

Chapter 3: Local and regional food - perspectives from the south Baltic region of Sweden

History, current state and future trends

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Summary

Traditionally, the south Baltic region of Sweden has been seen as the breadbasket of the country. Still, due to comparably favorable production conditions, the region represents an important food production area and approximately 25% of the food that is produced in Sweden is produced in Skåne. Local and regional food may tie together the past and the future. Traditions and trends appear and disappear cyclic fashion and most of the Swedish food culture is affected by influences from other cultures and regions. A number of current Swedish consumer surveys point at the fact that the interest in local and regional food is large and growing. Previously, local and regional food was often marketed directly via farm shops or fairs but with an increasing consumer demand, most major food retail stores in Sweden offer at least a small range of products originating from the nearby region. The direct connection of foods and beverages to a specific region may mean new competitive abilities for old companies as well as inspiration for entrepreneurship, development and innovation.

History

The composition of the diet is dependent on several factors. Geographic and economic conditions determine the availability of foods but socioeconomic and cultural factors are also very important in shaping the way we eat. Social development can therefore affect the composition of the diet as well as our foodways. Traditionally, the south Baltic region of Sweden has been seen as the bread basket of the country. Due to comparably favorable production conditions the region represents a very important food production area in the country. The unique prerequisites of this rural area and the long tradition of food production has created a special culture and a feeling of affinity among food producers and food consumers in the Skåne region. An old motto that has been attributed to the people of Skåne, and that illustrates the important role of food in the area reads:

Good food, plenty of food and food at the right time!

Historically, culinary art in Sweden has, with a certain delay, followed international trends and the Nordic countries were early incorporated in trade with colonial goods (Swahn, 2015). Regarding the practice of different cooking techniques, one of the first sources is from the early 16th century and originates from the region of Östergötland. Many dishes were then served in broth, soups and ragouts were

common, eaten from a bowl by using a spoon or bread. The diet was, to a large extent, based on cereals, legumes or vegetables and meat, fish and eggs were less frequent. The 17th century era was characterized by the so called “fatabur-kitchen” (the fatabur was the storage room for food). It was based on the necessity to harvest and collect when food was in season and preserve it for other parts of the year through for example drying, curing or smoking (Skaarup & Boyhus, 2011). These conservation methods featured this region to an extent so that also today, when modern preservation methods like the freezer and fridge have made the old methods redundant, we seek and highly appreciate the flavors and aroma brought about by smoking, curing and drying. Many people in the south Baltic region still also love the sweet and sour flavors brought about by using vinegar (ättika) and sugar or honey, presumably originally popular as a contrast to all the salted fish and meat that was consumed (Skaarup & Boyhus, 2011). In 1658, Skåne went from being Danish, situated in close proximity to the power in the capital of Copenhagen to being a more peripheral area in an alien country, Sweden. This created a stagnation in culture, known from other similar events. The people of Skåne tended to stick more firmly to ancient ways of living and eating, resulting in that the old southern Scandinavian food culture, tracing back all the way to the middle ages, is better preserved in Skåne than elsewhere (Skaarup & Boyhus, 2011).

Among noble Swedes, German, but also French, chefs and food habits were influential. At the royal court, a large number of different dishes were often served. This banquet custom lingered into the 18th century and was by then considered old-fashioned by visiting foreigners (Swahn, 2015). New customs were now introduced, among them the so called “brännvinsbord” which meant that the gentlemen initiated the meal by drinking Scandinavian vodka or schnapps. The selection of many dishes accompanied with vodka still remains in the form of the Swedish “Smörgåsbord” which is commonly served for Christmas, Easter and Midsummer celebrations.

During the last 150 years the food culture has changed at an increased speed. The transformation of agriculture, as a result of reforms, the industrialism and intense research and development in the area of cultivation and breeding lead to entirely new opportunities for food production (Skaarup & Boyhus, 2011). The development was from a diverse production run from self-sustaining units that primarily produced food for own use to a more specialized production intended for the market (Skaarup & Boyhus, 2011). From having eaten almost exclusively what could be produced in a very regional or even local area, complemented with what was foraged from nature, the new incomes from selling farm produce during the 19th century, lead to people successively abandoning the custom to grow and breed their own food. The food was bought in stores and large parts of home production, followed by its craftsmanship and know-how was forgotten (Skaarup & Boyhus, 2011).

The consumption patterns have continued to change during the last 50 years. Food has become cheaper in comparison with other goods and the share of the disposable income that the Swedish households spend on food has decreased (Statistics Sweden, 2014). Every day-food has undergone a radical internationalization, for example through the introduction of pizza, hamburgers and Asian food. Another apparent trend is that towards simplification and convenience through fast food and semi-ready dinner solutions. A better economy and access to foods from all over the world has led to a new food culture based on a large scale production in which the origin of the produce has not been local or regional but rather global. Consumers have gradually become more distant to both how food is produced and prepared. However, traditional produce and cooking techniques have always remained important in menus for banquets and other celebrations (Swahn, 2015). The most famous Swedish meal, The Nobel banquet, often features local and regional foods, like roaster from Skåne or Salmberries from Gotland. Furthermore, the Swedish everyday-food “husmanskost” has remained popular among many groups and attract may more attention from a new generation of chefs. Traditional dishes prepared in the south eastern part of Sweden and based on local or regional produce include;

- Äggakaka (a type of thick pancake served with fatty pork and lingonberry jam)
- Spettekaka (Sweet cake mad off eggwihte, potato flour)
- Kroppkaka (a type of potato or barley dumpling filled with pork, game or eel)
- Saffranspannkaka (Pancake with saffron)
- Brown beans with fatty pork
- Kalops (meatstew)
- Skånsk äpplekaka (Applecake)
- Pickled herring
- Rye bread (hard and semi soft)
- Meatballs with potatoes and lingonberries

Local and regional food may tie together the past and the future. Traditions and trends may appear and disappear cyclic fashion and, as already mentioned, most of the Swedish food culture is affected by influences from other cultures and regions. Buckwheat can serve as an example how a food, over time, can be introduced and used in a region, go out of fashion and reappear in culture as a new vintage. Porridge has for centuries been a staple food in Sweden. It has been based on different cereals in different regions depending on what could be cultivated, rye and buckwheat porridge was in eaten in Skåne. In the 18th century, the famous researcher and botanist Linneaus noted on the large fields cultivated with flowering buckwheat. He made comparisons with how the people of Skåne lived and eat as compared to the Sami people that he had observed during his travels in the northern part of Sweden. Linneaus noted the high porridge consumption in Skåne, how porridge was made and eaten at night and reheated or fried in the morning. Linneaus meant that the

different diets had a large influence on the characteristics of the people of the south and the north of Sweden. Albeit common during the 18th century, buckwheat disappeared from cultivation in the 1930-ties when industrial fertilizers was introduced. But now it may have been reintroduced to our region again –via Japan. An entrepreneur called Gunnel Pettersson has started to grow buckwheat in Skåne and processes it – not into porridge – but into Japanese noodles and blinis! Local and regional food is thus also “glocal” food!

Current state

Agriculture and the use of the rural landscape is the prerequisite for the production of food. Structural developments in agriculture over the last decades have led to fewer but larger and more specialized farms in Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2014). The number of people engaged in agriculture is steadily decreasing and many Swedish farms are very small if measured by labour requirements. About 2 % of the economically active population is engaged in farming and the farmers’ average age is high, 72 % are older than 50 years (Statistics Sweden, 2014). As shown in figure 1, animal husbandry is the dominant line of production but in the southern counties the cropping farms dominate (Statistics Sweden, 2014). About 60 % of the arable land is found on the fertile plains of southern Sweden and approximately 25 % of all food that were produced in Sweden were produced in Skåne (Jørgensen, 2013). Most of the food produced in elsewhere in Sweden is also produced in Skåne and some crops, for example sugar beet and fruit is almost exclusively produced in this region.

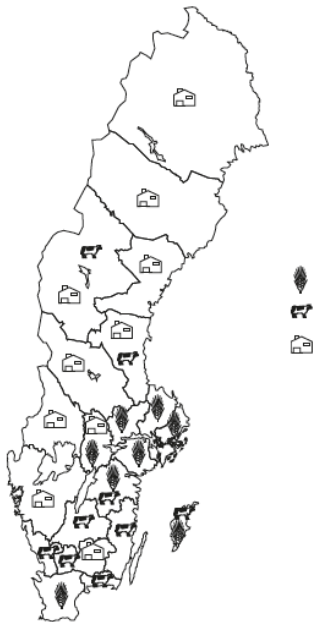


Figure 1. Characteristic type of farming by county. In Skåne the number of cropping farms is larger than average in Sweden while the counties of Blekinge and Småland are characterized by animal husbandry (Statistics Sweden, 2014).

The dairy sector plays a central role in Swedish agriculture. The number of dairy cows has, however, been decreasing over a long period of time (Statistics Sweden, 2014). The number of farms with livestock has also decreased the last decades whereas those remaining have increased their number of animals. In 2013, there were dairy cows in 4 700 farms. There is an average of 74 dairy cows/herd (Statistics Sweden, 2014). In 2013 there were roughly 1 300 pig farms in Sweden. Around 92 % of the fattening pigs were found in herds with at least 500 animals (Statistics Sweden, 2014). Egg production is dominated by few but large flocks. Over 97 % of the hens of laying breed are found in herds with at least 5 000 hens (Statistics Sweden, 2014).

Another source of meat is game, of all meat consumed in Sweden, 4% consists of game (Swedish Association for Hunting and Wildlife Management, 2015). Game is consumed monthly by 22% of the Swedes, more often in the northern part of the country than in the southern parts (Ljung, Sandström, Ericsson, & Kvastegård, 2014). Moose and roe deer are the most commonly eaten game, but wild boar meat consumption is rapidly growing. Minor prey is hunted to a very small extent but of cultural interest in the south Baltic region, is for example sea fowl and rook. According to retailers the demand for game is growing, during 2012 in the range of 10-15% (Lundgren, 2013).

In the case of horticultural holdings the South Baltic region of Sweden has a nationally leading position. In 2011, approximately 50% of the Swedish enterprises involved in greenhouse and outdoor horticultural cultivation were localized to Skåne, Blekinge, eastern Småland and Gotland (Statistics Sweden, 2014). Measured in terms of cultivation area the dominating outdoor crops during 2014 were: strawberries, carrot, apple, iceberg lettuce and onion (Swedish Board of Agriculture, 2015a). For more than a decade, the Swedish greenhouse production has exhibited a continuous increase in energy efficiency and a steady transition towards re-newable fuels (Swedish Board of Agriculture, 2015a). Also in later stages of the chain, Skåne dominates, two thirds of the processing industry for fruit, berries and vegetables is situated in this region (Jørgensen, 2013).

Beekeeping is very important for pollination of fruit trees, berries and many other crops as well as for honey production. In 2011, the estimated economic value of the pollination was between 26 and 47 million Euro according to the National Board of Agriculture in Sweden. Bees are often kept by small scale holdings, nationally there are approximately one hundred professional beekeepers in Sweden (Swedish Board of Agriculture, 2015b). The origin of honey should be declared but in case the product is a mixture of honey from different EU member states the origin does not have to be declared. The professional beekeepers sees it as a very important question that the origin of all honey should be declared and urge consumers to buy local or regional honey to ensure biodiversity (The Swedish Professional Beekeepers, 2015).

The fish species in the Baltic Sea are a mixture of marine and freshwater species adapted to the brackish (low salinity) conditions. Their distribution is largely gov-

erned by salinity levels. Of the roughly 100 fish species inhabiting the Baltic Sea, about 70 marine species dominate the Baltic Proper, while some 30-40 freshwater species occur in the coastal and the northern areas (HELCOM, 2006). Commercial fish species caught in the south Baltic region of Sweden are for example Cod, Herring, Sprat, Baltic flatfish species, Salmon, Sea trout and Eel. It is of the utmost importance to analyze the impact of fishing activities on coastal fish communities, including regional aspects. This analysis should be included in the future assessments of coastal fish (HELCOM, 2006). No crustaceans are commercially caught in the Baltic sea but sweet water crayfish is caught both in the wild and raised in ponds in the counties of Skåne, Blekinge and Småland.

The absolute volume of food harvested directly from nature or produced in private gardens is not easily estimated and in this paper no attempt has been made to quantify the volumes. However, many Swedes collect wild berries and mushrooms and other food ingredients for recreational and/or economic reasons. In Sweden 35% of the population claim that they eat “home-picked” berries every month and 29% that they eat mushrooms that were gathered by themselves (Ljung et al., 2014). The Swedish legislation and the “Allemansrätt” allows everyone to do so independent of if it you own the land. Typical berries harvested in the South Baltic region include lingonberries, bilberries, wild raspberries, and salmonberry. Mushrooms as chateaufortelles and champignons are also harvested and play a role in the regional cuisine. In the southern parts of Sweden it is also relatively common to collect for example elderberry flowers, nettles and ramsons from nature.

To summarize, the South Baltic region of Sweden is an important area for Swedish food production. Significant crops are cereals, oilseed, potatoes, sugar beet and leguminous plants like green peas and brown beans. These are grown in larger areas and harvested with better yields than in the rest of the country. Horticultural holdings mainly produce carrots, lettuce, onion, cabbage, apples and strawberries for the local, regional and national market. Although Skåne is dominated by crop production, pork, beef, poultry and processed meat are also produced in the region, as well as dairy products and eggs. Vegetables, fruit, herbs and spices and various preserves are made in Skåne, Blekinge, Småland and Gotland. Honey and game, fish and plants from the wild are also harvested. The production of different types of beverages, like beer from micro-breweries, ciders, fruit wines and different non-alcoholic varieties is a segment that has grown a lot in the southern part of Sweden lately.

During 2014, the Swedish Board of Agriculture undertook a survey to map the occurrence of traditional Swedish foods and agricultural products with ties to a specific geographic area. This was part of the government commission to develop gastronomic regions in Sweden (Smaka Sverige, 2015). The goal was to identify products that may come in to question for protected designation of origin (PDO) and protected geographical indication (PGI) according to the EU-regulation. The ambition is that Sweden, in 2020, will have tripled the number of protected Swedish food products. Currently, only five Swedish products are protected, among them Spettekaka from Skåne and Brown Beans from Öland. The new list of potential products for Skåne, Blekinge, Småland and the islands of Öland and Gotland in-

clude among other, spickekorv (a dried, salty sausage from the Swedish food history) kroppkaka (a type of potato or barley dumpling filled with pork, game or eel) and Gotlandic wheat. The whole list is to be found here: <http://smakasverige.jordbruksverket.se/>

Many agricultural enterprises engage in combinatory activities and complement the agribusiness with construction, tourism or further processing of farm products (Wretling Clarin, 2013). As an example 13% of the rural farmers are also engaged in construction (including for example snow clearance) and 7% in tourism-related activities. In this segment of multi-tasking farmers many of the producers of local and regional foods are found. However, when looking at the structure of the food-processing industry, Skåne has a comparably high number of large companies (> 250 employees) than the rest of Sweden. However, the dominance of these larger companies has decreased and a drift towards micro- (<10 employees) and small companies (10-49 employees) can be noted (Jørgensen, 2013).

Within Swedish politics there is a somewhat newfound and growing interest in food and food production and under a new government, the former efforts expressed through “Sweden - the new culinary nation” are substituted for a new governmental food strategy. The food strategy will, according to the responsible minister, encompass the entire food production chain, from primary production to food industry, exports, trade, consumer, public sector consumption, restaurants and culinary experiences. The ultimate goal of the strategy is to provide jobs and sustainable growth throughout the country (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, 2015). Consequently, for some time now, the emergence of small scale food production has been recognized and stimulated in Sweden. This has led to a remarkable evolvement of local food producers that are important in trade and industry and that enriches the food market.

There is obviously an abundant access to different local and regional food in the South Baltic region of Sweden, but the question is how this is perceived by the modern consumer? Is the origin of food an issue for the common consumer living in the south Baltic region of Sweden? And can local and regional food be expected to be an increasingly important marketing niche for the processing industry and retail?

Consumer demand for food has changed during the last decades resulting in an increased demand for both globally and locally produced foods and beverages (Jørgensen, 2013). A number of Swedish consumer surveys points at the fact that the interest in local and regional food is large and growing. On a national level, a survey from 2015 conducted by The Federation of Swedish Farmers and ICA, the largest food retail chain in Sweden, show that more consumers than previously say that they choose food produced in Sweden. 75% of the Swedes choose to buy foods that are produced in Sweden compared to that that they think is produced in another country and consumers claim they are prepared to pay more for food (Johansson, 2015). According to this survey, meat is a clearly product category where origin matters a lot. Among the reasons for buying Swedish are; animal welfare, less use of antibiotics, shorter transportation and a concern about Swedish

agriculture (Johansson, 2015). Thus, for many consumers it is no longer enough to know that the product is, for example ecologically produced, the place and person that lies behind the production of the food is also of interest and product quality is in focus (Nygård & Wramner, 2013). Geographic indications signal that the foods are well worth buying as they originate from a specific place or area (Sandberg, 2010). Consumers often perceive product quality as associated with, and even dependent of, the specific production region and its physical, biological and cultural prerequisites, its terroir (Nygård & Wramner, 2013). The fact that a product can be associated to a certain terroir is of central importance for place-specific foods and agricultural produce and thereby also for the application of geographic indications (Nygård & Wramner, 2013). Research show that local and regional foods create a positive attitude that lead to an increased intention to buy (Fernqvist & Ekelund, 2014). Further, regional and local brands or marketing schemes has a potent effect on the consumer habits within a specific region (Fernqvist & Ekelund, 2014). However, an interesting phenomena that coexists with the consumer interest in local and regional food is that an increasing share of the food that is sold in Sweden is imported and that the market share of anonymous, private label foods continuous to grow. This can be an expression for that many consumers think that imported foods are exchangeable to those produced in Sweden (Jørgensen, 2013).

One key initiative for marketing of local and regional food in the south Baltic region of Sweden region is the retail concept "Smaka på Skåne -Närproducerat och noga utvalt" – which can be translated to "Taste Skåne - produced nearby and chosen with care". The aim of this concept is to facilitate both consumers and local and regional producers finding and locating the products in food stores in Skåne and its surroundings. The criteria for labeling these products include regulations on geographic origin of production and processing and documentation of this (Skåne Food Innovation Network, 2015). Unprocessed products have to be cultivated/caught/raised in Skåne. Regarding processed products, the key ingredients should be produced in Skåne. Furthermore, processing/production shall be carried out in Skåne in an artisanal manner. This concept is primarily applied to products originating from small and middle scale food companies, as stated by the EU definition of SME: s.

The Regional Culinary Heritage concept was developed and introduced in Southeast Skåne and on the Danish Island of Bornholm in 1995. The project developed rapidly and received considerable interest from businesses and authorities within the region, as well as from other regions throughout Europe. In the winter of 1997/98 a European project group was established in order to introduce the concept throughout Europe. In spring 1998 the first new European regions joined the network. It is the ambition of Regional Culinary Heritage to offer tourists and consumers regional foods without fuss. Selected restaurants, food processing businesses and farms that highlight their regional connections are members of the European network for Regional Culinary Heritage. The businesses have to comply to set criteria. These states that the products should be food of local origin or that the major manufacturing value should come from the region. The products should also con-

tribute to a positive image of the region among other things. All counties in the South Baltic region of Sweden are represented in the European network for Regional Culinary Heritage (Skåne, Blekinge, Småland and Gotland).

There are several other official and private initiatives which directly or indirectly support local food businesses. Direct support to companies through business- and product development is offered for example through The Federation of Swedish Farmers, The Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies or other types of organizations like Transformat (<http://www.krinova.se/transformat/>) and the Skåne Food Innovation network (<http://www.livsmedelsakademin.se/en>). A very "hands on" assistance program in product development is available for small scale food producers interested in either beverages made of fruit via The Center for Innovative Beverages (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Balsgård) or other foodstuffs through the Centre for Food Development, CUL, in Karlshamn (<http://cluk.se/>). Previously, local and regional food was often marketed directly via farm shops or fairs but with an increasing consumer demand, most major food retail stores in Sweden offer at least a small range of products originating from the nearby region (Andersson, 2011). It is, to conclude the description of the current state of local and regional food production, consumption and market, clear that the direct connection of foods and beverages to a specific region may mean new competitive abilities for old companies as well as inspiration for entrepreneurship, development and innovation for new (Sandberg, 2010).

Future trends

In northern Europe the demand for locally produced foods continue to increase and these products are perceived as clean, authentic and free from chemical additives (Nygård & Wramner, 2013). For many, the ideal picture of agriculture and food processing involves traditional and artisanal methods, often associated to southern Europe. According to Nygård and Wramner (2013), this conception can partly be the result of a conscious ambition to emphasize regional features and of a successful marketing of southern European regions for gastronomic tourism. Other underlying factors to the rising interest for local and regional foods may be a new generation of chefs and consumers who are interested in sustainability issues, and who perceive locally produced foods as better for the environment and for health. In Sweden, television broadcasting of "infotainment" programs focusing on food culture and self-sufficiency in food production like "The history eaters" and "100% farmer" probably both steams from and induces an interest in local and regional foods as does the contemporary "hipster" subculture associated with an interest in organic and artisanal foods. In our busy everyday life foraging berries and mushrooms and other exiting food stuff like different herbs and "weeds" from nature seems relaxing. Making preserves like jam and different juices, baking sourdough bread and cooking "slow food" are creative activities, more like hobbies than a necessity to feed the family during the coming winter months. The gastronomic trend called "New Nordic Food" and the "Manifesto for the New Nordic Cuisine" signed by Nordic chefs who, already in 2004, has probably also meant a great deal

for the current interest in local and regional food. The quest for unique produce have led to a very promising new initiative called “Exceptional produce” where Swedish chefs and the Federation of Swedish farmers cooperate with producers to

“increase the contacts and deepen the relationships between chefs and producers in Sweden” and to test produce from different producers. The initiative is described as a “quality-oriented, broad and inclusive initiative to develop modern gastronomy and provide the growing network of top-level restaurants who use quality produce which is uniquely Swedish. The actual definition of exceptional produce can however never be entirely static as location, season, sort and breed matters much, and it is precisely this richness in diversity which the project strives for” (Hamberg & Hovstadius, 2015).

Today, even large fast food retailers like McDonalds, endeavor to present the origin of the food served. However, today restaurants that serve local or regional and ecologic food are no longer “sticking out” to the same extent and we have come to a stage when documented origin and production methods often are taken for granted when dining out. Instead analysts predict

“a backlash against the over pretentious, like demanding food that is locally grown in a unsuitable climate or only eating food originating from the nearest grove of trees”(Boëthius, 2015).

However, there are still many food caterers both on the private and public arena who don't pay much attention to issues regarding local or regional food production. Here lies a large potential in raising awareness and knowledge regarding food quality in less conscious food caterers as Swedish consumers tend to eat more and more of their meals out of home (Delfi Foodserviceguide, 2014).

There agriculture in the south Baltic region face many future challenges as well as opportunities. The global competition is fierce and the added values of local or regional production is not always easily communicated. Many farmers struggle with low profitability and few representatives from the younger generations are prepared to become farmers or food producers. New, improved techniques may improve the working environment and the dependence of input from non-renewable sources. The climate change may be both an possibility for growing new crops an creatin agro-food business around then, like for example wine production. However, a changing climate mag bring about new threats in the form of pest and diseases, draughts or storms.

Can the market for local and regional food continue to grow in Sweden? Five years ago, there was still not so much up-scaling going on in the local and regional food chain in Sweden. Logistics and transportation was (Franzén, 2009), and still is, a key issue for producers and consumers of local and regional foods. Small volumes and somewhat remote production sites make the cost of transportation unreasonably high in relation to the total value of the product. New initiatives in the logistic area are however emerging, as an example the company “Bondens Skafferi” can be

brought forward. Retailers now see the commercial possibilities that opens up when there are consumers who think it is worth paying more for food with a documented origin and quality (Sandberg, 2010).

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