

MALMÖ SWEDEN

SCHOOL MEALS FOR CHANGE

This food policy snapshot is based on an interview with Gunilla Andersson, Project Lead, Policy for Sustainable Development and Food at the City of Malmö Department of the Environment. Written by Erin Ronald, WWF Sweden.

GLASGOW FOOD AND CLIMATE DECLARATION

When it comes to integrated food policy, many Swedish cities have already begun sowing the seeds of sustainability. MALMÖ, a city in Sweden's southern region, has become renowned for its urban environmental leadership. In 2010, a partnership between elected officials, school canteens, and Malmö's Environmental Department, led to a 10-year Policy for SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND FOOD. The main objective of the policy was to ensure good food for all. To do so, Malmö committed to achieve all organic procurement by 2020 (interpreted as 90% due to limited availability) and reduce its food-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 40% from 1990 levels. Key strategies to achieve these goals included improving public procurement by increasing purchase of organic and local ingredients, improving transport efficiency (distance, vehicle, packing efficiency, fuel choice), and transforming the foods served in schools (minimizing empty calories, serving high-quality meat and vegetables, reducing meat consumption, reducing waste). Mealtimes have played an integral part in creating a food culture based on 'togetherness' and enjoyment. Between 2010 and 2020, Malmö succeeded in increasing organic food procurement from 29% to 70%, and reducing its quantifiable food-related emissions by 30%.

“ In Sweden we have a law stating that food in schools should be free of charge, cooked, hot, and nutritious, according to the nutrition requirements. So you can't serve unhealthy food, it's actually illegal.”

ENABLERS

EDUCATION AND COLLABORATION

As soon as funding was acquired to launch Malmö's sustainable food policy, its Environmental Department initiated an inspirational campaign to highlight the policy's most impactful areas for intervention: increasing organic public procurement and reducing meat consumption. This 3-year campaign focused on 1) how food and climate are connected, 2) nutritious menu planning with less meat, and 3) practical cooking classes. The campaign also included education for teachers and existing canteen cook networks. Though the Environmental Department spearheaded policy development and monitoring, other city departments managed public procurement of food, requiring consistent inter-departmental communication and collaboration to meet policy objectives.

ENGAGING CANTEEN COOKS

When Malmö conducted a mid-term evaluation of its policy in 2015, it found that the percentage of organic food the City was procuring was steadily increasing, but little progress was being made on food-related GHG emissions. To meet this second target, Malmö renewed its efforts to increase plant-based food in schools. To transform school meals, the City worked closely with the main school menu planner and a local network of experienced canteen cooks. To meet Malmö's food procurement emissions targets, the group set a weekly carbon emission allotment for themselves using WWF'S ONE PLANET PLATE tool. The group also started using CGI's menu-planning tool, Aromi, to determine the GHG emissions produced by each potential dish, and now plan a diversity of meals under their weekly emissions targets.

BARRIERS

A CHANGING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Over ten years, Malmö's Policy for Sustainable Development and Food has faced a changing political landscape. In its early years, substantial resources were dedicated to policy implementation, and the City witnessed significant progress. However, as municipal leadership changed, financial support for Malmö's food initiatives waned, affecting policy progress and the ability for campaigns to reach as many constituents. Developing sustainable food policies takes time, so maintaining political willingness and leadership is crucial to their success, particularly in the face of administrative change. Fortunately, following several years of uncertainty, Malmö's Environment Committee has undertaken an initiative to renew the Policy in 2021.

MARKET FORCES AND TRADE-OFFS

By working with suppliers and procurement departments within the City, Malmö was able to increase organic food procurement to 70% by 2020. Achieving the last 30%, however, has proven the most challenging. While the market for organic food has grown, Malmö has not always been able to find an organic option for every ingredient. In addition, large schools often require ingredients to be processed in advance to minimize cooking time, and vegetarian substitutes have sometimes proven more time-consuming to make from scratch. As a result, the balance between market availability, institutional requirements, and city goals often leads to trade-offs being made.

When Malmö's food policy was first launched, schools were serving meat or fish five days a week. 10 years later, schools focus more on organic plant-based meals, and only offer meals with sustainable-sourced meat or fish two or three days a week. Combined with efforts to procure locally, efficiently, and to reduce waste where possible, Malmö reduced its quantifiable food-related emissions by 30%, from approximately 2.2 kg CO₂-e per kilo food to 1.5 CO₂-e. These food emissions are among the lowest in Sweden, and schools continue to be deeply invested in advancing healthy and sustainable foods. In fact, schools are almost solely responsible for Malmö's success in reaching its climate goals. While the future of Malmö's food policy remains uncertain, local schools plan to continue their efforts and work to inspire pre-schools and elderly care centers to follow suit. With school canteens' leadership, Malmö is well on its way to change its food system, one meal at a time.

“ The school restaurants have already reached the goals for the whole municipality! They can inspire other places like preschools and elderly care centers to follow suit and reach our climate goals.”

FROM NATIONAL TO MUNICIPAL-LEVEL FOOD POLICY INTEGRATION

- Local governance of public procurement. Swedish cities manage and finance most public procurement of food, particularly for kindergartens and schools.
- Follow-up through digital buying systems. Most municipalities in Sweden partner with the procurement follow-up system, HANTERA, which is connected to the climate emissions database of the Swedish research institution, RISE. Through this database, municipalities can see the GHG emissions of the foods they buy and the percentage of organic foods they purchase, broken down to the individual school level.
- Compliance with national nutritional guidelines. Swedish municipalities have been incentivized to encourage the reduction of meat consumption ever since the Swedish Food Agency, Livsmedelsverket, issued national nutrition guidelines stating that individuals should not have more than 500 grams of red meat each week.

