

CATALONIA SPAIN

A UNIFIED VISION FOR A SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM

This food policy snapshot is based on an interview with Anna Castellví Méndez, Responsible for Technical Advice in the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, and Food for the Government of Catalonia.

GLASGOW
FOOD AND
CLIMATE
DECLARATION

In 2021, the Catalonia region, in northeastern Spain, launched the Strategic Food Plan for Catalonia 2021-2026 (PEAC), ushering in a new era for the future of food in the region. PEAC is a plan to establish a comprehensive, sustainable, and competitive food system, geographically rooted in and based on Catalonia's diversity of healthy, accessible, and quality foods. It is the result of more than a year of collaboration with a wide range of Catalans: primary producers, food industry representatives, distributors, restaurateurs and caterers, researchers, local and national agencies, and residents. The result is a consensus-driven food policy for the region, integrating various food system sectors and levels of government, from the local to the EU level.

ENABLERS

FOOD COUNCIL AS CATALYST FOR PARTICIPATORY, INTEGRATED FOOD POLICIES

The Strategic Food Plan for Catalonia is an initiative of the CATALAN FOOD COUNCIL. Created in 2017 by the Department of Agriculture, the Catalan Food Council acts as a forum to debate, propose, and evaluate agri-food policies. The Council is a joint civil society, business, and governmental body with representatives from all links along the Catalan food chain. As an inclusive institution, it was paramount to the council that the Strategic Food Plan for Catalonia results from an open, co-creative process with the full participation of Catalan residents and food chain actors. The Catalan Government helped set up spaces for debate and reflection for each municipality to ensure all views were heard and considered. While the public meetings that began in 2020 were all held virtually due to the coronavirus pandemic, participation remained high due to community interest.

The public process was carried out to prioritize the most relevant issues to residents and collect specific proposals for action based on the needs identified and existing regional opportunities. For example, one of the challenges raised by the Rural Women's Association and other organizations was the disconnect between urban, rural, and maritime communities. While rural and maritime communities are less populated, they are a major producer of food, whereas urban communities often remain unaware of the origins of what they eat. The participatory process resulted in 28 specific actions that encourage territorial cohesion and the promotion of Catalan food, including integrating women in rural and maritime food system work and promoting local, seasonal, and sustainable food in public food procurement.

ALIGNMENT WITH EU-LEVEL SUSTAINABILITY OBJECTIVES

The Strategic Food Plan for Catalonia also serves to implement the EU GREEN DEAL and the EU Farm to Fork Strategy at the regional level. The drafting of the EU FARM TO FORK STRATEGY coincided with the drafting of the PEAC. This provided the Catalan government with the opportunity to use the Farm to Fork Strategy as a guide to align their food system plans with those of the EU, including aligning goals and indicators.

As a regional government entity, the Catalan Government is uniquely positioned to liaise among and align local, national, and EU level policies. For example, the Catalan Government is promoting the EU Product Environmental Footprint initiative (PEF) to develop a standard methodology on the environmental impacts of products throughout their life cycle. A team in the Department of Agriculture is working with Catalan primary producers to determine the best indicators to measure. Eventually, the Catalan Government hopes to use this sustainability calculation to create a legislative framework and law on sustainable production and public procurement.

THE STRATEGIC FOOD PLAN FOR CATALONIA (PEAC) 2021-2026

- An intersectoral strategy that defines the vision, objectives, and actions to build an environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable food system in Catalonia.
- The Plan is based on a four-dimensional approach, and aims to be 1) sustainable, transformative, and based on the circular bioeconomy, 2) local and rooted in the territory, 3) fair, equitable, and cohesive, and 4) healthy and accountable.
- The drafting of the PEAC followed a year of debate and collaboration among 359 experts, 452 residents, and 217 organizations.

BARRIERS

SLOW PACE OF BUREAUCRACY

A great strength of the Catalan Government is that it is a lawmaking body, but crafting and enacting laws is often a slow and cumbersome process. Political will for integrated food policies is at an all-time high, but Catalonia's challenge is to maintain a sense of urgency through administrative turnovers and long legislative processes. The law on sustainable public procurement has been particularly challenging, especially since departments outside the Department of Agriculture have broadened the law beyond food procurement, lengthening the consultation and negotiation process. The Department of Agriculture is working to link the public procurement law with the environmental footprint initiative, hoping that both can gain visibility, buy-in, and quickly come to fruition.

The agri-food sector is a vital sector of the Catalan economy and the Strategic Food Plan for Catalonia (PEAC) paves the way toward a sustainable and resilient future of the region's food system. Several institutional, social, and economic factors enabled Catalonia's vision to have a single governance tool to create food system change. These factors included high levels of political will, the creation of the Catalan Food Council, and EU-level policy alignment with plans like the EU Farm to Fork Strategy and the Product Environmental Footprint initiative. With the PEAC, Catalonia is well on its way to ensuring that the Catalan food system becomes sustainable, equitable, healthy, and economically robust.

“ One of our greatest achievements is that we involved all food system stakeholders in the creation of our Catalan Food Strategy, from setting goals to implementing actions. The result is a food strategy with buy-in and consensus from all the agents involved. ”

“ In Catalonia, the link between rural and urban areas is crucial and needs to be strengthened. They need us, and we need them. If we lose the people who are in the rural areas, we not only lose the people who make our food, but we also lose the guardians of our natural landscapes. ”

