example, for energy use within the framework of carbon-neutral concepts. However, it is essential to state that food within the defined key areas will not be produced intentionally for energy use only. This fact may paradoxically mean that streamlining and further optimizing the system of sustainable food production will lead to their unavailability for socially vulnerable groups of the population. So, further government intervention in the area of food availability, or food self-sufficiency appears to be inevitable in the near future.

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