

BRUGES BELGIUM

THE POWER OF CO-CREATION IN DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING INTEGRATED FOOD POLICIES

This food policy snapshot is based on an interview with Karine De Batselier, coordinator of the City of Bruges Food Lab.

GLASGOW FOOD AND CLIMATE DECLARATION

In 2015, Bruges joined the EUROPEAN FOOD SMART CITIES project and began co-creating a sustainable food strategy with its citizens. Approved in 2015, Bruges' sustainable food strategy, Bruggesmaakt, cuts across several themes, from curbing food waste to promoting Fairtrade and a shift to less and better meat consumption. The Brugge Smaakt strategy is integral to the city's aim to be carbon neutral by 2050 and part of the local "Zorgen voor Morgen Brugge" narrative ('caring for tomorrow starts today'). This was also the start of the Bruges Food Lab, a policy and project innovation space that brings together people from across the city to tackle food issues. In Bruges, co-creation with citizens has been critical for the successful integration of food and climate targets.

ENABLERS

CO-CREATION: KEY TO INTEGRATED FOOD POLICIES AND CITIZEN BUY-IN

The Bruges Food Lab was initially led by a steering group of representatives from the City Council, civil society, research institutions, and farmers. From March 2021, the City funded a full-time coordinator for the Food Lab to expand its capacity. The Food Lab coordinator works closely with the City's Food Policy Coordinator and oversees the participatory work of the organization, while the City coordinator ensures that the relevant departments are involved across FOOD AND CLIMATE ACTIONS. This inclusive and dual city-civil society model ensures greater policy integration and effective implementation of the Brugge Smaakt. Within the Food Lab itself, members work on different themes through action groups, and its overall MEMBERSHIP is purposefully diverse: it includes farmers from around the city, representatives from high schools, universities and knowledge institutions, the restaurant and food retail sector, NGOs, community organizations, and interested residents and sustainable food advocates. This diversity allows the Food Lab to design policies with buy-in from local residents. For example, having both farmers and vegan advocates around the table led to a compromise on the Strategy's aim for 'LESS AND BETTER MEAT'. This compromise promotes a reduction in meat consumption and simultaneously supports organic and sustainable livestock farming.

WORKING WITH THE REGIONAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS ON SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE.

The City of Bruges does not have many farmers or vacant land for sustainable farming within its jurisdiction. To develop a Farm to Fork strategy for the city that connects producers with urban markets, the regional government of West Flanders joined the Food Lab to work with Bruges and farmers in the wider region. Joint actions include initiating a Community Supported Agriculture scheme by making land owned by the province accessible to people wishing to farm sustainably. Acknowledging the role of diets in climate mitigation strategies, the Flemish government announced a GREEN DEAL in 2021, outlining a target for shifting current protein consumption patterns from being 60% animal-sourced and 40% plant-based to 60% plant-based and only 40% animal-sourced by 2030. This overarching policy helps both cities and provinces in the Flemish Region promote greater sustainable vegetable production and consumption, and more mindful animal protein production and consumption.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

The City of Bruges is taking steps towards implementing the Brugge Smaakt and the Green Deal on protein shifts through municipally-led events and actions around public canteens. In 2017, the City launched a MANUAL for serving sustainable food at city events and public meetings. Since signing the Green Deal, the City has been committed to leading by example by serving 60% plant-based foods. Going forward, Bruges hopes to solidify this leadership by serving climate-friendly meals to children across its 120 schools – tackling food access, education, and sustainability at the same time.

MULTILEVEL AND MULTI-ACTOR FOOD AND CLIMATE POLICY

- Bruges' Climate Department is closely involved with the delivery of the BRUGGE SMAAKT strategy which includes actions on food waste, sustainable agriculture, and reduced meat consumption. The food strategy is part of a broader approach to sustainability to cut greenhouse-gas emissions with co-benefits for citizens and biodiversity.
- The BRUGES FOOD LAB, established in 2015, connects policy, civil society, and the public around food and implements the Brugge Smaakt in close collaboration with the City.
- Bruges is known as a gastronomic hotspot in Belgium, with several Michelin rated star-chefs and a strong tradition of culinary schooling. The local food strategy aims to inspire these actors to be drivers of a new, more sustainable cuisine.
- In 2021, Bruges signed up to the Flemish Government's GREEN DEAL to shift protein consumption to 40% animal-sourced and 60% plant-based by 2030 and engage citizens in sustainable food production and consumption.

BARRIERS

GETTING EVERYONE AROUND THE TABLE

According to Karine De Batselier who coordinates the City of Bruges involvement in the Food Lab, their greatest success has been bringing people together and setting the tone for actions on sustainable food across the city. However, getting the right people on board is not always easy nor without its disagreements, such as agreeing on what constitutes 'sustainable food' or how to balance economic and sustainability imperatives. To overcome this barrier, Karine and other members of the Food Lab invest significantly in effective communication between different sectors and policy departments to listen to all points of view and reach compromises.

“ Once people get to know each other, the tone is set for sustainable food initiatives, little projects and collaborations begin to crop up around the city.”

MEASURING IMPACT: LOCATING THE RIGHT METRICS AND DATA FOR MONITORING FOOD STRATEGIES

Finding the right metrics and data for monitoring the impact of the Brugge Smaakt initiatives remains a challenge for the City. However, one area where it is possible to measure GHG emission reductions is food waste. Bruges measures food wasted from the City's supermarkets and estimates carbon emissions based on an EU FUSION STUDY (1kg of food waste equals 3.2 kg of CO₂). The City has also used a self-declaration survey for citizens to measure the impact of recipes and tips shared by the City for reducing food waste at the household level. For Bruges's Farm to Fork and Fair Trade strategies, compiling the right data has proven more complicated. While the City has an overview of the foods that are produced locally and the number of fairtrade products sold in shops across the city, these numbers are not always accurate and difficult to associate to measurable impacts on climate change. A Flanders-wide working group for cities developing sustainable food strategies will provide a forum to overcome this issue. However, work is still underway to decide on relevant indicators.

The integral role of the Bruges Food Lab in the City's sustainable food strategy demonstrates the power of getting citizens, farmers, researchers, businesses, schools, and policy-makers around the table when it comes to designing and implementing integrated food policies. Beyond developing appropriate policies, having inclusive food governance mechanisms enables diverse actors to build trust and work together. The same can be said of collaboration across different levels of government: Bruges' collaboration with the regional government and other cities in the province unlocks new possibilities for the creation of sustainable and local food systems.

