



## **Policy Recommendations on *How to Reduce the Distance Between Demand and Supply of Organic Food in Public Food Procurement***

These recommendations have been developed to provide information to cities that would like to increase their share of organic food in their public canteens.



**This handout serves as a guideline for public authorities that want to increase their share of organic food in public school canteens.**

Several benefits are associated with the increase of organic food procurement, such as environmental benefits (reduction of GHG emissions, biodiversity protection, improved water quality), social and economic benefits (enhanced fairness, better payment for farmers and workers, support for small farmers and social integration) and health and nutritional benefits (emphasis on quality, taste, freshness, and seasonality).

Several key barriers and challenges have been identified by SF4C cities for the increase of local and organic food in public canteens:

- Lack of established collaboration channels between public authorities and farmers/associations
- Limited understanding of available organic supply and producer capacities
- Challenges in adapting existing legislation and tendering processes to favour organic and local products
- Perceived or actual budgetary limitations and supply chain complexities
- Scalability issues for local organic production to meet institutional demand

## The role of stakeholders in bridging the gap

To decrease the distance between demand and supply of organic produce, it is essential to involve all stakeholders.

### Farmers and farmers' associations

- Importance of direct input from farmers on organic food procurement uptake
- Mechanisms for involving farmers in shaping procurement strategies, e.g., by conducting market dialogues with local producers

### Organic sector organisations

- Networking and representation: connecting various actors across the value chain (researchers, certifiers, input providers, farmers, processors, traders, retailers)
- Advisory and support roles: providing expertise on availability, legislation, and supplier networks of organic food
- Supply chain facilitation: supporting the development of robust organic supply chains
- Promotion and awareness: campaigns and educational initiatives to increase knowledge and demand for organic products
- Intermediary role: assisting organic producers in navigating and accessing public procurement opportunities

### Public authorities - cities and regional governments

- Role in clearly communicating procurement strategies, criteria, and goals
- Consultation with stakeholders on new tender criteria and contract clauses
- Planning production based on the school canteen and public sector food needs

### Educational institutions and wider community

- Integrating food education and culture into school meal tendering (e.g., by applying the Whole School Food Approach)
- Promoting active participation of schoolchildren, teachers, and the broader school community in healthy eating initiatives (e.g., Farm 2 School Twinning)



## **Policy recommendations for reducing the distance between demand and supply**

### **Strategic public procurement policy frameworks**

- Setting ambitious targets: formalising targets for organic food procurement (e.g., 40% organic by mass/volume/value) and sourcing from small farmers
- Tailored tendering: designing tenders that explicitly integrate criteria for organic and fresh seasonal foods, including social and environmental aspects
- Contract lotting: policy requiring the division of contracts into smaller lots to encourage participation from SMEs and local producers
- Transparency: mandating the publication of forward procurement plans to allow suppliers to prepare
- Market dialogue: Engage with the market ahead of issuing a new tender to get a better understanding of the supply side, in this case, the market readiness to deliver higher shares of organic



## Case studies and lessons learned

### Ghent: Using Public Procurement for Scaling System Change

Ghent shows how increasing organic food in school meals can be advanced through collaboration across the wider public sector in Flanders. To scale the impact of SchoolFood4Change (SF4C), its strong principles, healthy nutrition, and a protein shift, Ghent created a working group for procurement officers from across Flanders. Cities, health care facilities, and other public bodies met regularly to exchange experiences, discover suppliers, and explore how SF4C criteria could be built into wider tenders.

This working group creates a platform that disseminates best practices, builds capacity, and encourages interorganisational collaboration, creating a ripple effect well beyond Ghent. Participants reported greater confidence in applying sustainable criteria. The working group model requires no major investment, just coordination and openness. Yet this example shows how cities can leverage procurement to accelerate systemic change.

### Milan: Ensuring organic food for the youngest

Since 2025, all nursery school (children aged 0-36 months) kitchens in the Municipality of Milan have been officially certified as organic canteens by the Ministry of Agriculture. This recognition attests to a quality meal service and recognises a daily commitment to selecting the best food suppliers. Over 76% of the food purchased is organic, reaching 100% for tomato puree, pasta, extra virgin olive oil, eggs, and yoghurt. This represents a tangible focus on ingredients and the health of the children. Potatoes, onions, and carrots are organic and sourced from very short supply chains, grown on the land of the Municipality of Milan.



## Case studies and lessons learned

### Valencia: Public Procurement for Healthy, Local, and Organic Food

The Region of Valencia uses public procurement to transform school meals into a driver of health and sustainability. By 2027, the region aims to require that 50-60% of meal budgets be spent on high-quality ingredients—including minimum percentages of organic products and purchases from local small-scale farmers—while improving nutritional standards and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Working within EU and national legislation, the region will integrate social and environmental criteria into its contracts, such as prioritising seasonal, plant-based options to support a protein shift, rewarding suppliers who reduce carbon footprints, and including food-education activities for students. To ensure small producers can compete, the region will encourage contract lotting and transparent forward planning. This combination is expected to attract new local suppliers and diversify the school food market.



The result will be a procurement system that nourishes children with healthy and sustainable food, strengthens regional farming economies, and educates the next generation. The Region of Valencia is demonstrating how targeted policies can turn public meals into a catalyst for systemic change.

Beyond Valencia, this model is already being replicated across Spain. ECOVALIA is actively supporting implementation in other regions including successful programs in Andalusia and Castilla-La Mancha. ECOVALIA also urges the national government to provide clearer legal frameworks and definitions, while 'organic' and 'local' criteria are mentioned in current regulations, the required percentages remain minimal and non-binding, rather than as mandatory criteria within tender specifications—a change that would enable regions like Valencia to implement their policies with greater legal certainty.

## Case studies and lessons learned

### Malmö: Strong supplier networks and closer relationships through DPS

Malmö has a new type of tender called the Dynamic Purchasing System – DPS. It allows small and medium-sized food producers to sell their products without committing to supplying the same product and quantities throughout the year. This makes seasonal ingredients available to public institutions in the city, which previously could only purchase through the wholesale agreement. To be included in the DPS tender, the producer must be able to offer a site visit for schools that can be carried out during one working day. This ensures that only nearby producers can participate in the agreement and strengthens the link between food education and production.



The advantages of DPS are many, primarily benefiting small and medium-sized food producers who are usually too small to be part of the city's regular food agreements due to low production volumes. In addition, purchasers get an opportunity to build a relationship with those who grow the food, and schools/preschools have the chance to visit producers and thereby create authentic learning. In a time when resilience and food supply have become increasingly relevant issues, this is also a way for the city to build strong supplier networks and encourage closer relationships between suppliers and consumers.

Find more information at [schoolfood4change.eu](https://schoolfood4change.eu)