

JOINT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING FOOD SYSTEMS & VALUE CHAINS

The following policy recommendations have been drafted based on the agroBRIDGES, COCOREADO, COACH and BEATLES projects' results and related tools, addressing food sustainability policies and public food procurement strategies at various governance levels (regional, national, EU level), while making use of national /regional examples and case studies.

The aim of this document is to empower policy makers towards developing conducive policies and incentives to promote **local food consumption models** and maximise the benefits for human health, promote socioeconomic development and create economic benefits in a sustainable and equitable manner.

A panel discussion took place during the Joint Clustering Event in Brussels on **September 21st, 2023**, among representatives of the 4 EU projects to reach a set of commonly agreed points regarding actions and reforms in public policy to expand the projects' impact and outreach.

Panelists:

- **Eirini Efthymiadou** (Q-PLAN: Coordinator of the agroBRIDGES project) - moderator
- **Erik Mathijs** (KU Leuven: Coordinator of the COCOREADO project)
- **Peter Defranceschi** (ICLEI: Partner of the COACH project consortium)
- **Serafín Pazos Vidal** (European Association for Innovation in Local Development - AEIDL: Partner of the BEATLES project consortium)

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I – Context and basis for public policies on food and farming.

The following recommendations address conceptual and systemic issues that policy makers should incorporate in the design of effective, well-targeted and clear policies for sustainable agri-food production:

- **Policy makers at EU level should define and integrate key terminology, in order to design meaningful and fair policies and strategies for sustainable food systems.**
 - Key terminology related to sustainable agrifood is not universally defined in the EU (e.g. Short Food Supply Chain, small-scale farmer, “healthy” food, agro-ecological practices,

etc.), as these are subject to the diverse context of agrifood systems at a national and regional contexts. Policy makers at national and local level should use specific definitions, in line with the idiosyncratic features of territorial food systems in their jurisdiction, making use of working definitions in research. This way, policies are designed, monitored and assessed against concrete targets and criteria.

- For instance, a working definition for SFSCs is proposed by EIP-AGRI Focus Group of experts¹ i.e. “Short food chains have as few links as possible between the food producer and the citizen who eats the food.[...]”
 - Policymakers should place particular focus on the adoption of such terminology in policy contexts, making sure that they promote correct targeting of agrifood actors and desired practices / outcomes, while avoiding involuntary bias and negative impact.
 - The EU can be of support by introducing guidelines on the adoption of location-specific definitions in local / national food policies².
 - In the case of SFSCs, **focus should also be placed on the business model or value chain synthesis** (e.g. minimum involvement of intermediaries, direct marketing to the end-consumer), rather than the size of production.
- **Policy makers should check and validate assumptions that motivate the rationale of agri-food policies.** The policy study and workshops of BEATLES project identified instances in the new CAP where agricultural practices with climate-negative impacts are implicitly promoted, in misalignment with the overall vision of the policy³. Assumptions related to the needs and behaviour of agrifood actors should also be very carefully assessed, as they might not be realistic.
 - **Policy makers should holistically assess local agri-food ecosystems to design policies,** in line with anticipated needs and behaviour of involved actors as well as their expected benefits and costs. Important pillars to understand agrifood ecosystem synthesis include:
 - Map the actors involved in the agrifood ecosystem/ SFSCs.
 - Identify local products and value chains and their link to the “public plate” (public food procurement) in support of regional food resilience
 - Study system dynamics, e.g. distribution of agri-food marketing functions⁴ among producers, intermediaries and consumers.
 - Assess reliance of policies and incentives on farmers’ business decisions (change of agri-food practices, investments, etc.), as well as on consumers’ invested time (e.g., volunteering activities) and implicit / explicit cost of taking action.

¹ The full working definition of SFSCs is provided in the EIP-AGRI Focus Group Final Report [“Innovative Short Food Supply Chain Management”](#), 2015, p. 6

² The [Manifesto for Establishing Minimum Standards for Public Canteens Across the EU](#)” (p.10) of the “Buy Better Food” coalition proposes a definition of “small-scale farmers” at EU-scale that utilises universal elements, allowing context-specific adaptation.

³ BEATLES - [D1.1](#) “Integrated framework of decision-making factors” (pending official EC approval)

⁴ Nine marketing functions are introduced in [Beierlein et al. \(2014\)](#), [“Principles of Agribusiness Management”](#): selling, buying, storage, transportation, processing, grades & standards, financing, risk-taking, market information.

- **Simplified public procurement policies and frameworks.**
 - **Policies and public food procurement policies should be supported by easy-to-access and simple procedures, limiting complexity and bureaucracy to the best possible extent.** Simplicity is crucial for small-scale farmers' ability to participate among others to public food tenders (e.g. via the Dynamic Purchasing System), standardisation and certification for products, access to financing, with reduced costs and resources. On the other hand, local policy makers and facilitators can offer practical support and guidance to local stakeholders more easily⁵.
 - **Policy makers should promote an integrated cross-sectoral approach,** designing food policies and public procurement processes that contribute to policies and strategies relevant to climate change, health, urban development, local economic development and social justice/poverty alleviation, to name a few.
 - **The cost-benefit ratio of policy reforms should be considered carefully and holistically, in both the long-term and short-term horizon,** as financing may become a barrier towards the implementation of improved strategies. There are examples of public food procurement practices that promote food sustainability without introducing additional costs or even leading to direct cost-reduction⁶. In other cases, short-term costs of promoting healthy food may be offset by long-term benefits and cost-saving in healthcare and other policy areas.
- **Policies should embrace the diversity of national and regional food systems.** Food and agricultural policies should be simple but “one-size-fits-all” should be avoided.
 - A framework should be defined at EU-level, complemented by targeted regional / national strategies and policies. For instance, the potential of the new CAP has not been exploited at its fullest. Member States should invest greater effort to programme CAP interventions focusing on their regional and territorial needs. This focus on diverse approaches is essential for supporting food security and resilience, linking among others to biodiversity, diversity of (big and small) farmers, as well as food culture diversity.

II – Recommended policy approaches for better inclusion of SFSCs in public food procurement and promotion of sustainable food systems.

The following instruments and approaches have been tested in various European cities to support the inclusion of SFSCs and small-scale farmers, promote sustainability and increase the share of healthy, nutritious, and high-quality food in the “public plate”. Experience shows that such practices reduce administrative burden, are more flexible and are not in violation with EU regulations on public procurement:

⁵ BEATLES - [D1.1](#) “Integrated framework of decision-making factors”

⁶ The [Torres Vedras municipality](#) is an indicative example, as organic food is promoted in school canteens with no additional cost, by introducing plant-based protein and food waste reduction.

- **“Smart” use of the legal framework and EU regulations in public food procurement is required by public institutions** to create a favourable framework for the inclusion of SFSCs in tendering processes⁷. Sustainable public food procurement proved to address most of the Sustainable Development Goals in one plate, thus offering a low hanging fruit for policy makers.
- **Stakeholder and market dialogues should be introduced in various stages of the public food procurement process**, with such mechanisms being applicable in the ideation, needs assessment, tender draft hearing, information meetings phases of the procurement cycle:
 - *Notable examples: City of Copenhagen⁸, City of Ghent⁹.*
- **Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) and digital market platforms should be promoted and used for inclusive food procurement.** Mini-tenders should be published for flexibility and supply of small quantities.
 - *Notable example: City of Copenhagen.*
- **Minimum mandatory criteria should be introduced to promote sustainable and healthy food procurement**, as described in the [Manifesto for Establishing Minimum Standards for Public Canteens Across the EU](#)” of the “Buy Better Food” coalition¹⁰ that introduces 7 mandatory and optional criteria for public canteens to promote high quality, nutritiousness and sustainability of food over low price, including concrete tender criteria, verification and enablers.
 - *Notable example: City of Bergamo¹¹*
- **Traditional and community-based financial instruments should be used.** Such instruments should promote investing behaviour of consumers and other intermediaries towards supporting the food system and particularly small-scale farmers. Crowdfunding¹² could be an effective instrument to stimulate community-driven financing.

III – Recommended approaches for community building, engagement, and innovation.

The following recommendations provide tips for policy makers towards making use of bottom-up approaches to effectively implement public food policies, including ecosystem coordination, stakeholder participation and knowledge exchange activities to spark innovation:

- **Public food policies should capitalise on actions of value-chain clusters, business development organisations and producers’ networks**, as they possess the resources and

⁷ For practical information, please see read Chapter 1 of the “**Legal Guide on Farm to Fork Procurement**” – available on the COACH Communications, Learning and Innovation Platform (URL: <https://hub.urgenci.net/resource/legal-guide-on-farm-to-fork-procurement/>).

⁸ **COACH Project – Urgenci Hub: Copenhagen best practice** (URL: <https://hub.urgenci.net/resource/best-practice-coach-copenhagen/>)

⁹ **COACH Project – Urgenci Hub: (Sustainability vision and strategy of the City of Ghent** (URL: <https://hub.urgenci.net/resource/sustainability-vision-and-strategy-of-the-city-of-ghent/>)

¹⁰ **Buy Better Food (2022): “Manifesto for establishing minimum standards for public canteens across the EU”**, URL: <https://buybetterfood.eu/documents/sustainable-food-procurement-manifesto>

¹¹ **COACH Project – Urgenci Hub: Bergamo best practice** (URL: <https://hub.urgenci.net/resource/best-practice-coach-bergamo/>)

¹² **agroBRIDGES Toolbox - “Hear my voice” tool: Crowdfunding guide for farmers** (URL: https://agrobridges-toolbox.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Crowdfunding-English_v1.pdf)

capacity to coordinate actions within the agri-food ecosystems and stimulate change. Such coordination activities may include:

- Organisation of B2B and networking activities.
 - Leading business skills development initiatives for farmers.
 - Raising awareness about financial instruments and opportunities for farmers/ SFSCs.
 - Supporting farmers to participate in public food tenders.
 - Engaging consumers through community-oriented events, needs expression, product validation, process innovation.
- **Participatory food governance should be promoted through increased engagement of consumers / citizens**, ensuring social and ecological justice, in line with human rights. Policy makers at all levels should properly incorporate citizens' agency in food system transformation, as market-oriented approaches currently dominate EU policies¹³.
 - Food Policy Councils are proposed by COACH project as an essential mechanism to involve food system actors at different scales in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies. Food Policy Councils should aim at making diverse voices heard, especially those of marginalised and underprivileged citizens. The Vienna Food Policy Council is considered a good practice in this respect¹⁴.
 - Proper incentives should be designed for enhancing citizens' participation, considering that they invest their time on a volunteering basis, in contrast with actors whose participation in policymaking procedures is part of their main economic activity and therefore have resources to commit.
 - **Roadmaps should be developed for inspiration and replication of SFSC good practices, using contextual information**, highlighting idiosyncratic (specific) factors that may have led to success of particular business models.

IV – Dissemination strategy for policy recommendations.

The following points outline the most effective approaches in informing and empowering policy makers across Europe to implement improved strategies regarding sustainable food systems, improved public food procurement mechanisms and promote the inclusion of SFSCs and small-scale farmers in the supply chain:

- **Dissemination of policy recommendations from a bottom-up perspective (e.g. local, regional national institutions)**, in addition to EU-level policy bodies and institutions. The latter may be harder to approach and instigate meaningful change.

¹³ **COACH Project – Urgenci Hub:** Farm-to-fork procurement toolkit (URL: <https://hub.urgenci.net/resource/policy-brief-human-rights-must-be-placed-at-the-heart-of-eu-food-systems-transformation/>)

¹⁴ Read the full case study about the [Vienna Food Policy Council](#) on the COACH Communications, Innovation and Learning Platform.

- **Raising awareness about successful cases of SFSC / sustainable food integration in public food procurement processes**, to support policy makers in the implementation of successful procurement models and policies for food. Such good practices are hard to find, thus making the need for such examples highly relevant. The Sustainable Food Procurement Toolkit of COACH provides 6 best practices¹⁵:
 - **Best practices:** Bergamo, City of Copenhagen, City of Ghent, Dordogne, Växjö, Torres Vedras
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V – Further reading:

- **Policy studies:**
 - BEATLES - [D1.1](#) “Integrated framework of decision-making factors” (pending EC approval)
 - COCOREADO – [Report](#) “Barriers for small-scale farmers in public food procurement”
 - agroBRIDGES – [D1.5](#) “Review of SFSC policy aspects”
- **Good practices and case studies:**
 - COCOREADO – [D4.1](#) “Report on good practices for sustainable public food procurement”
 - COACH - [Good practices of sustainable public food procurement](#) (6 case studies)
- **Policy briefs and policy recommendations:**
 - COCOREADO – [Policy briefs](#)
 - COACH – [Policy briefs](#)
 - “Buy Better Food” Coalition - [“Sustainable Food Manifesto”](#)
- **Tools and training for public food procurement:**
 - agroBRIDGES – [Training programme for public food procurement](#)
 - COACH – [Legal toolkit for food procurement](#)

¹⁵ COACH Project – Urgenci Hub: Farm-to-fork procurement toolkit (URL: <https://hub.urgenci.net/public-procurement/>)