



Zaragoza (Spain)

736,600 inhabitants



Small farmers + social integration of disadvantaged groups

Food education, food culture, + culinary traditions

GHG emission reduction

Participatory Process for Strategic Public Procurement

What? To involve civil society, public administration, and food sector stakeholders in shaping strategic public food procurement, with the goal of ensuring that 50% of Zaragoza's food contracts include healthy and sustainable food criteria by 2026.

When? 2023 - ongoing

Who? Municipal kindergartens

"Strategic food procurement isn't just about meals. It's about resilience justice, and sustainability."

The challenge?

Faced with growing environmental challenges, social inequalities, and unhealthy diets, Zaragoza recognised that traditional food contracts were missing opportunities to create wider impact. The city also faced limited technical support, a concentrated supplier market, and insufficient resources to define and monitor sustainable contracts.

The solution!

Zaragoza launched a participatory process to rethink food procurement in public institutions. Led by the municipal departments of Public Health and Environment, and supported by Mensa Cívica and CERAI, it brought together more than 20 civil society organisations to co-design a new approach to public procurement.

The results:

Zaragoza has developed a framework for food service contracts grounded in sustainability, health, and social equity, now implemented in the city's kindergartens. Contracts prioritise fresh, seasonal, and organic food, support smaller producers, and include practical tools, training and market consultations.

The participatory process also established a Working Group on Health and Sustainable Food Procurement within Zaragoza's Municipal Food Council, bringing together civil society, universities, producers, healthcare professionals, and other stakeholders. By Segmenting contracts and providing technical support, Zaragoza is improving market access while making its sustainability goals more achievable.

- **Economic impact:** Contract segmentation and support for shorter supply chains improve access to public procurement for SMEs and local producers.
- **Social impact (SROI):** The approach strengthens participation and transparency while supporting healthier and more equitable access to nutritious meals.
- **Environmental impact:** More seasonal and organic products and stronger food waste prevention measures contribute to lower environmental impacts and more sustainable food systems.



Photo by [David Vives](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Key Takeaways for Cities:

Build Alliances Early: Engage civil society, professionals, and market actors early to ensure buy-in and realism.

Start with What's Feasible: Use pilot contracts and flexible criteria—perfection isn't the goal; scalable impact is.

Train and Support Staff: Invest in capacity-building for procurement teams to implement and monitor strategic contracts effectively.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101036763.



Valencia (Spain)

5.27 million inhabitants



Organic production + biodiversity protection

GHG emission reduction

Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

Food education, food culture, + culinary traditions

Market Dialogues in Valencia Region for Better School Meals

What? To bring healthy, sustainable food into public institutions, including schools, while supporting local producers and regional food systems.

When? 2023 - 2024

Who? Schools!

"Embedding sustainability criteria into public procurement lays the foundation for healthier, more equitable school food."

The challenge?

In Valencia region, traditional procurement models were often rigid, distant from local realities, and difficult for small suppliers. Workshops revealed barriers like unfamiliarity with tendering rules and a mismatch between product availability and procurement specifications. These dialogues highlighted differing priorities for cost efficiency and a need for flexibility.

The solution!

Through SchoolFood4Change, Valencia pioneered a market dialogue uniting local farmers, canteen operators, and procurement officials. This dialogue built mutual understanding, mapped food flows, and identified shared priorities for future buying. Consequently the Region is moving towards a dynamic system that better accommodates seasonal, organic, and local produce.

The results:

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Photo by [Silvia Geers](#) on Unsplash

Key Takeaways for Cities:

Bring all key stakeholders together—including producers, caterers, schools, and legal experts—to identify barriers and co-create practical solutions.

Involve legal and financial teams early to align procurement plans with administrative and budget requirements.

Make tenders accessible to smaller suppliers by using geographical or product-based lots, framework agreements, or rotating supplier pools.



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Umeå (Sweden)

133,000 inhabitants



GHG emission reduction

Fossil-free Food Deliveries in Umeå

What? To reduce the climate impact of transporting goods procured by the Municipality of Umeå.

When? 2024 - 2026

Who? Pre-schools, schools, elderly homes, and other facilities managed by the municipality.

"By discussing transport, the municipality draws attention to both its impact and the supplier's work which is a win for both parties."

The challenge?

Umeå Municipality has set a target to reduce climate impact of transport by switching to fossil-free fuels by 2030. Market dialogues showed that suppliers were already making progress towards fossil-free transport, but that companies were at different stages in the transition.

The solution!

Umeå used its climate ambition as a starting point for market dialogues with potential bidders. The procurement set a minimum level for fossil-free deliveries, while bidders could receive additional points for going beyond this requirement. The contract set out gradually increasing requirements over time, allowing suppliers to transition while keeping the tender open to a range of bidders.

The results:

Umeå has developed a green procurement framework for public food services that drives the shift toward fossil-free transport across schools and retirement homes. By using market dialogues and smart evaluation criteria, the city sets a baseline for fossil-free deliveries while rewarding suppliers with higher environmental ambitions. This encourages market progress without excluding smaller suppliers from bidding.

Economic impact: Keeps tenders competitive by using a realistic baseline, rewarding top environmental performers through a balanced price-and-quality evaluation.

Social impact: Reduces noise and air pollution from heavy vehicles, creating cleaner and safer neighborhoods around public facilities.

Environmental impact: Lowers the carbon footprint of daily food logistics, accelerating the city's transition toward climate-neutral transport systems.



Photo by [Shashindhar S](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Key Takeaways for Cities:

Set clear city-wide goals to create a shared direction. Show suppliers and the public what matters to the municipality.

Hold individual market dialogues with bidders to discuss capabilities, opportunities, and contributions during contract period.

Design procurement to reward compliance and ambition while ensuring fair competition, with clear monitoring and penalties built into the contract





Viimsi (Estonia)

22,900 inhabitants



Organic production + biodiversity protection

Improved access to nutritious and affordable food

Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

Viimsi launches new 5-Year Contract for Healthy Food

What? To improve the quality, variety, and sustainability of school meals that are also accessible and appealing to children.

When? 2024 - 2029

Who? Eight public kindergartens and five public schools

"It's important to us that as many children as possible eat a healthy hot school lunch and also learn to put as much on their plate as they will eat."

The challenge?

Viimsi aimed to transform catering across all eight kindergartens and five schools by serving healthy, sustainable meals students loved. Introducing vibrant veggie options, boost variety, cut food waste and champion regional organic food was a goal. Although sourcing around Tallinn was challenging, this initiative strove to connect local menus with Estonia's larger farming regions.

The solution!

Before developing a new procurement contract, the Municipality of Viimis involved different stakeholders from the start, with a market dialogue involving students' opinions. A working group was created, including representatives of schools, kindergartens, parents, and national-level food experts (from the Estonian National Institute for Health Development TAI).

The results:

Following the stakeholder consultations, the Municipality signed a five-year catering contract covering 2024–2029. The biggest change is that more children now eat more varied school meals, including vegetarian options. In total, around 3,450 children and students benefit from the new catering service, alongside teachers and parents. The new contract includes 20% organic food, more fruit and vegetables, a wider range of meals, and greater attention to plant-based options and food waste. Children are encouraged to take only as much food as they eat. The caterer measures food waste twice a year.

- **Economic impact:** The new contract improved the price–quality ratio and created new jobs.
- **Social impact (SROI):** More children are choosing to eat school meals, providing access for children experiencing food insecurity. Breakfast is also served.
- **Environmental impact:** The contract increases organic food use and strengthens focus on food waste reduction through regular monitoring and awareness among students.



Photo by Kylli Kittus on Unsplash

Key Takeaways for Cities:

Organise a market dialogue before launching the procurement to understand what suppliers can offer and ensure that sustainability requirements are both feasible.



Keep the end goal in mind: ensure that school meals are sustainable, and importantly, taste good to children.

Involve students in providing feedback. Students know their food preferences and can also learn more by being involved.



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Tallinn (Estonia)

461,000 inhabitants



Organic production + biodiversity protection

Improved access to nutritious and affordable food

Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

Free Morning Porridge in the City of Tallinn

What? To ensure equal access to a warm, nutritious breakfast for all children in Tallinn's schools, supporting learning, focus, and well-being while reducing inequalities.

When? 2023 - ongoing

Who? All 58 municipal schools in Tallinn

"Equity remains central: all children receive school meals free-of-charge regardless of background"

The challenge?

In Tallinn, the school food procurement guidelines needed to align better with the city's values around health, sustainability, equity, and education. Before launching this initiative, each school followed city-issued procurement instructions, but these lacked strong, actionable sustainability criteria.

The solution!

The City of Tallinn built on what was already in place: its school food procurement guidelines. To strengthen sustainability, the city revised and updated the city-wide guidelines, introducing key requirements that apply to all future school catering tenders. This process went hand in hand with Tallinn's ambition to provide all school children with a warm, free breakfast of porridge every school day.

The results:

Using market dialogues, the city consulted schools, caterers, and sustainability experts (including SF4C partner SEI Tallinn) to develop updated procurement guidelines. These are now applied across all municipally managed schools and monitored by the Education Department in collaboration and the Department for Circular Economy. All public schools in Tallinn follow the same sustainability principles in their catering tenders, benefiting 47,000 children with healthier, high-quality meals while providing suppliers with clearer sustainability expectations.

- **Economic impact:** Saved costs by adding sustainability standards into existing operations instead of creating major new contracts.
- **Social impact (SROI):** Equity remains central: equal meals for all children in Tallinn build lifelong healthy habits.
- **Environmental impact:** Mandates 20-50% organic food, waste prevention plans, reusable tableware, and eco-labelled cleaning



Photo by Jan Ledermann on Unsplash

Key Takeaways for Cities:

Start by building on what you already have!

Engage suppliers early through open dialogue.

Align internally and ensure cross-department collaboration.



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Slovakia

5.5 million inhabitants



Organic production + biodiversity protection

Small farmers + social integration of disadvantaged groups

Food education, food culture, + culinary traditions

Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

'Skutočne zdravá škola' - Truly Healthy School Programme

What? To educate canteen managers to use local, regional, and organic

When? 2023 - 2025

Who? Schools in Slovakia

"Let's build healthy schools and thriving communities together."

The challenge?

Across Slovakia, school canteens often rely on processed food and long supply chains, while local farmers struggle to find reliable markets for their products. This leaves children disconnected from where their food comes from and limits opportunities to improve meal quality, reduce waste, and strengthen local food systems.

The solution!

The 'Skutočne zdravá škola' programme supports schools in taking a Whole School Approach to Food, connecting school kitchens, classrooms, and local communities. Schools are supported in sourcing seasonal food from nearby producers, building relationships with farmers, and integrating food education through gardening, cooking, farm visits, and nutrition lessons.

The results:

With more than 160 schools and 28,000 students participating, the programme has improved school food while strengthening connections between schools, local producers, and communities. More food producers are now ready to supply schools, while schools have increased their measures to reduce food waste.

- **Economic impact:** Schools are creating new markets for local farmers and producers, keeping public spending within the regional economy and supporting jobs. Better menu planning and training help schools use food resources more efficiently.
- **Social impact:** Children gain access to quality, seasonal food while learning its origins through gardening, cooking, farm visits, and food education activities, building lifelong healthy eating habits.
- **Environmental impact:** Schools are reducing food waste, improving menus, and involving students in food activities. The programme promotes seasonal, minimally processed, and local products to support shorter supply chains and environmentally friendly farming.



Photo by [Martin Katler](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Key Takeaways for Cities:

Set Clear Policy Goals:

Establish targets (e.g. 10–20% local/organic sourcing), adjust procurement rules flexibly, and align with national sustainability strategies.

Foster Local Partnerships:

Connect schools with local producers, form school "food teams" with kitchen staff, teachers, and parents. Collaborate with NGOs for education and training.

Start Small, Then Scale:

Launch pilot projects in selected schools, train staff, and monitor food waste, costs, and satisfaction. Use this data to refine and expand the program city-wide.



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Nuremberg (Germany)

544,000 inhabitants



💡 Raised awareness on systemic change

🍎 Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

🤝 Improved access to nutritious and affordable food

'GemüseWert' - Regional Organic Vegetable Supplies

What? To strengthen regional organic vegetable supply chains. To connect farmers, processors, retailers, and caterers, thus supporting organic farming and sustainable food procurement.

When? December 2020 - July 2025

Who? Producers, suppliers, schools, hospitals, catering companies, urban society

"Change is feasible if local authorities take bold steps and take practitioners seriously."

The challenge?

Despite growing demand for organic vegetables in Nuremberg, regional supply chains remained fragmented and dependent on centralised distribution. Regional farms faced barriers to organic conversion, limited sales channels, and complex logistics, while consumers lacked awareness of where their food comes from and how it is produced.

The solution!

'GemüseWert' established networks and specialist working groups on organic conversion, logistics, product development, and processing. New collaborations between farmers, processors, logistics partners, retailers, and the catering sector sparked practical regional solutions. Educational campaigns and public relations work raised awareness of regional organic products, supported by scientific evaluation.

The results:

'GemüseWert' strengthened cooperation across the regional food system, creating new opportunities for farmers, processors, retailers, and caterers. Several farms successfully switched to organic production, increasing availability of regional organic products through better logistics and new sales channels. Children and consumers are learning more about healthy, regional, and organic food through educational activities and school projects.

- **Economic impact:** Farmers benefit from new sales opportunities and support in switching to organic production, while buyers benefit from more reliable access to regional products.
- **Social Impact (SROI):** Educational and hands-on activities have increased awareness of healthy, regional, and organic food, especially among children and young people.
- **Environmental impact:** More regional organic production and improved logistics lay the foundations for more sustainable food sourcing and procurement, although the direct impact on emissions and food waste cannot yet be measured.



Photo by [Mateo Krossler](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Key Takeaways for Cities:

💡 **Involve producers, suppliers, canteens and administration early on equal footing.** A strong network is the basis for sustainable structures and mutual trust.



💡 **Start with concrete, achievable sub-goals.**

Visible successes create motivation and acceptance among all those involved.

💡 **Ensure clear political support** – e.g. through council resolutions or integration into a municipal nutrition strategy. This creates reliability for regional partners and facilitates procurement in terms of sustainability.



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Nuoro (Italy)

36,000 inhabitants



Organic production + biodiversity protection

Small farmers + social integration of disadvantaged groups

GHG emission reduction

Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

Enhancing Local Economies through Market Dialogues

What? To gather stakeholder input for school food procurement tenders. To transparently anticipate challenges in sourcing organic and local produce.

When? 2023

Who? Producers, suppliers, schools, hospitals, catering companies, urban society

The challenge?

In March 2023, the Municipality of Nuoro wanted to introduce Minimum Environmental Criteria (CAM = Criteri Ambientali Minimi) into its school food procurement tender while increasing the share of organic and locally sourced food in school canteens. The key challenge was ensuring that suppliers were ready and able to meet these requirements.

The solution!

SF4C partner Fondazione Ecosistemi and the Municipality of Nuoro organised a participatory procurement process. Local food suppliers, caterers, city representatives, local NGOs and trade unions engaged in co-creative workshops, public food policy and market discussions to gather feedback on sustainability criteria, food waste reduction targets, and market readiness to identify gaps early and together.

The results:

Dialogues and workshops identified potential barriers to organic sourcing and environmental impact tracking in public procurement.

More importantly, they created a shared vision for Nuoro's school canteens by involving local stakeholders in the process. The Municipality of Nuoro built trust and transparency, while creating a platform for continuous improvement.

- **Economic impact:** The needs and barriers of local producers and suppliers were considered through early dialogue, improving access to public procurement opportunities.
- **Social impact:** The participatory process strengthened community trust in the municipality and its services.
- **Environmental impact:** The process contributed to improved food quality in school canteens, strengthening food waste monitoring, and shaping more ambitious sustainability criteria for future tenders.

Key Takeaways for Cities:

Clarify your goals: Before launching any stakeholder process, define your goals clearly!



Engage a broad range of stakeholders: Involve everyone who influences or is impacted by school food.

Use dialogue as a tool for shaping strategy: Use consultations to collect practical insights that feed directly into your tender design and long-term strategy.



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Milan (Italy)

1.2 million inhabitants



Food education, food culture, + culinary traditions

Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

Using Procurement to Enable Food Education

What? To promote healthy and sustainable eating by integrating food education into school food procurement.

When? 2024 - 2025

Who? Around 150 primary and secondary schools (6 to 13 year old children)

"By making reliable nutrition information accessible to everyone, teachers and their lessons can inspire children."

The challenge?

While Milan's school catering system already provided healthy meals, the city wanted to extend learning beyond the plate and actively engage teachers, children, and families. The challenge was to encourage suppliers to contribute innovative educational activities while ensuring that all content was scientifically accurate, accessible, and aligned with the city's objectives.

The solution!

In its fruit and vegetable procurement tender, the City of Milan included an educational project as part of evaluation criteria, awarding more points for high-quality proposals. The winning supplier developed an interactive, educational website on healthy eating. All content was jointly reviewed and approved by the Municipality of Milan and Milano Ristorazione to ensure quality and consistency.

The results:

Launched in October 2025, the online platform provides teachers, children, and families with free, engaging resources that promote healthier eating habits and increase awareness of sustainable diets. By embedding food education within the procurement process, Milan demonstrated how suppliers can become active partners in achieving broader public health objectives.

- **Economic impact:** The project strengthens the visibility of seasonal products and supports local supply chains by promoting the fruit and vegetables used in Milan's school catering system.
- **Social impact:** Free, interactive educational resources improve access to food education for teachers, children, and families, helping to increase food literacy and reduce inequalities.
- **Environmental impact:** By encouraging the consumption of seasonal fruit and raising awareness of sustainable food choices, the project contributes to more environmentally responsible consumption patterns.



Photo by Xiaogian Shen on Unsplash

Key Takeaways for Cities:

Include educational added value as an evaluation criterion in procurement procedures.



Co-design educational content with suppliers and educators to ensure it meets users' needs.

Establish a joint review process to guarantee scientific accuracy and alignment with public objectives.



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Malmö (Sweden)

365,644 inhabitants



Food education, food culture, + culinary traditions

Organic production + biodiversity protection

Small farmers + social integration of disadvantaged groups

Strengthening Territoriality through Dynamic Purchasing

What? To build new supplier relationships and increase opportunities for local and small-scale food producers in Malmö's schools and preschools through a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS).

When? 2024 - ongoing

Who? Schools and pre-schools

"When we work locally with suppliers we can foster awareness for a more sustainable food system in our schools."

The challenge?

Malmö's traditional procurement model was primarily designed for large-scale suppliers, making it difficult for local and small-scale producers to participate in school food procurement. A new procurement model is setting out to address this challenge.

The solution!

Malmö introduced a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), allowing up to 10% of the city's wholesale food procurement budget to be spent on products from local and small-scale producers. To strengthen the link between food procurement and food education, participating producers must also be able to host study visits from Malmö's schools and preschools during the school day.

The results:

Launched in October 2024, Malmö's procurement model focuses on large scale suppliers. As it is the first time the Municipality has worked with small scale local producers for school food, there is a lot of potential for growth and better awareness for school food procurement. The results are preliminary but there are some expected outcomes from the procurement work in Malmö.

- **Economic impact:** With this model, Malmö is strengthening support for local producers and continuing to build partnerships for local economic collaboration.
- **Social impact:** As the work continues, study visits will ensure that children know where their food comes from and how it is produced.
- **Environmental impact:** By increasing sustainable sourcing, it is expected that emissions and impact of school food will decrease over time.



Photo by [Veljko Radan](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Key Takeaways for Cities:

Engage early with your main supplier to identify opportunities for integrating local and small-scale producers.



Build relationships with local producers to understand their capacity, needs, and potential to supply schools.

Be innovative in your procurement requirements to create opportunities for more sustainable and local sourcing.



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Lyon (France)

520,000 inhabitants



💡 Raised awareness on systemic change

🍎 Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

🧑‍🌾 Small farmers + social integration of disadvantaged groups

Institutionalising Market Dialogues through the 'Agricultural Commission'

What? To strengthen market dialogues for fair and balanced school catering through the agricultural commission. To raise local food supplies through balanced relationships with producers.

When? 2026 - 2030

Who? 207 publicly managed pre- and elementary schools

"Thanks to high quality requirements achieved through market dialogue, school food quality in Lyon has increased since 2022."

The challenge?

Establishing the Agricultural Commission required building trust between stakeholders before sensitive information, constraints, and expectations could be openly discussed. Creating a common foundation for collaboration was essential to develop a mutual understanding of key concepts such as local/ regional sourcing.

The solution!

Lyon established the Agricultural Commission in its 2022–2026 school catering tender to address (organic and local) food supplies and relationships with farmers. Participation of the city, agricultural organisations and farmers are included as a contractual requirement for the caterer as a permanent space for dialogue, joint problem-solving, and collaboration.

The results:

Since its launch, the Agricultural Commission has provided a trusted space to turn dialogue into concrete, system-wide improvements. It unites all school food supply stakeholders: the city, Education and Children's City Department, elected officials, agricultural organisations, farmers and suppliers.

- **Economic impact:** The Commission provided support which expanded market opportunities, fair trade, and long-term demand for local producers, boosting sales, hiring and land management.
- **Social impact:** The Commission has empowered farmers with a voice in decision-making, fostering more balanced relationships across the supply chain.
- **Environmental impact:** The Commission has contributed to increased share of organic and local food while supporting lower-emission sourcing. Collaborative crop planning with farmers and suppliers reduces food waste.



Photo by William Justen de Vasconcellos on Unsplash

Key Takeaways for Cities:

Embed participation in the commission within tender specifications, as a requirement for all successful applicants.



Establish clear rules and shared definitions early, ensuring a common understanding of objectives, roles, and expectations among all partners.

Bring all key stakeholders to the table and ensure equal participation, creating a trusted space where every perspective can contribute to solutions.





Leuven (Belgium)

104,189 inhabitants



💡 Raised awareness on systemic change

🍎 Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

🧑‍🌾 Small farmers + social integration of disadvantaged groups

Connecting Schools and Suppliers for Sustainable Food

What? To promote more healthy and sustainable school food, Leuven worked to improve understanding for healthy food offers in schools through engagement with suppliers and caterers across the city.

When? 2025 - ongoing

Who? Schools, school food suppliers and caterers.

"Staying close to schools helps motivate them to think about their tender"

The challenge?

SF4C is implemented by Leuven's Education Department. Since food procurement decisions are made by individual schools rather than the city, the challenge was to understand existing food provision networks and identify support needs for schools to integrate sustainability criteria into their purchasing decisions, moving beyond education for real change.

The solution!

Leuven identified three solutions through close local collaboration. School food provision, procurement practices, and school criteria were mapped to help schools select caterers and suppliers. The City's Education Department organised a market dialogue to discuss needs, barriers, and sustainability criteria and developed a public list of screened school procurement providers.

The results:

Leuven's mapping exercise and market dialogue provided valuable insights into school food provision, procurement practices bringing schools and suppliers together to exchange perspectives, align expectations, and build a shared vision.

While schools are not required to use the public list that emerged from the market dialogues, it will nonetheless serve as a trusted guide for procurement decisions.

- **Economic impact:** Leuven launched an open call for suppliers and caterers, developing a public provider list that meets city and school criteria to guide future purchasing decisions.
- **Social impact:** Strengthened collaboration by helping schools explain their needs while giving suppliers a voice to provide feedback on feasibility.
- **Environmental impact:** Sends a clear signal to the market regarding the specific sustainability standards the city seeks to promote.



Photo by Marek Lumiton / Unsplash

Key Takeaways for Cities:

💡 **This is a replicable roadmap!**
Engage schools, invite the market to co-create solutions, and make your values visible in procurement. It's about shifting from fragmented decisions to collective impact.

💡 **Small steps count, even if there is no immediate impact/ change show.**

💡 **Reach out to other city departments:** Through collaboration you can inspire and get inspired by your colleagues. Obstacles start to turn into possibilities.



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Essen (Germany)

596,973 inhabitants



 Raised awareness on systemic change

 Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

 Improved access to nutritious and affordable food

Food Strategy Networks to Drive Food System Change

What? To promote food education, e.g. education on food origins, production and supply chains. To foster public discussions through local network and social participation building stakeholder connections.

When? 2023 - ongoing

Who? All food system actors, including schools (administration), youth, kitchen staff, the environmental agency, procurement department, civil-society organisations, etc.

The challenge?

Major changes to school food procurement were not feasible in the short term due to existing administrative and political conditions. The first priority was therefore to build a shared understanding of school meal systems and responsibilities across the administration to lay the groundwork for change.

The solution!

The Food Strategy Network strengthens departmental cooperation and political support for sustainable food practices. By connecting committed stakeholders, the initiative builds continuous dialogue to gradually influence long-term procurement policy, requiring ambition, patience, and interdisciplinary collaboration to lay foundations for the future.

The results:

It is remarkable to see how much change can be driven through strong networks and committed people.

Since October 2023, Essen's Food Strategy Network has built immense momentum, bringing together over 50 organisations, associations, federations, administrative departments, and civil society groups.

- **Economic impact:** Connects diverse sectors to build a sustainable food system for the wider population, driving long-term economic change.
- **Social impact:** Fosters regular collaboration and a shared mission statement, uniting dedicated people to benefit future generations.
- **Environmental Impact:** Directs joint knowledge exchange and thematic priorities toward creating a draft Food Strategy for Essen by spring 2026.



Key Takeaways for Cities:

Communicate!

Communicate what you are doing (how and why) towards others within and outside your municipality – for better mutual understanding and transparency!

Be inclusive:

Invite the general public to join you and share their perspectives!

Implement structures for regular meetings with all people interested, while making sure these are moderated and guided by an assigned responsible person and supported by municipal structures.



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Czech Republic

10.5 million inhabitants



Organic production + biodiversity protection

Small farmers + social integration of disadvantaged groups

GHG emission reduction

Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

Market Dialogues between Canteen Managers and Procurers

What? To educate school canteen managers about the procurement of fresh, seasonal (organic) produce, from local or regional sources. And to support dialogue between school canteen managers and food procurers.

When? 2023 - 2025

Who? 100 schools located in different Czech cities.

"At the heart of our programme is a commitment to sourcing food directly from local farmers and food businesses."

The challenge?

Across the country, school meals often rely on processed foods with long supply chains, disconnecting children from the origins of their meals. Meanwhile, local farmers struggle to find stable markets. All of this undermines children's health, sustainability goals, and community cohesion.

The solution!

The Skutečně zdravá škola programme takes a whole-school approach to transform how schools think about food, linking school kitchens, classrooms, and communities to a rich culture of healthy, sustainable eating. Schools serve fresh, seasonal meals sourced from local farmers and integrate food education into everyday learning, from gardening and cooking to farm visits and nutrition lessons.

The results:

The "Skutečně zdravá škola" programme transforms school food culture by linking kitchens, classrooms, and communities. Through fresh, local, seasonal meals and practical food education, schools earn awards that set clear quality standards, requiring 5–10% organic food at higher tiers.

- **Economic impact:** Boosts regional economies by creating reliable customers for local farmers, supporting shorter supply chains, and keeping public funds circulating locally.
- **Social impact:** Fosters healthier children, happier families, and stronger communities by giving parents and local producers a direct voice through collaborative workshops and events.
- **Environmental impact:** Promotes eco-friendly farming practices and lowers transport emissions. By fulfilling 15 of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, it drives long-term sustainability leadership.



Key Takeaways for Cities:

Set specific goals and align with national and EU strategies to leverage support.



Build strong partnerships that embed initiatives into the community.

Invest in capacity building and pilot projects and make sure to provide trainings and monitor results!



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Budapest (Hungary)

1.685 million inhabitants



Organic production + biodiversity protection

Small farmers + social integration of disadvantaged groups

GHG emission reduction

Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

Pilot Tender for Buffet-style Catering at School

What? To implement sustainable school catering practices, starting with two pilot schools in Ferencváros (IXth district of Budapest), reaching over 650 students.

When? 2023 - 2025

Who? 100 schools located in different Czech cities.

"This work isn't just about food but rather education, inclusion and dignity."

The challenge?

Budapest Municipality aims to work beyond schools to increase their impact with a focus on providing food education and nutritious food to more schools in the city. Starting with two pilot schools in Ferencváros, buffet-style catering service is to be provided and sustainability criteria specified in the public procurement tender are to be met by the suppliers.

The solution!

On behalf of the Ferencváros Municipal Government and with the support of SF4C, an interdisciplinary team was assembled to design the tender, setting new standards for the school meals of two pilot schools, and empowering children to choose from more fruits, vegetables, and whole grain products.

The results:

A new catering tender reaches over 650 students in Budapest's IXth district, going beyond public regulations to improve access to healthy food with extra weekly fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Meanwhile, the Whole School Food Approach helps children try new items and respect their plates in a self-service canteen environment.

- **Economic impact:** Smart menu planning and training helps schools use resources more efficiently, improving economic resilience.
- **Social Impact (SROI):** Social inequalities are reduced through buffet-style catering in schools. Meals are free of charge for the children of disadvantaged families.
- **Environmental Impact:** Special meals are delivered in eco-friendly packaging, supporting children with dietary needs without compromising environmental goals.



Photo by Ljubomir Žarković on Unsplash

Key Takeaways for Cities:

Try to secure strong commitment and support from the local authority!



Conduct a **detailed feasibility study in advance** and engage in market dialogue early in tenders to elaborate technical specifications.

Involve all stakeholders through an interdisciplinary team of experts, and also involve the children and teachers to learn more about their wishes and needs.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101036763.



Copenhagen (Denmark)

667,099 inhabitants



Organic production + biodiversity protection

Small farmers + social integration of disadvantaged groups

GHG emission reduction

Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

Engaging with the Market for Better Tenders

What? To purchase food of good quality for kitchens operated by the City of Copenhagen.

When? 2025 (duration: 4 years)

Who? For kitchens in schools, elderly homes and other institutions for people in vulnerable situations.

"By being ambitious, staying in dialogue with suppliers and adjusting our requirements where needed, we found workable solutions."

The challenge?

In Copenhagen, the challenge at hand is to reconcile sustainability goals in food procurement with market conditions and what can be delivered. Their large municipal food system, including city-managed kitchens, should support both climate goals and healthy diets, in line with the [Danish Dietary Guidelines](#), tackling food waste while offering plant-based food.

The solution!

To address all these challenges, Copenhagen set clear and ambitious requirements in their public food tenders. Market dialogues between an internal working group of the city and market participants were held at an early stage. Requirements were adjusted to the market and then included in the tender.

The results:

By demanding high packaging, vehicle, and quality standards, the city included award criteria for seasonal, fairtrade, and eco-labelled products. This process led to 90% green delivery vehicles and over 150 seasonal product varieties, widening the climate-friendly options for municipal kitchens. Flexible ordering also allows switching stock items to order-on-demand to minimise supplier food waste.

- **Economic impact:** Supports suppliers and local kitchens by offering flexible ordering terms that protect resources and reduce financial losses across the value chain.
- **Social impact (SROI):** Encourages suppliers to offer internships and job opportunities to people in search of employment through contract performance agreements.
- **Environmental impact:** Lowers the carbon footprint of meals while requiring suppliers to actively minimise food waste and use green vehicles for deliveries.



Photo by Anders Mortensen on Unsplash

Key Takeaways for Cities:

Clear sustainability goals give suppliers direction, while tender requirements turn those goals into real impact.



Combine high standards for quality and green transport with flexibility, like on-demand delivery to prevent supplier food waste.

Talk to the market early to understand what is realistic. Work closely with your own kitchens, so they are ready to buy and use more sustainable products. Regular dialogue helps solve practical challenges and reduce complexity.





Ghent (Belgium)

272,389 inhabitants



Organic production + biodiversity protection

Small farmers + social integration of disadvantaged groups

GHG emission reduction

Nutrition, quality, taste, freshness, seasonality

Procurement Working Group to Drive Systemic Change

What? To disseminate key learnings from SF4C; foster collaboration between organisations; create a cascade effect beyond schools and cities; build capacity and shared understanding; and facilitate exchange of good practices.

When? 2023 - ongoing

Who? Procurement officers working for public institutions

"In Ghent, we saw the opportunity to go beyond schools and use public procurement as a tool to spark broader change across the public sector."

The challenge?

We wanted to ensure that the strong principles introduced by SchoolFood4Change, like promoting healthy nutrition, supporting the protein shift, reducing climate impact, and increasing organic food, would also apply outside schools and city limits.

The solution!

Our solution was to organise a working group for procurement officers from across Flanders. We brought together professionals from various public institutions, such as cities, care facilities, and other public bodies, to share insights, align strategies, and explore how SF4C principles could be embedded in broader procurement practices.

The results:

Ghent's promising model builds participant confidence in applying sustainable criteria, discovering new suppliers, and aligning procurement policies.

This simple, cost-effective approach requires no major investments, just coordination and a shared commitment to using existing tools.

- **Economic impact:** The initiative is currently too new to measure specific financial impacts, but it utilises a highly scalable, low-cost approach to improve future value for money.
- **Social impact (SROI):** Delivers tangible benefits to vulnerable individuals in psychiatric centers, elderly care facilities, and residential care homes by improving their daily food services.
- **Environmental impact:** Direct methods to measure waste or emission drops are not yet active due to the short time frame, but the project builds crucial foundations for sustainable sourcing.



Photo by Gokulon Unmesh

Key Takeaways for Cities:

A few motivated individuals are enough to get started.

Use your existing contacts, i.e. people who are already working on sustainable food or procurement.



Keep it nerdy and practical:

Procurement officers want to talk about rules, laws, procedures, and real cases – not abstract visions.

Let the group shape itself: Set up the first meeting, but let participants decide the topics, frequency, and format. Shared ownership builds trust and long-term engagement. It's about co-creating the agenda together.

