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New ways to distribute food

– REKO-rings in Sweden

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Louise Daving Götberg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L' and 'D'.

Louise Daving Götberg

Abstract

Alternative food systems have grown increasingly for the last 20 years and are seen as a reaction to the distant relationship between consumers and the origin of food. The discussion about shorter food systems and short food supply chains (SFSCs) raises the question about finding alternative ways to organize around food systems. In recent years the use of digital ordering systems for buying food has increased in combination with the increased interest of the consumption of locally produced food. In Sweden the virtual food platform REKO-rings is growing, which connect consumers and producers both interested in selling and buying locally produced food using Facebook groups.

The master thesis has a dual aim that at one side describes the development and organization of REKO-rings and on the other hand contribute to the understanding of the motives and underpinning values producers and consumers ascribe REKO-rings in Sweden. Based on those purposes I wanted to discuss the potential of REKO-rings to contribute towards alternative ways of distributing food in Sweden.

The study used a mixed method approach combination with both qualitative and quantitative features, using an online survey and interviews with nine different REKO-rings in Sweden.

The result showed that the number of members was increasing quickly. Throughout the time of the data gathering (ca 2 months) the member share increased from 78,461 members to 92,487 members, an increase of 18 % with five new REKO-rings. It also showed that REKO-rings were an easy way to connect local businesses and consumers using a flexible and social platform of communication. The result demonstrated that REKO-rings strengthen local communities and satisfy consumers and many different types of farmers, ranging from hobby farmers to full-time farmers. The virtual food platform of REKO-rings has the possibility to grow into an extensive social movement with prospects to challenge present conventional food systems.

Keywords: local food systems, short food supply chain, REKO-rings, local food.

Sammanfattning

Utvecklingen av alternativa livsmedelssystem har ökat kraftigt de senaste 20 åren, som kan ses som en motreaktion till komplexa och industriella matsystem. Diskussionen om lokala matsystem och korta livsmedelskedjor (SFSCs) väcker frågan om att hitta alternativa sätt att organisera matproduktion. Under de senaste åren har användningen av digitala beställningssystem för att köpa mat ökat, samtidigt som intresset av att köpa lokalt producerad mat expanderat. I Sverige växer den virtuella matplattformen REKO-ringar, som använder Facebookgrupper för att förena konsumenter och producenter att köpa och sälja lokalproducerad mat.

Den här magisteruppsatsen genomfördes som en kombinerad kvantitativ och kvalitativ studie. Syftet med studien var att å ena sidan beskriva utvecklingen och organisationen av REKO-ringar och å andra sidan utforska de motiv och underliggande värderingar som producenter och konsumenter tillskriver REKO-ringar. Baserat på dessa syften ville jag diskutera REKO-ringarnas potential för att bidra till alternativa sätt att distribuera mat i Sverige.

Resultatet visade att antalet medlemmar i REKO-ringarna ökar snabbt. Under tiden studien utfördes (ca 2 månader) ökade medlemmens andel från 78 461 medlemmar till 92 487 medlemmar, en ökning med 18% och fem nya REKO-ringar tillkom. REKO-ringar var ett nytt och enkelt sätt att sälja och köpa närproducerade produkter. REKO-ringar inkluderade ett brett spektrum av typer av producenter i olika storlekar, från hobbyodlare till heltidsbönder. Konsumenterna upplevde en tydlig nytta med plattformen då den kopplade samman producenter och konsumenter på ett sätt som bidrog till att stötta lokala företag och därigenom stärka det lokala samhället. Den virtuella matplattformen REKO-ringar, har möjlighet att växa till en omfattande social rörelse som kan utmana nuvarande konventionella matsystem.

Nyckelord: lokala matsystem, korta livsmedelskedjor, REKO-ringar, lokalproducerad mat.

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Abbreviations

The terms used in this thesis are as follows:

- EU – European Union
- CSA – Community Supported Agriculture
- JRC – Joint Research Center
- SFSCs – Short Food Supply Chains
- SLU – Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences)
- RDP - Rural Development Programme

1. Introduction

Consumers are today increasingly aware about the food they eat in terms of its origin, effect on the climate and under which conditions the production occurs. A significant share of the consumed food finds its way to consumers through long, complex and rationally organized industrial food chains (Marsden et al. 2000). These food chains create a physical and emotional distance between consumers and farmers and consequently to the food production itself (Mount 2012).

Retailers and wholesalers have for the last ten years increased their influence in the value chain of agro-food systems (Dahlbacka 2012; Gereffi 1994; Björnland et al. 2003; EU Conference 2012). In Sweden, the three largest retailers (ICA, Axfood and Coop) control about 85 % of the market share (Food strategy for Sweden 2017, p.110). The economic value of food has been restricted by retailers, manufacturers and processors (Pretty 2001), thus reducing the share received by the farmer in the food chain. At the same time the consumer spends less money on food. The average European household's budget spent on food has fallen from 30% at the beginning of the 1980s to 13% in 2016 (Task Force 2016, p.43). Consumers are motivated to buy locally produced food because of the quality, health reasons, environmental motives, knowledge of the origin of food and to be able to support local farmers and strengthen the local community (Cox et al. 2008).

During the past ten years (2007-2017) several initiatives promoting a direct contact between the producer and consumer has being emerged in Sweden. The demand for locally produced food has increased (Sundin & Troeng 2009; SLU 2008) and alternative types of distributional and sale systems have gained ground, called short food supply chains (SFSCs). SFSCs presents an alternative to the industrialized food supply chains. SFSCs can be manifested in many ways both in

terms of how food is distributed and sold, but also through which channels they are being sold and how food is organized. SFSCs aims to redefine the producer-consumer relationship in terms of providing knowledge of the origin of the food (Marsden et al. 2000).

A new aspect of the SFSCs trend is the digital tool operating in Facebook, namely REKO-ringar (REKO-rings) meaning - *fair consumption*. The concept aims to connect producers and consumers within a given area, to sell and buy local food, using Facebook as a communicative platform. REKO-rings can be expressed in terms of a concept but also as a digital tool. The concept of REKO-rings was introduced 2016 in Sweden from Finland. REKO-rings are a non-profit organization and the Facebook groups are self-governed with the help of administrators (EkoNu 2015). In December 2017, REKO-rings had more than 95 000 members organized in 55 groups, see Figure 1. REKO-rings has gained public knowledge and were introduced into the Swedish vocabulary 2017 (Språk och folkminne 2017).



Figure 1 A map of all REKO-ring in Sweden, the picture is taken from Google.

It exists little previous literature about the REKO-rings in English or Swedish, except of reports from Finland, mainly written in Finnish. During the initial process of this study, no research had previously been conducted on REKO-rings in Sweden. Therefor this master thesis provides a unique contribution of research to a new field of research.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The stud aims to provide a description of the development and organization of REKO-rings in Sweden. The aim is also to contribute to the understanding of the motives and the underpinning values producers and consumers ascribe REKO-rings. In relation to the aims the following issues emanate:

- How has the concept of REKO-ring developed and organized in Sweden?
- What characterizes the producers and consumers in terms of their demographics?
- What motives and values do the producers and consumers attribute to REKO-rings?

With the research questions in mind I intend to discuss the potential of the emerging virtual food platform REKO-rings to contribute towards alternative ways of distributing food in Sweden.

1.2 Outline



Figure 2 Illustration of the thesis

The study contains six sections. The first section contains the introduction of the study and research aims- and questions of the study. Further, in section two the method, analysis tools, and research design is explained. This part offers an explanation to how the empirical material was collected, including ethical considerations. Section three

comprises a survey of the field and guiding concepts for the thesis, which is used for analyzing the empirical data. In section four, the empirical material is categorized and presented according to the research question they respond to. The first part of section four also contains a description of REKO-rings and its organization. Section five discusses the potential of the virtual food platform REKO-ring has for contribution towards alternative way of distributing food in Sweden. Finally, the last section summarizes and highlights the main points and conclusions drawn from the study.

2. Method and research design

This section explains how the research process was conducted and operationalized to answer the research aim- and questions. It incorporates the method for collecting the empirical material, an analysis and motivations for the selected methods and what qualitative assurance and ethical considerations that were taken into consideration.

The research questions need a corresponding research method that enables them to answer the research questions (Bryman 2008). The master thesis combined a quantitative and qualitative study design to provide a description of REKO-rings and its developments in Sweden and more specifically answer the research aim about understanding of the motives and the underpinning values producers¹ and consumers ascribe REKO-rings. The quantitative design refers to the collection of information in the online survey, which helps to answer the research question about the demographics of the consumer and producers in the REKO-rings, in addition to the organization. The qualitative design refers to the collection of empirical material of interviews with the aim to answer the research question about what motives and values REKO-rings deliver and capture to the consumers and producers, in addition, to understand the development of the concept.

The thesis followed an inductive approach, which implies collecting the empirical material before selecting the theoretical framework (Portney & Watkins 2009). It is a ‘bottom up’ approach that lets the empirical material guides the selection of theoretical framework. The research process was initiated with a literature review, to provide a background for the research field of SFSCs in general and in the con-

¹ In the thesis, the word ‘producer’ will be used to describe the respondents representing the farmers. The definition producer includes a broad variety of different types of businesses ranging from fulltime businesses, hobby farmers to private persons.

text of Sweden. The databases of Elsevier, Google scholar, Web of Science and Primus were systematically screened with keywords described in Table 1. The literature search provided the thesis with different examples of SFSCs both internationally and in Sweden. The later part of the search focused on the selected SFSCs: REKO-rings. A large part of the search was based on different SFSCs such as Farmers' markets, food hubs and CSA, and has been empirically grounded and conducted in the US and in Europe (Matson & Thayer 2013; Galt 2015). Research conducted in Sweden within the field of SFSCs was limited therefore much of the literature originates from the United States, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

Table 1 Used keywords and examples of the literature research

Key terms	Examples from a Swedish context
'Short food supply chains', 'food', 'CSA', 'community-supported agriculture', local food systems', 'food hubs', 'Farmers' market', 'box schemes'	'Farmer's market', 'Min Farm', 'Local Food Nods', 'REKO-rings', 'community-supported agriculture'

Basic information about the REKO-rings was needed to answer the research question about how has the concept of REKO-rings had developed and organized in Sweden. The search for information on REKO-rings was performed on non-published research material, articles in newspaper, online web pages and of course Facebook.

The REKO-rings were geographically scattered throughout Sweden and the research methods for collecting the empirical data required to be accessible and manageable for a distance. For that reason, an online survey and telephone interviews were used. Both methods can reach a wide audience and can be answered at the convenience of the respondents.

2.1 Collecting the empirical material

I compiled a through list of how many REKO-rings and members each had. The research question concerns the development of REKO-rings required an understanding of how fast the REKO-ring groups grew. Therefore, all the REKO-rings groups were counted. Two counts were performed calculating the number of members in them. The first count was performed in the initial part the research, on the 25th October 2017 and the second count was conducted 1st of Decem-

ber 2017, counting the increase in members but also counting newly assembled REKO-rings.

Before I initiated the process of collecting the empirical material, I interviewed the founder of REKO-rings' *Thomas Snellman*. In addition, I interviewed a project manager at the department of agriculture. Later in the process I sent questions by mail to an official at the national food agency in Sweden. The two telephone interviews with *Snellman* and the department of agriculture provided me with a good foundation of knowledge about the REKO-ring concept and helped me with the formulation of the question later used in the online survey and the interviews.

2.1.1 The online survey

The process of preparing and conducting the online survey was started parallel to investigate the number of participants and REKO-rings. It was important to get contact to the administrators, namely the persons governing the Facebook groups, to inform about the study that was about to start. There was a national Facebook group that gathered administrators from all REKO-rings in Sweden. That group was the first to be informed about the research. The sequent step in the process was to contact the 50 Facebook groups that were found when mapping out

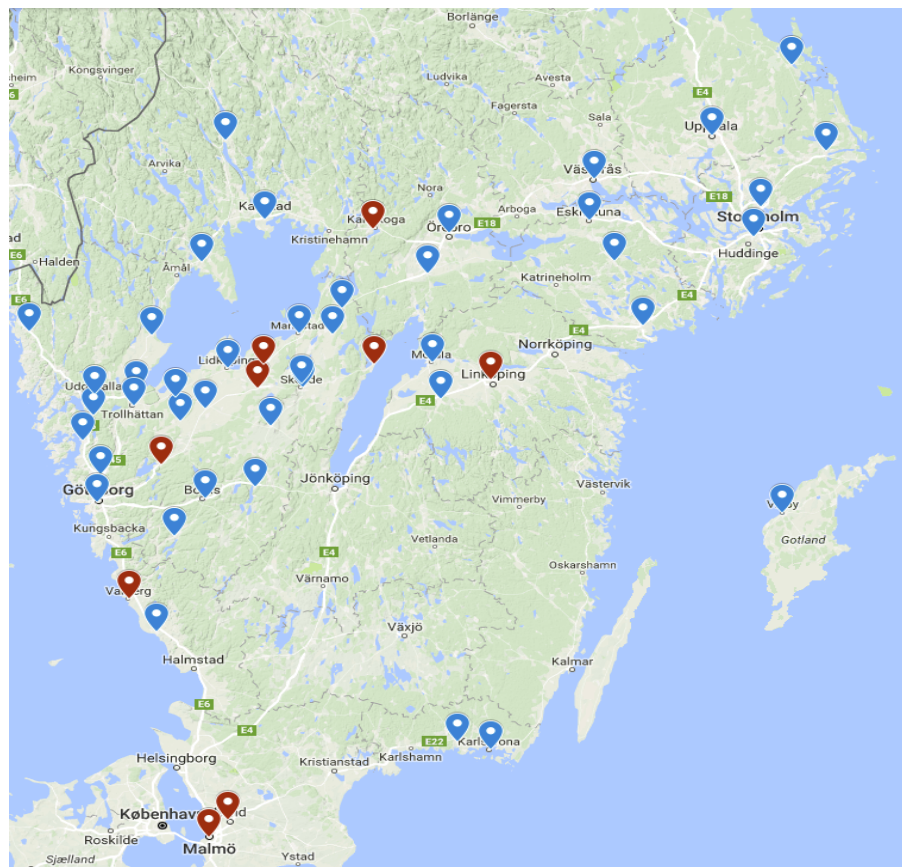


Figure 3 Map showing the nine selected REKO-rings. Source: Google 20 oktober.

the members earlier. At least one administrator from each group was contacted and asked to participate. More than ten groups would have obstructed the handling of empirical material and less than five groups would not have provide enough empirical material from the online survey to fulfill the issues about explaining the characters of producers and consumers. The nine REKO-rings are represented in Figure 3, marked in a red color (Alingsås, Karlsborg, Skara, Götene, Varberg, Karlskoga, Malmö, Lund and Linköping). The blue marks are REKO-rings who did not participate in the research. The selection of the nine groups was influenced by three conditions. First, the administrators needed to approve of the participation, second, the REKO-rings had to actively be buying and selling in the Facebook group. Thirdly, the REKO-rings would preferably not be too close, geographically, to each other, due to risk of duplicating the participants. The producers and consumers can participate in more than one REKO-rings.

The online survey was posted on the nine Facebook groups. There was a link to the survey and information about the purpose, contact information and about expire dates of 14 days. The online survey was uploaded for 14 days and was then the online survey was removed from the Facebook groups as well as my access. I used my personal Facebook account throughout the study..

In the survey, the first question divided the producers and consumers, into two groups giving them different sets of questions (see appendix 1). The producers were asked descriptive questions of demographics, type of farming practices (question 1-13), whereas the consumers received questions about general demographics, household, buying behavior etc. (question 1-8). The online survey had a section where Likert scales² were used. That implied that the respondents could specify their level of agreement or disagreement to different kind of statements. To be able to discuss the potential it was necessary to understand how the consumer perceived about REKO-rings, where the consumer had to agree to a statement to different degrees. The Likert scale provided a pre-decided statement that the respondents responded to. It does not capture the depth of why the person feels in a manner. However, it provided an overview about consumers' perception about REKO-rings. The last part of the survey contained descriptive questions about motives and values that both producers and con-

² A Likert scale is a psychometric scale that is commonly used in surveys with questionnaires, which was developed after its founder the psychologist Rensis Likert in 1932. (Likert 2013)

sumers received. At the end, the consumers were given a few additional questions about their views on price levels, quality of the products, relationships with the farmers, and weather REKO-rings had increased the consumers' appreciation for local food. These questions were used to understand the perception of how well REKO-rings meet the needs of the consumers REKO-rings as a part of the understanding of its development.

2.1.2 Interviews

Interviews provide a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Bryman 2008) and was used to understand the motives and values that REKO-rings delivered and captured to consumers and producers. It was particularly important to interpret complex expressions, but also to understand and depict the complexity of a farming business, which an online survey not alone could achieve. On the other hand, the online survey enabled a broader scope of the demographics. The interviews contained eight respondents, in which six were producers and two were consumers from the nine REKO-rings: Alingsås, Karlsborg, Skara, Götene, Varberg, Karlskoga, Malmö, Lund and Linköping, as presented in the Figure 1 (page 12). The Facebook groups were used to find informants, writing the question in their Facebook group, in combination with using the snowball sampling to find the informants. The snowball method was used to find some of the REKO-rings members whereas other relevant participants recommend another participant (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981). These two approaches gave me several participants. Interviews require finding 'effective informants' that will provide a rich source of information (Portney & Watkins 2009, pp 313). The snowball effect is particularly useful, to use in the process of selecting the producers because they could provide names to other producers that were relevant for the research. The types of producers involved in REKO-rings range from hobby-farmers, to fulltime farmers.

In the survey I also asked for volunteer persons to interview. This generated interviews with two producers and two with consumers. Another two producers were found on the Facebook group and they were contacted directly by e-mail. Not all REKO-ring groups were represented in the interviews. All interviews were performed via telephone and four of them were recorded with the permission of the interviewee. By asking for voluntary participation the interviewees tend to be more cooperative (Portney and Watkins 2009). The snowball

sampling can be a good source of information; however, it can lack criticism because those asked are really motivated to respond. In the survey there were open-end question in which critique could be adressed.

2.2 Analytical method

The empirical material was analyzed using categorization.

‘The categorization is the process in which ideas and objectives are recognized, differentiated and understood’ (Mahalakshmi & Duraiswamy 2012, p 1)

An increasingly amount of textual information require a method that can structure it. In this case the online survey provides much raw data that needs to be categorized and an effective retrieval was difficult without indexing and summarization of document content (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). The categorization of text can therefore help to sort out a large amount information and will be useful when analyzing the online survey and the interviews. The categorization also follows the inductive research process which allows the empirical material to firstly be collected and then analyzed. In this way the empirical material guides the theoretical framework. The characteristics were structured in tables to ease the overview of the quantitative results.

2.2.1 Method discussion

The online survey provided more replies from the consumers than from producers, therefore the interviews for the producers had a bigger importance. The empirical material based on quantitative measures does not go as deep into the real experience of the consumer through n telephone interview, as a personal interview would have. However, it was necessary to have a mobile solution for the interviews. The producer section provides a more vivid explanation of the motives because they were performed in the format of an interview. Because the participation in the interviews were voluntary with one respondent helping to find the next one, it could be difficult to reach more critical voices. To do so, there were sections to each question providing the respondent to state whether they did not use the REKO-rings or didn’t approve with the question.

The inductive approach was well fitted in this research when identifying relationships such as values and motives for producer and consumer in REKO-rings. There were little previous studies on REKO-rings and no official web page. The thesis is empirically oriented and based on the empirical material gathered. One factor influencing the

decision to use an online survey was that considering the growth rate of REKO-rings and that members were constantly changing, the method needed to be flexible.

Looking at the selected REKO-rings and their situation, it could have to some extent have influenced the results. Because some of the REKO-rings that were selected were situated close to universities, for example Lund has one of the oldest Universities in Sweden. That could have influenced the statistics of some aspects of the characteristics of the sample e.g. educational levels. Because the online survey was anonymous it was difficult to see from which REKO-rings the responses came from and creates one critique to the study.

2.3 Qualitative assurance and ethical considerations

Reliability and validity are important to assure that the reader can be guided logically through the writing process and the research process (Bryman 2008). It has the aim to ensure that the collection of data has been performed in accordance to how it has been described (ibid).

The validity refers to if a measurement is measuring what it intended to measure and how well the different phases in the research process had been expressed (Bryman 2008). To secure that the online survey-questions functioned as they were intended the questions were tested. First, on a fellow student and after some revisions I tested the survey on persons with another educational background. I have in this thesis used recording equipment to remember the interviews (except for some interviews where the equipment failed), to secure the external validity. The external validity refers to the researcher's ability to correctly depict a situation and circumstances this was particularly important in the transcribing and writing of the empirical material of the interviews and survey. None of the interview persons were met in-person, which could be a weakness in this thesis. All participants were asked if they wanted a validation afterwards, with the transcribed interviews.

The reliability of the thesis ensures that the results can be repeated under the same conditions (Bryman 2008). This aspect has been included in the thesis by consequently following the interview guide and the online survey and those aspects had been tested before the start of the study. Given the timeframe there was little time to repeat interviews and to do a re-test, which has been proven to be a good way to prove the reliability. Another important aspect to ensure strong relia-

bility is to make sure that the translation from Swedish to English is correct. The linguistic and cultural context plays an important role when interpret the results, therefore the translations skills of the author can affect the outcome. Thick descriptions in the empirical finding to explain the context of the respondents can help understanding that.

Good validity and reliability is a precondition for the result to be generalizable and implicated how the result can say something about other groups and situations (Bryman 2008). In this case, the REKO-rings from the survey could tell us more about the whole movement of REKO, and why it is important to its users.

With respect to ethical considerations anonymity was incorporated in both the survey and interviews. The interviewees received fictive names and the respondents from the online survey were given a number. Everyone in the online survey answered without declaring their identity, which was stated in the opening letter of the survey and interview.

3. Theoretical guiding concepts and survey of the field

This chapter explains the survey of the field and what theoretical guiding concept that has been used in the thesis. Further, this section provides a contextual setting in which REKO-rings act in, other types of food system and short food supply chains (SFSCs) can provide a framework in order to understand and interpret the result about REKO-rings.

Looking at the actors (producer, processor, retailer and wholesaler) in the food supply chain, the value was not equally distributed. The European Commission presented figures for the distribution of value in the food chain between the years 1995 and 2005 in a staff working paper (European Commission, 2009a) and later a communication 'A better functioning food supply chain in Europe' in 2009 (European commission, 2009b). The analysis showed that value added for agriculture in the food chain dropped from 31% in 1995 to 24% in 2005, mainly in favor of other food chain actors. The average share of the financial price that farmers received was 21%, relative to the share received by other actors in the food supply chain whereas the food industry received 28% and the retailing- and wholesale received 51 % (Task Force 2016, p.43). In short EU stresses the importance of establishing short food supply chains as alternative ways to distribute food for small and medium size enterprises (EU Conference 2012; Kneafsey et al. 2013).

Retailers have increased their power in the food chain steadily empowering a small number of retailers and wholesalers (Dahlbacka 2012; EU Conference 2012, p. 5; Gereffi, 1994; Pretti 2001). In the domestic market in the US, five retailers controlled 60 % of the domestic food markets in 13-member states in 2014 (EU Conference 2012, p. 5). In 2011, four retailers controlled 85 % of the food market

in Germany and three retailers controlled 90 % of the Portuguese food market (ibid). In Sweden, the three largest retailers (ICA, Axfood and Coop) control about 85 % of the market share where the retailer ICA controls about 50 % of the market (Dahlbacka 2012). The effect the consumer lose contact with the origin of food in the complex food chains and the development of alternatives to the industrialized food chains have grew (Mount 2012). Examples of alternative food chains can also be expressed in terms of short food supply chains (SFSCs).

In the special Euro barometer survey from 2013, it was noted that 71 % believed that the origin of the food was important. The JRC Scientific and Policy Reports performed in 2013 show similar tendencies. The report also reveals that that many of the SFSCs were organic, although it is not a necessary feature of SFSCs (Kneafsey et al. 2013, p. 32) suggesting that SFSCs were embedded with values concerned with consciousness to the environment.

3.1 Short food supply chains

Short food supply chains (SFSCs) is a wide-ranging concept containing great variations in the organizations. Research within the field of SFSCs have increased in recent years, particularly in Europe and the United States (Moynihan & McDonagh 2008). There is no unified definition presented of SFSCs in the literatures. However the EU: s Joint Research Center (JRC) define in their scientific and policy report (Kneafsey et al. 2013) short supply chains as ‘where the number of intermediaries is minimized, the ideal being a direct contact between the producer and the consumers’ (p. 13). Pretty (2001) classify nine types of local food systems³, whereas the most frequent used SFSCs is the box scheme and farmers market. A central rationale for box schemes is that they emphasize that payment is not just for the food, but also for support of the farm, much like CSA⁴. That model encourages social responsibility, increases the understanding of farming issues amongst consumers, and results in greater diversity in the farmed landscape. Food markets has direct link between producers and consumers. Marsden et al. (2000, p. 426) and later Renting et al. (2003)

³ Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), Box Schemes, Farmers group, Consumer groups and cooperatives, Farmers market, Community garden, Clear labeling, food webs and local shops and last slow food systems.

⁴ The attributes of box schemes are similar to North American CSAs, though CSAs generally expect a higher level of commitment from consumers.

definition of short food supply chain classified SFSCs in three different categories:

- Face-to-face, whereas the consumer buys the product directly from the producer, e.g. this could be either at the farm, or in local markets. The trust and authenticity are mediated through personal interaction.
- Spatial proximity, imply that the products are sold in another region or place than of the place of production (aka. its origin), but with the awareness of the 'local nature' of the product at the point of sale. It could for example be in a food stores close to the origin of the product.
- Spatially extended, represent a model where the products are sold outside of the local area, then in the 'spatial proximity'. The value of the 'local nature' is mediate at sales point either verbally or through information on the package. In this case the consumer might not have any prior personal experience of the region, e.g. the chees Parmeggiano Reggiano is a specialty from the region Emilia-Romagna in Italy, and can be found in countries other than in that region.

The concept of SFSCs and local food are tangent to each other, but the nature of local food is not necessarily a requirement in the SFSCs. One predicament was that the concept of local food, unlike organic food, has no legal or universally accepted definition. The core idea of local food and local food systems are the distance that the products travel.

'Local food systems where the production, processing, trade and consumption of food occur in a defined reduced geographical area (depending on the sources and reflections, of about 20 to 100 km radius' (Kneafsey et al. 2013, p. 13)

In the case of Farmer's market in Sweden, they have set 250-kilometer limit for the distance the food has been transported (bondensegen.se, n.d). SFSCs is a geographical concept related to the amount of stops that the product makes before reaching the consumer. REKO-rings can be seen as SFSC because its organization managed to consolidate reoccurring sale channels of trade between local producers and consumer within the same geographical area.

SFSCs imply that a larger part of the income from the sold products goes directly back to the producer (Marsden et al. 2000; Milestad & Kummer 2012). The reduction of number of intermediaries has been

one economic incentive for SFSCs. Farms using a pre-payment system, where the consumer by pays a fee in the beginning of the season and receives the harvest in later in the season. It allows the farms to have better knowledge about the revenues for the seasons in advance, thus it enables them to plan accordingly with the advantage of reducing their marketing risk.

Renting et al. (2003) conclude in their study that SFSCs play a significant role for the agrarian-bases rural development. They also emphasize the importance of new forms of SFSCs. SFSCs engages both farmers and non-farmers, rural or urban on new basis. Values were created and developed through the creation of new networks in local communities.

'SFSCs can be seen as a way of organizing food transactions where consumers and producers can rely on more informal and social-based governance mechanisms' (Fondse et al. 2012, p. 13).

No previous research has been conducted on REKO-rings, which imply that research preformed on other SFSCs have been crucial to understand the characteristics, values and motives of REKO-rings.

4. Empirical findings of the study

This chapter presents the empirical material from the online survey and interviews organized in three categories 1) The concept of REKO-rings, 2) Consumer perspective and 3) Producer perspective.

4.1 The Concept of REKO-rings

The initiator behind REKO-rings is *Thomas Snellman* and he introduced the concept in Finland in 2013 (pers.com. *Snellman*, 2017). *Snellman* borrowed the idea from the French movement AMAP⁵ meaning 'maintaining small scale family farming' (own translation). *Snellman* picked the name REKO because it has the same connotation in Swedish and Finnish and explained the idea behind REKO-rings during a telephone interview in the following way;

'The products are locally, ethically and mostly organic produced. Thus, you'll know the origin of your food as well as promote small producers and the local economy'

In 2015 the number of REKO-rings proliferated in Finland and went from 20 to over 100 groups in one year. At the end of 2017 there were 180 REKO-rings in Finland with approximately 270 000 members, whereof 4000 producers (pers.com. *Snellman*, 2017). In 2015 the total turnover of sold products through REKO-rings in Finland was estimated to 8 million euro and in 2016 the turnover increased to approximately 30 million euro according to (pers.com. *Snellman*)⁶. The es-

⁵ The abbreviation in French is "Associations pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne"

⁶ The information is based on Thomas Snellman's own counting, collecting information from several REKO-rings throughout a whole year and producing an average of the whole; the information has not been confirmed from other sources.

establishment of REKO-rings in Finland had many motives, but foremost because of its simple and effective concept of connecting producers and consumers, according to *Snellman*. That type of information found in Finland concerning turnover does not exist in Sweden. However, an indication was given from one administrator of a REKO-rings, *Anna*, who collected information from all sales in one month (August 2016) and counted a total monthly turnover of approximately 100.000SEK⁷. In Sweden, the first REKO-rings was established in the autumn of 2016 in Grästorps (pers.com. *Snellman*, 2017). Looking at the development of REKO-rings in Sweden a measure of the member were performed two times. In the 20th of October 2017 the number of REKO-rings in Sweden counted 50, involving 78,461 members (both consumers and producers). In December 2017 the number of members had increased with 18% to 92,487 members and 55 REKO-rings (see picture 1, on page 9).

The National Food Agency in Sweden explained the concept of REKO-rings as:

'Small-scale food companies deliver goods that customers ordered in advance via the platform of REKO-ring. The REKO-rings organizes a place where customers and food business owners meet temporarily to complete the deal.' (mail.com. National Food Agency 2018).

4.1.1 How REKO-rings works

REKO-rings rely on the existence and willingness of both producers and consumers to create a REKO-rings in a specific area and anyone can start one (pers.com. *Snellman* 2017). All that was needed was a Facebook account in order to create a Facebook group, and then invite persons to join the Facebook group. However, the activity of the group relies on the participation of the administrator, producers and consumers. The ordering system is set up so that the producer uploads advertisements about what type and number of products they can offer to the enlisted consumers on the Facebook group. The consumer responds to the advertisement by stating what they would like to order, in comment below the advertisement. Thereafter both parties meet on a pick-up/drop-off place e.g. an empty parking, decided by the administrator. Consumers are obliged to make the orders in advance on the Facebook group.

⁷ The 100 000SEK was equivalent to 9630€ (exchange rate 10SEK=1,01, the 22 of December 2017)

The administrators in the Facebook groups were responsible for approving the advertisements formulated by the producers. They were responsible for managing new membership proposals and arrange the pick-up/drop-off place. In addition, the administrators can withhold 'ethical rules' and govern the balance which types of producers to allow. All work carried out in REKO-rings were on voluntary basis and administrators do not receive any compensation. When interviewing one of the administrators *Anna*, she estimated that she (initially) spent between 10-15 hours per week on administrating her REKO-ring and didn't see that as a problem. The administrators also decided the amount of time they would like to spend on administrating the REKO-rings. The work of the administrators includes administrative work such as managing the advertisers from producers, educating the members on how the advertisers and orders should look like. Managing orders can at times become logistically difficult to deliver when they become too many. *Anna* said that orders exceeding more than 40 advertisements were difficult for the producers to coordinate. The administrator was responsible to accept new members and do that with care. She meant that too many producers selling the same type of products could lead to a high internal competition. She would not accept new entrances of that was the case.

In theory the producers set a price that she/he believes that the consumers were prepared to pay (pers.com. *Snellman* 2017). It was important to maintain a price level in which the consumers feel motivated to buy at, said *Snellman*. However, there could potentially be a problem if one REKO-ring has too many producers selling the same products and starts competing. *Snellman* implied that it could create a discriminating position to other producers and cause disadvantages within the same REKO-ring, a fear confirmed by a hobby producer *Peter* in the interviews. Further, *Peter* emphasized the importance of having administrators guiding and supporting its members in questions relating the pricing setting to ensure that no one was creating unfair competition.

4.1.2 Food security

REKO-rings has grown fast since its entrance in 2016 attracting many producers and consumers buying food. To fulfill the research question about describing the organization and development of REKO-rings in Sweden, the regulatory setting in which the concept acts in was necessary to describe.

REKO-rings operate under the Swedish food regulations and all food-production businesses, stretching from hobby farms to full-time farmers, are always responsible for the products they sell. REKO-rings provided overall information, but the responsibility about whether the agri-business needs to register, the producer has the final responsibility of knowing which legislative framework that apply for that particular production type. The producers must be upright about the product and be able to trace it and in accordance with national hygiene regulations so called 'redlighet och spårbarhet' (Livsmedelsverket 2016a). If the producer sells processed foods the activities will in most cases be registered with the municipality and county administrative board. The purpose of this registration is that the relevant inspection authority could carry out checks about the food quality. If only small quantities of products were sold directly to the end-consumer, there was an exception to the rules of registration (Livsmedelsverket 2016b). If the production expands at some point, it must be registered (mail com. National Food administration 2018; Livsmedelsverket 2016b). The administrators can individually decide to adopt measures to exclude a member in the Facebook group if they do not comply with the rules set by the REKO-ring group. In the online survey one producer express critique about this aspect of participating in REKO-rings.

'I do not use REKO-rings anymore, because some producers are not registered businesses, which mean that these are not approved by the national food administration. The control and demand relating to food security and law is too weak. I live in a little village and I have decided to sell directly to regular grocery stores because they have a full range of products. I do not think REKO-rings are for everyone to use' (Producer 13 from the online survey)

The place in disposal for the drop-off meetings, namely where the pre-ordered products were handed over to the consumers, do not require permission from the municipality. The REKO-rings model counts as temporary market or mobile facility and the trade and payments occur online and prior to the deliveries and does not require the same permits as a stationary business. According to the police in Sweden, a permission for using a public area was not required if the site was used temporarily to an insignificant extent and without interfering with someone else's permission' (Polisen 2016). This indicates that REKO-rings can use public places temporarily.

4.1.3 Introducing a support function

One of the most recent developments to the concept was the support function ‘REKO-bas’⁸ procured by The Swedish board of agriculture in October 2017. The REKO-base was financed with earmarked money from the Rural Development Program ‘RDP’ (2014-2020) for a two years period counting from 2016 (pers.com. administration official 10 October 2017). The aim with the support function was to act as an information resource, collecting and providing information about the concept. The REKO-base has the purpose to arrange educational and informative meetings, for administrators, producers, consumers and could provide information to persons interested in starting a new REKO-ring (pers.com. Swedish board of Agriculture 2017; Jordbruksverket 2016a).

4.1.4 Consumer satisfaction

The online survey could detect that consumers used a combination of different SFSCs where REKO-rings was one of them. In the online survey 75 % answered that they used SFSCs⁹ for buying local food, meaning that consumers regularly used SFSCs, where REKO-rings was included.

The consumers’ perception of four different aspects illustrated in figure 4 showed the result from the Likertscale where the consumers were asked to agree to different extent to four statements, see appendix 2 on page 53.

Almost half of the respondents stated that the appreciation for local food had increased after joining the REKO-ring. More than 60 % expressed that they strongly agree with the statement that their appreciation of local food had increased because of using the platform of REKO-rings. The selection on different products seemed good for more than 70 % of the total respondents. Almost 50 % of the respondents stated that they agree or strongly agree that REKO-rings had increased their connection with farmers. In an interview *Camilla*, could not clearly state whether her relationship with the local farmer had improved or not.

Figure 4 Illustration of the result from the Likertscale statements in the online survey

⁸ REKO-bas would translate to ‘REKO-base’ in English.

⁹ Including on-farm shops, farmers’ markets, CSAs, Food hubs, and other box schemes such as on-farm shops, farmers’ markets, CSAs, Food hubs, and other box schemes.

4.2 Consumer perspective

This section presents the results from the 173 consumers participated in the online survey and two consumers participated via telephone interviews¹⁰ were conducted.

4.2.1 Characteristics of the consumers

The online survey showed a higher level of education compared to the national average of education level in Sweden, see table 2. In Sweden 42 % had a post-secondary education whereof 27 % were highly educated (SCB 2016). In the result indicated that the average person active in REKO-rings were not mainly within one age range between 25 to 55 years of age, as illustrated in table 2.

Table 2 Characteristics of the sample on the consumers.

Category	Percent
Men	10,5%
Women	89,5%
Age	
<24 years	4 %
25–35 years	24, 3 %
36-45 years	25, 4 %
46-55 years	24, 9 %
56-64 years	15, 6 %
>65 years	5, 8 %
Education level	
Secondary school	1,2%
Gymnasium	16,8%
Vocational training	19,8%
University (3 years)	28,3%
University (5 years)	34,7%

¹⁰ The consumers in the two interviews were not included in the statistics, if used they was specifically mentioned.

In the online survey the consumers also stated that 42 % bought products less than one time per month, 51 % respondents bought two to three times per month on an average. About 2 % bought products four to five times per month and 5 % stated that they did not use REKO-rings at all. The average amount of money spent on SFSCs (not only REKO-rings) was 775 SEK (approximately 77, 62 €)¹¹.

The consumers also stated what type of products they purchased in their REKO-ring. The most common products bought in the REKO-rings were: meat, vegetables, eggs, dairy products and honey, illustrated in figure 5.

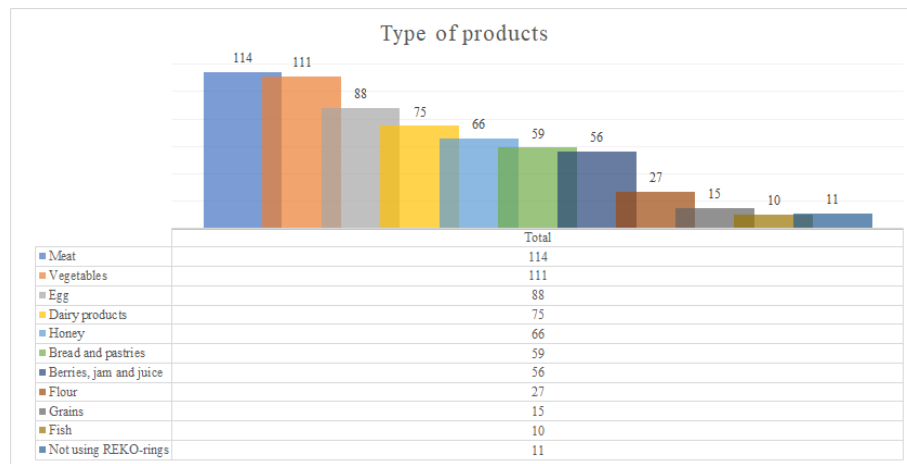


Figure 5 Graph showing the result from what types of products the consumers' buy in the REKO-rings

4.2.2 Consumers' motives and values

The motives and values in this section were based on the replies of 173 consumers in the online survey, whereof 164 consumers answered the open-end questions in the second part of the survey, about motives and values. In the online survey the informants were asked to state, which motives, starting with the most important one, for using REKO-rings. The motives were categorized into three main themes: local community, environment and product quality.

REKO-rings were active choices to strengthen the producers in the local society. One of the most frequently used answers was 'local community' with 91 consumers saying that the locality of the product itself was the main motive for buying in REKO-rings. The responses implied that it was important that the consumers knew that the prod-

¹¹ Exchange rate 10 SEK = 1,01 €, in 22 December 2017.

ucts had been produced within a close range to the consumer and in the local community. Another 51 consumers stated that they wanted to support local businesses and small-scale producers in the local community; one of the consumers expressed it in terms of:

'I strongly support local businesses, and local production of food, which was a reason to why I started a REKO-ring in my town' (Consumer 58 from the online survey)

The consumer met the producer face-to-face at the pick-up/drop-off place and 21 consumers said that the direct contact to the producers was crucial and an important aspect of using REKO-rings. In the interview the two consumers, *Camilla* and *Yvonne*, expressed that the biggest value achieved in REKO-rings, was its simplicity to order and pick up the products and at the same time they received a personal experience and provided qualitative products. Eleven respondents stated that buying directly from the producers acted as an important motive as they felt that more of the profit goes directly back to producers, 'the producer is clearly seen, and I would like to have a lively rural society' (Consumer 118 from the online survey).

The result also showed that knowing about the origin of the food was a vital aspect behind purchasing food through REKO-rings. This was mentioned by 21 of the respondents in the online survey. One consumer expressed that purchasing food from a small-scale farmer and consuming local food was appreciated (Consumer 140 from the online survey). Another consumer expressed it in terms of 'assurance, transparency and origin. In addition, I get a relationship to the farmer' (Consumer 123 from the online survey).

Another highly valued motive for choosing this type ordering system. *Yvonne* compared her REKO-ring with a farm shop. She said that the farm shops were not as consumer-friendly as REKO-rings, in terms of distance when they were situated outside of the city. *Yvonne* argued that that purchasing food through REKO-rings reduces carbon emissions because the driving was reduced, as the producers transport the products closer to the consumers. In the online survey 50 respondents articulated the desire of buying products that was produced using little plant protection products and preferably using organic farming practices. All details were not revealed about what different aspects of the organic farming practice that was the most preferred, however it was evident that they respondent mentioned organic production as an important factor for them.

In the online survey 38 respondents valued the quality of the products purchased in REKO-rings. They believed that the quality was higher and the products were fresher compared to regular food stores. Small-scale producers could have rare types of vegetables that couldn't be found in a regular food stores. One of which said in the survey 'I cannot find all products that I want in a regular supermarket' (Consumer 118 from the online survey). The online survey could also identify other motives that falls outside of the identified categories, namely that they think that it is fun and interesting. 'It is an easy way to shop, I can order at home and pick up the products on my way home, with the kids in the car' (Consumer 7 from the online survey).

4.3 Producer perspectives

This section presents the result from the 22 producers participated in the online survey and six telephoneinterviews.

4.3.1 Characteristics of the producers

The results showed that there were more women responded to the online survey, see Table 3. The result showed that many of the producers were younger than the average in Sweden where 51 % were older than 54 years old in 2016 (Jordbruksverket 2016b) compared to REKO-rings where 41 % were between the ages 25-35. As shown in previous studies, the characteristics of the members in SFSCs have a general higher level of active female farmers. Research conducted in Quebec Canada on SFSCs, showed that 41 % were female farm operators, which was higher than the average of 26% in the whole of Quebec (Mundler & Laughrea 2016, p. 223; Wells & Gradwell 2001). Looking at the educational level over 60 % has a university education between 3-5 years (post-secondary school). In Quebec, Canada a clear majority, 82 % of farm operators had post-secondary education of the SFSCs (Mundler & Laughera 2016).

Table 2 Characteristics of the sample on the producers.

Category	Percent
Men	36%
Women	64%
Age	
<25 years	0%
25-35 years	41%
36-45 years	14%
46-55 years	18%
56-64 years	18%
>65 years	9%
Education level	
Secondary school	0%
Gymnasium	32,1%
Vocational training	15,4%
University (3 years)	38,5%
University (5 years)	23,1%

The empirical material indicated that there were many different types of producers ranging from people selling products grown in a small garden, on a hobby level, to full-time agri-businesses shown in Figure 6.

When discussing REKO-rings with the full-time farmers, REKO-rings was important for marketing purposes as well as to have a closer connection to the end-consumer. *Elisabeth* who grew tomatoes worked fulltime with eight seasonal employees (middle of April to the beginning of November) liked REKO-rings but it was not enough large scale to simply rely on as the only sales channel. Similarly, to *Elisabeth*, *Margareta* was also a full-time farmer, believed that REKO-rings was something good. She and her husband ran the farming practice together with a beef and grain production approximately 100 beef animals. *Margareta* and her husband used several different sale channels, including wholesalers that enabled the distribution of the products to supermarkets and restaurants. She sold directly to supermar-

kets, on farmer’s market and since 2016 also in REKO-rings, when it came to income flows she had several ‘legs’ to stand on. However, she wanted more contact with the end-customers. Something that she felt was given to her using REKO-rings. REKO-rings enabled a better contact as well as a direct feedback and *Margareta* had 5-15 customers each delivery occasion.

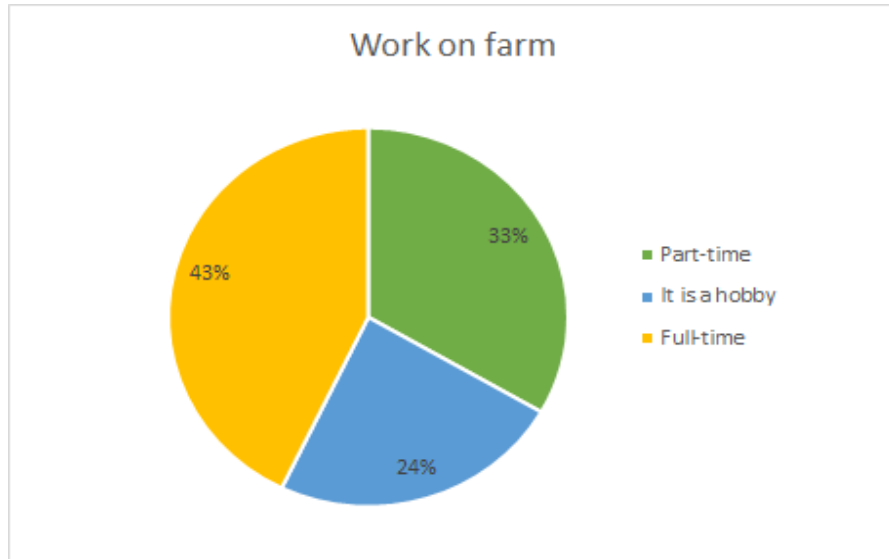


Figure 6 The figure illustrates work on farm

Peter and *Anna* that were smaller producers perceived REKO-rings have a more important function as a sale channel. Amongst the six interviewed producers, two of which were combining CSA farm, namely consumers share the costs by paying a fixed amount in advance also shared the risk regardless of the realized quantity and quality of the harvest (Martinez et al. 2010). *Peter* and *Anna* used REKO-ring as an additional sale channel that was flexible and fitted the need that their farm had. The full-time farmer *Tor* had a business with a combination of three different parts making up the business: a CSA farm, agriculture practice focusing on crops and a golf cores. He was an administrator and producer, like *Anna* and expressed that the combination of CSA and REKO-rings was good.

Two producers use REKO-rings in combination with community-supported agriculture. *Tor* could achieve few layers between him and the consumer. *Eva*, whom had tried delivering to REKO-rings a few times, emphasized that she was foremost a CSA farm but could see the advantages with the high accessibility REKO-rings provide. The administrator and hobby farmer, *Anna*, said that their group in total

had 80-90 producers in the Facebook group. *Anna* believed that REKO-ring was an easy way to introduce smaller producers to a wider consumers group. She said that two in her Facebook group were in the process of going from hobby farmers to registered businesses. Further she expressed REKO-rings as a ‘gate opener’ for the smaller producers to be helped to find a consumer segment willing with no marketing costs. *Anna* sold vegetable bags in two different REKO-rings during a short period in the summer and described CSA and REKO-rings was a good combination:

‘REKO-rings are most important for small producers and farms because they find a new customer segment that enables them to grow’ - *Anna*

Further the online survey revealed that 68% of the sample organic production methods¹², see table 4. The hobby-producer *Peter* was selling vegetables and eggs. He used organic production method but was not certified, because he had not a registered business and could therefore not fulfill the required demands of being a certified organic producer.

Table 3 Showing what kind of production method used in the sample

Production method	Percent
Organic	68%
Conventional	9%
Combination of both	9%
I don't know	9%
Other certificate	5%

4.3.2 Producers' motives and values

In the survey 21 producers responded to the open-end question about their motives. When gathering and analyzing the responses from the producers in the survey and interviews, it appeared that there were two major motives for producers being involved in the REKO-rings; 1) the flexibility and simplicity of REKO-rings as ordering system and 2)

¹² Organic production ‘strives to utilize natural resources such as energy, land and water in a long-term sustainable manner. Large biodiversity and high ambition in animal welfare are other guiding stars’ (Jordbruksverket 2018).

improved and closer contacts with the consumers forming a local network on food exchange which enables them to grow.

More than half of the respondents stated that one of the motives for using REKO-rings as sale channel was ‘the simplicity and flexibility of the ordering system’. It was easy to get access to the Facebook group and it did not cost anything, which meant that the producers did not lose anything by joining. One respondent expressed the following; ‘when I get to the pick-up point, I know what I have sold in advance’ (producer 5 from the online survey). Several producers have expressed this the control of what they sell, because it does not produce any waste. Another producer liked using social media and Facebook because little was required by the users, since the membership only requires a Facebook account to partake in the REKO-rings’ Facebook groups.

‘I have just tried REKO-rings once, but I think that it is smart to pre-order, in comparison to markets that are time consuming. REKO-rings has not provided any income of value yet.’

(producer 13 from the online survey)

The concept of REKO-ring was described as easy, because anyone can enter without preconditions. According to the farmer *Tor* the flexibility in REKO-rings was a ‘Game changer’ because of the flexibility of using social media and to partake without a too big commitment. One of the main strengths to *Peter* was the system with pre-ordering operation. What REKO-rings provide was an overview that made it easier plan the producing capacity of the farm and available products at the moment. That was a feature he was missing in the sales channels that he used, a flexible and interactive sale channel with direct contact to the customer.

An effect of knowing the number of products to bring to the drop-off point was that it did not create any food waste. The hobby farmers in the interviews who said that they often harvested according to the pre-orders settled through their REKO-ring stated this as an important motive. In the case of the full-time farmers connected to the REKO-rings, *Margareta a full-time famer* explained that their family business used REKO-rings for marketing purposes. In addition, it was important with continuity on the orders, so that the consumer can rely on the producers and REKO-rings as a sales channel. *Elisabeth* said that the motive for her and her husband for participating in REKO-rings was:

'I have a desire to get more consumers and make more money. That is the reason to why I look for new sales channels such as REKO-rings'

(Elisabeth)

Margareta has other sales channels as well, such as a wholesaler that distribute the meat locally. She wanted to have many different sale channels where REKO-rings was one of them. She noted that REKO-rings provided extra value and contact to the customer, where her REKO-ring creates a network important for her business. The involvement of REKO-rings was not their main income source; *Margareta* added that REKO only counts for a fraction of their financial income. However, those other sales channels do not provide a direct contact with the consumers and no feedback. For *Margareta* it was the meeting with the consumers and feedback that motivated her joining REKO-rings.

Another important motive was the accessibility to new 'networks'. Several of the producers stated that REKO-rings had enlarged their network of buyers. One producer expressed it in terms of new customer in a wider network (producer 5 from the online survey). In the interview with *Anna*, she said that she had improved her network in the local community and therefore received a better relationship with both the neighbors but also consumers living in the community. *Elisabeth* expressed motivation of joy when meeting the consumers was a fun way to meet conscious consumers. However, *Elisabeth* did not sell as much through REKO as she does on farmer's markets, but the advertisement through the REKO-ring is important to her. The direct contact with the consumers was important to maintain the contact with the consumers and at the same time communicate the value of the products.

5. Discussion

This chapter will discuss the empirical material together with the theoretical guiding concepts in order to reply to the research questions and aim of the study. The aim is on one hand to describe the development and organization of REKO-rings in Sweden and on the other hand contribute to the understanding of the motives and the underpinning values producers and consumers ascribe REKO-rings. Further, to discuss the potential of the emerging virtual food platform REKO-rings to contribute towards alternative ways of distributing food in Sweden.

5.1 A social movement and virtual food platform

All farmers act in an international field, competing with larger actors in the domestic and international food market where the value distributed empowered a small number of retailers and wholesalers (Dahlbacka 2012; EU Conference 2012 p. 5; Gereffi 1994; Pretti 2001). At the same time the European household spent less money on food, 30% at the beginning of the 1980s to 13% at present (Task Force 2016, p.43). In the context of these developments SFSCs appeared throughout Sweden, increasing the opportunity for consumers and producers to partake in shorter alternative SFSCs, such as farmer's market, food hubs, box schemes and now the virtual food platform REKO-rings. The concept of REKO-rings provides a new model to order and distribute food using social media as communicative platform. Using Marsden et al. (2000) description of three different types of SFSCs, REKO-rings was identified in the face-to-face model. The interaction between consumers and producers in a local community has been proven to be one of the most important element for the consumers in the study, where producers put more emphasis on simplicity in marketing, communication and the flexibility of REKO-rings. One

of the strengths with the face-to-face model was the local nature of the products is mediated at the point of sale, creating a personal connection to the producer as well as to the food.

REKO-rings was a new concept and model in Sweden. The results also showed that REKO-rings had a steady stream of new consumers and producers. The membership has increased with about 18 % throughout a two-month period. Renting et al. (2003) emphasized the importance of the creation of new forms of SFSCs because they engage farmers, non-farmers, rural- and urban communities on a new basis. Based on where they were situated geographically, a majority of the REKO-rings were located stretching from Stockholm in the east to Göteborg in the west, with relatively closely situated to smaller cities and communities.

The thesis aims discuss the potential of the emerging virtual food platform REKO-rings to contribute towards alternative ways of distributing food in Sweden. In order to be able to answer that research aim some three research questions were used to gain knowledge of REKO-ring characteristics. The characteristics of gender identified in the study for the producers showed similarities to other studies performed on more alternative food (Mundler & Laughrea 2016; Wells & Gradwell 2001). When looking at the producer perspective, women seem to be more involved in the farm operations in alternative food system than in traditional ones. In the study performed in Canada looking at SFSCs Mundler & Laughera (2016) there was a clear majority of women active in the farming activities and having an operational position. The study showed that the consumer also had a high rate of active women. This high number of female users of REKO-rings stand out and in the results, 89.5% consumers were women. It can be possible to make out that Facebook as a social platform enables a more interactive method of selling and buying products. It was not the aim to go into depth about gender aspects in this thesis however it becomes eminent that REKO-rings attracts a dominantly female audience, which is worth highlighting. When looking at the producers in the study it can be difficult to fully conclude the gender structure of a farm business. The statistics mainly look at the persons responding to the survey and interview, in this case females might have responded more actively in the online survey, because they were more active users of social media. Therefore, it was difficult to distinguish whether the high representation of females related to their patterns of using social media or whether there were more actively involved in REKO-rings.

The concept of REKO-rings has been used as a communicative platform and has grown into something more important than just a platform, but it created and mediated other values important to both consumers and producers. The ordering system on Facebook was described as flexible and one of the strengths of REKO-rings. However, it also sets a limit on how many orders one producer can manage on one advertisement, where one producer set the limit at 40 orders. Those orders were individually packed and a common description by full-time farmers was that even though they received a good price for the products, the quantity and time taken to arrange with them, might be the limiting factor for those types of farmers. When looking at the hobby- and small-scale farmers that reply was not formulated, but a context and forum in which they could expand their network and grow. The possibilities within one given REKO-ring can have limitations, thus the concept of REKO-rings seems to understand and satisfy consumers beyond regular food stores.

The results of this study can provide an initial statistic about the consumer's expenditures on SFSC. Yet, consumers were motivated to use REKO-rings because it favors both small-scale producers and larger agri-businesses. The face-to-face model pinpoints the importance of a direct feedback between the two parties. The result shows that 51% consumers purchased from SFSCs two to three times per month, with an average amount 775 SEK spend per month. This estimate reflects a willingness to use SFSC and REKO-rings and looking at the development of REKO-rings, it was not showing any signs to decrease

5.2 Values and motives

Looking at the motives and values in the result, the consumers and producers in the nine REKO-rings valued the closer connection it enabled with the local community. As previous research within the field of local food systems and SFSC shows, that all food systems are socially embedded in various degrees (Hinrich 2000; Ilberty & Maye 2005; Sage 2003). In light of this reasoning and when looking at the consumers responding in the online survey, the answers indicated that one of the main motives for using REKO-rings was to strengthen the local society. It was difficult to conclude to what extent the consumers felt that their choice was an active choice. Yet, it was evident that one of the motives behind REKO-rings was to strengthen the local community. At the same time consumers received products that according

lived up to their expectations of high quality and a production method that they believed represented a sustainable food production. Marsden et al. (2000) mentioned that it was not important to count the number of times a product has been handled or the distance the product has been traveled in SFSC, but rather that the product reaches the consumer embedded with information (p. 426). This reasoning can be reflected in the empirical material. The core function of REKO-rings was to connect consumers and producers within a local area. In the interviews the imbedded information in the products could both be received by contact in Facebook as well as a face-to-face interaction at the point of drop-off. As stated in both the online survey and the interviews, to have knowledge of the origin of the product makes the history and story of the food visual. That made the story of the food connected to a local context and a face.

The empirical findings showed that REKO-rings were important because they strengthen the local community in terms of supporting local businesses and creating new networks. REKO-rings provided value by connecting the consumers with the producers, with the effect of strengthening the local community.

'I buy locally produced products to support the farmers, to create work opportunities and to help keeping the landscape open to increase the biodiversity.' (Consumer 109 from the online survey)

When looking at the producer perspective, the producers seem put slightly more focus on the organization, the functionality of the ordering system and on Facebook as a communicative platform, than the consumers did. Even though REKO-rings were not the main source of income REKO-rings were still to be explored further. The fulltime farmers considered the REKO-rings primarily as a good marketing channel with an easy accessible platform of communications. The producers felt that they reached consumers in the local area and expand their network. When looking at the research field of SFSC: s the community supported agriculture (CSA) was a reoccurring example of a method that contributed with another sustainable food system that removed middle hands (Nilsson & Wejåker 2016). In a similar way REKO-rings removed the middle hands and create a direct link between the consumer and the producer, it was difficult to determine to what extent the farmers felt

Research has concluded that consumers were increasingly aware about the foods they buy, in terms of their origin and local context (Cox et al. 2008). Consumers were looking for meaningful food sys-

tem that at one hand provide high quality products and on the other hand do so by strengthening local communities. The social movement and virtual food platform REKO-rings, was driven by passionate and devoted individuals. The mobilization and understanding of the concept was starting to consolidate to the common public and reaching the interest of government agency.

5.3 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this master thesis provides a description of the current situation on the development of REKO-rings in Sweden. The concept has been operating in Sweden since 2016 and the thesis showed that REKO-rings has a rapid expansion rate and are attracting more participants. From the first count the 20th of October to the 1st of December 2017, the members increased from 50 REKO-ring groups with 78,461 members to 55 REKO-ring groups with 92,487 members, an 18 % increase of members and additionally five groups.

It becomes clear that the users of REKO-rings appreciate the values in terms of how REKO-rings provides a closer contact to the origin of the food in a local context and strengthening the relationship between consumers and local businesses. At the same time the consumers in REKO-rings express a high level of satisfaction when it comes to the variation of products and affordable prices with a high product quality. REKO-rings have the possibility to grow into an extensive social movement with prospects to challenge present conventional food systems. This paper constitutes a first attempt to describe and discuss the concept of REKO-rings from consumers' and producers' perspectives in Sweden. Further studies are needed to investigate the complexity of the organization and the consumers' and producers' perspectives.

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6.4 Personal messages

- Interview by telephone with the founder of REKO-rings in Finland: Thomas Snellman, 24 October 2017.
- Interview by telephone with an official at the Swedish board of Agriculture in Stockholm, 10 October 2017.
- Mail communication with an official at the National Food administration in Sweden, 18 April 2018.

7. Appendix

1 Online Survey

Enkät om korta försäljningskedjor

FRÅGOR SVAR 199

Avsnitt 1 av 5

Enkät

Hejsan!

Jag heter Louise Daving Göteborg och jag är Agronomstudent med inriktning mot landsbygdsutveckling vid Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet i Uppsala. Jag skriver mitt examensarbete om mindre försäljnings- och distributionskanaler och de värden som dessa kanaler förmedla mellan konsumenter och producenter.

REKO-ringar - Beställning sker via Facebook och hämtas på förbestämd plats och tid.
Torg marknad - Producenten åker in till närmsta stad för att sälja varor.
Gårdsbutik - egen försäljning på gården
Andelsjordbruk (CSA) - Konsument och producent delar på insatsvaror, arbete och på avkastningen.
Prenumeration - En låda/kasse (blandade produkter) levereras direkt till konsumenten eller till upphämtningsplats.
Food hub - Central som samlar in varor från flera olika gårdar, för att sälja vidare (till butik eller privatperson)

Enkäten tar ca 5 minuter och den är uppdelad i två delar, första delen innefattar kryss och flersvarsfrågor och den andra delen lämnar utrymme för utförligare svar.

Du kommer att behandlas anonymt i undersökningen och ditt svar registreras när du trycker på 'skicka in'. Enkäten är lättast att göra på dator, då mobilens skärm inte visar svarsalternativen på ett tillfredställande sätt.

Har du frågor eller vill ta del av resultatet så kan du mail mig på:
louise.daving.gotberg@gmail.com

Med vänliga hälsningar,
Louise
PS. Jag söker personer för intervju, så har du tid och vill ställa upp skulle det vara mycket värdefullt för mig.

Avsnitt 2 av 5

Producent

Här kommer 13 enklare frågor till dig som är producent

1. Kön?

Kvinna

Man

2. Ålder?

- < 25 år
- 25 - 35 år
- 36 - 45 år
- 46 - 55 år
- 56 - 65 år
- > 65 år

3. Vilken utbildningsnivå har du?

- Grundskola
- Gymnasial utbildning
- Yrkesutbildning
- Treåring universitet- eller högskoleutbildning
- Femårig universitet- eller högskoleutbildning

4. Vilken är den huvudsakliga produktionsinriktning på gården?

- Växtodling
- Animalieproduktion
- Mjolkproduktion
- Skog och vilt
- Grönsaksodling
- Jag har ingen gård, men jag producerar på annat sätt
- Inget av ovanstående alternativ

5. Hur har gården kommit i din ägo?

6. Gårdens storlek i hektar?

7. Vilken modell arbetar ni efter?

- Ekologisk/Krav
- Konventionell
- En kombination av 1 och 2.
- Annan certifiering
- Vet ej

8. Hur mycket arbetar du på gården?

- Heltid
- Deltid
- Det är en hobby

9. Har ni anställda på gården? Om ja, hur många och hur mycket arbetar dessa per månad?

10. Hur stor del av inkomsten är kopplad till respektive kanal?

Dra markören i sidled för att se fler alternativ

Använd...	1-10 %	10-20 %	30-40 %	40-50 %	50-60 %	60-70 %	70-80 %	80-90 %	100 %
REKO-rin...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bonden...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gårdsbu...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Andelsj...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prenum...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Food hub	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vanlig li...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Vilka typer av produkt säljer du genom respektive kanal?

Dra markören i sidled för att se fler alternativ.

Använ...	Kött /...	Ägg	Gröns...	Honung	Mejeri...	Bär / S...	Fisk	Bröd el...	Spann...	Annat	Sp...
REKO-f...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bonde...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gårds...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Andels...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prenu...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food h...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12 a. Markera det alternativ som passar bäst in på frågan.

Dra markören i sidled för att se fler alternativ.

Inget av...	REKO-rin...	Bondens...	Gårdsbutik	Andelsjor...	Prenume...	Food hub	Vanlig liv...	Annan fö...
Vilken är...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vilken för...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Av de för...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12 b. Kommentera gärna dina svar på 11 a om varför du valt dessa.

13. Hur långt är du villig att åka för att lämna varor till kund?

Använder...	< 1km	1 - 10 km	11 - 30 km	31 - 50 km	51 - 70 km	71 - 90 km	> 100 km
REKO-ringar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bondens...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gårdsbutik	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Andelsjord...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prenumer...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Food hub	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Avsnitt 4 av 5



Del 2

1. Beskriv tre motiv, börja med den viktigaste, till varför du började använda REKO-ringar som försäljningskanal ?

2. Hur har din relation till konsumenterna förändrats sedan du gick med i REKO-ringar?

Avsnitt 3 av 5

Konsument

Här kommer 8 enklare frågor för dig som är konsument.

1. Kön?

Kvinna

Man

2. Ålder?

< 25 år

25 - 35 år

36 - 45 år

46 - 55 år

56 - 65 år

> 65 år

3. Hur många bor i hushållet?

4. Hushållets inkomst per månad?

5. Vad har du för utbildningsnivå?

Grundskola

Gymnasial utbildning

Yrkesutbildning efter gymnasiet

Treåring universitet/högskoleutbildning

Femårig universitet/högskoleutbildning

6. Vilka typer av produkt köper du genom respektive kanal?

Dra markören i sidled för att se fler alternativ

	Använ...	Kött / c...	Ägg	Grönsa...	Honung	Mejerip...	Bär / S...	Fisk	Bröd el...	Spann...	Mjöl
REKO-r...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bonde...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gårdsb...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Andelsj...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prenu...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food h...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Uppskatta hur mycket av din/er livsmedelskonsumtion ni köper från dessa försäljningskanaler i SEK per månad.

8. Ungefär hur många gånger per månad handlar du via försäljningskanalerna?

Beskrivning av modellerna finns längst ner på sidan

	Använder ej...	< 1	2 - 3 gånger	4 - 5 gånger	6 - 7 gånger	8 - 9 gånger	> 10 gånger
REKO-ringar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bondens ma...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gårdsbutik	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Andelsjordb...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prenumerati...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Food hub	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Avsnitt 5 av 5

Del 2

1. Kryssa i det alternativ som du tycker stämmer bäst överens med dessa påståenden om REKO-ringar.

	Stämmer inte	Håller delvis med	Håller varken me...	Håller med	Håller starkt med
Utbudet av varor...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Varorna är prisvär...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Min uppskattning...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jag har fått en bä...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Beskriv tre motiv, börja med den viktigaste, till varför du köper varor via REKO-ringar?

2. Likertscale on consumer satisfaction

Statements from the consumers

