

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Revaluing Public Sector Food
Procurement in Europe:

An Action Plan for Sustainability



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report on **Revaluing Public Sector Food Procurement** is the result of a unique collaboration between policy-makers, practitioners and scientists working together during the *Foodlinks* project¹. It reflects not only the reality of devising and implementing innovative approaches to public sector food procurement throughout Europe, but also offers an **Action Plan** to help and encourage urban governments to take up the challenge of more sustainable purchasing practices.
2. Developing more sustainable food consumption and production patterns will have a significant impact on sustainable development. One area that European policy makers have identified for furthering sustainable consumption and production is the *Greening of Public Procurement*. Public sector institutions as centres of procurement – hospitals, care homes, schools, universities, prisons, armed forces, and canteens in government buildings – represent a significant part of the procurement of any national food economy. These agencies and institutions of the state, which serve the public, have a moral responsibility to promote an “ethic of care” for their communities and environment in the ways that they purchase, prepare and serve food.
3. Many public authorities at the local, regional and national levels have adopted sustainable procurement practices. A selection of **inspiring best practices** – five case studies from Malmö (Sweden), Rome (Italy), East Ayrshire (Scotland), Copenhagen (Denmark) and Vienna (Austria) - is presented with the aim of providing an overview of what change is happening across Europe. Each case study is presented according to the following categories: what change is happening; a focus on the driving forces that made change possible; what aspects of sustainability have been prioritized and why; and lastly, the main challenges encountered
4. The **case studies** demonstrate that revaluing public procurement is possible and takes different forms depending on the conditions and context of each European city. Although problems come up, creative and imaginative ways are found to resolve them. These different experiences and good practices provide trends of change to inspire municipalities that intend to take up the challenge of more sustainable purchasing practices.
5. The examples demonstrate that **public procurement** is one of the most **powerful tools urban governments** have at their disposal to fashion sustainable food systems that prioritize quality foods. They also show that successful long-term change must be tailored to the culture and system of governance in each city or region. As each case study demonstrates, commitment and creativity is vital and the ability to think ‘outside the box’ brings environmental, financial, health and social rewards.
6. **This is the central message of revaluing public sector food procurement to all urban governments:** investing today in public food systems may indeed imply a significant financial effort and sacrifice at a time of recession, but the savings made in other budgetary accounts will far outweigh and offset the costs of your initial investment.
7. At the **policy level**, the examples discussed highlight the importance of integration i.e. the adoption of an approach that recognizes and emphasizes the cross cutting, multifunctional nature of public food systems and their capacity to deliver socio-economic and environmental benefits.
8. At the **practical level**, the examples demonstrate the efficacy of a creative procurement approach, which manifests itself in different ways. In all cases, local governments have managed to promote re-localization without breaching the EU legislation on public procurement.
9. We present a **two-step action** plan to really make a difference to revaluing public sector food procurement:
 - i. adopt the set of basic indicators set out in the report to guide and monitor progress towards sustainability and the impact of your sustainable food strategy; and
 - ii. adopt the set of key actions outlined in the report and use them to guide your own policy-making, implementation and monitoring and evaluation practices.

¹ The report was written as a joint collaboration over a number of months using a wiki on a web-based platform that was also open to other members of our knowledge-based Community of Practice.

i. THE INDICATORS

A set of indicators must work for your own culture and system of governance but using the good practice set out in the case studies, we have identified the following basic indicators that can be adapted to help monitor progress towards sustainability and the impact of sustainable food strategies:

Environmental issues

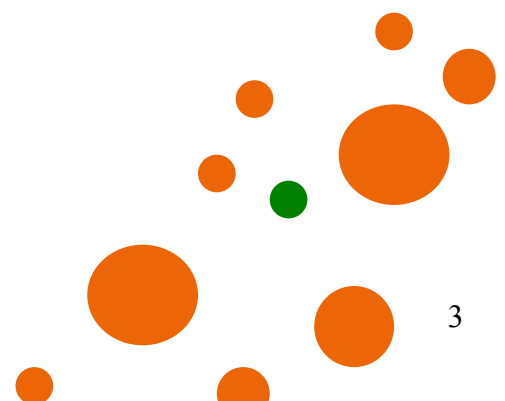
- Percentage of organic and sustainably sourced fish using recognized certification schemes e.g. Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
- Availability of products that promote animal welfare
- Emphasis on seasonality/ local food
- Initiatives in place to minimize waste at all stages of the food chain
- Freshness (intended as use of unprocessed and freshly prepared foods)
- Number and/or percentage of vegetarian dishes and meals
- Reduce energy consumption
- Reduce water consumption/ protect ground water from contamination

Social/Health issues

- Availability/percentage of Fair Trade/fairly traded products
- Number of staff trained on sustainable public procurement issues
- Educational initiatives in place to promote awareness of sustainable food
- Social Return on Investment (SROI)
- Prioritize nutritional content
- Prioritize menu planning/ innovative recipes

Economic issues

- Support for local employment and local small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) – ensure they remain financially viable when adjusting to new quality requirements
- Adopt an incremental approach – phase in change and budgets to support this over time
- Establish criteria to improve kitchens and eating environments
- Establish budgets to train catering staff and educate practitioners and the public over time.



ii. KEY ACTION POINTS

The Sustainable Procurement of food and drink will not happen without intervention at both the corporate and operational levels. By adopting and taking the following key actions, public bodies maximise the opportunities to revalue public sector food procurement and help build a more sustainable food system for all.

Good Governance

It is vital that key Sustainable Development Objectives are identified corporately and reflected in each public organisation's strategy for procurement. This should include wider engagement with Civil Society.

Identify Sustainable Food as a Priority

Public bodies should specifically identify Sustainable Food Procurement as part of their Corporate Objectives. This is a key area where major sustainable development gains can be achieved across a range of policy sectors.

Sustainable Menus can deliver Multiple Dividends

Menus and recipes should be prioritised for health, carbon reduction, seasonality and for a capacity to promote biodiversity, animal welfare, sustainable fisheries, good employment practices and training opportunities.

Account for Sustainability

Public bodies should have a recognised methodology in place for evaluating contracts that applies a whole life cycle costing approach. This accounts for social, environmental and economic benefits which accrue through sustainable food procurement and should also include an assessment of regional impacts.

Help Create the Market for Sustainable Food

A diverse and sustainable agri-food sector is essential. Procurement Organisations should actively work with foodservice contractors and suppliers to source sustainable food. Each public organisation should ensure measures are in place to include participation from small businesses (SMEs). This will develop a sustainable and more competitive supply base.

Ensure Contracts Strengthen Competition

Public Sector Organisations should give a high priority to geographic and product lotting of contracts to allow for the inclusion of SMEs alongside larger businesses whether for food purchased through its own contracts or through a foodservice contractor on behalf of the organisation.

For example, food and drink procurement can divide contracts into smaller lots and segment food categories into geographic lots of a suitable scale to allow a range of businesses to participate. Contracts should also be offered in separate lots for: soft drinks, milk, cheese, eggs, fresh meat, fish, poultry, fruit, vegetables, cereals, groceries or any suitable configuration.

Stimulate Demand for Sustainable Food

A strategy to stimulate more sustainable practices by suppliers in the food sector should be prioritised by each municipality, province and region. This includes strategic support for food production and carbon reduction, food safety and quality accreditations, reformulation of processed food, and tendering for public contracts, including electronic tendering mechanisms and capacity building.

Work with Suppliers

Procurement processes, ease of access to contracts, public and product liability insurance requirements and quality assurance accreditations should be proportionate to manage risk but not too onerous. They should not act as a disincentive for SMEs to tender or be a disproportionate cost in their tender price.

Plan for Sustainability and the Seasons

Lead times for production are critical in the food sector to allow for seasonal production planning. A Prior Information Notice (PIN) should be used to notify of the intention to advertise a food tender a minimum of 18 months in advance of the contract being advertised.

Skill Your Staff

Creating impetus for the sustainable purchase of food is essential at a corporate level. Inspire commitment and ensure knowledge and skills are firmly established within the procurement and catering functions, where the facility to implement change is found.

Know what your Organisation is Buying

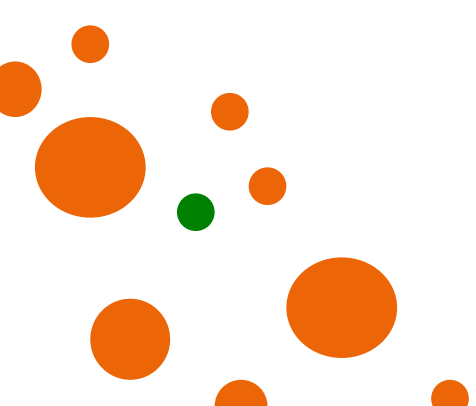
By prioritising food from sustainable sources, all public organisations should require that contracts record the place of origin of food. This should be monitored by the public buying agency.

Know where there is Waste

Every Public Organisation should monitor food waste and have transparent mechanisms that report progress on minimising food-waste and recycling.

Consumers value Sustainable Food

Every public organisation should educate its consumers by providing information on its policy for food and advertise this through the provenance of its menus. Wider community engagement is key to the success of wider sustainable food consumption.



The Foodlinks project: Using knowledge networks to promote sustainable food

The Foodlinks project aims to develop and experiment with new ways of linking research to policy-making in the field of sustainable food consumption and production. In order to do so, project partners have been leveraging new technologies, such as social media.

Three Communities of Practice

Foodlinks partners have used knowledge brokerage activities to create effective linkages between scientists, civil society actors and policy makers. To achieve this, Communities of Practice (CoP) were established in three project themes:

- > **Short producer to consumer food chains:** New relations between civil society and the chain of food provision
- > **Re-valuing public food procurement:** New relations between the public sector and the chain of food provision
- > **Urban food strategies:** The rise of municipalities and city-regions as food policy makers, pointing to new relations between the government and civil society

Researchers, policy makers and **civil society** actors sharing a common interest, a practice, a concern or a passion have built up learning communities that have evolved over the length of the project and beyond.

Foodlinks: Key facts

- > Funding: 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development of the European Union
- > Project number: 265287
- > Duration: January 2011 – December 2013
- > Project coordinator: Wageningen University, The Netherlands
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- > Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL
- > Cardiff University
- > University of Pisa
- > Baltic Studies Centre
- > City University London
- > Inter-University Research Centre for Technology, Work and Culture IFZ
- > City of Malmö
- > Scottish Government
- > Neiker
- > FRCIVAM Bretagne
- > Tukums municipality
- > Via Campesina Austria
- > Province of Limburg

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