

# MONTEMOR-O-NOVO PORTUGAL

## AGENDA 21 AS A CATALYST FOR LOCAL FOOD STRATEGIES

*This food policy snapshot is based on an interview with the SMEA working group and the Head of the Support Division for Planning and Economic Development of the Municipality of Montemor-o-Novo, the SMEA strategy monitoring team (MED - University of Évora), two regional/local partners (Slow Food Alentejo and Marca - ADL) and the external consultant for the strategy development phase. Written by Cecilia Delgado, NOVA University of Lisbon, CICS.NOVA, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, NOVA*

GLASGOW  
FOOD AND  
CLIMATE  
DECLARATION

MONTEMOR-O-NOVO is a municipality located in the Alentejo Central region of the district of Évora, Portugal. It is characterized by vast swathes of protected meadowland and cork and holm oak forests. Cork exploitation is often integrated with livestock farming, but this integration is being threatened by climate change, water availability, and the consequences of intensive soil-depleting farming practices. Montemor-o-Novo is a municipality with a rich agri-food tradition where small family farms coexist alongside large landowners. The FREIXO DO MEIO USERS' COOPERATIVE (440 hectares) is recognized as a national benchmark for agroecological practices.

In 1992 the United Nations formulated an action plan for sustainable development based on the Agenda 21 Program, which some Portuguese municipalities have since adopted. In the case of Montemor-o-Novo, the participation by locals in the implementation of the A21L Program (2009-2013) fostered an increased interest in promoting its cork oak forests and local food products. A group of proactive stakeholders consisting of local technicians, members of the Montemor-o-Novo citizenship network, and academics from the neighboring University of Évora engaged in intense discussions and developed specific actions to promote local products and raise awareness among both producers and consumers. To enhance and complement these efforts, the Local Council hired a team of external consultants in 2017 to draft and facilitate the development of a food strategy (2017-2019). As a result, the SMEA FOOD STRATEGY was collaboratively designed over two years with various local, regional and national partners. The A21L Program laid the foundations for this participatory process and confirmed the presence of a dynamic local community interested in developing a food strategy for the municipality. At the same time, the local authorities felt the need to communicate and work with local partners to draw on the positive dynamics established by the A21L Program.

“ Food strategies are not set in stone, they must be seen as a dynamic process. ”

### ENABLERS

The existence of an active community allowed consolidation of a considerable number of partners around local food issues, including the FREIXO DO MEIO USERS' COOPERATIVE at Herdade do Freixo, the MINGA cooperative, MARCA-ADL, SLOW FOOD ALENTEJO, the local academic community, and other stakeholders concerned and committed to maintaining the successes of the agri-food sector that had already been achieved in the territory. At the same time, local authorities allocated the human and financial resources necessary to develop the SMEA, namely by appointing an external technical group to facilitate and manage the strategy's development process. The five workshops organized by this external team and public awareness-raising campaigns in schools and around the community played a vital role in gaining community buy-in and approval. Over 2019, efforts were also made to formally involve stakeholders in the process through the creation of the SMEA Municipal Board. This culminated in the signing of the SMEA Food Strategy LETTER OF INTENT by a number of local, regional, and national partners in June of that same year.

### BARRIERS

When seeking to develop a vision of the local food system, stakeholders and partners realized that they did not have a roster of local producers. They also discovered that they did not have the capacity to carry out some of the food strategy actions foreseen, such as school canteen provisioning. These barriers were overcome with the creation of the MINGA cooperative, which incorporated small farmers and increased local capacity.

Fear of change and misgivings as to whether anything would come of the process were a constant challenge. However, these doubts were dissipated through small group discussions which built shared understandings and a stronger sense of collective ownership.

Following the signing of the SMEA Letter of Intent, the pandemic restricted development of the 14 priority actions defined under the strategy. The very large number of partners and actions involved also complicated the organization and implementation of the process. However, the parties were firmly established on the ground and continued to carry out their actions, although not necessarily identifying them with the SMEA strategy. In this context, the local authorities prioritized monitoring the strategy and creating a technical office to support farmers, namely by hiring an external team from the University of Évora - MED. This process is now underway, despite pandemic delays.

Of the 14 priority actions, the monitoring of SMEA continues through the services subcontracted to the external team of the University of Évora - MED. One action, the refurbishment of the local market financed by the Local Council, has been completed. This market is now a key meeting point for local producers and consumers. Although barriers need to be overcome to execute the remaining actions, the Local Council included a vision of the food strategy in its review of the Municipal Master Plan (September 2021). The strategic targets set for the next 10 years confirm that Montemor-o-Novo intends to support the consolidation of the agri-food sector, promote the articulation of agroforestry and other activities of economic interest to enhance the local environment, and manage the construction of greenhouses and intensive farming practices.

“ There is still much to be done, in fact we've hardly started. Moreover, after a nearly two-year hiatus due to the pandemic, we felt there was a need to listen and rethink decisions. But we will continue to forge ahead and will eventually achieve our goals. ”

### THE SMEA FOOD STRATEGY

- The strategy is composed of four axes: 1) health and food security, 2) short-term consumption, production and marketing circuits, 3) sustainability and resource management, and 4) strategic governance, corresponding to a total of 24 actions.
- These actions have six objectives: 1) apply more environmentally-friendly farming practices in the municipality according to the agro-ecological model, 2) preserve existing natural resources, encouraging conservation of water, soil and native species, 3) promote healthier eating habits, 4) reduce food waste and ensure local food security, 5) promote more sustainable consumption practices, highlighting local products and short supply chains, and 6) promote the local economy, boosting the development of the agri-food sector.



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