

# STATEMENT OF THE SCHOOLFOOD4CHANGE DELEGATION FOR THE WORLD FOOD FORUM 2023

## Harnessing the potential of school meals to transform food systems for climate action

Rome, Italy, 16-20 October 2023

Food and nutrition insecurity hinders a child's ability to learn. The 2023 State of Food Security and Nutrition Report makes it clear: **child nutrition should be prioritised by ensuring access to affordable, nutritious diets** but also by protecting children from nutrient-poor, ultra-processed foods. School meals are at the heart of the solution. The provision of nutritious and sustainable school meals carries incredible potential to support children's health and wellbeing, promote social justice, fight against poverty, and protect the climate and biodiversity. Throughout the world, school meals offer a key opportunity to tackle child hunger and malnutrition, which often results from climate change. Not only will school meals address childhood hunger, but when paired with food education, they can empower children to become agents of change and carry this message forward. Today, we want to amplify the voices of youth and children to demand ambitious action for every child to access a healthy school meal – as stated in our [petition](#) which now (October 2023) reached over 50,000 signatures. **School food needs a change, and the time is now.**

**SchoolFood4Change (SF4C) sees schools as catalysts for systemic and multi-actor change towards a sustainable and healthy food system.** To deliver on this promise, local and regional authorities are crucial: they have the power to be the change they want to see in the world. The City of Milan (Italy), for example, managed to reduce GHG emissions related to their **food procurement** by 43% between 2015 and 2021 by investing in plant-based meals, seasonal and organic products, shorter food value chains and 100% sustainable dishes and cutlery. Likewise, the City of Ghent (Belgium) achieved a 38% reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions between 2019 and 2023, notably by limiting animal-based proteins to 50% of their dishes' protein content. In this way, cities like Milan and Ghent support the seven targets as defined in the Report on '[Innovative Criteria and Models for Procurement of Sustainable and Healthy School Meals](#)' and showcase that food system transformation can be significantly advanced through changes in the procurement process and menu planning.

We hope that these good practices can also inspire other municipalities to start their food system transformation journey.

Despite this progress, actors on the ground need to be supported by an enabling policy environment. On this matter, **minimum mandatory sustainability criteria** (as proposed in the [Sustainable Food Procurement Manifesto](#)) act as a critical tool to ensure that entities in charge of food tenders have the same level of ambition when addressing public food procurement. To deliver these criteria, schools should also invest in **effective monitoring systems** while engaging in continuous **dialogue** with suppliers - in particular small-scale farmers - from their region, thereby enhancing urban-rural linkages and resilience.

But public food procurement is only one part of a larger food picture: once high-quality ingredients are carefully sourced, leaving them in the hands of skilled cooks will make a real difference in preparing delicious, healthy, and nutritious meals. On this matter, the Department of Dordogne (France) leads by example by serving 100% local, organic and home-made meals in their school canteens. Dordogne offers fresh and seasonal food made with natural and whole ingredients. Investing in training for kitchen staff and the purchase of equipment was a necessary step to make this transition successful. The kitchen staff is encouraged to interact with children and teach them the importance of cooking and eating consciously. **Lunch time** is now an **educational and enjoyable moment** - something to look forward to. The programme had many positive outcomes on nutrition and the environment, while curbing food waste, creating a better working environment for cooks, benefiting the economy of local small-scale farmers, and saving public money. Luckily, the case of Dordogne is not an isolated phenomenon: other local authorities such as Copenhagen (Denmark) and Malmö and Umeå (Sweden) improved the quality of their school meals by **training their canteen and kitchen staff** to integrate values related to health and environmental sustainability in their menu planning and cooking practices. These best practices show that uplifting the role of cooks by giving them the skills to prepare meals that are nutritionally balanced, respectful of the environment, while being appreciated by children, can nurture a positive food culture among children and their families, in addition to creating a **sense of community around food in schools**.

To support such changes, governments should create and extend **training of cooks** in all canteens, creating linkages with dietitians to reshape the menu together and integrate nutritional and environmental criteria in menu planning. Moreover, public authorities should support the **relocalisation of kitchens in schools** whenever possible, to create a closer relationship between children and kitchen staff.



However, cooks cannot realise this change alone: they need to involve pupils to bring change in and around the school. The SchoolFood4Change consortium is united in its policy ambition to **bring food education into schools and make lunch time an integrated part of the pedagogic mission**. A fact worth considering: over the course of a child's schooling, the lunch hour makes up thousands of opportunities to learn. Let's not waste it, let's use it! This is why SchoolFood4Change developed a joint framework called the **Whole School Food Approach (WSFA)**. In short, the holistic WSFA approach can be described as good school food accompanied by food and nutrition education that is well integrated into the curriculum and learned in an enjoyable school food environment. A "WSFA school" creates space for exchange - bringing in caregivers, farmers, local shops, communities, restaurants, and retailers - and shows children how food is grown, processed and sold, all while engaging them actively in school decisions regarding food. Currently piloted in Belgium and Spain, farm-to-school twinning is a concrete example of the WSFA in practice. The pilots have confirmed that bringing students to farms and farmers to schools helps young people gain practical experience and knowledge of where their food comes from and appreciate the way food is produced.

To mainstream the WSFA across cities and schools, national and federal education governance should recognise and prioritise school meals as part of their mission, and governments should develop national strategies for sustainable food systems that integrate food education. Municipalities, in parallel, can use various levers - including food procurement - to ensure that food education is an integral part of the school curriculum.

In a nutshell, the comprehensive approach outlined in SchoolFood4Change holds the promise of transforming the nutritional landscape for children while addressing broader societal challenges. **The emphasis on school meals as a tool for change, aligned with food education and innovative sustainable food procurement practices, is a powerful step towards fairer and more sustainable food systems.** The transformation initiated by SchoolFood4Change is only one facet in a broader spectrum of actions and policies that can accelerate climate action. Today, **we call on governments to create ambitious policy frameworks to drive systemic changes that not only benefit the health and nutrition of current and future generations but also contribute significantly to climate resilience and sustainability on a global scale.**

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# It's time for a new menu

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